

# Tips for Parents on How to Talk to Children about Violence



Acts of violence – or potential violence – can confuse, frighten, and/or anger children. These experiences may increase worry that friends, family, or loved ones are at risk of being harmed. Children look to adults to provide cues regarding how to react and a safe place to address fears and anxieties. It may take time, but allowing children a safe place to explore their concerns will help them move through this difficult time.

## General ways to support your child:

- **Reassure children that they are safe**, and that you are there to explore their feelings about the incident. Acknowledge that senseless violence occurs, and that it is difficult to understand. Give clear explanations and avoid details that may scare your child. Let children talk about their feelings, help put them into perspective, and assist them in expressing these feelings appropriately.
- **Make time to talk.** Children and youth do not always talk about their feelings readily. By creating the space to talk and letting them know you are here to listen, they will be more likely to seek out support when they need to talk. Allow your child to cry or be sad; don't expect them to be brave or tough.
- **Base explanations on the age of your child.** There is no need to volunteer more information than your child needs!
  - For younger children, responding in simple short sentences is best, remembering to reassure them that you will do all you can to maintain their own and your safety.
  - For older children, offer options to discuss their concerns with you, or consider contacting your child's school to have the school social worker or nurse spend time with him or her.
- **Review safety procedures.** Reassure children that adults at home and school are there to keep them safe. Help children identify at least one adult at school and in the community to whom they can go if they feel unsafe. Let children know that their concerns can also be brought to you, and you will do your best to assist them.
- **Observe emotions and behaviors.** Some children may not express their concerns verbally. Look for changes such as sleep disturbances, being clingy, crying, or even bursts of anger. Sometimes children may express their anxiety through physical complaints, such as headaches or stomachaches. In most children, these symptoms will ease with support, reassurance, and time.
- **Maintain a normal routine.** Keeping to a regular schedule can be reassuring. Encourage children to keep up with regular activities but don't push them if they seem overwhelmed.
- **Keep children focused in the present.** Have children focus on the good they see in their home, friends, family, and how this network will assist in keeping them safe.
- **Stress that violence is never a solution to a personal problem.**



**Seek out additional support if you are concerned about your child.** Talk to your school social worker and/or nurse if you are having concerns about your child's reaction to the event. They can provide on-site support or referrals for additional support for your child.