

DEMAREST SCHOOL DISTRICT

TIPS FOR DEALING WITH CHILDREN AND CRISIS

As adults, it is difficult to comprehend what happened and know how to deal with the confusion, pain, and uncertainty of such a terrible tragedy. For children, it can be upsetting and confusing and based on their age it is important to understand how they may respond and how we can be most helpful to them. The following suggestions have been prepared for you as a general guideline of recommended approaches. Of course, each family must decide what's best for a particular situation. Please call the school and speak with our counselors if you have any questions or specific concerns. We want to be as helpful as possible and are available to help you as needed.

For Younger Children - Pre-K - Grade 4

Children need to be reassured that they are safe and that although a terrible tragedy has occurred, it is not likely to happen in their neighborhood.

Answer direct questions honestly with no need to go into greater detail than necessary. For younger children too much information is both confusing and unnecessarily alarming. It is not recommended to try and over-explain what happened. Don't dwell on the topic, but you do want to be sure to allow children to express any fears, concerns, or questions they may have.

Know that all of us, including children, react to crisis in a variety of ways. Some become very quiet; others anxious, sometimes children make immature or inappropriate remarks as a way of dealing with fear, and uncertainty. Some reactions are observable right away; others don't surface for days or weeks.

Try to maintain as normal a routine as possible. If we display overreactions, we send confusing messages to children. Be careful with conversations when children are present. Sometimes we forget how much they hear and can't be sure how much they truly understand.

Be aware of any changes in your child's behavior. Keep in contact with teachers regarding any concerns or changes at home or at school.

For Children Grades 5 and Higher.

Children this age also need to be reassured that they are safe and that although a terrible tragedy has occurred, it is not likely to happen in their neighborhood.

Answer direct questions honestly. It is recommended to even ask “How are you doing with all of this? Do you have any questions or concerns I can help you with?” Remind your children to come to you if they have any questions and to let them know you’re available to help them as needed. It’s important at this age to clarify information and dispel rumors or exaggerations that may be incorrectly shared with friends. It’s not recommended to try and over-explain what happened. Don’t dwell on the topic. You do want to be sure to allow children to express any fears, concerns, or questions they may have. Remember older children have many relationships outside the home and may be very concerned about a friend, neighbor, or other person in their lives you may not know as well.

Know that all of us especially adolescent children react to crisis in a variety of ways. Some become very quiet; others anxious, sometimes children make immature or inappropriate remarks as a way of dealing with fear, and uncertainty. This doesn’t necessarily reflect a lack of compassion or understanding. Some reactions are observable right away; others don’t surface for days or weeks. Sometimes these events trigger other emotional concerns involving family members or friends that remind them of other sensitive situations for teenagers.

Know that it’s normal for children at this age to share their feelings with coaches, teachers, other parents, clergy, relatives, neighbors and friends of the family.

Try to maintain as normal a routine as possible. Be careful with conversations when children are present. Sometimes we forget how much children hear, and we can’t be sure how much they truly understand. Other times we have unfair expectations of teenagers as they begin to demonstrate maturity and independence but still need our love and support in ways they may not want to admit.

Remember our children are growing up in the information age and have constant access to powerful messages, images, and reports from the media that’s unlike anything we ever experienced during our childhood. Sometimes we forget to appreciate how much they’ve been challenged to cope with during their first 10-16 years of life.

Do not hesitate to call and ask for help and guidance. Our professional staff is trained in dealing with crisis, and our counselors are available at school to offer support or recommend additional services if needed.