**Franklin Township Community School Corporation**

***Mental Health Minute***

***November 2018***

**Talking to Children About Violence: Tips for Parents and Teachers**

High-profile acts of violence, particularly in schools, can confuse and frighten children who may feel in danger or worry that their friends or loved ones are at risk. They will look to adults for information and guidance on how to react. Parents and school personnel can help children feel safe by establishing a sense of normalcy and security and by talking with them about their fears.

1. **Reassure children that they are safe.** Emphasize that schools are safe. Validate their feelings. Explain that all feelings are okay when a tragedy occurs. Let children talk about their feelings; help put them into perspective and assist them in expressing these feelings appropriately.
2. **Make time to talk.** Let their questions be your guide as to how much information to provide. Be patient. Children and youth do not always talk about their feelings readily. Watch for clues that they may want to talk, such as hovering around while you do the dishes. Some children prefer writing, playing music, or doing an art project as an outlet and to help them identify and express their feelings.
3. **Keep your explanations developmentally appropriate.**
	1. ***Early elementary school*** children need brief, simple information that should be balanced with reassurances that their school and homes are safe and that adults are there to protect them. Give simple examples of school safety, such as reminding children about exterior doors being locked, child-monitoring efforts on the playground, and emergency drills practiced during the school day.
	2. ***Upper elementary and early middle school*** children will be more vocal in asking questions about whether they truly are safe and what is being done at their school. Discuss the efforts of school and community leaders to provide safe schools.
	3. ***Upper middle school and high school*** students will have strong and varying opinions about the causes of violence in schools and society. They will share concrete suggestions about how to make school safer and how to prevent tragedies in society. Emphasize the role that students have in maintaining safe schools by following school safety guidelines (e.g., not providing building access to strangers, reporting strangers on campus, reporting threats to school safety that are made by students or community members, etc.); communicating any personal safety concerns to school administrators; and accessing support for emotional needs. School counselors are great resources for students to have these conversations, as well as parents.
4. **Review safety procedures.** This should include procedures and safeguards at school and at home. Help children identify at least one adult at school and in the community to whom they can go if they feel threatened or at risk.
5. **Observe children’s emotional state.** Some children may not express their concerns verbally. Changes in behavior, appetite, and sleep patterns can also indicate a child’s level of anxiety or discomfort. In most children, these symptoms will ease with reassurance and time. However, some children may be at risk for more intense reactions. Children who have had a past traumatic experience or personal loss, suffer from depression or other mental illness, or who have special needs may be at greater risk for severe reactions than other children. Seek the help of a school counselor or mental health professional if you are at all concerned. These professionals are available in all Franklin Township schools.
6. **Limit television viewing of these events.** Limit television viewing of tragic events and be aware if the television is on in common areas. Developmentally inappropriate information can cause anxiety or confusion, particularly in young children. Adults also need to be mindful of the content of conversations that they have with each other in front of children, even teenagers, and limit children’s exposure to vengeful, hateful, and angry comments that might be misunderstood.
7. **Maintain a normal routine.** Keeping to a regular schedule can be reassuring and promote physical health. Ensure that children get plenty of sleep, regular meals, and exercise. Encourage them to keep up with their schoolwork, extracurricular activities, and time with friends.
8. **Reach out for help.** If you have concerns about your child’s well-being, reach out to your child’s school counselor or to the district’s mental health specialist for guidance. We are here to support our students and school communities.

***Dr. Kristy Eaton***

***District Mental Health Specialist***

***2018-2021 Robert Wood Johnson Clinical Scholar Fellow***

***kristine.eaton@ftcsc.org***

***(317)803-5420***

Adapted from the National Association of School Psychologists School Crisis and Safety Information.