

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, such as this shooting at Virginia Tech University, 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 panic 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.

Continued on reverse

You can help your children by...

listening.

It may be painful, but the best thing 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 a little extra love and affection won't spoil them.

reassuring.

You can also reassure your children that they are now safe. Remind them that they can take precautions to protect themselves from bad weather, even when it's severe, and acts of violence.

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.

praising.

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.

not being over-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 they return to a regular routine as soon as possible.

being a good example.

Actions speak louder than words, and by your actions, you can set an example for your children of how to handle these reactions in a productive way.

encouraging children to help.

Children can and should help in the cleaning and rebuilding that needs to be done. If your family has been spared from severe losses, you may want to encourage your children to offer help or give a donation to others in need.

preparing.

If you start now, you can prevent the upsetting reactions that can occur when an event may trigger 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, or the destruction of a home or farm, they may need 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.