

Helping Kids and Teens Cope with the Threat of School Violence

In the wake of the horrific [school shooting in Minneapolis](#), this article from Take Out is being republished here on Teaching Catholic Kids.

By Dr. Joseph White

This fall, children and teens are returning to school under the shadow of multiple, high-profile school shootings that occurred last spring. More schools are installing metal detectors and other security procedures, and even elementary schools are having “lockdown” or “active-shooter” drills. Just the thought that something so tragic could happen at school is a source of fear for many children (and their parents). What can we do to help kids stay safe while also easing the fear that their school could be the next site of such a tragedy? Here are some tips for parents on managing children’s worries about school shootings:

Help them remember that these events are rare. Although even one episode of gun violence at school is too many, students in the vast majority of schools across the country will, thankfully, never experience an incident like this. Let them know that active-shooter drills are like fire drills. They are preparing for something that will probably never happen, but it’s important to have a plan just in case.

Don’t tell them nothing will happen to them. Although we want to reassure children and teens that such a tragedy is not likely, unfortunately, we can’t promise that it will never happen.

Reassure your child that you and others are working to make

sure they stay safe, and that you would never send him or her into an environment that you knew was dangerous. Adults at your child's school also know that student safety is their top priority. Encourage your child to listen and follow directions related to school safety and to trust that the adults who care for them are working to keep them safe.

Encourage teens to be watchful. Many teens are glued to their smartphone screens, even when in crowded places. When in large crowds, such as school dances, graduations, assemblies and areas where students are congregating before and after school, teens periodically should look around and check their surroundings. Does anything look suspicious? Do they know where the exits are if they had to leave quickly?

Emphasize the importance of reporting threats. There have been numerous examples of situations in which students who committed acts of violence had made threats, either on social media or in person, prior to the event. Teens are sometimes reluctant to report these threats for fear of retaliation. Highlight the importance of telling someone about what they see and hear if they think a fellow student might be planning to act out. If their concerns are dismissed, tell them to keep talking about it until someone takes them seriously. In recent months, several tragedies were averted because vigilant students and staff acted quickly when they saw signs of potential violence.

For additional tips on helping children and teens talk about school violence, see the website of the [National Association of School Psychologists](#). At its resources and publications link, you will find multiple resources for dealing with school safety issues.

School violence is a scary subject, but we need to keep lines of communication open, both with our children and with school personnel. Continued communication and collaboration can help our kids stay safer and feel more secure.

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