

Helping

CHILDREN

Process

SCHOOL SHOOTINGS

STICK TO ROUTINES

Kids feel more secure with the predictability of routine, including attending school.

LIMIT EXPOSURE

Limit exposure to television, the news, and social media.

START THE CONVERSATION

Talking lets you know what your child is thinking and feeling and gives you the opportunity to provide answers, support and get additional help if needed. If your child doesn't bring it up, you should.

If your teen doesn't want to talk, don't force the conversation. Let them know you are available when they're ready.

BE TRUTHFUL

Be honest with kids and share with them as much information as they are developmentally able to handle. Let their questions guide how much information you provide.

Books like *Once I Was Very Very Scared*, by Chandra Ghosh Ippen can help parents start the conversation with preschoolers.

Early elementary school children need brief, simple information that should be balanced with reassurances that their school and homes are safe and that adults are there to protect them. Give simple examples of school safety like playground and carpool monitors, and emergency drills practiced at school.

Upper elementary and early middle school children will be more vocal in asking questions about whether they truly are safe and what is being done at their school. They may need assistance separating reality from fantasy. Discuss efforts of school and community leaders to provide safe schools.

Upper middle school and high school students will have strong and varying opinions about the causes of violence in schools and society. They will share concrete suggestions about how to make school safer. Emphasize the role that students have in keeping schools safe by following school safety guidelines -- not providing building access to strangers, reporting strangers on campus, reporting threats to the school safety made by students or community members -- communicating any personal safety concerns to school administrators, and accessing support for emotional needs.

LISTEN

Listen to kids' fears and concerns.
Offer empathy.

ASK QUESTIONS

Find out what your kids have heard.
Ask what questions they have. Ask about their feelings.

BE PATIENT

Especially young kids may need to have these conversations several times. Or they may need information in little chunks. They might not be able to digest everything in one sitting.

REASSURE KIDS

Reassure kids that the world is a good place to be, but that there are people who do bad things. Validate their feelings. Explain that all feelings are okay when a tragedy occurs. Let children talk about their feelings, help put them into perspective, and assist them in expressing these feelings appropriately.

OBSERVE EMOTIONAL STATE

Some children may not express their concerns verbally. Changes in behavior, appetite, and sleep patterns can also indicate a child's level of anxiety or discomfort. In most children, these symptoms will ease with reassurance and time. However, some children may be at risk for more intense reactions. Children who have had a past traumatic experience or personal loss, suffer from depression or other mental illness, or with special needs may be at greater risk for severe reactions than others. Seek the help of mental health professional if you are at all concerned.

ENHANCE COPING

Reinforce that your children should be kind to themselves and that there are reasons why they aren't feeling the same as before.

Some children prefer writing, playing music, or doing an art project as an outlet. Young children may need concrete activities (such as drawing, looking at picture books, or imaginative play) to help them identify and express their feelings.

Older adolescents may want to take action to be part of a solution. An example is getting involved in initiatives to address gun violence like students from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, FL.

IDENTIFY OTHER SUPPORT

Children may want to discuss their concerns with others who share their identities or with whom they have been talking about current events. Help them find ways of connecting with these people.

CHECK IN

Unfortunately, many stressors are likely to continue in the immediate future. Check-in with your children on a regular basis. This reinforces that you are there to support them always, especially during these challenging times.

SEEK HELP

Reach out when you need help or support as there is no manual for parenting at any time, but particularly during these incredibly stressful times. Your pediatrician, faith leader, and local mental health agencies can be resources for support and guidance.