



Yesterday's events in Uvalde, Texas, were unconscionable. We will never understand how someone could take such action and cannot imagine the pain and sorrow of the children, teachers and families that were impacted. WCSI plays a key role in helping others and acknowledges how paralyzing such horrendous news can be to our employees, clients, families, and communities.

Incidents, such as a school shooting, can cause immense reactions that can have a significant impact within our schools and communities even if they are not directly involved in the event. Both adults and students will struggle to understand why such events occur and even more importantly, how they can be prevented. The EBH (Emergency Behavioral Health) team would like to offer some resources and suggestions on how to take care of yourself and your family when these events are at the forefront of our lives.

It is imperative for each of us to take account of our response as we work in the field of helping others. Ensuring that each of us are utilizing self-care as we care for others is vital to our success.

Our hope as an Emergency Behavioral Health team is to assist each of you on how we keep our children safe and how do we support each other in a space when fear of the unknown is present and we are charged with talking to clients, families, and our own children.

We understand the challenges that staff will face helping clients and their families navigate traumatic events and we acknowledge and appreciate how emotionally taxing this will be for you all. Please know that we are here to support you as you continue to support yourselves and your clients.

#### **Talking to Children About a Critical Incident**

- Children will understand different amounts of what has happened
  - Children need to know facts appropriate to their age
  - Caregivers must be the judge of what their children should know
  - Try and keep routines as normal as possible. Kids gain security from the predictability of routine, including attending school.
  - Limit exposure to television and the news.
  - Be honest with kids and share with them as much information as they are developmentally able to handle.
  - Allow children to express themselves through talking, drawing, or playing
  - Do not be afraid to say "I don't know"
  - Do not project your fears onto your children
  - Listen to kids' fears and concerns.

INTEGRITY, ACCOUNTABILITY, RESPECT, QUALITY, COMMITMENT.

[www.wcsi.org](http://www.wcsi.org)

770 East Pittsburgh Street | Greensburg, PA 15601 | P. 1-800-353-6467 or 724-837-1808 | F. 724-858-9012

- Reassure kids that the world is a good place to be, but that there are people who do terrible things.
- Parents and adults need to first deal with and assess their own responses to crisis and stress
- Support each other within your family by talking and spending time together
  - Rebuild and reaffirm attachments and relationships
- Monitor for distress signs that your child may exhibit and be supportive
  - Stress affects everyone differently. Be aware of the unusual ways stress affects your child, as well as you.
  - Some signs of stress to be aware of are dizziness, stomach aches, headaches, tears, feeling guilty, angry, or sad.
- Common Reactions to Stress in Children
  - Young children (Pre-School– Kindergarten) may appear to withdraw and be more quiet or subdued, they may act out their interpretations of the event through drawings or play, they may demonstrate anxiety by clinging to parents or favorite toys, having tantrums, and avoiding strangers
  - School Age Children may demonstrate any of the above behaviors plus inappropriate moods or feelings towards the incident, regressive or attention seeking behaviors, performance decline in school or sports
  - Adolescents or Teens may demonstrate any of the above behaviors plus acting out behaviors such as running away, drug and alcohol use, suicidal ideation/expression, low self-esteem, displaced anger or developing amplified self-centeredness
  - If abnormal behaviors persist for longer than 3 weeks, please refer the child to a Mental Health Professional for help.

### **Coping Options**

- Talking to friends, family, or co-workers for support
- Reach out to community resources for support such as the Westmoreland County EBH Team or the crisis hotline (Westmoreland County Crisis Hotline 1-800-836-6010)
- Get enough rest, nutrition, and exercise
- Engage in positive distracting activities such as reading, sports or hobbies
- Try to maintain a normal routine or schedule
- Use relaxation methods such as breathing exercises, yoga, or meditation
- Focus on practical things you can do to better manage your emotions and the situation
- Use calming and positive self-talk
- Participate in support groups or seek counseling
- Avoid alcohol or depressants