



Pocono Mountain School District

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Dear Parents/Guardians:

The news of the horrific school mass shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, yesterday leaves all of us shaken and scared.

Our hearts are breaking for the families of the 19 children and 2 teachers lost in this devastating act of violence against another school. Please keep those families in your thoughts and prayers. Please also pray for those who survived this awful school shooting. The entire Robb Elementary School community needs our thoughts and prayers as they grieve and struggle to cope with this senseless act of violence.

It is understandable during such tragedies that parents and students may become more concerned about the safety measures within our schools. Please know that school safety – keeping our students, faculty, staff, and administrators safe – is our top priority every day. I want to reassure you that we work hand-in-hand with the Pocono Mountain Regional Police Department and other law enforcement agencies to keep our students, staff and schools safe.

Pocono Mountain School District has numerous measures in place to keep our schools safe. School safety experts recommend a layered approach to keeping our schools safe, which is the approach we follow on a daily basis. Some safety and security measures are visible to you and others are not easy to see. This is done purposefully to keep our schools as safe and secure as possible. School security experts recommend that we do not provide/publish a list of all the security measures we have in place, because to do so may actually make our schools more vulnerable. Our safety and security measures are flexible, and we adapt our measures to meet any new concerns that arise. We routinely seek the advice of our local and state police and other agencies on how to better safeguard our schools and improve our safety and security measures. Our local and state police departments also continually provide us with immediate and excellent support to keep our schools safe.

In the upcoming days, I am sure our law enforcement community will share new recommendations with us as they analyze the details of the horrific school shooting in Texas, so we can improve the safety of our schools.

Tragedies, especially those involving schools, can fill us with dread and fear. Our children may experience the same doubts and fears that we, as adults, are struggling to overcome. Please know that we have experienced crisis counselors available in our schools to help our students who maybe experiencing anxiety, fear or depression following the Texas school tragedy. Please inform your child's teacher, guidance counselor or principal if you have a concern with your child's emotional and mental well-being. The American Psychological Association offers the following tips for parents on how to manage the exposure their children have to news coverage of tragic events and how to prevent overexposure to such news by children:

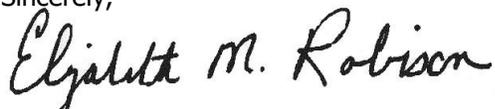
- **Talk to your children.** Parents should have an age appropriate conversation with your children and teens about what they have seen and heard. Explain or correct rumors or misunderstandings that they may have.
- **Be mindful of your children.** It's easy to get caught up in news coverage and not even realize your children are present. It's unnecessary for very young children to watch news coverage at all. They may not understand that what they see are replays which can be misconstrued as circumstances happening again.
- **Find other ways to connect.** Children may want to send pictures they made or letters they have written to families, first responders, hospitals or teachers. This can be a way to take positive actions and express caring.
- **Plan your TV/Internet viewing.** Find windows of time each day (like in the morning, midday and evening) to watch. Limit this to 30–60 minutes. Then get up and do something else. It may be taking a walk, washing dishes or even reading a book. If you continue to want to stay with TV/Internet, switch to another show or site that has programming you enjoy.
- **Enlist a buddy.** Ask a friend to help you turn it off. Go out to lunch, see a movie or just simply spend time together. With children, find time to play games, read or other ways to enjoy being together. Laugh. It's OK even in times of sadness or loss.

You or your children may find yourselves struggling to cope with tragic news events. If news coverage is interfering with your relationships, job performance, sleeping or eating habits, it may be time to talk to a psychologist to identify positive thoughts and actions that can help. If your children exhibit signs of anxiety, such as nightmares or anxiousness when a parent leaves them, psychologists can provide tips to overcome these symptoms and offer solutions to build their resilience for the future.

I've also included a resource with my letter from the National Association of School Psychologists on "Talking to Children About Violence: Tips for Parents and Teachers" to help you talk to you children about the tragedy in Texas. We will make this and other resources available on the PMSD website (www.pmsd.org) to support our students and families.

Please know that as a mother of two sons, I share your horror, heartache, grief and fear from yesterday's tragedy. As your Superintendent of Schools, I assure you that we are continually evaluating our school safety and security measures to keep our schools safe.

Sincerely,



Dr. Elizabeth Robison
Superintendent of Schools

Talking to Children About Violence: Tips for Parents and Teachers

High profile acts of violence, particularly in schools, can confuse and frighten children who may feel in danger or worry that their friends or loved-ones are at risk. They will look to adults for information and guidance on how to react. Parents and school personnel can help children feel safe by establishing a sense of normalcy and security and talking with them about their fears.

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. Watch for clues that they may want to talk, such as hovering around while you do the dishes or yard work. Some children prefer writing, playing music, or doing an art project as an outlet. Young children may need concrete activities (such as drawing, looking at picture books, or imaginative play) to help them identify and express their feelings.
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. Give simple examples of school safety like reminding children about exterior doors being locked, child monitoring efforts on the playground, and emergency drills practiced during the school day.
 - **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 (e.g. not providing building access to strangers, reporting strangers on campus, reporting threats to the school safety made by students or community members, etc.), 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 also 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.

Suggested Points to Emphasize When Talking to Children

- Schools are safe places. School staff works with parents and public safety providers (local police and fire departments, emergency responders, hospitals, etc.) to keep you safe.
- The school building is safe because ... (cite specific school procedures).
- We all play a role in the school safety. Be observant and let an adult know if you see or hear something that makes you feel uncomfortable, nervous or frightened.
- There is a difference between reporting, tattling or gossiping. You can provide important information that may prevent harm either directly or anonymously by telling a trusted adult what you know or hear.
- Although there is no absolute guarantee that something bad will never happen, it is important to understand the difference between the **possibility** of something happening and **probability** that it will affect you (our school community).
- Senseless violence is hard for everyone to understand. Doing things that you enjoy, sticking to your normal routine, and being with friends and family help make us feel better and keep us from worrying about the event.
- Sometimes people do bad things that hurt others. They may be unable to handle their anger, under the influence of drugs or alcohol, or suffering from mental illness. Adults (parents, teachers, police officers, doctors, faith leaders) work very hard to get those people help and keep them from hurting others. It is important for all of us to know how to get help if we feel really upset or angry and to stay away from drugs and alcohol.
- Stay away from guns and other weapons. Tell an adult if you know someone has a gun. Access to guns is one of the leading risk factors for deadly violence.
- Violence is never a solution to personal problems. Students can be part of the positive solution by participating in anti-violence programs at school, learning conflict mediation skills, and seeking help from an adult if they or a peer is struggling with anger, depression, or other emotions they cannot control.

NASP has additional information for parents and educators on school safety, violence prevention, children's trauma reactions, and crisis response at www.nasponline.org.

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