MARIN COUNTY SCHOOL/LAW ENFORCEMENT PARTNERSHIP

SPECIAL MEETING

MONDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2012

at

Marin County Office of Education

AGENDA

• Introductions

• Purpose of Meeting

• Input on Actions for today, this week and going forward.
  o Law Enforcement Perspective
  o School Perspective
  o Other

• Resources, Trainings and Follow Up
RESOURCES TO SUPPORT
SCHOOL PERSONNEL
For School Personnel & Support Providers

A Workshop on Resources and Strategies to Support Children During Times of Tragedy

December 18, 2012
3:30-5:00 p.m.

A panel of professionals representing education, mental health, law enforcement and community agencies will provide information to support school personnel and support providers as our community deals with the aftermath of the Connecticut shooting.

Marin County Office of Education
1111 Las Gallinas Avenue
San Rafael
Community Room

Please call (415) 499-5857 to RSVP

Mary Jane Burke
Marin County Superintendent of Schools
School Safety

Disasters come in many forms and can occur anywhere, knowing how to react and respond in a time of crisis can go a long way to keeping you and your community out of harm's way. This page has a host of resources for parents, guardians, administrators, educators and facilities managers. Share these links with your neighbors, friends and community leaders to reduce your school’s vulnerability to an emergency.

School Violence Preparedness

**Heighened School Security Procedures During Threats**

In consideration of possible incidents, schools should give serious consideration to additional heightened security procedures during times of terrorist threats including:

- Train teachers and support staff, evaluate and refine security plans, and test/exercise school crisis plans.
- Encourage school personnel to maintain a "heightened awareness" for suspicious activity and to report.
- Provide special attention to perimeter security and access control issues. Have clearly defined perimeters for schools through the use of fences, gates, environmental design, signage, and other professional security measures.
- Use designated parking areas especially for visitors and register staff and student vehicles.
- Provide supervision and monitoring of parking lots and outside areas as appropriate.
- Train custodial, maintenance, and grounds personnel on identifying and handling suspicious packages and items found on campus.
- Establish routine inspections of the building and grounds by trained facility personnel. Secure roof hatches and eliminate structural items that facilitate easy access to school roofs.
- Make sure that classroom windows are secured at the end of the school day.
- Utilize security technology and devices for monitoring and controlling exterior facilities as defined by professional security assessments.
- Review staffing and supervision plans. Stress the importance of adult supervision before, during, and after school, both inside school buildings and on campus, and in common areas such as hallways, stairwells, restrooms, cafeterias, bus areas, and other high-traffic areas.
- Encourage staff to maintain a heightened awareness during recess, physical education classes, drop-off and dismissal, and other outside activities.

**Prepare For and Survive an Active Shooter Emergency**

If you have suggestions on how we can improve the resources available on this page, contact us.

California News

- Governor Brown Issues Statement on Connecticut School Shooting
- Statement from California’s Top Homeland Security Advisor & State Superintendent on Public Instruction

Resources for Parents and Kids

- 5 Tips for Talking to Kids About Scary News
- Kid Power - Talking to Kids About Gun Violence
- American Psychological Association – Helping Your Children Manage Distress in the Aftermath of a Shooting
- American Academy of Pediatrics – Resources to Help Parents, Children and Others Cope in the Aftermath of School Shootings
- American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry – Children and Grief
- Massachusetts General Hospital for Children – Talking To Children About A Shooting
- Child Mind Institute – Caring For Kids After A School Shooting
- National Child Abuse Hotline
- SafeStart Center

Resources for Schools

- Active Shooter Safety
- School Terrorism Preparedness
- Emergency Planning for Schools
- Action Guide for Emergency Management at Institutions of Higher Education
- Project School Emergency Response to Violence (SERV)
- Active Shooter Protocols for Schools

Government Resources

- US Department of Education
- California Department of Education
- CA County Offices of Education

Have Suggestions?

If you would like to help the families of the victims of Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting, click here or here. To read President Obama’s proclamation honoring the victims, click here.
Examine staffing levels and procedures for security personnel, school resource officers and other police personnel, and associated protection personnel.

Maintain a proactive effort of visitor access and control. Reduce the number of doors accessible from the outside to one designated entrance.

Stress the importance of staff greeting and challenging strangers, and reporting suspicious individuals.

