

Talking to Kids about School Violence in the Media

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Hearing the news stories of school violence is frightening for both children and their parents. Kids are having to cope with tough issues such as violence at increasingly earlier ages, often before they are ready to understand all the aspects of complicated situations. However, parents can use this time as an opportunity to talk with their children about the issues and are encouraged to do so.

Parents are encouraged to ask their school-age children how they're feeling about the shootings and listen to their questions about the news. Once the children have been able to voice their feelings, questions, and concerns, parents can validate their feelings, support them, and answer the questions in an age-appropriate, yet straightforward manner. Without talking about these issues, your children may make up their own explanations that can be more frightening than any honest response you could offer.

Children ages 6 to 12 are encouraged to only watch the news with a parent, who can use this shared time as an opportunity to talk about their children's reactions and feelings. Parents can reassure children that school shootings rarely happen, and that their school is safe. Parents can also take this opportunity to discuss the importance of their children making friends with all children, rather than teasing or bullying children.

Parents of adolescents should also take the opportunity to explore their adolescents' reactions and feelings to the recent shootings. They are encouraged to discuss the consequences of using violence to resolve conflict. Adolescents, like younger kids, should understand the importance of avoiding cliques, which alienate unpopular students, as well as the importance of helping adults identify students who are at potential risk for violent behavior. They should be empowered to inform school staff immediately of any concerns they have with another student.

Communicating with your children about these tough issues can help you to raise healthy, confident, secure children who know how to resolve conflicts peacefully and make smart decisions to protect themselves.

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