

KNOW! TO HELP KIDS COPE WITH VIOLENCE IN THE NEWS

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Gun violence does not discriminate – it has the potential to affect anyone in our communities. From school shootings to politically motivated attacks, gun violence has become increasingly publicized in our country. News outlets and social media posts can contribute to increasing the spread of graphic images, hateful language, and fear among various communities. For many of us, processing such public violence is challenging, and it's likely even more difficult for our youth.

Constant exposure to violence in the news, on social media, and in daily life can weigh heavily on young minds, leading to feelings of fear, anger, sadness, and anxiety. Because they have less experience processing difficult events, children are more vulnerable to emotional stress. They may struggle to understand what's happening,¹ feel a loss of control, or have trouble expressing their emotions. Talking about these events with the young people in your life can help them process their feelings and find healthy ways to cope with the stress they are experiencing.

Check In with Yourself First

Before you start the conversation, take a moment to acknowledge your own feelings. It's difficult to offer reassurance if you're feeling overwhelmed. Ask yourself, "How am I feeling?" and try to name your emotions—whether it's anxiety, sadness, helplessness, or uncertainty. Recognizing your feelings helps your brain process them and regain a sense of control.

Next, ask, "What do I need right now?" Addressing your own needs, whether through deep breathing, physical activity, or talking to someone you trust, can help you feel more grounded and prepare you for a productive conversation.

Set a Goal

Before starting the conversation, think about what you want to accomplish. Do you want to provide a safe space for your child to share their feelings? Correct any misinformation they may have heard? Simply offer reassurance? Keeping your goal in mind will help you stay focused and find the right words, even when the conversation is challenging.

Ask Young People About Their Feelings

Open the conversation with a question like "What have you seen on social media or on the news? How do you feel about it?" Let them guide the conversation. Listen carefully, validate their feelings, and offer insights without pushing the conversation in any particular direction. Acknowledge that it's okay to feel uneasy or scared in response to hateful speech and threats.

Encourage Compassion, Not Stigma

When talking with young people, avoid language that demonizes or stereotypes groups, as this can lead to prejudice. Instead, encourage compassion, respect, and a commitment to stand against hate and bullying. Your actions have a significant impact on the young people around you. Make it a priority to model respect, both in-person and online. Keep in mind that sharing memes, jokes, or social media posts can contribute to a culture of negativity. Everyone plays a role in promoting kindness and understanding.

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Limit Media Exposure

When tragedies occur, media coverage can be overwhelming, often showing graphic images and distressing details. While it's important to stay informed, too much exposure can heighten fear and anxiety, especially for children. Instead of relying on the news, take time to disconnect and initiate a conversation with your child. If they do want to follow the news, consider watching together so you can help them process what they're seeing and answer their questions in real time.

Support Healthy Coping Skills

Young people need guidance in developing healthy coping skills, especially during times of widespread anxiety. Emphasize to young people that they should be kind to themselves and reassure them that it's okay to feel different. Find activities you can do together, like going outside in nature, a game night, trying new recipes, or arts and crafts that allow young people to care for themselves. You can also explore more coping ideas in [this Know! Tip](#).

Pay Attention to Warning Signs

While stress and anxiety are normal responses to a crisis, they can be concerning if they start to interfere with daily life. Be mindful of warning signs such as loss of interest in usual activities, changes in sleep patterns, overeating or undereating, or difficulty focusing. If you notice these signs, consider seeking the support of a mental health professional.

By fostering open, compassionate conversations, we can help the young people in our lives navigate these challenging times and empower them to become forces of positivity and change in their communities.

RESOURCES

- [Helping Students After a School Shooting | ASCA](#)
- [Help for Victims and Survivors of Gun Violence | Sandy Hook Promise](#)
- [School Shooting Resources | NCTSN](#)
- [12 Tips to Help Children Process Graphic News and Violence Online | Children and Screens](#)
- [Talking To Kids About Fear And Violence | MHA](#)

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