

After the Shooting: What Parents Can Do

As a parent, one of your most important concerns is the safety and wellbeing of your child. When a horrific act of violence occurs, such as this shooting, you may be wondering...

After the shooting, do your children have...

a need to talk about it?

Your children may want to tell what happened again and again. Even generally quiet children may talk a lot about what they saw, felt and did during the shooting.

nightmares and trouble sleeping?

Your children may be afraid to go to sleep or wake up frightened from bad dreams.

fears of being alone?

Some children are afraid of being left alone anywhere, even if it's only in another room at home. Yours may cling to you and may even want to sleep with you at night. They may be afraid of leaving home to go to school.

worries and fears?

Children may pay closer attention to the news and weather reports now. When they feel a gust of wind or see a few raindrops, they may become nervous. And if the weather turns bad or the news sounds grim, children may be worried that another shooting is on the way.

vivid memories of the shooting?

Children can picture in their minds detailed scenes from the shooting. And many different sights, sounds or smells can easily "trigger" these memories in your children.

trouble sitting still?

Your children may now be more active, have problems paying attention, and be more impatient.

upset feelings or no feelings at all?

Some children are easily upset or feel apathetic. Many express concern about the welfare of others, particularly other young ones.

physical problems?

Your child may suffer from headaches, stomach aches, nausea, and fatigue.



These are just some of the common, temporary reactions children can have to a shooting. Keep in mind that these are normal responses to an abnormal event. Fortunately, there are some simple steps you can take to help your children through these difficult times.

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You can help your children by...

listening.

It may be painful, but one of the best things you can do for children is to listen to them talk about the shooting. Younger children may be drawing pictures of the shooting or acting it out in their play. Talking, drawing and play-acting are healthy and natural ways for children to work through their reactions.

comforting.

Feel free to hold and comfort your children more during this time. They are reaching out to you for security right now, and will benefit from extra love and affection.

reassuring.

You can also reassure your children that they are now safe. Review or create a family safety plan that notes how you plan to connect in times of crisis.

teaching.

Emergencies are opportunities for children to learn the most important lessons of life – what it means to be part of a loving family and caring community. Take advantage of this chance to teach your children these basics and note the efforts of first responders.

noting positive qualities.

Children often show strengths, such as compassion, courage and hope, in troubled times. You can point with pride to their acts of generosity, hard work and patience. Be generous with your praise.

being appropriately protective.

This may be the most difficult for you to do, but you must fight the temptation to over-protect your children. It may be very hard even to let them out of your sight, but its important that the family relies on the comfort provided by familiar, regular routines and expectations.

being a good example.

Actions speak louder than words, and by your actions, you can set an example for your children of how to cope adaptively, ask for and provide support, and respond in productive ways.

encouraging children to help.

Children can and should help in age-appropriate ways - reaching out with messages of support and care. You may want to encourage your children to offer help or give a donation to others with needs.

preparing.

You can help lessen the likelihood of overly upsetting reactions that can occur when an event triggers memories of the shooting. You can tell your children what to expect and what to do to handle that situation.

seeking help if your children are suffering severe problems.

If your children have had serious losses, such as the death of a loved one, they will likely benefit from more help. See a professional if they are having extreme reactions to the shooting, such as repeated nightmares, flashbacks, crying spells, behavior problems, and panic reactions. Talk to your child's pediatrician, teacher, or school counselor for a recommendation.