

Statement from Superintendent Catherine Latham in response to the Newtown, Conn. tragedy

On behalf of the Lynn School Committee, the entire staff of Lynn Public Schools, and the Lynn community, I send heartfelt thoughts and prayers to the staff, students, and families of Newtown as they deal with this horrific tragedy. As we seek to comprehend and understand the horror of the event, we naturally look inwardly at our own schools and our own children. I write this message in an attempt to offer some sense of security to the families of all Lynn students and to offer resources to parents on how to speak with their children, answer their questions and calm their fears.

Lynn Public Schools Security Systems

We have performed cutting-edge work over the past six years to maintain safe and secure schools. Our School Safety and Security Liaison, Lynn Police Officer Robert Ferrari, has worked tirelessly with us, the Lynn Police Department and the Lynn Fire Department to establish safety systems in all schools. These systems include:

- Ai Phone Systems in every school that allow video monitoring and two-way communication before visitors are buzzed into the buildings.
- Yearly lock-down drills (in addition to fire drills) in every school.
- Card access systems that allow only designated school department personnel into our buildings.
- A strict Visitor Policy newly adopted by the Lynn School Committee and posted on our school department website.
- Collaboration with the Lynn Police and Lynn Fire Department in yearly *Mock Active Shooter Drills* in our schools. This year a drill was held at LVTI and included Lynn English High School ROTC students as student volunteers.
- CCTV Security Camera Systems in 16 of our 25 schools that include more than 400 interior and exterior cameras; a plan to add security cameras in the remaining nine schools in 2013.
- Computer phone systems in all schools that enable phones to be used as intercoms and emergency notification systems.

Our No. 1 priority is the safety and security of our children. There is absolutely nothing more important.

Resources for Parents and Teachers

My entire district staff is working to provide school personnel with assistance in dealing with this tragedy. Our principals, school psychologists, school adjustment counselors, guidance counselors will be available on Monday and throughout the week and beyond to assist you and your children. Below are links to resources to assist parents and teachers in talking to children about school violence. I will add additional resources as they become available.

National Association of School Psychologists: [Talking to Children about Violence: Tips for Parents and Teachers](#)

National Association of School Psychologists: [Talking to Children about Violence: Tips for Parents and Teachers - Spanish](#)

The American Academy of Pediatrics | [School Shootings](#)

National Association of School Psychologists | [Talking to Children About Violence](#)

University of Minnesota | [Talking to Kids About Violence Against Kids](#)

Common Sense Media | [Explaining the News To Our Kids](#)



NATIONAL
ASSOCIATION OF
SCHOOL
PSYCHOLOGISTS

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 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 work 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.
- ***Don't dwell on the worst possibilities.*** 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 the ***probability*** that it will affect our school.
- ***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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Talking to Children About Violence: Tips for Parents and Teachers

Conversando con Niños Sobre la Violencia: Sugerencias para Padres y Maestros

Actos de violencia que reciben mucha publicidad, particularmente los que ocurren en las escuelas, pueden confundir y asustar a niños que tal vez pueden sentir que ellos o sus amigos y seres queridos corren peligro. Se dirigirán a los adultos para información y para saber como reaccionar. Los padres y el personal de las escuelas pueden ayudar a que los niños sientan seguros al establecer un ambiente de normalidad y seguridad y conversar con ellos sobre sus temores.

1. **Reasegurarles que están a salvo.** Enfatice que las escuelas son lugares seguros. Dar validez a los sentimientos de ellos. Explicar que toda clase de sentimiento es aceptable cuando ocurre una tragedia. Dejar a los niños que hablen sobre sus sentimientos, ayudarles poner esos sentimientos en perspectiva, ayudarles a expresar apropiadamente estos sentimientos
2. **Acomodar y dar tiempo para hablar.** Deje que las preguntas del niño le guíe en cuanto a que tanta información proporciona. Sea paciente. No siempre quieren hablar de sus sentimientos libremente. Mantenga la vigilancia para que note los indicios de que quieren hablar, tales como el rondarle cuando lava los platos o hace los quehaceres del jardín. Algunos niños prefieren expresarse por escrito, tocar música, o completar un proyecto de arte. Pueden necesitar los niños mas pequeños actividades concretas para ayudarles a identificar y expresar sus sentimientos (tales como dibujar, ver libros con imagines, o juegos imaginarios).
3. **Mantenga las explicaciones apropiadas para el nivel de desarrollo.**
 - **Primeros Grados de Escuela primaria** estos estudiantes necesitan información sencilla, breve, que sea balanceada y que asegure que las casas y las escuelas son lugares seguros y que los adultos los van a proteger.
 - **Grados Últimos de Primaria y Primeros del Intermedio** estos estudiantes serán más verbales, harán preguntas sobre si realmente están a salvo y precisamente lo que están pasando en sus escuelas. Pueden necesitar ayuda para separar las fantasías de la realidad. Hable con ellos de los esfuerzos para proporcionar escuelas seguras por parte de los líderes escolares y comunitarios.
 - **Grados Últimos del Intermedio y Secundario** estos estudiantes tendrán opiniones fuertes y variadas acerca de las causas de la violencia en las escuelas y en la sociedad. Compartirán sugerencias concretas de cómo mejorar la seguridad escolar y prevenir tragedias en la sociedad. Enfatice el papel que juega el estudiante en la manutención de la seguridad escolar al seguir las directivas de seguridad (por ejemplo, no dar acceso a la escuela a los desconocidos, reportar a los desconocidos en la escuela, reportar amenazas a la seguridad de la escuela hecho por estudiantes o miembros de la comunidad, etc.). Deben comunicar inquietudes de la seguridad personal de uno a los administradores y aprovechar de los apoyos para necesidades emocionales.
4. **Revisar los procedimientos de seguridad.** Se deben incluir reglamentos y protecciones en la escuela y los hogares. Ayude a los niños a identificar al menos un adulto en la escuela y en la comunidad a quien podría recurrir en el caso de que sienten amenazados o en peligro.
5. **Observar el estado emocional de los niños.** Algunos niños no expresarán sus inquietudes verbalmente. Pueden ser indicios del nivel de ansiedad o preocupación de los niños los cambios en el comportamiento, apetito, y hábitos de dormir. En la mayoría de niños, disminuirán estos síntomas al

