



GILROY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT  
Superintendent's Office

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SUPERINTENDENT

Dr. Deborah A. Flores

BOARD OF EDUCATION

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December 20, 2012

Dear GUSD Parents and Staff,

It is with a heavy heart that I write this letter about school safety. The shooting of young children and staff at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut last Friday (December 14, 2012) is just beyond comprehension. Words are inadequate to express the sorrow felt about this horrific event.

Many parents and staff have contacted the District, (including me, the school board, and/or principals) about the shooting to express concerns and to offer suggestions about how to improve our schools' safety. We appreciate all of the input. I cannot respond to all of these concerns individually but wanted to share with parents and staff some of the steps the District is taking.

On Tuesday, December 18, 2012, I convened a meeting with all principals, district office staff, and members of the Gilroy Police Department including Chief Turner. We reviewed our Code Red (lockdown procedures), discussed safety protocols, and identified many "next steps". I would like to share some of these with you;

- Safety assessments of all schools will be conducted when we return from the winter break. These assessments will be completed by a team – comprised of Gilroy Police Dept., the District's Safety Officer and the principal. The purpose of these assessments will be to determine what steps need to be taken to make our campuses more secure.
- Principals will review Code Red (lock down) procedures with all staff soon after we return from the winter break. The Gilroy Police Dept. has provided us with a Code Red PowerPoint for this meeting. Lock down procedures and evacuation routes will be reviewed.
- By the end of January, all schools will conduct a Code Red (lock down) drill. A second drill will be conducted in the spring. Parents and staff will be notified in advance of the dates of the drills. Before these drills begin, parents and staff should speak to children about the drills so that they are not surprised and understand that they are just drills.
- With the assistance of the District Safety Officer and the G.P.D., a staging location will be identified off campus for parents to obtain information and/or be reunited with their children in the event of a campus lockdown. Parents will be notified of the location for their school.
- Our full time School Resource Officer from the Gilroy Police Department will continue to patrol schools during the school day. We will pursue grant funding to try to increase the number of dedicated school police officers.
- Protocols for visitors coming on campus will be reviewed and enforced. All visitors – parents, vendors, presenters, district office personnel, etc. – will be required to enter through the main office and sign in and sign out. **There will be no exceptions to this rule. Anyone violating this rule will be escorted off campus and may lose the privilege to return.**
- Other issues that are under consideration are; whether to keep classroom doors locked during the day, ways to secure doors from the inside, and ways to expedite exiting through locked gates.

I am attaching a document titled "Helping Your Child Manage Distress, Fear and Anxiety in the Aftermath of a Shooting" for your reference. Also, our school psychologists and counselors are available to talk with children about the Connecticut shootings. This can be arranged by contacting your principal.

We understand that parents, staff, and students are worried about what happened in Connecticut. I want to assure you that the District shares your concerns and is taking proactive steps to make our schools as safe as possible.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Deborah A. Flores, PhD  
Superintendent

## Helping Your Child Manage Distress, Fear and Anxiety in the Aftermath of a Shooting

As a parent, you may be struggling with how to talk with your children about a shooting rampage. It is important to remember that children look to their parents to make them feel safe. This is true no matter what age your children are, be they toddlers, adolescents or even young adults. **Consider the following tips for helping your children manage their distress.**

**Talk with your child.** Talking to your children about their worries and concerns is the first step to help them feel safe and begin to cope with the events occurring around them. What you talk about and how you say it does depend on their age, but all children need to be able to know you are there listening to them.

- Find times when they are most likely to talk: such as when riding in the car, before dinner, or at bedtime.
- Start the conversation; let them know you are interested in them and how they are coping with the information they are getting.
- Encourage children to ask questions. Listen to their thoughts and point of view; don't interrupt — allow them to express their ideas and understanding before you respond.
- Express your own opinions and ideas without putting down theirs; acknowledge that it is okay to disagree.
- Find out what frightens them. Encourage your children to talk about fears they may have. They may worry that someone will harm them at school or that someone will try to harm you.
- Focus on the positive. Reinforce the fact that most people are kind and caring. Remind your child of the heroic actions taken by ordinary people.
- Remind them you are there for them to provide safety, comfort and support. Give them a hug.

**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 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, communicating any personal safety concerns to school administrators and accessing support for emotional needs.

**Keep home a safe place.** Children, regardless of age, often find home to be a safe haven when the world around them becomes overwhelming. During times of crisis, it is important to remember that your children may come home seeking the safe feeling they have being there. Help make it a place where your children find the solitude or comfort they need. Plan a night where everyone participates in a favorite family activity.

**Watch for signs of stress, fear or anxiety.** After a traumatic event, it is typical for children (and adults) to experience a wide range of emotions, including fearfulness, shock, anger, grief and anxiety. Your children's behaviors may change because of their response to the event. They may experience trouble sleeping, difficulty with concentrating on school work or changes in appetite. This is normal for everyone and should begin to disappear in a few months. Encourage your children to put their feelings into words by talking about them or journaling. Some children may find it helpful to express their feelings through art.

**Take "news breaks."** Your children may want to keep informed by gathering information about the event from the Internet, television or newspapers. It is important to limit the amount of time spent watching the news because constant exposure may actually heighten their anxiety and fears.

**Develop a plan.** Establish a family emergency plan for the future, such as a meeting place where everyone should gather if something unexpected happens in your family or neighborhood. It can help you and your child feel safer.

**Take care of yourself.** Take care of yourself so you can take care of your children. Be a model for your children on how to manage traumatic events. Keep regular schedules for activities such as family meals and exercise to help restore a sense of security and normalcy.

These tips and strategies can help you guide your children through the current crisis. If you are feeling stuck or overwhelmed, you may want to consider talking to someone who could help. A licensed mental health professional such as a psychologist can assist you in developing an appropriate strategy for moving forward. It is important to [get professional help](#) if you feel like you are unable to function or perform basic activities of daily living.

### Additional Website Resources for Parents

Talking with Kids about News  
Talking to Kids About School Safety  
Talking with Children about School Violence  
Talking to Children about Community Violence

<http://www.pbs.org/parents/talkingwithkids/news/>  
<http://www.nmha.org/index.cfm?objectid=CA866E4C-1372-4D2D-C8079608087D2F6>  
<http://www.lucydanielscenter.org/page/talking-with-children-about-school-violence>  
[http://www.aacap.org/cs/root/resources\\_for\\_families/talking\\_to\\_children\\_about\\_community\\_violence](http://www.aacap.org/cs/root/resources_for_families/talking_to_children_about_community_violence)

### References:

Helping Your Children Manage Distress in the Aftermath of a Shooting . American Psychological Association  
<http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/aftermath.aspx>  
Helping Children Cope with Fear and Anxiety . US Department of Health and Human Services  
Talking to Children About Violence: Tips for Parents and Teachers . National Association of School Psychologists