

## Resources Developed by Rondout Valley Central School District to Assist You In Talking to Your Child About Threats to our Schools

### Talking to Secondary Students:

- **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.

### Talking to Younger Students:

- **Early elementary school** students need brief, simple information that is balanced with reassurances that their school and homes are safe and that adults are there to protect them. Give simple examples of school safety such as exterior doors being locked, child monitoring efforts on the playground, and emergency drills being practiced so they are prepared if something happens.
- **Intermediate school and Junior High school** students 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 and provide concrete examples, such as those listed above.
- **Emphasize the following points:**
  - Schools are safe places. Our school staff works with local police and fire departments, emergency responders, and hospitals to keep you safe.
  - We all play a role in the school safety. Let an adult know if you see or hear something that makes you feel uncomfortable, nervous, or frightened.
  - There is a difference between reporting and tattling, or gossiping. You can provide important information, either directly or anonymously, that may prevent harm by telling a trusted adult what you know or hear.
  - Help your child to understand that there is a difference between the *possibility* of something happening and *probability* that something will happen in our school.

### Here are some ideas for how to have and guide the conversation with your child:

- Start by **checking in with your children** using open-ended questions and listening to their concerns. (ex: How was your day? What did you do today?)
- When thinking about how to talk to your children, **take your cues from them** in terms of what they need and what they are thinking and feeling. Answer the question they ask without adding additional information.
- **It is okay if your child does not want to talk about the threat.** Do not force him/her to talk. Remind the child that he/she can come to you at any time to discuss his/her feelings.
- **Let the child draw** if he/she does not want to “talk” about his/her feelings.
- **Open a line of communication with your child’s teacher** if you think your child will have difficulty coping in school.
- **Encourage children to talk about their concerns and to express their feelings.** Some children may be hesitant to initiate such conversation, so you may want to prompt them by asking if they feel safe at school. When talking with younger children remember to talk on their level. For example, they may not understand the term “violence” but can talk to you about being afraid or a classmate who is mean to them.
- **Talk honestly about your own feelings regarding school violence.** It is important for children to recognize they are not dealing with their fears alone.
- **Validate the child’s feelings.** Do not minimize a child’s concerns, but stress that schools are safe places. In fact, recent studies have shown that schools are more secure now than ever before.

- **Empower children to take action regarding school safety.** Encourage them to report specific incidents (such as bullying, threats or talk of suicide) and to develop problem solving and conflict resolution skills. Encourage older children to actively participate in student-run anti-violence programs.
- **Discuss the safety procedures that are in place at your child’s school.** Explain why visitors sign in at the principal’s office or certain doors remain locked during the school day. Help your child understand that such precautions are in place to ensure his or her safety and stress the importance of adhering to school rules and policies.
- **Create safety plans with your child.** Help identify which adults (a friendly secretary, trusted teacher or approachable administrator) your child can talk to if they feel threatened at school. Also ensure that your child knows how to reach you (or another family member or friend) in case of crisis during the school day. Remind your child that they can talk to you anytime they feel threatened.
- **Recognize behavior that may indicate your child is struggling.** Younger children may react to school violence by not wanting to attend school or participate in school-based activities. Teens and adolescents may minimize their concerns outwardly, but may become argumentative, withdrawn, or allow their school performance to decline.
- **Keep the dialogue going** and make school safety a common topic in family discussions rather than just a response to an immediate crisis. Open dialogue will encourage children to share their concerns.
- **Remember that it is ok to admit that you don't have all of the answers.** It is ok to say that you don’t have all of the answers. It may also be helpful to follow uncertainties with reassuring words such as “I don’t know, but I love you and I’m here for you”.
- **Be patient.** If the child doesn't have much to say yet, give him some time and let him know he can come back with more questions or to talk about the events when he is ready. If he shows signs of depression and anxiety over time, speak with the child's pediatrician or a school counselor for guidance.
- **Limit access to news or discussions** about the threat, particularly for young children. Be aware when speaking to others that there may be a child nearby who is listening.
- **Try to keep your child’s normal routines**, especially involving bed time and meal time. It is important for children to get enough rest and have good nourishment.
- **Monitor your own stress level** and how your child may be impacted by your stress. Know your limits and seek help for yourself if needed.
- **Seek help when necessary.** If you are worried about a child’s reaction or have ongoing concerns about his/her behavior or emotions, contact your child’s school counselor or school psychologist.

Kerhonkson Elementary –	Kiersten Tupper, ext. 4304
Marbletown Elementary -	Laura Mehalak, ext. 4341
Intermediate-	Stacey Bowers, ext. 4437
	Chelsea Petito, ext. 4443
	Anna Brudvig, ext. 4703
	Deb Marinucci, ext. 4704
	Jaclyn Bleski-Alesi, ext. 4746
Junior High -	Nanette Simone, ext. 4769
	Stephanie Chan-Haver, ext. 4725
High School -	Peter Costello, ext. 4256
	Holly Miller, ext. 4212
	Jody Hoffman, ext. 4209
	Megan Marquis, ext. 4269
	Jennifer Stellavato, ext. 4118
	Chelsea Petito, ext. 4164

The above information has been gathered from <http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/conditions/talking-kids-about-school-safety> and <http://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/school-safety-and-crisis/school-violence-prevention/school-violence-prevention-tips-for-parents-and-educators>