Verify the identity of service personnel and vendors visiting the school, including those seeking access to utilities, alarm systems, communications systems, maintenance areas, and related locations.

Assess school health and medical preparedness. Evaluate school nurse staffing levels. Make sure that schools maintain an adequate number and level of emergency kits and medical supplies.

Conduct a status check of emergency communications mechanisms. Be sure that two-way radio units and cell phones are functioning, and have back-up batteries charged.

Make sure that the public address system is fully functioning.

Review procedures for emergency communications with parents, notify parents in advance how school officials will communicate with them in an emergency (media, district web site, etc.), discuss importance of parents not flocking to the school if directed during an active crisis, review family reunification procedures and communicate other relevant information to ease parent concerns.

Review procedures for mobilizing mental health services for students and staff in the event of a crisis. Plan in advance how adults will communicate with children in a time of crisis.

Evaluate and enforce employee screening procedures. Review guidelines for subcontractors and identify all individuals working on school property.

Develop, review, refine, and test crisis preparedness guidelines. Be sure to have guidelines for both natural disasters and acts of violence.

These and many more tips and information can be found by clicking any of the "Helpful Resources" listed above.
Helping your children manage distress in the aftermath of a shooting

As a parent, you may be struggling with how to talk with your children about a shooting rampage. It is important to remember that children look to their parents to make them feel safe. This is true no matter what age your children are, be they toddlers, adolescents or even young adults.

Consider the following tips for helping your children manage their distress.

**Talk with your child.** Talking to your children about their worries and concerns is the first step to help them feel safe and begin to cope with the events occurring around them. What you talk about and how you say it does depend on their age, but all children need to be able to know you are there listening to them.

- Find times when they are most likely to talk: such as when riding in the car, before dinner, or at bedtime.
- Start the conversation; let them know you are interested in them and how they are coping with the information they are getting.
- Listen to their thoughts and point of view; don't interrupt — allow them to express their ideas and understanding before you respond.
- Express your own opinions and ideas without putting down theirs; acknowledge that it is okay to disagree.
- Remind them you are there for them to provide safety, comfort and support. Give them a hug.

**Keep home a safe place.** Children, regardless of age, often find home to be a safe haven when the world around them becomes overwhelming. During times of crisis, it is important to remember that your children may come home seeking the safe feeling they have being there. Help make it a place where your children find the solitude or comfort they need. Plan a night where everyone participates in a favorite family activity.

**Watch for signs of stress, fear or anxiety.** After a traumatic event, it is typical for children (and adults) to experience a wide range of emotions, including fearfulness, shock, anger, grief and anxiety. Your children's behaviors may change because of their response to the event. They may experience trouble sleeping, difficulty with concentrating on school work or changes in appetite. This is normal for everyone and should begin to disappear in a few months. Encourage your children to put their feelings into words by talking about them or journaling. Some children may find it helpful to express their feelings through art.

**Take “news breaks.”** Your children may want to keep informed by gathering information about the event from the Internet, television or newspapers. It is important to limit the amount of time spent watching the news because constant exposure may actually heighten their anxiety and fears. Also, scheduling some breaks for yourself is important; allow yourself time to engage in activities you enjoy.

**Take care of yourself.** Take care of yourself so you can take care of your children. Be a model for your children on how to manage traumatic events. Keep regular schedules for activities such as family meals and exercise to help restore a sense of security and normalcy.

These tips and strategies can help you guide your children through the current crisis. If you are feeling stuck or overwhelmed, you may want to consider talking to someone who could help. A licensed mental health professional such as a psychologist can assist you in developing an appropriate strategy for moving forward. It is important to get professional help ([helpcenter/understanding-psychotherapy.aspx](http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/understanding-psychotherapy.aspx)) if you feel like you are unable to function or perform basic activities of daily living.

Thanks to psychologists Ronald S. Palomares, PhD, and Lynn F. Bufka, PhD. who assisted us with this article.

Updated April 2011
exceptions to this, including excerpting, paraphrasing or reproduction in a commercial work, must be presented in writing to the APA. (mailto:permissions@apa.org) Images from the APA Help Center may not be reproduced.

Find this article at:
Tips for Adults on How to Talk with Children about Connecticut School Shooting

From National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center

As the nation watches the reports about the recent Connecticut school shooting, many people may find themselves feeling anxious, worried, saddened or otherwise concerned.

While adults may know how to express these feelings, often they do not know how to talk with children about the way the children are feeling.

