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Talking regularly with youth about the dangers of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs reduces their risk of using in the first place.

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Start Talking!
Building a Drug-Free Future

Know! How To Talk To Your Kids About School Violence

Have you checked in with your children regarding the recent school shooting in Florida to see what they're thinking and how they're feeling about it? Do you know what to say? It is only natural for us parents to struggle with what to say about this senseless tragedy, along with the additional acts and threats of school violence that have since followed. While it may not a comfortable topic to discuss with our children, it is a necessary one; and one that will hopefully help to ease some young peoples' anxiety and fear after witnessing (through news and social media) the horrific events unfold right in front of their eyes, then replayed again and again.

As parents, it is up to us to provide a filter for what they're seeing and hearing, give them factual information, clear up any questions, and help them feel safe.

How can we do this?

1. **Consider your own reactions:** Your child is watching you and taking notes. The way you handle yourself in the midst of tragedy will hugely impact the way your child handles it. If you are able to remain calm and rational, they will be more likely to do the same.
2. **Let them express themselves:** This is especially important for our teens, as they will have absorbed information independently of us. Ask your child what they've heard and how they're feeling, then listen carefully to determine how to best continue the conversation.
3. **Share the truth:** Do not dismiss anything your child has to say, but do address any misinformation or misunderstandings. Give them age-appropriate information so that they have an understanding of the events that took place. Experts warn, however, to avoid graphic details and unnecessary information. Older children, for instance, may be able to understand the moral implications of taking another person's life and the social consequences.
4. **Give them a chance to ask questions:** And if you don't have all the answers, which most of us don't, it is ok to admit it. Assure your child that he or she is safe and, if needed, seek the help of a trained professional if your child's distress continues for several weeks.
5. **Be aware of your child's social media activity and monitor and/or limit their exposure to the news:** Experts say young children should not be allowed to watch live images of traumatic events playing out. Even for our teens, experts advise parents to watch the news with them to talk through what is happening. Depending on the needs of your child in particular, you can take it one step further by recording and screening the news ahead of time, then using the pause button to stop and address questions and concerns as things unfold.



Talk early and often about alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. Even when it gets tough.

Empowering Parents To Raise Their Children To Be Substance-Free



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6. **Reassure children of their safety:** This is the number one goal - for our children to be able to feel safe at school - so that they can learn and grow, and just enjoy being kids. Remind them of the safety measures their school takes to protect them. And regardless of where you stand on gun control issues, let your teen know that your family, their school, and the community cares about them deeply. Remind them that all of you, and adults nationwide, are working very hard to determine and implement new measures that will protect them and prevent tragedies like this in the future.

Even as we try to move forward, this conversation will need to continue. Don't worry about saying everything perfectly. The biggest mistake we can make is to avoid the conversation with our children. If we are the ones leading the discussion, we are in the best position possible to provide them with appropriate and correct information, as well as lend our support along the way.

** If your child is afraid to go to school, try to ease their mind by taking them through their school's current safety/security plan in detail, including any additional measures the school may be introducing. Let your child know that in the unlikely event something were to happen, you would be made aware of it right away and that you would rush to be there for them. If your child continues to struggle with feelings of fear related to the recent school tragedy or threats of additional school violence, it may be necessary to reach out to a counselor or therapist.*

Sources: CommonSenseMedia.org: Explaining the News to Our Kids. Oct. 2, 2017. Kenneth R. Ginsburg. MD, MS, ED, FAAP, and Martha M. Jablow. American Academy of Pediatrics-HealthyChildren.org How to Support Your Child's Resilience in a Time of Crisis. Nov. 21, 2015. David Schonfeld, MD, FAAP. American Academy of Pediatrics – HealthyChildren.org: Talking to Children About Tragedies & Other News Events. July 9, 2016. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration: Understanding Child Trauma.

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