

Talking with Your Child After a Tragedy

Dear Parents,

As our hearts are heavy for those affected by the school shooting in Parkland, Florida we know this can be a difficult time to process the violence and fears that accompany being a part of a sinful and broken world. Providing opportunities for a child to discuss these events and express their emotions and concerns are essential to a child's development. You may find the following suggestions helpful as you seek to guide your children through the tragic losses experienced in South Florida.

Minimize and limit media exposure. Limiting media exposure via radio, television, and social media is important as repeated exposure for children and adolescents can be perceived as new events, giving the false perception that these events are much more likely to occur within your child's community.

Maintain a routine. Maintaining a predictable routine, including school attendance, assists in providing a sense of security and comfort to a child.

Welcome discussions. Having a safe place to discuss concerns, fears, and other emotions serves as a pillar in emotional health and well-being for children and adolescents as they are often observing and experiencing tragedy for the first time. Be sure to have repeated conversations regarding acts of violence, especially if your child is being exposed to news, pictures, and related conversations on social media.

Find out what they know. Simply asking your child what they have heard and empathetically listening to their experiences with their peers will help guide your conversation with them and will assist in creating a safe place to discuss their thoughts and emotions.

Be honest. Sharing the truth and happenings with your child in a developmentally appropriate manner will give them the necessary information they need to cope with the difficult news and develop emotional resiliency. Take the opportunity to share your feelings appropriately and model healthy emotion regulation and coping.

Keep a calm presence. It is healthy and appropriate for a child to observe a parent be sad or cry, but excuse yourself if you experience intense emotion or fear.

Reassure your child's safety. Review with your child that his or her school has an action plan in place to ensure your child's security. Also, take the opportunity to review your family's procedures in the event of an emergency.

Help your child understand the tragedy from a biblical worldview. God's Word offers comfort, hope, and solutions that we as helpers, parents, and friends cannot provide alone. Take this opportunity to read scripture with your child and show them that our hope cannot be found in the brokenness of this world, but in the hope of Jesus Christ, God's Son. Here are two scriptures that are especially comforting in a time of tragedy:

"Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them for the Lord your God goes with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you." Deuteronomy 31:6

“I have said these things to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” John 16:33

We will be in prayer for your family as you guide your children through these difficult topics. Please don't hesitate to reach out if your child needs additional assistance in processing these events.

In Christ,

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References and Resources

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