

May 25, 2022

Dear Parents and Guardians:

Once again, a school has experienced the tragedy of a violent act resulting in multiple fatalities. In a Catholic school board like ours, we pray for all those who are impacted by this tragedy and seek to find an answer to the question, "How can something like this happen?"

In this regard, we turn to God in prayer.

Loving and merciful God, your Son Jesus welcomed the little children into his arms and blessed them.

Your beloved children and teachers of Uvalde, Texas were violently taken away from their families.

We pray for their souls, that they are embraced by your everlasting care and love in your heavenly kingdom.

Pour down your heavenly grace on all who mourn and console them in their grief.

Brighten their tomorrows with the promise of your love.

Restore their trust in your goodness.

Dry their tears of sorrow with the consolation of your loving presence.

We humbly ask you to send your Holy Spirit to take away the anger and violence that infects people's hearts.

Help us be instruments of your peace and children of the light so that our peace and light may touch the hearts of all whose sorrow and grief are too much to bear on their own.

We pray this prayer through Jesus Christ, the Risen Lord and Saviour. Amen.

Below, we offer some tips from the National Association of School Psychologists on what parents and guardians can do at times like this.

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 talking with them about their fears.

- **Reassure children that they are safe.** Emphasize that schools are very 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.
- **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 or yard work. Some children prefer writing, playing music, or doing an art project as an outlet. Young children may need concrete activities

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(e.g., drawing, looking at picture books, or imaginative play) to help them identify and express their feelings.

- **Keep your explanations developmentally appropriate:**
 - **FDK and primary grades 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 like reminding children about exterior doors being locked, child monitoring efforts on the playground, and emergency drills practiced during the school day.
 - Discuss efforts of school and community leaders to provide safe schools. **Junior grades school** children will be more vocal in asking questions about whether they truly are safe and what is being done at their school. They may need assistance separating reality from fantasy.
 - **Intermediate and secondary 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 school property, reporting threats to the school safety made by students or community members, etc.), communicating any personal safety concerns to school administrators, and accessing support for emotional needs.
- **Review safety procedures.** This should include procedures and safeguards at school and home. Help children identify at least one adult at school and in the community to whom they go if they feel threatened or at risk.
- **Observe children's emotional state.** Some children may not express their concerns verbally. Changes in behaviour, 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 with special needs may be at greater risk for severe reactions than others. Seek the help of mental health professional if you are at all concerned.
- **Limit television viewing of these events.** Limit television viewing 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 their exposure to vengeful, hateful, and angry comments that might be misunderstood.
- **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 and extracurricular activities, but don't push them if they seem overwhelmed.

As parents, we are troubled by tragic events like this. However, they also provide us with the opportunity to be leaders as we help our children to understand, reminding them that, as the adults in their lives, we do everything we can to keep them safe.

May God bless you and your family.