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### **6 Tips for Talking to Your Kids About the Florida School Shooting:**

As the nation reels from a high school shooting in Florida that killed 17 people, parents across the country are grappling with how best to discuss the tragedy with their children. These conversations can be scary and overwhelming, but they are important in helping your child cope with big feelings about the shooting. Consider these six tips when talking to your kids about what happened in Parkland, FL.:

1. **Prepare yourself emotionally for the discussion.** These scary incidents aren't just hard on the little ones – they're hard on us big people, too. Give yourself time and space to process your own feelings and reactions around the shooting. Call a friend. Have a good cry. Go for a walk. Consider contacting a mental health professional if you find yourself struggling more than you would expect. However it looks, do your own preparation so you can be emotionally ready to talk to your kids. They'll be following your lead, so you want to project a sense of calmness and safety.
2. **Start where your kids are.** To begin the conversation, ask your kids "did your teacher talk about what happened at a school in Florida? What did they say?" This will help you get a sense of what your child already knows and how they are conceptualizing what happened. It's possible that your child has heard a wildly inaccurate version of what happened from a fellow classmate, so be prepared to explain what actually happened.
3. **Keep your explanations developmentally appropriate.** Below are some guidelines for how to best explain to your kids what happened, depending on their age:
  - a. *Kids in early elementary school:* Keep your explanations brief and simple, but not vague. For example, in the case of the shooting in Florida, you could say "someone went into a school far away from here and hurt a lot of people. But we know that your school is safe and you are safe at home." Combine information about the event with reassurances that those affected are being helped and your child is safe. You can also give them some context of how far Florida is from Minnesota.
  - b. *Kids in upper elementary school or lower middle school:* At this age, kids might be more concerned of whether they are currently safe. Provide more information about the systems in place to keep children safe: emergency drills, locks and alarms at school and home, and the presence of police and teachers to help in case of an emergency.
  - c. *Kids in upper middle school or high school:* Your child at this age is likely to have access to a lot of information about the event and also have strong opinions about it. Give them space and time to share their thoughts. You can also discuss the important role that they play in keeping the community safe – for example, talk about how important it is for them to speak up if they see something strange or worrisome.
4. **Limit their exposure to media.** This will be especially difficult with older adolescents and teens, but do your best to keep your kids away from the news – especially graphic images or videos. If your older child wants to watch coverage of the shooting, consider recording the news segment before they watch it so you can screen for graphic content. Change the news or radio when younger kids are in the room, and do your best to keep newspapers out of view. But also know

that you can't protect your kids from everything. Check in with them on what they're hearing and seeing about the tragedy.

5. **Take action together.** Kids can feel helpless when something big and scary happens around them. Help them regain some control by taking a small, age-appropriate action together. You can say a prayer or write a card for those affected, donate to a cause that prevents school shootings from happening, or research the safety procedures in your own community.
6. **Keep an eye out.** As the days and weeks follow, you'll want to monitor for signs that your child is experiencing emotional distress, including: sleeping problems (trouble falling or staying asleep, nightmares); changes in behavior (declining school performance, needing more attention than usual, decrease in patience); physical symptoms (headaches or stomach aches, changes in appetite); or a general increase in feelings of sadness, anxiety or anger. If you notice these symptoms in your child, contact your pediatrician or a local mental health provider to schedule an evaluation.

Sources:

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