darles seguridad y con el paso de tiempo. No obstante, pueden correr el riesgo de intensas reacciones en algunos niños. Pueden correr mayor riesgo de reacciones severas los niños quienes han experimentado previas experiencias traumáticas o pérdidas personales, los que sufren de depresión u otras enfermedades mentales, o los que tienen necesidades especiales. Si tiene cualquier inquietud se debe buscar la ayuda de un profesional de salud mental.

6. **Limitar la observación de estos eventos en la televisión.** Limite lo que ven en la televisión y sea consciente de la televisión prendida en algunos lugares comunales. Puede causar ansiedad y confusión la información que es inapropiada por el nivel de desarrollo del niño, especialmente para los niños pequeños. Los adultos también necesitan estar conscientes del contenido de las conversaciones que conducen con niños presentes, aun en frente de adolescentes, y limitar que escuchen los comentarios vengativos, odiosos y enfadados porque los pueden malentender.
7. **Mantener una rutina normal.** Puede asegúrales y promover la salud física el mantener una rutina normal. Asegure que los niños duerman lo suficiente, que coman con regularidad, y hagan ejercicio. Aliénteles a mantenerse al tanto de las tareas y las actividades extra curriculares, pero no a la fuerza, por que se sentirán agobiados.

Sugerencias de Puntos de Énfasis al Conversar con los niños:

- **Las escuelas son lugares seguros.** Trabajan junto con los padres para mantenerlos seguros. todos se unen, los empleados de la escuela y los de la seguridad pública (policía local, departamentos de bomberos, trabajadores de emergencia, hospitales, etc.).
- **El edificio de la escuela es seguro porque...** (referirse a los reglamentos específicos de la escuela).
- **Todos jugamos un papel en la seguridad escolar.** Ponga atención y comunique con un adulto si ve o escucha algo que le inquieta o provoca nervios o miedo.
- **No es lo mismo reportar que chismear o ser soplón.** Puede proveer información importante que ha escuchado o visto, lo cual que puede prevenir al darnos, o comunicándose directamente o anónimamente con un adulto de confianza
- **No se fijen en las peores posibilidades.** Aunque no existe una garantía absoluta de que nunca sucederá nada malo, es importante distinguir entre la **posibilidad** de que algo pase y la **probabilidad** de que afectará a nuestra escuela.
- **Es difícil para todos entender la violencia sin sentido.** Nos puede ayudar sentir mejor y alejarnos de las preocupaciones del acontecimiento el hacer cosas que disfrutamos, mantener la rutina normal, y estar con amigos y familia.
- **A veces personas hacen malas cosas que hiera a los demás.** Tal vez no podían manejar los enojos, estaban bajo la influencia de las drogas o alcohol o tal vez sufrían de una enfermedad mental. Muchos adultos (padres, maestros, policías, doctores, líderes espirituales etc.) se esfuerzan mucho en conseguirles ayuda para prevenir que hagan daño a los demás. Es importante que sepamos todos cómo buscar ayuda si nos sentimos muy alterados o con iras y que no alejemos de las drogas y alcohol.
- **Aléjense de las pistolas u otras armas.** Si sabes que alguien tiene una pistola, notifiqué a un adulto. Uno de los más importantes factores de riesgo para la violencia mortal es acceso a las armas.
- **La violencia nunca es una solución para los problemas personales.** Los estudiantes puede formar parte de una solución positiva al participar en programas contra la violencia en las escuelas, aprender las destrezas de mediación de conflicto, y al buscar la ayuda de un adulto si ellos o un compañero experimentan dificultades con las iras, depresión, u otras emociones que no pueden controlar.

NASP tiene información adicional sobre la seguridad escolar, prevención de violencia y reacciones de trauma infantiles, reacción a crisis, para los educadores y los padres en www.nasponline.org