

HOW TO TALK TO YOUR CHILD ABOUT THE CONNECTICUT TRAGEDY

As a resident of Chestnut Hill and a practicing psychotherapist as well as a mother and grandmother I was profoundly affected by the tragedy in Connecticut.

When the tragedy in Connecticut occurred last week I thought of all the many families with preschoolers in our neighborhood and their struggles to decide how to handle talking to their children about the violence. I would like to share some insights and information about violence and children that may be of help to families in this time of crisis.

When a violent event hits the news about a shooting at school all parents get anxious about their child's safety. If your preschooler happens to listen to radio or television accounts about the Connecticut tragedy, or perhaps hears about it at school, it can prevent a child from seeing their preschool or day care as a safe and caring place. You may notice your preschooler acting more whiny or clinging to you more, throwing tantrums or complaining of stomachaches or waking up more often at night. This is called regression and is a coping mechanism children may use to make themselves feel safer. Set the same consistent limits as you have previously but allow them this slight regression during their healing period. Adhere to comforting routines at home and stay clear of all news on the radio or television. In addition, it is important to monitor your own feelings when your child is present.

With regard to talking to your child about the tragedy, first find out what your child knows by asking what was heard. Remember, some children may learn about the event and quickly forget about it, so don't feel the need to press the issue. If your child does want to talk and begins to ask questions keep your response truthful but simple, and use words that a child can comprehend. Give the child as much information as they ask for but no more than that. Offer reassurance by normalizing the situation by keeping a regular schedule and reminding your child that you will always protect them. Keep a regular schedule and remind your child that you as parents are here to protect them. Remind them that they are safe, and that their home, their neighborhood and their school are very safe places. Stay close to your children and give an abundance of hugs and other ways of nurturing them in this difficult time. Be sure to take time for yourself to find friends or family members whom you can talk to about your feelings related to the tragedy so you will be better able to help your child. Children of this age react more to their parents' distress than to anything else

If you notice that your child needs more help to process this violence, in order to provide closure to it contact your child's preschool or school to see if they have a school counselor for your child to talk to. Encourage your child's school to develop support groups for children where they can safely verbalize their questions led by competent staff. You may also want to contact your child's pediatrician for referrals to therapists in the area who specialize in therapy for children, particularly if your child is becoming more anxious or depressed than you feel you and your child's school can manage.

If you need further information or names of therapists who specialize in children's therapy please contact me at 215-540-5860 ext. 100. There are many highly qualified therapists in this area that can help your child. I hope this information proves helpful to you and your families.

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