

## Talking to Kids About Mass Violence

Unfortunately, we can't shield our kids from hearing about mass shootings and violence against innocent people. But, how do we talk to them about it?

Like everyone else, you may be unsettled by what seems to be the increase in mass violence and kids are able to pick up on your anxiety and nervousness. How kids will understand the subject starts with you. It's important that you take time to deal with your own emotions and grow your own faith in the midst of hearing about the tragedies in the world. It's also okay to acknowledge that you have feelings of sadness about tragic events and admit that you don't have all the answers, especially with older children. But, children must learn that we are not meant to continue to live in fear.

## Understanding Your Child

Is your child prone to worry and anxiety? Does he/she need time to reflect on events before engaging in deeper discussions? Understanding your child's unique personality will help you to have an effective and meaningful conversation. As parents, you know how much they can comprehend and how much to share with them. Then, you need to listen. No matter the age, children will reveal what is bothering them if you listen to their words and watch their actions.



## Timing is Key

Amy Paris, a behavioral neuroscientist, urges parents to not force early conversations that kids may not be ready for, to limit exposure to media, and continue normal activities as much as possible. Then, based on the child's age and level of maturity, discuss the events with them. Additionally, consider the time of day you have these conversations. Bedtime is not a good time for discussing violence. Pick a time of day when you won't be in a hurry or constantly interrupted.

## What is Age Appropriate?

Every child is different and the following are basic guidelines for discussing violence with children.

0-4 years of age: These children won't understand what is happening. Avoid exposure to media.

4-7 years of age: For these children, keep the information simple unless they ask for more details. Let them know what you and their school is doing to keep them safe such as locking exterior doors of the school, installing security cameras, and practicing emergency drills.

8-12 years of age: Some children of this age-range can handle a mature conversation, while others cannot. Let your child determine the conversation. Have them express what they are curious about or what they fear. Reassure them that it is healthy to talk about sad or even scary events. When kids become more vocal in asking questions about personal safety, they need reassurance about what is to be done to keep them safe. Also, it may be helpful to point out all the heroes or the helpers in the tragedies.

Teens: By the time children reach this age, they are forming their own opinions about issues. They are developing their own faith, and they may be questioning where God is in all of this. Be willing to have deeper conversations and listen as they process events. It's okay to start more philosophical discussions with them about the news and ask for their thoughts on a specific tragedy. Help them consider how they see God responding in the situation through others who are helping victims. Additionally, you can emphasize the role that they can make in maintaining a safe school by following school policies (e.g. not providing building access to strangers, reporting strangers on campus, reporting threats to authorities) and communicating any personal safety concerns to school administrators.

### **When They Won't Talk**

For some kids, face-to-face conversations are difficult. You can supplement your dialogue with a parent / child journal. Journaling back and forth in a notebook allows ongoing communication and time to process thoughts. Also, consider texting with your child about news events. It's a less intimidating way to communicate about tough issues young people face.

Ultimately, there is no easy way to talk to children about this. But, we have to be prepared to have age-appropriate, sensitive, and thoughtful discussions with our kids if this happens again.

<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/talking-to-kids-about-mass-violence/>

<https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/school-violence-resources/talking-to-children-about-violence-tips-for-parents-and-teachers>

<https://images.search.yahoo.com/search/images;>