

How to talk to your child after a tragedy occurs



HARBORVIEW
INJURY PREVENTION
& RESEARCH CENTER

UNIVERSITY of WASHINGTON

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.

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.

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.



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