

TIPS FOR CAREGIVERS: TALKING TO YOUTH

As a caregiver, you are very important in your child's life and are counted on to help him or her understand what is going on when negative things occur at home, in school, and in the community. When negative events occur, it can be upsetting and confusing for both adults and children. When children see and hear about conflict near their schools and homes, they can have many feelings such as anger, sadness, and fear. Talking things out with adults, especially parents can help a child cope with upsetting events in a positive way.

SOME IDEAS TO HELP YOUR CHILD:

TAKE TIME:

- ✓ Offer time to talk about any concerns or questions that they may have. It may help to start the talk with questions like, "Do you have any questions about the negative event that occurred in the community?" Some children may not be ready to talk and may feel more comfortable showing what they are thinking and feeling through drawing, playing, or acting things out.
- ✓ Share with your child that the conflict and actions of those involved in the conflict can be confusing for adults too and share how it makes you feel.
- ✓ Talk with your child about the positive events going on in school, at home and in the community. Point out when you see or hear of people showing their thoughts and feelings in a healthy, caring way.

MEET THEM WHERE THEY ARE:

- ✓ Consider the age of your child when answering their questions –use fewer words and keep it very simple for younger children. Have more back and forth discussion with middle and high school students, answering questions they may have. Let him or her know that you like and welcome the questions. It is okay to say that you don't know the answer.
- ✓ Limit your children's television and internet viewing about negative events if they are included as part of the news, as the media often repeats only the most violent and disturbing images. If your children do watch, be willing to sit with them to explain what they are seeing. Watching too much violence can be especially upsetting for younger children and may lead to them not feeling safe.

REASSURE THEM:

- ✓ Compliment your child for sharing his or her feelings and let him or her know that what they are feeling is common.
- ✓ Let your child know what you and others are doing to keep him or her safe and how they can work with you and others to stay safe.



TAKE ACTION:

- ✓ **Keep to your normal routine as much as possible.** This can be comforting for a child. Consider having regular family meals with time to talk and a routine for homework, free time, and bedtime.
- ✓ **Plan some enjoyable activities** with your child, including those that support the community.
- ✓ **Know what is normal and not normal for your child.** Ask for help from school staff, doctors, nurses, or counselors if you are worried about changes in your child’s mood, behavior, or grades or notice any of the following:
 - ❖ **What to look for:**
 - ◆ increased distractibility
 - ◆ “zoning out”
 - ◆ increased startle response
 - ◆ increased emotional reactions
 - ◆ excessive worry or nervousness
 - ◆ isolation from friends
 - ◆ trouble sleeping
 - ◆ stomachache, headache, “feeling sick”
 - ◆ refusing to go to school
 - ◆ increased irritability
 - ◆ increased anger
 - ◆ verbal and physical aggression
 - ◆ express thoughts about wanting to harm self or others

REMEMBER YOURSELF:

- ✓ Pay attention to how you are coping with recent events and take care of your own emotional well-being. Caregiver stress has a great impact on a child’s adjustment to stressors.
- ✓ Ask for help when needed from school staff, doctors and nurses, or counselors.