David Schonfeld, MD, Director, National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center provides the following tips to help adults talk with children about the shooting.

- Talk about the event with your child. Silence isn’t comforting in crisis situations and suggests that what has occurred is too horrible to even speak of. After a major crisis, even very young children have likely already heard what has happened – but they may not understand what it means.

- Start by asking what your child what he or she has already heard about the events and what questions or concerns they have. Listen for misinformation, misconceptions and any underlying fears or concerns. If the child expresses worries, sadness or fears, tell them what adults are doing to keep them safe but don’t provide false reassurance or dismiss their concerns. Help them identify strategies to cope with difficult feelings.

- Minimize your child’s exposure to media (television, radio, print, internet, social media) and if they do watch, consider recording, screening and watching with them. Remember children often overhear or see what you are watching on TV or listening to on the radio and may be exposed directly as the news evolves through the internet or social media. While children may seek and benefit from basic information about what happened so that they can understand what is happening in their world, they (and adults) don't benefit from graphic details or exposure to disturbing images or sounds. The aftermath of a crisis is a good time to disconnect from all media and sit down together and talk as a family.

- Encourage your child to ask questions now and in the future, and answer the questions directly. Like adults, children are better able to cope with a crisis if they feel they understand it. Question-and-answer exchanges provide you with the opportunity to offer support as your child begins to understand the crisis and the response to it.

- Share your feelings about the shooting with your child and the strategies you have used to cope with your concerns, sadness, or other difficult feelings. If you feel overwhelmed and/or hopeless, look for some support from other adults before reaching out to your child.
• Reassure the child that feeling sad, worried or angry is okay. Let your child know that it is all right to be upset about something bad that happened. Use the conversation to take the opportunity to talk about other troubling feelings your child may have.

• Don’t feel obligated to give a reason for what happened. Although adults often feel the need to provide a reason for why someone committed such a crime, many times they don’t know. It is okay to tell your child that you don’t know why at this time such a crime was committed.

• If you have concerns about your child’s behavior, contact his or her pediatrician, other primary care provider, or a qualified mental health care specialist.

For information on how to help your children cope with crises or disasters, please visit the website for the National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement at www.cincinnatichildrens.org/school-crisis.

About Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center

Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center ranks third in the nation among all Honor Roll hospitals in U.S. News and World Report’s 2012 Best Children’s Hospitals ranking. It is ranked #1 for neonatology and in the top 10 for all pediatric specialties. Cincinnati Children’s is one of the top two recipients of pediatric research grants from the National Institutes of Health, and a research and teaching affiliate of the University Of Cincinnati College Of Medicine. The medical center is internationally recognized for improving child health and transforming delivery of care through fully integrated, globally recognized research, education and innovation. Additional information can be found at www.cincinnatichildrens.org.
Heightened school security procedures during terrorist threats
A number of potential terrorist threats have been discussed ranging from the potential use of car/truck bombs to biological attacks. In addition to the recommendations above, schools should give serious consideration to additional heightened security procedures during times of terrorist threats including:

- Prepared schools will train teachers and support staff, evaluate and refine security plans, and test/exercise school crisis plans.

- Encourage school personnel to maintain a "heightened awareness" for suspicious activity and to report same. This may include suspicious vehicles on and around campus, suspicious persons in and around school buildings including those taking photographs or videotaping, suspicious packages around the building perimeter and/or in the school, and suspicious information seeking efforts by phone or by unknown "visitors."

- Provide special attention to perimeter security and access control issues. Have clearly defined perimeters for schools through the use of fences, gates, environmental design, signage, and other professional security measures. Use designated parking areas especially for visitors and register staff and student vehicles. Provide supervision and monitoring of parking lots and outside areas as appropriate. Train custodial, maintenance, and grounds personnel on identifying and handling suspicious packages and items found on campus. Establish routine inspections of the building and grounds by trained facility personnel. Secure roof hatches and eliminate structural items that facilitate easy access to school roofs. Make sure that classroom windows are secured at the end of the school day. Utilize security technology and devices for monitoring and controlling exterior facilities as defined by professional security assessments.

- Review staffing and supervision plans. Stress the importance of adult supervision before, during, and after school, both inside school buildings and on campus, and in common areas such as hallways, stairwells, restrooms, cafeterias, bus areas, and other high-traffic areas. Encourage staff to maintain a heightened awareness during recess, physical education classes, drop-off and dismissal, and other outside activities. Examine staffing levels and procedures for security personnel, school resource officers and other
police personnel, and associated protection personnel.

