How to talk to your child after a tragedy occurs

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) encourages parents, teachers, childcare providers, and others who work closely with children and teens to filter information about tragic events and to present in a way that allows for understanding, adjusting and coping with tragedy.

Middle School Children & High School Teens (12-17):

- Start by asking your child what they’ve heard about an incident, their reactions, and feelings about what occurred (try to gauge what your child is feeling and if they want to talk more about it).
- Reassure them that they are safe—let them know that you, their teachers, and their school are doing everything they can to keep them safe so that something like this won’t happen to them.
- Acknowledge you’re not sure why things like this happen—let them know you do everything to protect them at home and in this world.
- Let your teen know the firearm laws in WA State are more strict—to try to prevent firearms getting in the hands of those who want to harm themselves or other.
- Do not push information on them, check-in with your child to see how they are doing in the days to come.

Pre-School-age Children (4 or younger):

- Do not bring the incident up, unless your child does
- Reassure the child that they are safe
- Do not watch the news in front of your child

Elementary School-age Children (5-12):

- Appropriate to bring up tragic incident(s) and say:
  “You know this terrible thing happened, where some kids/people were hurt/killed by somebody.”
- Gauge your child’s reaction to see if they want to discuss any further.
- Reassure them that they are safe—let them know that you, their teachers, and their school are doing everything they can to keep them safe; something like this won’t happen to them.
- Acknowledge you’re not sure why things like this happen—let them know you do everything to protect them at home and in this world.

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