

PRINT-Talking to kids about the Kansas City parade shooting

The shooting at a parade for the Kansas City Chiefs that killed one person and wounded 22 included children and that, no doubt, will have some kids worried about their own safety at public events. According to local media accounts, 11 children were wounded and required hospital treatment but none critically. The children are expected to make a full recovery.

This latest news is scary, and many parents are left wondering how to talk to their children about such an unsettling event.

“The conversation really should be about the child. Give them permission to express their feelings. Make sure that they understand it’s important for them to be expressing their opinions, their viewpoints, their feelings. We want to make sure that they are hearing from us as the parent that we care about what they think. We care about what they are feeling,” explains Kyle Boerke, PsyD, director of OSF HealthCare Outpatient Behavioral Health Services.

As information comes in, children may misinterpret what they hear, and might be frightened by something they don’t understand. Dr. Boerke says the first step parents should take is to simply ask kids what they know, and then talk about it truthfully, in a way that is appropriate for the age and developmental level of their child.

“We want them to know the information that I am giving to them is something that they can trust is accurate. So if they are hearing me fiddle with the truth one way or another and they have a teacher at school that is having a conversations with them, that is going to put kind of a doubt in their head. So it is important to be open and honest with them at that age appropriate level. That way they know that they can trust you as a parent and your discretion,” he says.

And while the topic of how to solve gun violence might be divisive, parents can use the current environment as a teaching opportunity. Dr. Boerke reminds us that our kids are watching our reactions to current events and how we treat those with differing opinions or outlooks.

“We have the ability to model how we agree with or how we disagree with something in an appropriate way, and especially in a time like this when the country is so divided, that is a really important thing for us to model – appropriate ways to disagree or have different opinions from other people,” urges Dr. Boerke.

And Dr. Boerke says one of the most important things a parent can do is to reassure kids that they are safe, that home is a safe place, and that mom and dad are going to be ok.

“During unsettling times, sometimes kids can have trouble coping. Dr. Boerke says signs of that include changes in behavior like nightmares, a child not sleeping, new fears, a lack of concentration or unusual moods.”

If a parent notices these changes are ongoing, and talking with the child doesn’t seem to alleviate the fear, Dr. Boerke suggests speaking to your child’s pediatrician to get a referral to a behavioral health provider.

OSF HealthCare Behavioral Health provides outpatient-based counseling services for people of all ages, from infants to the elderly. You can learn more by clicking [here](#), or by calling (309) 664-3130.