- Maintain a proactive effort of visitor access and control. Reduce the number of doors accessible from the outside to one designated entrance. Stress the importance of staff greeting and challenging strangers, and reporting suspicious individuals. Review security procedures for after-school and evening activities and building use. Utilize security technology and devices for monitoring and controlling interior facility access as defined by professional security assessments.

- Verify the identity of service personnel and vendors visiting the school, including those seeking access to utilities, alarm systems, communications systems, maintenance areas, and related locations. Do not permit access and report suspicious individuals representing themselves as service or delivery personnel who cannot be verified. Maintain detailed and accurate records of service and delivery personnel including a log (signed in by school personnel) of the full names, organization name, vehicle information (as appropriate), and other identification information.

- Evaluate security measures at school transportation facilities. Assess emergency plans involving buses and other transportation issues.

- Secure access to utilities, boiler rooms, and other maintenance/facilities operations locations. Examine and enhance physical security measures related to outside access to HVAC (heating, ventilation, and air conditioning) systems, utility controls (electrical, gas, water, phone), and related facility operations mechanisms. Secure chemical and cleaning product storage areas, and maintain appropriate records of such items according to local, state, and federal guidelines.

- Evaluate food and beverage service stock, storage, and protection procedures. Determine if schools have adequate water, food, and related supplies in the event that students and staff would have to be detained at the school for an extended period of time beyond normal school hours. Examine measures for securing access to food and beverage products and food service areas during normal food service periods and after hours.

- Assess school health and medical preparedness. Evaluate school nurse staffing levels. Make sure that schools maintain an adequate number and level of emergency kits and medical supplies. Maintain a stock of at least three days worth of medications for students required to have medications at school. Consider offering first aid/first responder training to faculty members who are interested in volunteering for such training so as to increase the number of trained individuals available to assist in the event of medical emergencies.

- Conduct a status check of emergency communications mechanisms. Be sure that two-way radio units and cell phones are functioning, and have back-up batteries charged. Make sure that the public address system is fully functioning. Test the fire alarm system. Review procedures for emergency communications with parents, notify parents in advance how school officials will communicate with them in an emergency
(media, district web site, etc.), discuss importance of parents not flocking to the school if
directed during an active crisis, review family reunification procedures and communicate
other relevant information to ease parent concerns.

- Review procedures for mobilizing mental health services for students and staff in the
event of a crisis. Plan in advance how adults will communicate with children in a time of
crisis. Discuss approaches for age and developmentally appropriate communications
with students about violence and threatening issues. Be familiar with community mental
health resources for families and have plans for securing supplemental mental health
services from outside of the school/district in a major crisis.

- Evaluate and enforce employee screening procedures. Review guidelines for
subcontractors and identify all individuals working on school property.

- Implement "information security" programs. Evaluate the storage, access, and security
of sensitive information. Create guidelines and conduct periodic assessments of school
and district web sites to avoid posting of security-sensitive information.

- Identify higher-risk facilities, organizations, and potential terrorist targets in the
community surrounding schools. Such entities might include military facilities,
government offices and facilities, nuclear power plants, airports and airport flight paths,
railroads, chemical companies, etc. Develop appropriate security countermeasures and
crisis preparedness planning guidelines accordingly.

- Continue local field trips unless specific threat assessments suggest otherwise, using
safety plans that include adequate supervision, communications capabilities,
etc. Evaluate national travel decisions based upon ongoing threat assessments and
common sense. International travel during war-time and terrorist acts is discouraged.

- Develop, review, refine, and test crisis preparedness guidelines. Be sure to have
guidelines for both natural disasters and acts of violence. Particular procedures for
handling bombs, bomb threats, hostage situations, kidnappings, chemical and biological
terrorism, and related information should be reviewed. Review with staff their specific
roles and responsibilities consistent with your crisis guidelines. Identify back-up crisis
team leaders in case normally assigned leaders are not at the building or are unable to
lead.

- Provide K-12 school-specific security, crime prevention, and crisis preparedness
training to staff.
School/Law Enforcement Partnership

The goal of the Marin County School/Law Enforcement Partnership, a collaboration of schools, law enforcement and community agencies, is to encourage and support a countywide effort to keep Marin schools and communities as safe and healthy environments for all students and families. We are grateful to our partners in this important endeavor.

