

Talking Points to Help Your Child Work Through a Traumatic Event at School

1. Initiate the Conversation

- Just because children aren't talking about a tragedy doesn't mean they're not thinking about it.
- They may sense your discomfort and not want to upset you by bringing it up, or they may be too overwhelmed by their own feelings to express them.
- Without factual information, children (and adults) 'speculate' and fill in the empty spaces to make a complete story or explanation
- To open up the conversation, consider starting with questions such as:
 - How do you feel about what's happening at school?
 - What are you or your friends thinking about or talking about in terms of this incident?
 - Are you and your friends talking about what happened at school? I'd be really interesting in hearing what you think. Let me know if you want to talk.
- Encourage your child to share their feelings, and you can begin by sharing your own. If your child is having difficulty opening up, invite them to express their emotions in a non-verbal manner such as drawing or writing.

2. Reassure Them

- Trauma can rattle our sense of safety, and our children's.
- To make your reassurances more believable, you can point out some of the safety measures that are being taken, like explaining that perpetrator has been criminally charged and dismissed from their job
- One goal of this conversation is to provide them with the reassurance that:
 - Things will get better.
 - You will be there for them.
 - They can ask you questions anytime.
 - They are safe, and so are the people they care about.

3. Listen

- Although we always want to be good listeners for our children, it's especially crucial in the wake of traumatic events.
- That means giving them our full attention, and not jumping to judge or minimize what they're saying—no matter how silly or illogical it may seem.
- For example, if a child is afraid this might be their fault or that they might be a future victim it might be better to say, "I understand why you're scared, but actually..." instead of stuttering out a horrified "No, of course not!"
- If children's fears sound vague or jumbled, parents can help by gently summarizing what they're hearing: "It sounds like what you're feeling is..."
 - A few clarifying questions can also help:
 - "That's interesting, can you tell me more about that?"

- “What do you mean by...?”
- “How long have you been feeling...?”

4. Focus on the Good

- Where there is tragedy, there is also heroism—acts by police officers, teachers, school personnel that restore our faith in humanity right when it is shaken.
- The forces of good spring into action with their love, support, and generosity.
- When we feel the pain of others, compassion motivates us to help and to transform that pain into a feeling of connection and support. Encouraging kids to *do* something about what they’re feeling can give them an outlet and restore their sense of control. Some suggestions might include:
 - Writing letters to victims and their families.
 - Sending thank you notes to the school personnel for acting to ensure a safe school environment
 - Setting up a community study group to learn more about the issue
 - Writing a letter or a short book to encourage children to stand up and report abuse to those in authority