

How to put mass shooting tragedies in perspective for kids

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(HealthDay)—In the wake of yet another deadly school shooting in the

United States, one health specialist offers advice on how to ease children's fears about acts of terror and violence.

Consider the child's age and [emotional maturity](#) when weighing the right time to discuss such tragedies, recommends Dr. Hannah Chow, a pediatrician at Loyola University Health System in Maywood, Ill.

"The older they are, the quicker you should tell them. You want to get in front of any misinformation, as they may have already heard the news from another source," she said in a Loyola news release.

Younger [children](#) require special consideration.

"They may not be aware of what's happening, but can pick up the emotions of those around them," Chow said. "I've always advised [parents](#) to address these issues in a timely manner and give them a brief modified version of what happened. Most importantly, remember to be truthful."

Before deciding whether to let a child watch news coverage of a tragedy, parents should watch the news first and use their best judgment. They also need to set a time limit for viewing.

"The news can be pretty intense for viewers under the age of 10. Don't leave the TV on for hours," Chow advised.

She said watching the news with your child can provide a teaching moment.

"Have a discussion while watching the [news](#), and help them digest the information afterward. The older they are, the more they will be able to comprehend and process," Chow said.

Many school-age children get information from friends and classmates, so parents also need to ask children what they have heard and correct any misinformation.

It's important to reassure children that you will do all you can to protect them and to create an emergency plan for older children, such as finding safe places, locating the nearest exits, and how to reach you when there is trouble.

If a child is anxious or scared, emphasize that their risk is low and have them write down the good and happy things in their life and to review them often, Chow suggested.

However, if your child continues to have difficulties, get professional help.

Parents also need to assure children that not all people are bad and how to identify adults they can trust.

"Point out that the majority of people can be trusted—teachers, firefighters, police officers, medical professionals—they are there to help you in the event you need them," Chow said.

"I would let them know that only a small number of people want to hurt people and that people are usually kind to one another," she added.

More information: The U.S. National Institute of Mental Health has more on helping [children and teens deal with violence and disasters](#).

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