



December 17, 2012

Preparing today's students for tomorrow's world.

Dear Parents, Guardians, and Community Members:

We were deeply saddened to hear the news of the school shooting last Friday at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut. Our thoughts are with the members of that community. The safety of our students is always the top priority in our District. We take seriously our responsibility to ensure the safety of your child every day.

I would like to take this opportunity to remind all of our families that we have a plan in place at each of our schools to handle emergency situations. We work with all Monroe County police and fire departments to prepare for these types of emergencies and regularly practice our safety procedures with students and staff through discussions and emergency exercises. While no amount of planning can guarantee that a tragedy such as this will not occur, we are doing everything we know to keep students and staff safe while at school.


It is equally important for us to work with our staff and ensure they are prepared to support their students in difficult times. At this time, we are updating our staff on this tragic event and ensure that they have the resources they will need to respond to student questions. We have our counselors and administrators ready this morning to respond to students as needed. As we learn more details about this tragic incident in the hours and days ahead, it will be important for you to spend time talking with your children and helping them cope with this news. I would like to share with you a list of tips from the National Association of School Psychologists about what parents can do at times like this:

1. Reassure children that they are safe. Emphasize that schools are very safe. Validate their feelings. Explain that all feelings are okay when a tragedy occurs. Let children talk about their feelings, help put them into perspective, and assist them in expressing these feelings appropriately.
2. Make time to talk. Let their questions be your guide as to how much information to provide. Be patient. Children and youth do not always talk about their feelings readily.
3. Keep your explanations developmentally appropriate.

- Early elementary school children need brief, simple information that should be balanced with reassurances that their school and homes are safe and that adults are there to protect them.
 - Upper elementary and early middle school children will be more vocal in asking questions about whether they truly are safe and what is being done at their school. They may need assistance separating reality from fantasy. Discuss efforts of school and community leaders to provide safe schools.
 - Upper middle school and high school students will have strong and varying opinions about the causes of violence in schools and society. They will share concrete suggestions about how to make school safer and how to prevent tragedies in society. Emphasize the role that students have in maintaining safe schools by following school safety guidelines communicating any personal safety concerns to school administrators, and accessing support for emotional needs.
4. Review safety procedures. This should include procedures and safeguards at school and at home. Help children identify at least one adult at school and in the community to whom they go if they feel threatened or at risk.
 5. Observe children's emotional state. Some children may not express their concerns verbally. Changes in behavior, appetite, and sleep patterns can indicate a child's level of anxiety or discomfort. In most children, these symptoms will ease with reassurance and time. However, some children may be at risk for more intense reactions. Children who have had a past traumatic experience or personal loss, suffer from depression or other mental illness, or with special needs may be at greater risk for severe reactions than others. Seek the help of mental health professional if you are at all concerned.
 6. Limit television viewing of these events. Limit television viewing and be aware if the television is on in common areas. Developmentally inappropriate information can cause anxiety or confusion, particularly in young children. Adults also need to be mindful of the content of conversations that they have with each other in front of children, even teenagers, and limit their exposure to vengeful, hateful, and angry comments that might be misunderstood.
 7. Maintain a normal routine. Keeping to a regular schedule can be reassuring and promote physical health. Ensure that children get plenty of sleep, regular meals, and exercise. Encourage them to keep up with their schoolwork and extracurricular activities but don't push them if they seem overwhelmed.

As parents, we are troubled by events like what occurred in Sandy Hook Elementary School. However, days like last Friday also provide us with the opportunity to be leaders as we help our children to understand, also reminding them that, as the adults in their lives, we do everything we can to keep them safe. As we learn more details about these events, we will discuss and debrief with administrators and staff accordingly and be ready to help your children as they return to school.

Sincerely,



Donald A. Spencer, Ed. D.
Superintendent