MARY JANE BURKE
Marin County Superintendent of Schools

ROBERT T. DOYLE
Marin County Sheriff

Resources provided by the School/Law Enforcement Partnership

- Letter to Parents
- Calendars
  - Marin County School/Law Enforcement Meeting Schedule 2012-2013
- School Protocols, Templates and Resources
  - Trainings and Events
    - Sexual Harassment Prevention - October 12, 2012 OR January 13, 2013
    - NEW - The Connected Child: Safety, Trust & Respect in the Digital Age
    - Peer Summit XVII - November 9, 2012
    - 2012-2013 Safe Schools and Prevention Programs - Trainings and Workshops
    - Prior Years Safe Schools and Prevention Programs - Trainings and Workshops
      - 2011-2012 Safe Schools and Prevention Programs - Trainings and Workshops
      - 2010-2011 Safe Schools and Prevention Programs - Trainings and Workshops
      - 2009-2010 Safe Schools and Prevention Programs - Trainings and Workshops
      - 2008-2009 Safe Schools and Prevention Programs - Trainings and Workshops
      - 2007-2008 Parent Education Opportunities
      - 2006-2007 Safe Schools and Prevention Programs - Trainings and Workshops

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The Marin County Office of Education (MCOE) has been working closely with Marin's public and private schools to support emergency preparedness. This web site is part of the effort to provide an effective plan and resources to improve emergency response procedures in all local schools.

Office of Emergency Services: Current Emergency Information
H1N1 Influenza Update

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This web site was established through a generous grant from the Fireman's Fund Foundation.
RESOURCES TO SUPPORT
PARENTS/GUARDIANS
For Parents and Community Members

A Workshop on Resources and Strategies to Support Children During Times of Tragedy

December 18, 2012
6:30-8:00 p.m.

A panel of professionals representing education, mental health, law enforcement and community agencies will provide information to support parents as our community deals with the aftermath of the Connecticut shooting.

Marin County Office of Education
1111 Las Gallinas Avenue
San Rafael
Community Room

Please call (415) 499-5857 to RSVP

Mary Jane Burke
Marin County Superintendent of Schools
A National Tragedy: Helping Children Cope

Tips for Parents and Teachers
Whenever a national tragedy occurs, such as terrorist attacks or natural disasters, children, like many people, may be confused or frightened. Most likely they will look to adults for information and guidance on how to react. Parents and school personnel can help children cope first and foremost by establishing a sense of safety and security. As more information becomes available, adults can continue to help children work through their emotions and perhaps even use the process as a learning experience.

All Adults Should:

1. **Model calm and control.** Children take their emotional cues from the significant adults in their lives. Avoid appearing anxious or frightened.

2. **Reassure children that they are safe** and (if true) so are the other important adults in their lives. Depending on the situation, point out factors that help insure their immediate safety and that of their community.

3. **Remind them that trustworthy people are in charge.** Explain that the government emergency workers, police, firefighters, doctors, and the military are helping people who are hurt and are working to ensure that no further tragedies occur.

4. **Let children know that it is okay to feel upset.** Explain that all feelings are okay when a tragedy like this occurs. Let children talk about their feelings and help put them into perspective. Even anger is okay, but children may need help and patience from adults to assist them in expressing these feelings appropriately.

5. **Observe children’s emotional state.** Depending on their age, children may not express their concerns verbally. Changes in behavior, appetite, and sleep patterns can also indicate a child’s level of grief, anxiety or discomfort. Children will express their emotions differently. There is no right or wrong way to feel or express grief.

6. **Look for children at greater risk.** 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. Be particularly observant for those who may be at risk of suicide. Seek the help of mental health professional if you are at all concerned.

7. **Tell children the truth.** Don’t try to pretend the event has not occurred or that it is not serious. Children are smart. They will be more worried if they think you are too afraid to tell them what is happening.

8. **Stick to the facts.** Don’t embellish or speculate about what has happened and what might happen. Don’t dwell on the scale or scope of the tragedy, particularly with young children.

