

Tips for Parents Discussing National Tragedies with Children

Tip: Take a minute to think about what you will say. Do your best to speak calmly. Rehearse in your mind sticking to what you know is being done to keep your child safe and if asked, to tell what you know is being done to help the families who are directly affected by these tragedies. Take a deep breath every few sentences. Take a break and come back to the conversation if you're feeling overwhelmed.

Be aware of your tone of voice and try to be calm and warm, yet matter of fact.

Name, normalize and validate emotions, model appropriate expression of coping and emotions.

Example: It sounds to me like you're feeling sad and scared. That makes sense because this was a really awful thing that happened. Lots of people feel the same way as you do, and it can be helpful to talk about it.

Example: It is really hard to hear about these things. I am going to go for a walk to help me feel a little better- would you like to come with me, or do you have other ideas of what might help?

Example: I want to tell you about something that happened yesterday that you might hear about. Somebody in [location] brought a gun to a school and some kids and teachers were killed. Most of the students and adults were able to get out safely. We don't know why this happened yet. Most schools are very safe, but bad things like this do happen sometimes, and I wanted you to know in case people are talking about it at school today.

Focus on facts: what, when, where, who was affected and not affected; describe what is known and not yet known.

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Example: There have been some scary things on the news. How are you feeling?

Let them know you are interested in how they are feeling without them having to bring it up.

Convey confidence without promising nothing bad will ever happen.

Example: We will do everything we can to keep you safe.

Example: It's okay if you don't want to talk right now. You can come to me anytime you want.

Respect your child's wish to not talk much.

Welcome all questions, and know that it is okay not to have all the answers.

Example: I know this may be scary or confusing. What questions do you have? If you don't have any now, you can always ask me later.

Example: That's a really good question. I don't have an answer right now, but I will think about it more and answer when I can.

Tip: Ask for support from other parents, school staff, and/or family for answers to their questions and appropriate language.

Be aware of all the ways children might be learning about the event.

Example: I saw some information on TV and online. Have you seen anything on your phone or heard anything from friends?

Tip: Be prepared to talk about any graphic details or images they may have seen or heard about, and to clear up any misunderstandings or misinformation that came from an unreliable source.