

## Following School Violence: What to Say to Students

Talk with students and validate their feelings. Let their questions guide what and how much information to provide, be open to opportunities to talk when they are ready, be honest about your own feelings related to violence, and emphasize the positive things that child/family/school can do to stay safe. Be patient. Children and youth do not always talk about their feelings readily. Watch for clues that they may want to talk, such as hovering around while you do the dishes or yard work. 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.

Be aware of signs that a student might be in distress, e.g., changes in behavior, anxiety, sleep problems, acting out, problems at school or with academic work. Also be conscious of media exposure and what you say about the event. Limit television viewing (be aware if the television is on in common areas).

Following are some suggested general key points when talking to students:

- Schools are safe places. Our school staff works with local police and fire departments, emergency responders, and hospitals to keep you safe.
- Our school is safe because....
- We all play a role in the school safety. Be observant and let an adult know if you see or hear something that makes you feel uncomfortable, nervous or frightened.
- There is a difference between reporting, tattling or gossiping. You can provide important information that may prevent harm either directly or anonymously by telling a trusted adult what you know or hear.
- Although there is no absolute guarantee that something bad will never happen, it is important to understand the difference between the **possibility** of something happening and **probability** that it will affect you or our school.
- Senseless violence is hard for everyone to understand. Doing things that you enjoy, sticking to your normal routine, and being with friends and family help make us feel better and keep us from worrying about the event.
- Sometimes people do bad things that hurt others. They may be unable to handle their anger, under the influence of drugs or alcohol, or suffering from mental illness. Adults (parents, teachers, police officers, doctors, faith leaders) work very hard to get those people help and keep them from hurting others. It is important for all of us to know how to get help if we feel really upset or angry and to stay away from drugs and alcohol.
- Stay away from guns and other weapons. Tell an adult if you know someone has a gun. Access to guns is one of the leading risk factors for deadly violence.
- Violence is never a solution to personal problems. Students can be part of the positive solution by participating in anti-violence programs at school, learning conflict mediation skills, and seeking help from an adult if they or a peer is struggling with anger, depression, or other emotions they cannot control.

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NASP School Safety and Crisis Response Committee. (2015). *Responding to School Violence Prevention: Guidelines for School Administrators and Crisis Teams*. Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.