



## Helping Children Cope When Tragedy Impacts Our Community

As our nation mourns and reacts to another mass shooting, we at OUR HOUSE Grief Support Center are struck by the ways in which this event evokes similar feelings that arose in response to other recent traumatic events. Whether it was in the aftermath of a shooting that took place at a school, congregation, work place, vigil or nightclub, adults struggle to find the words to comfort and support their children. At a loss for the “right” words or fearing a strong reaction, adults may avoid the topic altogether. Far too often, children are left alone, struggling to understand why bad and scary things happen and searching for ways to cope. The following are some suggested ways to approach the subject, address feelings, and provide a sense of safety and containment for children:

1. First, determine if your child has acquired knowledge about the traumatic event by asking “has anything happened today that you have questions or feelings about?” It’s okay for them not to know, especially if they are very young.
2. Respect your child’s need to know and assess their level of exposure to the facts. Be prepared to add information if the child wants to know details. Answer in an age-appropriate and honest way. For example: “a bad person used a gun to shoot people at a school.” You can follow up by saying “do you have any questions?” and then add information based on the question.
3. Provide a safe environment for your children to express their concerns and feelings. Let them know that all of their feelings are okay.
4. Address your child’s fears for their own safety by offering reassurance that their school and home are safe places and that they are cared for there.
5. Limit exposure to news coverage and adult conversations about the traumatic event as much as possible. Turn off the television and monitor internet usage.
6. Decrease nighttime anxieties by preparing your child for bedtime by turning off television and computers and engaging in soothing activities such as listening to soft music, warm baths and for young children, reading bedtime stories.
7. Seek professional help if your child exhibits extreme changes in their sleeping, eating, mood or if you are concerned about the way your child is behaving.
8. Model healthy ways to cope including talking to someone you trust, exercising, eating healthy foods and knowing that all feelings are okay.
9. Honor the memory of those who died and decrease feelings of helplessness by making a card or sending a donation to the families affected by the tragedy.