

Talking to your kid about school shootings

When a school shooting happens, most parents wonder whether to talk to their kid about it and how much to share or not share. If your kid is young (10 and under) and they have not heard about the school shooting, there is no reason to tell them about it. If your kid is older and they hear about it or you want to share with them, here are some guidelines for talking about school shootings in supportive ways.

Use age appropriate language

Use concrete and clear language to describe what happened. Don't go into detail about what happened and don't show them images. You might say something like: "Someone made a selfish and bad decision yesterday and hurt several kids at school."

Let them lead the conversation

Don't offer more than basic information about what happened unless your kid asks questions. Allow them to lead where the conversation goes and what you talk about. Some kids will not have any questions and some will have a bunch. Answer the questions you feel comfortable answering. It's okay to not have answers to some of their questions. And it's okay to give short and general answers. Part of your role is to protect their brain from too much information and too many details.

Validate and empathize with their feelings

Whatever your kid is feeling in response to a school shooting is normal. There is no right or wrong way to feel about a nonsensical tragedy. Validate whatever they say or express. You can do this by reflecting and observing. "It makes sense that you feel sad," or, "I know it's awful to hear about something like this," or, "I don't know what to say in response to it either."

Use the opportunity to connect and empathize with them. "I feel angry about this too." "It makes me feel scared too."

Offer reassurances

Your kid looks to you for their safety. While you can't protect them from violent acts like school shootings, you want to offer them realistic reassurances. Remind them that you will do everything in your power to keep them safe. Offer them physical affection and comfort. Reassure them of your love and affection for them. Remind them that you are there for them and they are not alone in their feelings about this.

Make home a safe space

Your home is a space that you can control. Think through ways to help your kid feel more safe and comfortable at home.

Talk about and manage triggers

Your kid might feel more anxious going to school or to public spaces. Talk to them openly about their anxious feelings. Work with them to point out safety features like emergency exits and security people at different locations. Talk with them about how their school and public spaces take safety precautions.