

WHAT DO WE TELL THE CHILDREN?

By Joseph Primo

Honesty is important and so too is entering these conversations without expectations. Some kids may respond with fear while others may seem indifferent. No reaction is better or more appropriate than another. Getting back to the e-mail I received this morning from a Good Grief mom, having a conversation about the shooting this weekend is probably a smart and important thing to do before school on Monday. Classmates will have their own interpretation of the events; many of those narratives will have been learned this weekend from the media and the adults in their lives. Again, there is not a lot we control about these events, but we can play a big role in how our children hear and come to understand the events. We can best support our children by having an honest dialogue that helps build coping skills and taps into their inherent resiliency. Below is a script you might try.

Adult: So, Alex, have you heard about the sad thing that happened to a school in Connecticut?

→ *Don't assume Alex doesn't already know. She may have picked it up already.*

Adult: Somebody hurt a lot of children with a gun. It's very sad. Children died.

→ *WAIT to see how the child responds.*

Adult: I think a lot of your friends and teachers will be talking about it this week in school. I would like us to talk about it too.

→ *Allow the conversation to happen and be spontaneous. Here are some things you should know about reactions:*

- *Each child responds differently*
- *Children may have an increased sense of fear for their safety*
- *Children may be afraid to return to school or name "scary kids" in their school*
- *Children process information in fragments. They may take it in and then quickly move onto something else.*

Adult: I wonder how these things happen?

→ *Wait to see if the child has ideas of her own.*

Adult: Assure the child that their school (name administrators and teachers) works hard to keep them safe. You can encourage them to listen to their teachers about safety protocol. Assure them of your love and allow them to explore their reactions.

Often times, being together and offering each other love are the most meaningful things we can tell our children.

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