

What parents should know about talking to middle-schoolers, others about Indiana school shooting

May 28 2018, by Amy Patterson Neubert

A Purdue University child development expert can talk about what parents and caregivers should know when talking about the middle school shooting that is so close to home.

"Parents and other adults should be ready to deal with a range of feelings from [children](#) and [young people](#)," says Judith Myers-Walls, professor emeritus of [human development](#) and family studies. "One issue with middle-schoolers is that they want to look brave. They want to look grown up. They might give the impression they were not affected. But [parents](#) should note that that these young people probably did notice. And they probably will want to talk about it at some point."

Parents should let them know the door is open when they are ready.

"Some will be afraid as it is becoming increasingly likely that this could happen to them. But others—and sometimes the same young people—will be sad and/or angry that this keeps happening. They will want to know what they can do to help the victims and what they can do to prevent it. Don't assume that reassuring their [safety](#) is all they want. And at this point, it is not easy or convincing for anyone to assure safety."

Myers-Walls says talking about a safety plan is good. An evacuation plan is good. But talking about preventing violence is even better. Teaching

children nonviolent ways of dealing with conflict and dealing with bullying might be some of the most powerful ways of preventing these events in the long run.

"We can't hide from these issues," Myers-Walls says. "Parents, teachers and other adults need to talk with children and young people about these issues. And we need to teach them that reaching for a gun is not the way to solve their problems."

Here are some other specific guidelines for talking with children and young people:

- Don't assume they didn't notice. Young children will try to get back to normal right away. They want to reestablish their base. But then they will want to talk.
- Pre-teens and teens will want to look strong and unaffected in front of their friends, but then will need to talk about their fears and misgivings in private. Those who are from that school, however, are likely to want to express anger, surprise, and hurt about the people who were involved.

Provided by Purdue University

Citation: What parents should know about talking to middle-schoolers, others about Indiana school shooting (2018, May 28) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-05-parents-middle-schoolers-indiana-school.html>

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