

CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH NETWORK

Specific strategies for talking with your kids about the tragedy in Connecticut

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Greetings faithful readers. Our hearts are saddened by the senseless violence that took place at a Connecticut elementary school. The news of this tragedy is unfolding and we will certainly be weighing in as more details emerge. Keep the families of those lost, the teachers and children who witnessed the horror, and the first responders close to your heart.

Here is some great advice from Jeffrey Rowe, MD, Clinical Director of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Rady Children's Hospital-San Diego. *Thanks to Network Advisory Council member Alfredo Aguirre for sharing this information.*

What parents should talk about with children:

Recognize the sudden, unexpected, tragic event. Be clear that children and teachers were hurt, don't be vague. If the child asks if anyone died, tell the truth as they will certainly hear it via media.

Confirm that a lot of people are scared and sad. Confirm that some people will be worried for a while

Let the children know the schools, law enforcement, and government workers have been making safety plans for all of the schools in our area and that their safety and security is the most important thing in their mind.

Provide emotional support- it may take a few minutes or hours (even days) for the emotional impact to reach the children. When it does, provide nurturance (hugs, empathy, kindness, calm support) and ask about their thoughts and feelings. Be prepared for children to need this several times.

Do not have the TV news about the event on for an extended period of time- the news stations wish to inform people about progress of the investigation and other aspects of the case- this is not helpful for children as multiple exposures to this information can exaggerate the event in their minds.

Make sure to spend family time together doing “normalizing” activities- regular meal times, bedtimes, play times. For some children there may be mild disruptions in sleep, appetite, and social interest. If these problems go on for more than a few days, contact your family doctor or your local Access and Crisis Line.

There are a number of additional great resources available to help you talk with children that we are posting on the Network website.

Network reader Robert Abramovitz, MD, contributed this excellent straightforward article posted in the New York Times. In addition, Dr. Abramovitz has also contributed a number of great resources from the Child Traumatic Stress Network.

Talking to Children about the Shooting

Psychological Impact of the Recent Shooting

Parent Guidelines for Helping Youth after the Recent Shooting

Tip Sheet for Youth Talking to Journalists

Take a look at the excellent work Mental Health America did with their fact sheet Helping Children Cope With Tragedy Related to Anxiety. Please be sure to visit their website for other helpful resources.

The University of Maryland School of Medicine has developed a comprehensive list of resources for dealing with traumatic events in schools. Download here.

The National Association of School Psychologists also offers a lot of great information, including handouts on dealing

with death in school, helping children through crises, and how to talk to children about violence (this last one available in English, Spanish, Korean, and Vietnamese).

- *More great tips from an article on ivillage about talking to kids about tragedy. [Click here to watch the video and learn more.](#) Although it can be easy to want to avoid talking about a tragedy with your kids, it's important if they're old enough to have heard about it. This resource will walk you through how to talk about a school shooting with your kids, age by age.*