

# Coping with school shootings

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After countless school shootings, parents and children are terrified and confused. Parents and guardians struggle with explaining the terror to their children, while they also fear sending them back to school. Baylor College of Medicine experts offer tips for those struggling during this difficult time.

## Talking to your child

Before talking to your child about [traumatic events](#), ask your child what they know about the event. According to Dr. Laurel Williams, child and adolescent psychiatrist, [professor](#) in the Menninger Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Baylor and medical director for the Texas Child Mental Health Care Consortium, the biggest mistake parents make is when they have not had a chance to process it for themselves yet and start telling their children what they should be worried about. It may not be what the child was initially worried about, giving them a potential new worry or fear. If the child has not heard about the event, give them the appropriate amount of information based on their ability to handle difficult news.

"It is likely that kids have heard something, so inquiring about this and correcting any inaccurate information is an important first step. At the same time, limit exposure to media for everyone, but especially among children," said Dr. Eric Storch, professor and vice chair in the Menninger Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Baylor.

Storch also states that parents should normalize their child's reactions. Be on the lookout for:

- Extreme distress reactions
- Change in behavior
- Sleep problems

## What parents can do

Williams encourages [parents](#) to keep their child's routine, which is more helpful for [children](#) than not sending them to school.

Parents who are upset and distressed about a tragic event should speak with an adult they trust to digest how they feel—that way, if your child sees you upset, you know how to speak with them about it.

"Children can sense if you're upset, so if you don't share what is bothering you, you might actually make your child worry more. Don't outpour everything so you frighten them, but don't hide it either," Williams said.

## **Coping as a teacher**

For teachers, sharing how they feel after a [school shooting](#) is an important first step. As schools revisit their safety protocols, they will start learning how to feel safe in the classroom again. Loss of control is very overwhelming for anyone including teachers, so understanding how to feel safe is important.

## **Coping as a survivor**

Survivors of similar events might feel triggered after hearing of school shootings. They should work with someone they trust and feel safe with, so when something triggers them, they can revisit [coping skills](#) used in the past. Coping can be individualized, and there is not one way to deal with trauma.

"Trauma leaves a mark in your body and mind. It is not something you get over, but something you go through. There is no right way to deal with the [trigger](#) to your trauma but acknowledge that you can get help and you are not alone," Williams said.

Provided by Baylor College of Medicine

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