

## Helping Children through Difficult and Scary Times

Tragedy, trauma, violence and loss can and does happen more often than we wish. The Arlee School District has recently begun a process to develop improved ways of helping children and others in the community when experiences such as these strike close to home, or far away.

One step in the process is to provide more information and education to parents and staff about ways to help children process and cope with these kinds of events. When tragedy strikes children can lose their sense of safety in the world. In the wake of the many recent difficult losses in Arlee, and now in the shadow of what has just happened in Newtown, Connecticut, we'd like to share some suggestions and resources that might help you to help your children. Below are some tips for how to talk with and support children around these concerns.

- Talk honestly about the incident, without graphic detail, and share some of your own feelings about it.
- Routine is important for children. A sense of security arises when kids understand what will happen next.
- Limit viewing of television coverage about tragic events. It can be difficult to process the images and messages in news reports. Children can sometimes be oversaturated with information the media portrays. Talk to your child about the events and spend time with him or her reading, playing games, or drawing (Lovre, C., 2006). If your child is watching TV, please watch with him or her so you can discuss the media information surrounding the event.  
(National Center for Children Exposed to Violence at the Yale Child Study Center, 2006).
- Encourage young people to talk about their concerns and to express their feelings, and validate the young person's feelings and concerns. Listen to your child. Your ability to listen to concerns, worries, and questions is the best way a child can learn how to cope with his or her feelings and to help the child feel safe. (National Center for Children Exposed to Violence at the Yale Child Study Center, 2006). Creating an environment in which your child can ask questions helps alleviate fears; this includes sending a message that you are available to talk anytime.
- Recognize and consider your own feelings about the event. If you are unable to talk to your child because of your own fears, please talk to family member, a trusted friend, a school counselor, or a mental health professional (National Center for Children Exposed to Violence at the Yale Child Study Center, 2006).
- Please contact your child's teacher and/or school counselor any time if you feel your child would benefit from more support. One example to look for is disruptions in sleeping or eating patterns. Also, recognize what may be behind a young person's behavior. They may minimize their concerns outwardly, but may become argumentative, withdrawn or allow their school performance to decline.
- Keep the dialogue going even after any media coverage subsides. Continue to talk about feelings and discuss actions being taken to make schools and communities safer.
- Seek help when necessary. If you are worried about a young person's reaction or have ongoing concerns about his/her behavior or emotions, contact a counselor at their school or at your community mental health center. Resources:

Resources:

Lovre, C. (2006). Guidelines for Helping Children in the Aftermath of the Shooting in the Amish School. Crisis Management Institute. Retrieved from <http://www.cmionline.com/getstarted/parents/>

National Center for Children Exposed to Violence at the Yale Child Study Center. (2006). Parents' Guide for Helping Children in the Wake of Disaster. Retrieved from <http://www.ncccev.org/resources/publications.html>

Mental Health America's website has a number of additional resources on its website to help provide support and perspective to those affected by a tragedy (<http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/go/information/get-info/coping-with-disaster.>)

From Scholastic :

In light of today's tragedy at an elementary school in Newtown, Connecticut, we wanted to provide you with reliable resources that can help you discuss a difficult topic like this with children. Please pass these resources along to parents at your school and in your community who may need help talking to their kids about today's event.

"Talking to Your Kids About Natural Disasters, War, and Violence" is a Scholastic article that offers advice from a child-development expert about how to talk with kids about violent, disturbing news. [http://www.scholastic.com/resources/article/talking-to-your-kids-about-natural-disasters-war-and-violence?cid=SN/e/20121214///CTadvice/////&ym\\_MID=1455116&ym\\_rid=10323647](http://www.scholastic.com/resources/article/talking-to-your-kids-about-natural-disasters-war-and-violence?cid=SN/e/20121214///CTadvice/////&ym_MID=1455116&ym_rid=10323647)

"Talking to Children About Community Violence" is a tip sheet from the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry about how to handle discussions with kids about violence in local communities. [http://www.aacap.org/cs/root/resources\\_for\\_families/talking\\_to\\_children\\_about\\_community\\_violence](http://www.aacap.org/cs/root/resources_for_families/talking_to_children_about_community_violence)

Follow the link below for Scholastic News Online's age-appropriate coverage of the tragedy in Connecticut.

[http://sni.scholastic.com/top-news/2012/12/A-Tragedy-in-Connecticut?cid=SN/e/20121214///CTadvice/////&ym\\_MID=1455116&ym\\_rid=10323647](http://sni.scholastic.com/top-news/2012/12/A-Tragedy-in-Connecticut?cid=SN/e/20121214///CTadvice/////&ym_MID=1455116&ym_rid=10323647)

You may also contact our School Counselors at any time for ideas, support or referral for yourself or your children. Contact: Dana Eisenberg x2212 (M & Th), x2249 (T & W) or Misty Brien x2302 or check out Dana's webpage at the school site for other links to resource materials for dealing with grief and other concerns.