



## *Talking to Children About Violence*

### **Talk Time Activities**

It is sometimes hard to know where to start the conversation about violence and safety, especially when you may still be feeling stunned or off-balance yourself. These ideas are easy to do, some even while driving in the car or while preparing dinner. Choose an age group below to find TeachersAndFamilies' ideas for activities and conversation starters:

#### **Early Elementary Talk Time Activities**

##### SOAR WITH THE EAGLES

Talk to your child about the meaning of the words "power" and "strong." Discuss animals that seem to have great strength (such as a lion, eagle or shark). Then act out these "strong" animals with your child. Soar around your room like an eagle, swim like a shark, or run like a lion. Make the sounds of the animals. Then talk about how your child can have "power" and be "strong" in the world. Some possible ideas might be: always help other people, never bully anyone, tell an adult if you ever see someone being mean to another student, never open doors for strangers, etc.

##### HELPFUL HUMANS

Help your child to help someone else. Talk about the importance of helpful humans and ask about how they help to make our world a safer and happier place. One easy way to help your child help others is to designate a separate piggy bank to save money for others. Have your child complete special chores to earn money for his/her "helpful human piggy bank." As your child earns extra money, he/she will have the concrete piggy bank to see the earnings. Help your child to choose a charity to donate the "helpful human piggy bank" money. By allowing your child to earn money to help others, he/she will feel the strength of helping and protecting others.

##### FEELING PICTURES

Help your child to explore feelings by drawing pictures. Discuss the drawings with your child. Use a variety of colors: how does each color make your child feel?

## THANK YOU

Help your child create a thank you note or card to the people who protect others in your community, such as police officers, fire fighters, or military personnel. Take it to the fire or police station together or go to the post office together to mail the letter to service personal.

## DOLL TALKS

If your child is having a hard time talking about his/her feelings, try two dolls, puppets, or stuffed animals. Have your child use one of the animals to talk to you, while you use the other to respond. For example, you might say "Hey bunny, how are you feeling today?" and your child might respond, "Well Molly, I think I am sad today." Continue the opportunity to talk "through" the dolls or stuffed animals.

## SENTENCE STARTERS

Here are a few ways to start a conversation:

- You know mommy (daddy, grandma, etc.) loves you so much, and you are always safe. Let's talk about the ways that we keep you safe. We lock our doors; your school keeps their doors locked; we keep you safe in the car by using a booster seat; we keep you safe on your bike by using a helmet. What else do we do that keeps you safe?
- I know what you saw on the TV might make you sad. I wish you wouldn't have seen that. What exactly do you think happened? How does it make you feel?
- Do you have any questions for me about what you saw/heard? We are always here for you if you want to talk about anything. Any question is okay to ask. We are here to help you and keep you safe.

## Upper Elementary/Early Middle School Activities

### LETTERS OF LOVE

Have your child write a letter or email to you, a friend, or another family member. In the letter or email, encourage your child to discuss his/her feelings, fears and other emotions about the event.

## SENTENCE STARTERS

Here are a few age-appropriate ways to start this conversation:

- Have you heard people at school talking about this scary event? How did it make you feel?
- I know you saw the news today about the terrible events that happened. Let's talk about it – what did you see?

## SAFETY SENSE

After a tragic event has occurred, talk to your child about ways you can all be safe and what your family, school, and friends do to make children safe. Some examples of safety sense may include locking outside doors, not talking to strangers, telling an adult if a student is bullying another student, wearing a bike helmet, using seatbelts, metal detectors and much more.

## SONGS OR POEMS

Create a song or poem with your child. Encourage him/her to express feelings in words or sounds. Sing the song or read the poem together, and discuss your child's feelings about the event.

## DRAWINGS OF DEPTH

Help your child to explore his/her feelings by drawing pictures. Discuss the drawings with your child. Use a variety of colors – how does each color make the child feel?

## HEALING BY HELPING

Show your child that he/she can make a difference in the world. Volunteer with your child at a nursing home, community event or other age-appropriate opportunities. Discuss how helpful humans make the world a better, brighter and safer environment for everyone.

## **Upper Middle School/High School Activities**

### SENTENCE STARTERS

Here are a few age-appropriate ways to approach this subject:

- I am sure everyone at school today was talking about the tragedy that occurred. What did you hear? Do you have any questions?

- Let's watch the news together and talk about the tragedy. It is okay to be sad; everyone is.
- You know when I was younger, I remember the tragedy \_\_\_\_\_ occurring. It made me feel so sad and out of control. I bet you are feeling the same way. I am here if you want to talk about it, but I understand if you aren't in the mood to talk.

### WRITING RESPONSES

Encourage your teenager to write about his/her feelings about the tragedy. Some starter sentences could include, "Last night I couldn't sleep. I lay awake and thought about..." or, "I can't imagine what the terrorist/bully was thinking. What could make someone do something so terrible?"

### LIFE IN PICTURES

Challenge your teenager to draw pictures or create images on the computer of what his/her emotions "look" like. What colors represent how the feelings? Once he/she is finished creating, talk to your child about what he/she drew and the feelings inside the images.

### MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Help your teenager understand that he/she can make a positive difference in the world. Talk about the many positive things he/she can do – volunteer, tutor a younger student, report any "threats" heard in school, tell an adult if students are bullying anyone, be helpful to others, and many other examples.

### YOU ARE SAFE!

Sit with your teenager and make a list (mentally or on paper) of all of the ways he/she is safe. For example, you use seatbelts when you drive, the school doors are always locked, etc. Then make another list of additional ways that teens can help to stay safe. For example, don't talk to strangers, report any threats that they hear (even if they think the other kids are just joking), drive carefully, learn about government and vote when the time comes, etc.