



TIPS FOR TALKING ABOUT VIOLENCE & SOCIAL UNREST

When there are violent acts or social unrest, it is important that students feel safe, supported, and have a trusted adult with whom to talk, so please consider these tips for talking with your student(s) about violence and social unrest. It can almost go without saying that high profile acts of violence and social unrest can worry, scare, and/or confuse children and teens. They will worry about those they care about and what might happen. Oftentimes, children get their cues of how to respond to events from adults in their environment, therefore, during times of unrest, we can help children feel safe and secure, and model appropriate behavior, speech, and citizenship. This can be done by creating a sense of normalcy in their world and having conversations to provide some reassurance and guidance.

As you support your children, please consider the following tips to help guide your conversations and interactions:

- 1. Provide reassurance for children & teens safety**-Emphasize that school is safe. Encourage students to share their feelings. As they share, acknowledge their feelings and let them know they may experience a range of feelings, and how they handle those feelings is important. Discuss healthy ways to cope and regulate themselves (please see the P-H-M's SEL & Mental Health webpage for additional information). You may need to help keep things in perspective and rationalize. For students who question the limits, while we do all we can to foster physical and psychological safety, no one can ~~not~~ absolutely guarantee that nothing will ever happen; however, we can talk about the difference between the possibility and probability of a child or teen being impacted by a violent act, and most

conversations will need to stay focused on the probability of the child or teen not being impacted by acts of violence.

2. Make time to talk and communicate (build empathy and understanding)

-Provide a safe space for children to talk. Make sure you are calm, reassuring, and focused on what they are saying. Listen and allow questions to help guide discussion. If they are not wanting to talk, then you could watch for any cues in their behavior that may signal the child or teen is experiencing stress and then provide security and comfort. Some students may express themselves in ways other than conversation, such as music or art. Younger children may benefit from imaginative play.

3. Consider the child's developmental level and keep conversations developmentally appropriate

-As you discuss heavy topics, it is important to keep the developmental level of your child or teen in mind. You will also want to monitor the amount of time you spend talking about the topic. Some children need the information in small doses, while others can handle longer conversations.

- **Early Elementary Aged Children:** Information should be simple and brief. Provide reassurance that they are safe and adults can help protect them.
- **Upper Elementary Aged Children:** May be more vocal and ask questions. May need help separating fantasy from reality. Reiterate their safe environments.
- **Upper Middle and High School Aged Students:** Many students this age will have strong opinions. Emphasize the importance of being a good citizen and helping to foster safe environments.

4. Share safety procedures and systems that are in place to provide physical and psychologically safe environments

- Review safety procedures, talk about good citizenship, and remind them of people in their environments or identify who they can go to if they feel worried, scared or threatened. Remind students that there is a difference between tattling, gossiping and reporting concerns, and if they have concerns to report, they should tell a trusted adult immediately. Please see the information regarding the Safe School Helpline® at the bottom of this resource.

5. Monitor emotions and behaviors. Look for changes in behavior and mood

-Not all students will be able to verbalize their feelings or identify if they are upset. If you notice changes in functioning related to sleeping, eating, behavior, mood, or social interactions, be sure to help ease their worry, anxiety or discomfort. Please be aware that children who have had an adverse or traumatic experiences or loss in their life,

may be prone to more intense reactions. Seek the help of a mental health provider if you have concerns. You can reach out to a counselor or Youth Service Bureau Specialist at your child's school, or your family may wish to explore the possibility of a community mental health provider.

6. Limit social media exposure-Be aware of what you listen to and watch in front of your children, because violent images or stories can cause psychological distress. It is likely best that news media coverage is not scrolling on your television when students are within audio or visual range. It is also important to monitor your child's access to the internet and their devices (e.g., Chromebook, phone, ipad, etc.). Talk to your student about the potential concerns related to watching and hearing about violent acts and social unrest. It is also helpful to avoid exposure to vengeful, hateful, and angry comments that could cause additional stress for your child.

7. Maintain a routine-When you stay on a routine, students know what to expect, and this fosters a sense of safety and security. Make sure students are getting plenty of rest, are eating appropriately, and are staying active. A focus on keeping up with schoolwork and managing extracurricular activities is important.

8. Fostering resiliency is vital. Focus on mental wellness, healthy, positive relationships, and consider being a part of the solution-While they may be experiencing a range of emotions, it is important that everyone engages in self-regulation and healthy coping strategies. This allows us the ability to connect with others. Strong, healthy, and safe relationships with others helps us to become stronger and resilient. Emphasize they can make a difference by being a good citizen, showing care and being empathetic. Perhaps consider joining a group that focuses on positive, non-violent solutions. As needed, they can also focus on conflict resolution strategies and manage stress in healthy ways.

If your child needs additional support, please do not hesitate to reach out to your child's administrator, school counselor (for middle and high) or Youth Service Bureau at their school.

Please do not hesitate to report any safety concerns to the Safe School Helpline®. The Safe School Helpline® is a confidential way to report student concerns about threats, suicide, drugs, bullying, or anything that threatens the safety of our schools. Available 24/7.

*Three Ways to Report to the Safe School Helpline®
Call: 1-800-418-6423 ext 359*

Text: TIPS to 66746

Online: [SafeSchoolHelpline.com](https://www.safeschoolhelpline.com)

Resources:

National Association of School Psychologists