

Helping Children Cope After a School Shooting

In response to a school shooting tragedy, many children may have questions and concerns. The ICHOC offers the following suggestions to help guide parents, teachers, and caring adults to best support children who may be grieving, concerned, or troubled by the school shooting:

Be Supportive

- Children will benefit greatly from support and caring expressed by the adults in their lives. Create an environment in your home or classroom that encourages respect for each other's feelings and fears, and allows for a supportive, healing environment.

Be Available

- Let children know that you are available to talk with them.
- Let children ask questions.
- It is ok if you do not have answers to all the questions. It is ok to let your child know that you do not have the answer but that you will try and find out.

Be Caring

- Let children know about the support being provided to students, friends, and families of the victims.
- Be aware of children who may have experienced a previous trauma and may be more vulnerable to experiencing prolonged or intense reactions and will need extra support.

Be Reassuring

- Acknowledge the frightening parts of the event.
- Explain what happened in words that children understand. Explanations should be appropriate to the child's age, developmental stage, and language skills.
- Reassure children that they are loved and will be taken care of.
- Children who have concerns about siblings who are living on a college campus or have concerns about safety at their own school should be reassured and their concerns validated.

Be Thoughtful

- Be aware of how you talk about the event and cope with the tragedy. Children learn about how to react to traumatic situations by watching and listening to parents, peers, and the media.
- Reduce or eliminate your child's exposure to television images and news coverage of the shooting. The frightening images and repetition of the scenes can be disturbing for children. If they do see coverage, be sure to talk with them about what they saw and what they understood about the coverage. Make sure to correct any misunderstanding or misinterpretations.
- Maintain your child's routine as best as possible.

Be Creative

- For children who are too young to talk or do not feel comfortable talking about their feelings, expressive techniques such as play, art and music can provide additional ways for children to express their feelings and let you know what may be troubling them.

Many behaviors and symptoms of stress are normal for children who have just experienced a trauma. However, if you find that your child is preoccupied with the event, has ongoing sleep or eating disturbances, is experiencing intrusive thoughts or worries, is focused on fears about death, or is having difficulty going to school and leaving parents, your child should be evaluated by a mental health professional. Contact your pediatrician, family physician, or school counselor if you feel that the symptoms are persisting and are interfering with your child's daily routines.

For more information and resources about children and traumatic stress, please visit our website at www.ChildrensNational.org/ichoc. Fact sheets and other resources for parents, schools and professionals are available under the Resource section.