

Resources For Talking With Kids About School Shootings: When Should I Do It and How?

Ugh. Another school shooting. The words alone feel unbearable. The awfulness of this reality weighs on all of us, and it can be especially overwhelming, I am sure especially for parents. We are left with grief, anger, fear, and sadness. We are also left wondering how to protect our kids not just physically but emotionally. How do we talk with them about something we ourselves struggle to understand?

Our first instinct may be to stay silent, hoping to shield our children from what has happened. It can feel easier not to bring it up at all, hoping they won't hear about it. That is a very natural and loving response. At the same time, silence may not protect them. Especially for middle and older elementary students and beyond, it is very likely they will hear about this tragedy from peers, social media, or the news. If that happens, they may carry worries or confusion alone unless we create a safe space to talk.

Every child is different. Some may ask big questions. Some may want reassurance. Some may not say much at all. You know your child best, and you are the most important person to help them process what they are hearing and feeling. My hope in sharing these resources is not to give you a script, but to equip you with tools, language, and faith practices to guide these conversations in a way that best fits your child and your family – whether you choose to have that conversation or wait until they bring it up. Again, you know your child best and how to approach difficult conversations with them.

Please remember that you do not need to have all the answers. Your children do not need you to solve every question. What they need most is your presence. They need to be heard, to have their feelings validated, and to know they are safe and loved. And just as your children need care, so do you. Make space for your own grief and emotions. Cry. Pray. Sit in silence. Listen to a song that brings comfort. Do what you need to tend to your own heart so that you can walk with your child.

Caring for Yourself

This tragedy impacts you too. Give yourself permission to feel what you feel. Cry. Scream. Sit in silence. Listen to a favorite song that brings comfort. Lay beside your kids as they sleep. Pray. Do whatever helps you care for your own heart. Your children need your presence more than they need perfection, and you will be better equipped to walk with them if you are also tending to yourself.

Beginning the Conversation

It can be tempting to avoid talking about these tragedies out of fear of scaring our kids. That concern is valid, but silence may not protect them. If your child is in middle or upper elementary school or older, chances are very high they will hear about this event from friends or on their phones. Beginning the conversation at home gives you the chance to listen, gently correct misinformation, and assure them that they are safe and loved.

Remember you do not need to have every answer. What your child needs most is space to ask questions, to express their feelings, and to know you are a steady and safe presence.

Faith Practices Together

In addition to the resources below, our faith gives us concrete ways to respond that can help children feel less helpless. Here are a few practices you can try together as a family:

- Light a candle as a reminder that Jesus is the light of the world and that God's light shines even in the darkest places.
- Pray through art by drawing or decorating a word or intention to lift to God on behalf of those who are suffering. Words might include comfort, healing, peace, hope, or rest.
- Say a familiar prayer together, like the Lord's Prayer.
- Read Psalm 23 as a family, paying attention to the way God's presence is with us in fear, death, and pain.

Resources (Click Title and should take you to a website)

[School Crisis Center](#)

[Good Morning America: Conversation with Clinical Psychologist](#)

[National Child Traumatic Stress Center](#)

[Fred Rogers Institute: Talking with Children About Difficult Things in the News](#)

[Child Mind: Helping Children Cope after a Traumatic Event](#)

[Child Welfare: Parenting a Child Who Has Experienced Trauma](#)

Questions about Faith:

Is this part of God's plan?

No. God does not plan shootings or tragedies like this. God's plan is always for love, peace, and life. What happened was the result of people making choices that go against God's way. God is sad and heartbroken, too, when terrible things like this happen.

Why does evil continue to exist in the world?

God gave people freedom to choose. Love only works if it's real and not forced. Sadly, that means people can also choose to do harmful and selfish things, which is where evil comes from. Evil is still in the world because people misuse their freedom. The good news is that God is stronger than evil, and one day God will make all things right. Until then, God calls us to be part of pushing back against evil with love and goodness.

Why did God allow this to happen?

That's one of the hardest questions. God doesn't cause these things, and God's heart breaks when people are hurt. But God allows us to make choices, even when they're harmful. What God does do is walk with us in our pain, bringing comfort, strength, and hope.

Is God all-powerful? If so, couldn't he have stopped it?

Yes, God is all-powerful. But God doesn't force people to do good, because real love requires freedom. If God stopped every wrong choice, then love wouldn't be love anymore. Instead, God uses his power to bring good even out of tragedy by stirring people to help, to heal, and to love. And the resurrection reminds us that in the end, love wins and evil will not have the final word.

How should I pray about this?

Pray honestly. Tell God what you feel whether that is fear, anger, sadness, confusion. You can pray for the victims, their families, your school, and even the person who caused harm. God listens and cares. Prayer is one way we partner with God to bring love, hope, and healing into the world.

How do I hold on to hope when it feels hopeless?

Focus on the ways God is at work in the world through helpers, families, friends, and acts of love. Remember that God promises to be with us always. Jesus' resurrection shows us that love and life will ultimately triumph over fear, hate, and death. You can trust that hope is possible, even when things feel dark.

Does everything happen for a reason?

Not exactly. Not everything that happens is God's plan or part of a bigger purpose. Bad things, like violence, accidents, or tragedies, happen because the world is broken and people make wrong choices. God does not cause those things.

At the same time, God can work through even the worst situations. God can bring comfort, inspire people to help, and use our pain to grow compassion, resilience, and hope. So while everything that happens is not part of a divine plan, God can bring good out of suffering and be present with us through it all.

You know your child better than anyone else, and you are the best person to guide these conversations in a way that fits their needs. This resource is meant simply as a tool to equip you whenever you feel ready to have these discussions. Trust yourself, trust God's presence with your family, and know that even small conversations can make a big difference.

If you have questions as you undertake these conversations or need pastoral support for yourself or your child, please reach out. I am here for you. May the peace of God surround you and those facing unbearable pain and loss on this dark night. You are not alone.