

Talking to Children about School Threats and Violence: Tips for Families and Educators



Reassure Children

- Reassure children the adults at school are there to keep them safe.
- Point out clear or visible safety efforts whenever possible.
- Explain that, although the possibility of school violence exists, the probability that it will affect us (our school) is very low. Most schools are safe, even though it may not feel that way in the moment.
- Be aware of how your emotions/reactions could contribute to fear/trauma in some children. It's okay to acknowledge your own fear/concern, but prioritize calmness in the presence of children.

Make Time to Talk

- Be patient and look for clues that a child wants to talk, such as hovering around.
- Let children's questions guide the information provided.
- Only share facts that you know about the situation. **Sharing misinformation can increase anxiety and fear.**
- If a child is fearful/worried/confused, listen and acknowledge (e.g., "This is really hard to understand."). Use statements like "Let's talk about what we are doing at school/home to keep us safe (provide 2-3 visible or clear examples)." This is not a guarantee of safety; rather, it is reassurance adults are doing everything they can to support safety.
- Young children may need concrete activities such as looking at books, while some older children may prefer writing, drawing, or playing music to identify and express their feelings.

Review Safety Procedures



- Help children identify an adult at school and in the community that they can go to if they feel uncomfortable, threatened, or at risk.
- Review procedures and safeguards in school and at home. Be sure children understand the information.
- Limit access to all social media platforms and monitor their usage on a regular basis.
- Help children understand the difference between Shelter-in-Place and School Lockdown. A *shelter-in-place* is a precautionary measure for safety while instruction and learning continue. This is typically used for severe weather or at the beginning of an investigation of a potential threat. A *school lockdown* requires instruction to stop and all students and staff to follow strict security procedures for their immediate safety; law enforcement is likely involved at this time.

If you have information about suspicious or dangerous behaviors, please use the **FortifyFL** tipline to anonymously report your concerns.

If your child needs support at school, please contact your child's **school counselor**.

If you or your child need emergency assistance, dial **911**. For 24-hour emotional crisis support, dial **988**.

Adapted from National Association of School Psychologists. (2023). Talking to children about violence [Handout].



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Talking Points

Safety

- School staff work with families and public safety providers (such as local police, fire departments, emergency responders, and hospitals) to keep you safe.
- Although there is no absolute guarantee that something bad will never happen, it is important to understand the difference between the **possibility** of something happening and the **probability** that it will affect you (or our school community) directly. Even though any act of mass violence is horrible and unacceptable, the likelihood of experiencing such violence in school is low.
- Who is your trusted adult at school? Who is your trusted adult outside of school? Trusted adults are people you can talk to and share information with when you are scared, nervous, or need help.
- Some of the ways your school is safe is that you have a lot of adults watching over the school, like the guardian and/or School Resource Officer (SRO). You also have access to FortifyFL to report suspicious or dangerous activities, you have weapons detection systems on campus (all high schools and random middle schools), campus doors are locked, all staff wear a mobile crisis alert panic badge (Centegix card) that can be initiated during an immediate threat to notify 911 and first responders, and everyone must be wearing an identification badge.

Reporting

- Adults are responsible for keeping you safe, but we can all play a role in school safety. Be observant and let an adult know if you see or hear something that makes you feel uncomfortable, nervous, or frightened.
- There is a difference between reporting and ratting, tattling, or gossiping. Think of reporting as a way to get others out of danger. Reporting is a way to help others and keep your friends safe by telling a trusted adult what you know or hear.

Helpful Tips

- Senseless violence is hard for everyone to understand. Doing things we enjoy, sticking to our normal routine, and being with friends and family help make us feel better and help keep us from worrying about the event.
- Sometimes good people make bad choices. They may be unable to handle their anger, struggle with dysregulation, are seeking attention in a negative way, or may not understand the long-term consequences of their actions. Adults (parents, teachers, police officers, doctors, coaches) work very hard to get those people help and keep them from hurting others. It is important for all of us to know how to get help if we feel really upset or angry.
- It's important to be aware of what you post on any online platform. Postings are not private and never disappear from the internet, even if you think you deleted it. Posting threatening language or photos are subject to disciplinary and legal consequences that could change your life forever.
- Violence and threats of violence are never a solution to personal problems. You can be part of the positive solution by participating in antiviolence programs at school, learning conflict mediation skills, and seeking help from adults if you or a peer is struggling with anger, depression, or other emotions you cannot control.

