

Tips for Talking to Children About School Threats

REASSURE CHILDREN THAT THEY ARE SAFE

- Emphasize that schools are very safe
- Validate their feelings and explain that all feelings are OK
- Let children talk about their feelings and help them put these feelings into perspective
- Assist children in expressing these feelings appropriately

MAKE TIME TO TALK

- Let your child's questions be your guide as to how much information to provide
- Be patient. Children do not always talk about their feelings readily
- Watch for clues that your child may want to talk, such as hovering around while you work on a chore or task
- Some children prefer writing, playing music or doing an art project as an outlet
- Young children may need concrete activities (drawing, looking at picture books or imaginative play) to help express their feelings

KEEP YOUR EXPLANATIONS DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE

Elementary School

Elementary school children need brief and simple information. Be sure to reinforce that their school and homes are safe and that adults are there to protect them. Give simple examples of school safety:

- School doors are locked
- Adults are present to monitor them on the playground
- They have practiced emergency drills during school

Intermediate School

Expect that Intermediate school children will be more vocal in asking questions about whether they believe they are safe. They may need help in separating reality from fantasy. Discuss efforts of their school and community leaders to provide safe schools:

- Regular drills
- School doors are locked
- Adults are present to monitor them on the playground

Middle and high school students will have strong and varying opinions about the cause of threats of violence in school and society. They will share suggestions about how to make school safer and how to avoid tragedy. Emphasize the role that they have in maintaining safe schools:

- Do not provide building access to strangers
- Report strangers on campus
- Report threats to school safety made by students or others
- Communicate personal safety concerns to school administrators
- Access support (or encourage others to do so) for emotional needs

OBSERVE YOUR CHILD'S EMOTIONS

Some children may not express their concerns verbally. Changes in behavior, appetite and sleep patterns can also indicate a child's level of anxiety or discomfort.

In most children, these symptoms will ease with reassurance and time. Some children may be at risk for more intense reactions. Children who have had a past traumatic experience or personal loss, suffer from depression or other mental illness, or with special needs may be at greater risk for severe reactions than others. Seek the help of mental health professionals if you are concerned.

LIMIT TELEVISION VIEWING OF THESE EVENTS

Limit television viewing and be aware if the television is on in a common area. Developmentally inappropriate information can cause anxiety or confusion, particularly in young children. Adults also need to be mindful of the content of conversations that they have with each other in front of children, even teenagers, and limit their exposure to vengeful, hateful and angry comments that might be misunderstood.

MAINTAIN A NORMAL ROUTINE

Keeping a regular schedule can be reassuring and promote physical health. Ensure that children get plenty of sleep, regular meals and exercise. Encourage them to keep up with their schoolwork and extracurricular activities. Don't push too hard if they seem overwhelmed.

**SOURCE: NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS
([HTTPS://WWW.NASPONLINE.ORG/RESOURCES-AND-PUBLICATIONS/RESOURCES-AND-PODCASTS/SCHOOL-SAFETY-AND-CRISIS/SCHOOL-VIOLENCE-RESOURCES/TALKING-TO-CHILDREN-ABOUT-VIOLENCE-TIPS-FOR-PARENTS-AND-TEACHERS](https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-safety-and-crisis/school-violence-resources/talking-to-children-about-violence-tips-for-parents-and-teachers))**

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[Terms We Will Use in an Emergency](#) ((departments/safety-and-security/terms-we-will-use-in-an-emergency))

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[Tips to Prepare Your Family for An Emergency \(/departments/safety-and-security/tips-to-prepare-your-family-for-an-emergency\)](/departments/safety-and-security/tips-to-prepare-your-family-for-an-emergency)

[Safe Routes to School \(/departments/safety-and-security/safe-routes-to-school\)](/departments/safety-and-security/safe-routes-to-school)

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