

When a tragic event occurs, children and youth will hear about these events through media, peers or other sources. These are difficult topics to talk about and your response will shape your child/youth's core beliefs.

Tips for talking to children/youth about tragedies

You know your child/youth best, and you'll have a good idea of how much information your child/youth is ready to hear. Consider these tips as a guideline:

Don't allow young children to watch the news. Watching news footage can be very disturbing to young children so it's important to keep it off when they're around.

Keep your message simple. Say something like, "That person decided to hurt other people." For young children, this may be all the information they need. Older children are likely to ask more questions. Stick to the simple facts. It's OK to say you don't know all the answers.

Focus on the steps that are being taken to keep people safe. Talk about how police officers, government officials, and other first responders are helping. Spend more time talking about the good work people are doing, rather than the horrific event. This can help reduce your child/youth's anxiety about safety.

Empower your kids to become helpers. Discuss how they can take positive action in the wake of a tragic event. Volunteering in the community and donating allowance money can go a long way toward helping children/youth see that they can always take steps to make the world a little better. Children/youth who feel like they have a little bit of control are less likely to feel helpless in the wake of a tragic event.

Send a healthy message to your child

No matter how many conversations you hold or how much you decide to share, keep the message the same, bad things happen but there are good people out there helping and we're strong enough to get through it.

Sharing with your child/youth messages that fosters resilience and teaches your children/youth they're able to cope with whatever bad things come their way in life and there are caring adults in their lives to talk to and who will support them.

(This information is taken from Psychology Today: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/what-mentally-strong-people-dont-do/201710/how-talk-kids-about-the-las-vegas-shooting>)

Have a mentally healthy day!

*Dr. Lynn Woodford is the Mental Health Lead for Upper Grand District School Board
Follow me on twitter: @drlynnwoodford*