

Helping Children Cope with School Violence

Incidents of school violence have shocked and saddened the nation. They have left worried parents wondering how their children could be affected. Read this handout for information on how to:

- Speak to your children about the violence.
- Help ease their fears.
- Protect them from future violence.

How Will Children Respond To a Tragedy?

Most children will be aware of school violence by seeing media coverage. But how they respond depends on a child's:

- Age.
- Personality.
- Level of maturity.

Some children may not understand the tragedy. Some may not understand that violence could affect their own lives. Especially children ages nine and under. Others may be scared that something could happen to them. And others may try to protect themselves by trying to pretend the event did not happen.

Your child will be looking to you for answers. You can provide guidance and support.

How Can Parents Help?

Speak to your child about school violence openly and honestly. Adapt your conversations to the age of the child. Children deserve honest answers. The following tips may also help:

- **Encourage your child to express his or her feelings.** Children usually feel better when they can talk about their feelings. Ask specific questions, such as:
 - “How do you feel?”
 - “Does it make you feel scared?”
 - “What worries you the most?”

Encourage your child to be honest. Listen for clues about hidden feelings or worries.

- **Comfort your child.** Respond to your child's feelings. Acknowledge his or her fears. Reassure your child that he or she is safe. Tell him or her that this was a rare event. But do not make false promises. Instead, offer your love, support and guidance. Say things such as “I am here to

protect you and to help keep you safe.” Also remind your child that his or her teachers and the police are looking out for his or her safety.

- **Monitor the media.** Monitor and limit the amount of television your child watches. Seeing coverage of the school violence may make him or her more afraid.
- **Speak to your child’s school administrators.** Ask your child’s teachers and school principal how they have addressed school violence. Many schools speak to students about safety issues. Many help children understand that they are doing everything they can to keep the children safe.

Help Is Available

Call us using the phone number in your member handbook for more information, help and support. We are here to help you get and stay well.