



## Talking with Kids about School Violence

For many children, school is a safe and predictable place where they spend a good portion of their days. But when this part of their lives is impacted by violence, whether directly or indirectly, "it can significantly impact their view of the world and interfere with their social emotional growth and well-being," states Rick Amaral, Director of Children's Services at InterCommunity.

Children may feel confused and scared, and worry that they or their friends or loved ones are in danger. Parents, teachers, and other authority figures can help children feel safe by sharing information that is age-appropriate and talking with them about their fears and concerns.

Different ages require different responses. "Very young children and those in elementary school may not have much awareness of the incident, and parents should monitor their access to disturbing news reports," states Mr. Amaral. "For kids who are aware of school-based violent events, the first line of action could be a debriefing conversation in the classroom by teachers of what the students know, think, and feel, followed up by reassurances of the school's safety features. Validating their concerns and providing reassurance may be all that is needed for elementary-age students. Those who appear to be struggling emotionally may benefit from one-on-one time with a clinician or social worker."

## Middle and High School Students

With access to social media and TV news, middle and high school students are usually highly aware of incidents of school violence and have strong opinions of how to prevent it. Mr. Amaral advises parents and teachers to

validate students' concerns and feelings, review the safety measures that schools have in place, ways to stay safe, and be patient and open to cues that a student may want to talk.

Some students prefer writing, playing music, or doing an art project as an outlet. Others find that concrete actions such as writing and sending a condolence card to be helpful. "Creating student body groups to discuss ways to increase safety also provides students a sense of empowerment. Allowing particular student to have access to individual counselors may be important options to consider for students who are more triggered by the experiences than others," suggests Mr. Amaral.

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## What Parents Can Do

- Talk with your children and answer their questions honestly, keeping in mind age-appropriate responses.
- Provide reassurance and stay calm.
- Talk about the people who are helping and the safety measures that are in place.
- Turn off or limit the news, especially for younger children.

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