February 15, 2018

Dear Parents/Guardians,

By now you may have heard about the tragic school shooting that occurred yesterday at a high school in Parkland, Florida. No doubt there will be extensive coverage of this on the news and much discussion about it in our communities in the coming days. Our thoughts and hearts are with those families and that community.

I want to assure you that the safety of our students and staff is our top priority and that our schools have comprehensive crisis plans in place to guide us through a variety of emergency situations should the need arise. These plans are reviewed annually and updated when needed. We also hold crisis drills with the students each year so they know what to do in case of an emergency.

I also want to share with you some tips from the National Association of School Psychologists for helping your children cope with news such as this.

What Parents Can Do:

1. Focus on your children over the week following the tragedy. Tell them you love them and everything will be okay. Try to help them understand what has happened, keeping in mind their developmental level.

2. Make time to talk with your children. Remember if you do not talk to your children about this incident someone else will. Take some time and determine what you wish to say.

3. Stay close to your children. Your physical presence will reassure them and give you the opportunity to monitor their reaction. Many children will want actual physical contact. Give plenty of hugs. Let them sit close to you, and make sure to take extra time at bedtime to cuddle and to reassure them that they are loved and safe.

4. Limit your child’s television viewing of these events. If they must watch, watch with them for a brief time; then turn the set off. Don’t sit mesmerized re-watching the same events over and over again.

5. Maintain a “normal” routine. To the extent possible stick to your family’s normal routine for dinner, homework, chores, bedtime, etc., but don’t be inflexible. Children may have a hard time concentrating on schoolwork or falling asleep at night.
6. Spend extra time reading or playing quiet games with your children before bed. These activities are calming, foster a sense of closeness and security, and reinforce a sense of normalcy. Spend more time tucking them in. Let them sleep with a light on if they ask for it.

7. Safeguard your children’s physical health. Stress can take a physical toll on children as well as adults. Make sure your children get appropriate sleep, exercise and nutrition.

If you have any concerns about the way your child is behaving, please call your school psychologist or social worker. During the school day, we have social workers, psychologists and other professionals available to talk to children. Encourage your children to talk to them, if necessary.

You play an essential role in our efforts to keep students safe. Please do not hesitate to contact my office or your principal with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Ellen Correll
Superintendent of Schools
Community Consolidated School District 46
Talking to Children About Violence: Tips for Parents and Educators

Families and school personnel play a critical role in helping to reestablish a sense of normalcy and security for children after an act of violence occurs. Follow these key reminders and visit www.nasponline.org/children-and-violence to learn more.

**Reaffirm Safety**
Emphasize that schools are very safe. Let children speak about their feelings and validate all reactions to the event. Support the appropriate expression of their feelings and help to put them in perspective.

**Make Time to Talk**
Let children's questions guide the information provided. Be patient and look for clues that a child wants to talk. Young children may need concrete activities (e.g., imaginative play) and some older children may prefer writing or playing music.

**Keep Explanations Developmentally Appropriate**
- **Early Elementary**
  Provide simple information balanced by assurance of safety.
- **Upper Elementary & Early Middle**
  Answer questions and assist in separating reality from fantasy.
- **Upper Middle & High**
  Emphasize student role in safety & how to access support.

**Review Safety Procedures**
Help children identify one adult at school and in the community that they can go to if they feel threatened or at risk. Review procedures and safeguards in school and home settings.

**Observe Children’s Emotional State**
Some will not express themselves verbally but changes in behavior, appetite, or sleep patterns can indicate anxiety or stress. Seek help from a mental health professional for those with more intense reactions.

**Maintain a Normal Routine**
Keep a regular schedule to assure and promote physical and mental health. Encourage maintenance of school work and extracurricular activities but do not push children if they seem overwhelmed. Limit TV exposure.