9. **Keep your explanations developmentally appropriate.** Early elementary school children need brief, simple information that should be balanced with reassurances that the daily structures of their lives will not change. 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. Upper middle school and high school students will have strong and varying opinions about the causes of violence and threats to safety in schools and society. They will share concrete suggestions about how to make school safer and how to prevent tragedies in society. They will be more committed to doing something to help the victims and affected community. **For all children, encourage them to verbalize their thoughts and feelings. Be a good listener!**

10. **Monitor your own stress level.** Don’t ignore your own feelings of anxiety, grief, and anger. Talking to friends, family members, religious leaders, and mental health counselors can help. It is okay to let your children know that you are sad, but that you believe things will get better. You will be better able to support your children if you can express your own emotions in a productive manner. Get appropriate sleep, nutrition, and exercise.

What Parents Can Do:

1. **Focus on your children over the week following the tragedy.** Tell them you love them and everything will be okay. Try to help them understand what has happened, keeping in mind their developmental level.

2. **Make time to talk with your children.** Remember if you do not talk to your children about this incident someone else will. Take some time and determine what you wish to say.

3. **Stay close to your children.** Your physical presence will reassure them and give you the opportunity to monitor their reaction. Many children will want actual physical contact. Give plenty of hugs. Let them sit close to you, and make sure to take extra time at bedtime to cuddle and to reassure them that they are loved and safe.
4. Limit your child’s television viewing of these events. If they must watch, watch with them for a brief time; then turn the set off. Don’t sit mesmerized re-watching the same events over and over again.

5. Maintain a “normal” routine. To the extent possible stick to your family’s normal routine for dinner, homework, chores, bedtime, etc., but don’t be inflexible. Children may have a hard time concentrating on schoolwork or falling asleep at night.

6. Spend extra time reading or playing quiet games with your children before bed. These activities are calming, foster a sense of closeness and security, and reinforce a sense of normalcy. Spend more time tucking them in. Let them sleep with a light on if they ask for it.

7. Safeguard your children’s physical health. Stress can take a physical toll on children as well as adults. Make sure your children get appropriate sleep, exercise, and nutrition.

8. Consider praying or thinking hopeful thoughts for the victims and their families. It may be a good time to take your children to your place of worship, write a poem, or draw a picture to help your child express their feelings and feel that they are somehow supporting the victims and their families.

9. Find out what resources your school has in place to help children cope. Most schools are likely to be open and often are a good place for children to regain a sense of normalcy. Being with their friends and teachers can help. Schools should also have a plan for making counseling available to children and adults who need it.

What Schools Can Do:

1. Assure children that they are safe and that schools are well prepared to take care of all children at all times.

2. Maintain structure and stability within the schools. It would be best, however, not to have tests or major projects within the next few days.

3. Have a plan for the first few days back at school. Include school psychologists, counselors, and crisis team members in planning the school’s response.

4. Provide teachers and parents with information about what to say and do for children in school and at home.

5. Have teachers provide information directly to their students, not during the public address announcements.

6. Have school psychologists and counselors available to talk to students and staff who may need or want extra support.

7. Be aware of students who may have recently experienced a personal tragedy or a have personal connection to victims or their families. Even a child who has merely visited the affected area or community may have a strong reaction. Provide these students extra support and leniency if necessary.

8. Know what community resources are available for children who may need extra counseling. School psychologists can be very helpful in directing families to the right community resources.

9. Allow time for age appropriate classroom discussion and activities. Do not expect teachers to provide all of the answers. They should ask questions and guide the discussion, but not dominate it. Other activities can include art and writing projects, play acting, and physical games.

10. Be careful not to stereotype people or countries that might be associated with the tragedy. Children can easily generalize negative statements and develop prejudice. Talk about tolerance and justice versus vengeance. Stop any bullying or teasing of students immediately.

11. Refer children who exhibit extreme anxiety, fear or anger to mental health counselors in the school. Inform their parents.

12. Provide an outlet for students’ desire to help. Consider making get well cards or sending letters to the families and survivors of the tragedy, or writing thank you letters to doctors, nurses, and other health care professionals as well as emergency rescue workers, firefighters and police.

13. Monitor or restrict viewing scenes of the event as well as the aftermath.

For information on helping children and youth with this crisis, contact NASP at (301) 657-0270 or visit NASP’s website at www.nasponline.org.

Modified from material posted on the NASP website in September 2001.

Children and Grief

When a family member dies, children react differently from adults. Preschool children usually see death as temporary and reversible, a belief reinforced by cartoon characters who die and come to life again. Children between five and nine begin to think more like adults about death, yet they still believe it will never happen to them or anyone they know.

