

The Aftermath of School Shootings and Other Terrorist/Traumatizing Events:

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Call 954-262-5833 to schedule a screening and/or appointment

For Parents:

1. Invite children and adolescents to talk about their feelings and concerns. Try and keep the conversation open-ended; in other words, do not lead the conversation but allow it to be child driven. However, if your child is not forthcoming, use minimal prompts to get the conversation started.
2. The more children and teens can talk about the event the better for them; however, it is important to limit their exposure to others who have had other more intense traumatic experiences. This is because the more traumatized children may disclose traumatizing information that your less-traumatized child did not experience. Learning of this additional information can heighten a child's trauma response. . It will be important for many adolescents to be with their friends, which can assist in healing as long as they are not overly exposed to traumatic information from their friends.

Similarly, parents should limit children's and adolescent's (and adult's) exposure to the media where the traumatizing information including recordings of the event are frequently repeated. This exposure can contribute to vicarious traumatization of those observing media/news reports

3. Children are prone to protect the feelings of others, especially their parents and ones who they love. Parents need to be clear with their child that the child can ask them anything and discuss any aspect of the trauma with them and that no matter how sad the parent is they are tough and strong and can hear anything and do not need to be protected. If the parent is not functioning well and is unable to cope, then another parent or trusted adult needs to have these conversations with them. Conversations about the traumatic event between caretaker and the adolescent or child should be invited periodically if the child is not bringing the topic up on their own.

4. Label for children and adolescents all the possible emotions they may experience: fear, anger, sadness, other emotional pain, grief, guilt (survivor guilt), and love for the ones who have passed as well as the ones who survived.
5. Anticipate for children that they will experience a myriad of feelings at different times as they process what happened to them. Let them know it is okay to cry, and at times they may be surprised when all of a sudden they cry or experience other overwhelming feelings and that it will take awhile before they feel better. They will have good days and bad days and sometimes the bad days will fall on the heels of a good day (thereby catching them off-guard).
6. Reassure children that this is NOT their fault no matter what (even if they knew the gunman) because if they really had any idea this was truly going to happen (if they had a crystal ball), they would have done something. But even then, they are only children and it is up to the adults to protect children. Let them know it is okay for them to be angry at caretakers and other adults for not preventing the shooting.
7. Expect regression in your child or teenager -- they may be more clingy, want to sleep with the light on (or even with you). They may be more irritable or emotional. Give them enough structure so they have accountability or predictability but also within the structure allow enough flexibility so you can accommodate their ever-changing emotional state.
8. You will likely get the proverbial "why ?" This is likely the most difficult question because the answer is complicated –Parents can communicate: “the truth is "we don't know" but we are doing everything in our power to make you safe.”
9. Discuss the event with younger siblings or younger children who were aware of the event (but did not have siblings affected) in age/developmentally appropriate terms but frequently point out how the current danger is over and everyone is safe now.
10. Do more as a family -- cohesiveness and support are extremely helpful. This will also prevent a teen or child from withdrawing. Reduce family conflict as conflict exacerbates children’s adjustment in almost every circumstance.
11. Listen to your children and teenagers and consider their communications of what they need to heal.
12. Assist them with how to memorialize the victims and friends and/or how to assist the families of the victims (and survivors)– action is healing !