

Lincoln Park Public Schools

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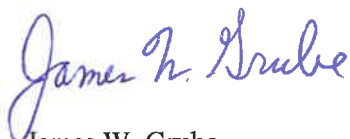
Dear Parents/Guardians & Students:

In response to the tragedy that took place at the Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida this past Wednesday, the Lincoln Park School District wants to express our condolences to the Stoneman Douglas High School Community. We are all sickened and saddened about the senseless display of violence and the loss of precious lives.

As Superintendent, I want to assure the Lincoln Park School Community that the Lincoln Park School District takes the safety and security of the students and staff very seriously. The schools have safety procedures and protocols in place that are reviewed and practiced on a regular basis throughout the school year. We have Crisis Management Teams in both buildings which will be meeting again next week to review the procedures further. As we do every year when the plans are reviewed, we will receive guidance from the Lincoln Park Police Department. The Lincoln Park Police attend all of our emergency drills and not only assist us with the drills, but they also provide guidance on how to improve upon the existing safety procedures. We have already identified some procedures that have been modified for additional security. As we continue to meet and review our procedures and protocols, I am sure that other measures will be modified or added to the current plan. I do want to make you aware that the schools have an emergency communication system in place, which the police are connected to as well, that enables the entire staff to quickly report on and communicate during emergency situations. Please keep in mind that security reasons prevent us from sharing specific information in the safety plan. We also realize some of our procedures may cause some inconvenience for you as parents, and we ask you for your patience and cooperation. We are confident that you share our vigilance in keeping the Lincoln Park Schools safe for all of our students and staff.

In closing, as we keep the Stoneman Douglas High School Community in our thoughts and prayers, we will all do whatever is necessary to protect our school community. We will continue to take every measure necessary to assure the safety and wellbeing of our school community. I have attached some resources that can be referenced when talking with your children about the tragedy. If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact my office or the building principals.

Sincerely,



James W. Grube
Superintendent of Schools

Talking to Children about the Shooting

The recent shooting has evoked many emotions—sadness, grief, helplessness, anxiety, and anger. Children who are struggling with their thoughts and feelings about the stories and images of the shooting may turn to trusted adults for help and guidance.

- **Start the conversation.** Talk about the shooting with your child. Not talking about it can make the event even more threatening in your child’s mind. Silence suggests that what has occurred is too horrible even to speak about or that you do not know what has happened. With social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, text messages, newsbreaks on favorite radio and TV stations, and others), it is highly unlikely that children and teenagers have not heard about this. Chances are your child has heard about it, too.
- **What does your child already know?** Start by asking what your child/teen already has heard about the events from the media and from friends. Listen carefully; try to figure out what he or she knows or believes. As your child explains, listen for misinformation, misconceptions, and underlying fears or concerns. Understand that this information will change as more facts about the shooting are known.
- **Gently correct inaccurate information.** If your child/teen has inaccurate information or misconceptions, take time to provide the correct information in simple, clear, age-appropriate language.
- **Encourage your child to ask questions, and answer those questions directly.** Your child/teen may have some difficult questions about the incident. For example, she may ask if it is possible that it could happen at your workplace; she is probably really asking whether it is “likely.” The concern about re-occurrence will be an issue for caregivers and children/teens alike. While it is important to discuss the likelihood of this risk, she is also asking if she is safe. This may be a time to review plans your family has for keeping safe in the event of *any* crisis situation. Do give any information you have on the help and support the victims and their families are receiving. Like adults, children/teens are better able to cope with a difficult situation when they have the facts about it. Having question-and-answer talks gives your child ongoing support as he or she begins to cope with the range of emotions stirred up by this tragedy.
- **Limit media exposure.** Limit your child’s exposure to media images and sounds of the shooting, and *do not allow your very young children to see or hear any TV/radio shooting-related messages.* Even if they appear to be engrossed in play, children often are aware of what you are watching on TV or listening to on the radio. What may not be upsetting to an adult may be very upsetting and confusing for a child. Limit your own exposure as well. Adults may become more distressed with nonstop exposure to media coverage of this shooting.
- **Common reactions.** Children/Teens may have reactions to this tragedy. In the immediate aftermath of the shooting, they may have more problems paying attention and concentrating.

They may become more irritable or defiant. Children and even teens may have trouble separating from caregivers, wanting to stay at home or close by them. It's common for young people to feel anxious about what has happened, what may happen in the future, and how it will impact their lives. Children/Teens may think about this event, even when they try not to. Their sleep and appetite routines may change. In general, you should see these reactions lessen within a few weeks.

