



# Talking with kids about horrible events...

by Harriet Hudson, MD



The recent shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School is difficult for adults to process. For children, these atrocities are even more difficult to understand and to deal with. There is no one best way to talk with your children, but there are some basic guidelines to open communication. We also have some suggestions on how best to help with your child's stress (whether your child shows it or not).

Understand that children process the outside world differently from adults, depending on their age and level of development. This tragic massacre of so many children, or the events of 9-11, are broadcast over and over again. **Turn off the media!** No one needs to hear it on the TV/radio/internet over and over again. Depending on the age of your child, start a conversation with open-ended questions. *Did you hear/see the stuff that happened at the school in Connecticut?* Find out what they know. Let them take the lead in asking questions. Some may just say "oh" and move on to the next thing. As a parent, we need to understand that our fears and anxieties are not theirs.

It is also very important to continue routines. Swim/dance/sports classes should continue, for example. Bedtime is as usual. But please do make some extra time to hug and love your child. Have special one-on-one time. If your child is anxious or upset, let them know they are safe. Let them know that their small world is safe and warm (and it **is** all about **them**). Stress may not appear for a while. You may be returning from the market with a young one in the back who "out of the blue" asks you about the events or guns or killings. My grandson (a first grader) asked me today returning from church: "Grandma, aren't there doctors in Connecticut? Can't they stitch the kids up and make them better?"

A few good resources:

- **American Psychological Association**  
[www.apa.org/helpcenter/aftermath.aspx](http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/aftermath.aspx)
- **American Academy of Pediatrics**  
[www.healthychildren.org/English/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.healthychildren.org/English/Pages/default.aspx)
- **American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry**  
[www.aacap.org/cs/root/facts\\_for\\_families/children\\_and\\_grief](http://www.aacap.org/cs/root/facts_for_families/children_and_grief)
- **Child Mind Institute**  
[www.childmind.org/en/posts/articles/2011-1-6-caring-kids-after-school-shooting](http://www.childmind.org/en/posts/articles/2011-1-6-caring-kids-after-school-shooting)
- **PBS**  
[www.pbs.org/parents/talkingwithkids/news/](http://www.pbs.org/parents/talkingwithkids/news/)

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