Adding to a child's shock and confusion at the death of a brother, sister, or parent is the unavailability of other family members, who may be so shaken by grief that they are not able to cope with the normal responsibility of childcare.

Parents should be aware of normal childhood responses to a death in the family, as well as signs when a child is having difficulty coping with grief. It is normal during the weeks following the death for some children to feel immediate grief or persist in the belief that the family member is still alive. However, long-term denial of the death or avoidance of grief can be emotionally unhealthy and can later lead to more severe problems.

A child who is frightened about attending a funeral should not be forced to go; however, honoring or remembering the person in some way, such as lighting a candle, saying a prayer, making a scrapbook, reviewing photographs, or telling a story may be helpful. Children should be allowed to express feelings about their loss and grief in their own way.

Once children accept the death, they are likely to display their feelings of sadness on and off over a long period of time, and often at unexpected moments. The surviving relatives should spend as much time as possible with the child, making it clear that the child has permission to show his or her feelings openly or freely.

The person who has died was essential to the stability of the child's world, and anger is a natural reaction. The anger may be revealed in boisterous play, nightmares, irritability, or a variety of other behaviors. Often the child will show anger towards the surviving family members.

After a parent dies, many children will act younger than they are. The child may temporarily become more infantile; demand food, attention and cuddling; and talk baby talk. Younger children frequently believe they are the cause of what happens around them. A young child may believe a parent, grandparent, brother, or sister died because he or she had once wished the person dead when they were angry. The child feels guilty or blames him or herself because the wish came true.
Children who are having serious problems with grief and loss may show one or more of these signs:

- an extended period of depression in which the child loses interest in daily activities and events
- inability to sleep, loss of appetite, prolonged fear of being alone
- acting much younger for an extended period
- excessively imitating the dead person
- repeated statements of wanting to join the dead person
- withdrawal from friends, or
- sharp drop in school performance or refusal to attend school

If these signs persist, professional help may be needed. A child and adolescent psychiatrist or other qualified mental health professional can help the child accept the death and assist the others in helping the child through the mourning process.

For more information, see Facts for Families:
- #4 The Depressed Child
- #7 Children Who Won't Go to School
- #34 Children's Sleep Problems
- #36 Helping Children After a Disaster
- #78 When a Pet Dies

If you find Facts for Families® helpful and would like to make good mental health a reality, consider donating to the Campaign for America’s Kids. Your support will help us continue to produce and distribute Facts for Families, as well as other vital mental health information, free of charge.

You may also mail in your contribution. Please make checks payable to the AACAP and send to Campaign for America’s Kids, P.O. Box 96106, Washington, DC 20090.

The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) represents over 8,500 child and adolescent psychiatrists who are physicians with at least five years of additional training beyond medical school in general (adult) and child and adolescent psychiatry.

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If you need immediate assistance, please dial 911.

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AAP Offers Resources to Help Parents, Children and Others Cope in the Aftermath of School Shootings

The AAP has assembled a collection of resources to help parents, teachers, students, and schools cope with the aftermath of school shootings. Additional resources are provided on promoting mental health, school safety and violence prevention. Contact your pediatrician for more information.

For Parents/Teachers:

• Teen Suicide and Guns
• Talking with Your Teen: Tips for Parents
• Next Stop Adulthood: Tips for Parents
• Tips for Talking to Children After a Disaster
• Bright Futures in Practice: Mental Health:
  ◦ Tools for Families

For Students:

• Stress Management Guide for Teens
• Health Care for College Students
• Connecting with Your Community
• Staying Cool When Things Heat Up

For Schools:

• Health, Mental Health, and Safety Guidelines for Schools
• The following guidelines, in particular, may be considered in developing policies and procedures to aid in preparing for and responding to crises:
  ◦ Mental Health Problems: Capacity to Identify, Refer, Manage
  ◦ Staff Trained for Emergencies
  ◦ Crisis Response Team and Plans
• National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement
  ◦ Guidelines for Responding to the Death of a Student or School Staff
• Early Warning, Timely Response: A Guide to Safe Schools
• Tips for Talking to Children After a Disaster

Related AAP Policy Statements:

• Firearm-Related Injuries Affecting the Pediatric Population
• Role of the Pediatrician in Youth Violence Prevention
• The Pediatrician and Childhood Bereavement