- **Be a positive role model.** Consider sharing your feelings about the events with your child/teen, but at a level they can understand. You may express sadness and empathy for the victims and their families. You may share some worry, but it is important to also share ideas for coping with difficult situations like this tragedy. When you speak of the quick response by law enforcement and medical personnel to help the victims (and the heroic or generous efforts of ordinary citizens), you help your child/teen see that there can be good, even in the mist of such a horrific event.
- **Be patient.** In times of stress, children/teens may have trouble with their behavior, concentration, and attention. While they may not openly ask for your guidance or support, they will want it. Adolescents who are seeking increased independence may have difficulty expressing their needs. Both children and teens will need a little extra patience, care, and love. (Be patient with yourself, too!).
- **Extra help.** Should reactions continue or at any point interfere with your children's/teens' abilities to function or if you are worried, contact local mental health professionals who have expertise in trauma. Contact your family physician, pediatrician, or state mental health associations for referrals to such experts.



Helping Children when Violence Occurs

Children may be especially vulnerable due to their limited life experiences and developmental levels. This is particularly relevant when they are exposed to anxiety producing events that are unusual or beyond the normal everyday issues they deal with.

No matter how frightening some feelings are, it is more frightening if no one addresses them. If we are silent, the children who depend on us may experience the added fear that we are not able to take care of them.

Adults are in a position to create an atmosphere of security, stability, and support, which will provide a cushion against the full impact of the threatening environment. Thus, it is important that adults first acknowledge their own feelings of uncertainty and find suitable ways to lessen their anxiety. Remember, these reactions may be a normal response to an extraordinary situation. People have different ways of coping and need to do what is best for them. Identify your individual way of coping.

1. Be there and be calm: Ask children what they know and what they have heard. Listen to the child's story, follow the child's lead, and be reassuring about the ways that you will take care of them. Use simple language and correct any misunderstood accounts. Tell a child what they need to know, not all that you know. For example, say something like "Some people did some bad things and other people were hurt. But you are safe here and we will protect you." Practice these conversations with other adults.

2. Give permission for many different feelings: Infants experience the emotions of sad, mad, glad and worried. As children grow, they experience and express sad, mad, glad, excited, scared and frustrated, and more. Avoid imposing meanings or interpretations on children, but allow them to feel what they feel. Often children will explain their feelings through their body states. Consider asking "where" do they feel as well as "how" do they feel.

3. Share your feelings: It is okay and important for children to know that the adults in their lives have the same feelings when bad things happen. Let children know you feel these feelings and that you are there for them. It is important, however, that you remain in control. Monitor your own emotion and tone of voice. Pay attention to your gestures, affect, and voice because children pay special attention to these ways of communicating. You can help children feel safer and calmer when your behaviors convey these feelings. If your own reaction is difficult to manage, enlist another adult to help you.

4. Limit repeat exposure to images and reports of the events: Recognize the impact of media on children. Provide an opportunity to discuss what they have seen or heard. When children do see images or reports of tragedies, Fred Rogers of *Mr. Rogers Neighborhood* suggests that we help them “look for all the people who are helping”. Couple the sad tragedy with the comforting presence of others who are helping and taking care of others.

5. Remember the 3R’s of security: Relationships, Routines and Restoration: Both children and adults need the basic “R’s” of safety for comfort and reassurance at times of uncertainty. Highlight relationships with familiar and consistent caregivers, family and friends. Protect and increase routines that are familiar and normalizing such as play time, going to school, reading books, and other patterned activities. Remember the body and the importance of restoration, including appropriate sleeping and eating patterns, and time-limited regression to previously used ways of feeling better, i.e. hugs and physical touch, sensory-based ‘soothies’ like a blanket, stuffed animal or pacifier, and expression of emotion like crying, clinging, whining or wailing.

6. Intervene with the developmental age and stage of the child in mind: Infants require comfort, familiar attachment figures, holding, protection and restoration of order. As language and imagination grow, toddlers and very young children need simple words, repeated reassurances, acceptance of time-limited regression, constant monitoring and love. At each developmental period, the availability and empathic response of a caring, familiar adult begins the process of remediation.

7. Intervene with the particular learning style and temperament of the child in mind: Children with autism and other special needs may process information – gestures, pictures and language – in different ways. Often a “4L’s” strategy may help: Less Language and Longer Latency. This means that you can use fewer words and wait longer for a reply. Ask the child what they were thinking and feeling and even draw pictures or tell stories. Use your own facial expressions, voice and words to reflect and “tune in” to their emotions. If helpful, use pictures or drawings to identify and label different feelings. Be prepared for misunderstandings and misinterpretations, and keep clarifying and reassuring the child that you will be sure they are safe.

8. Provide structure and communicate safety: Uncertainty is the province of adulthood. While we as adults may feel unsure of the possibility of future tragedies, we must always let children know that we will take care of them and protect them. Children thrive when provided structure and safety.

9. Recognize that there are some feelings that we can only share and cannot fix: Children need us to be there with and for them at such times. It’s appropriate to both not have an answer and be with the children in their sadness and confusion.

10. Remember to take care of yourself: If the adults in a child’s life are overwhelmed, overstressed and overtired, it will be more difficult to be safe, secure and stable for the child. Pay attention to the “ABC’s” of self-care: awareness, balance and connection, in your own life. Enlist other adults to help you process what has happened and support you in your support of the child