

# Beal City Public Schools

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Dear Students, Parents, Staff and Community Members,

As the news of the latest school shooting floods the media, we again see the faces of children, parents and school staff shocked by another school tragedy. Again, we see images of terrified children and watch the events unfold as teens capture it live on social media. We cannot accept these tragedies as a normal part of life in America.

As Superintendents of the public schools in Gratiot and Isabella Counties, we believe it is important for you to know we are diligently working to prevent school shootings and other types of violence in our schools. Our schools continue to participate in multiple trainings and build strong and supportive relationships with law enforcement and other first responders. They have advised us on how to better secure our schools in a variety of ways. For example, across our counties, we have limited access to buildings, secure entries, and a strong network of security cameras. We know that students learn best in safe and secure environments.

We cannot keep our schools safe without the help and support of our entire community. We urge you to learn about the warning signs connected with school shooters in the United States. They include violent fantasies, anger problems, fascination with weapons, being a loner, suicidal or homicidal ideation, stalking, interest in previous shootings, paranoia, violence and cruelty, acting out, police contact, mental health issues, use of alcohol and drugs and unusual interest in police, military and terrorist activities. Experts say a single warning sign by itself might not be significant, but a cluster of warning signs is much more serious.

Please make sure your child knows they must tell a trusted adult immediately if they feel their school is threatened in any way. This includes sharing information about weapons or threatening acts of violence in person or online.

Finally, we need your support in helping our children cope with the painful feelings that may be triggered by this week's tragedy in Oxford, Michigan. The National Association of School Psychologists have created the resource [Talking to Children about Violence: Tips for Parents and Teachers](#). Help your child express their feelings by making the time to ask them questions, listen and help them process by pointing out safeguards and what to do during an emergency.

Across Gratiot and Isabella Counties, please know that we stand united as a community against all acts of violence. We are stronger and safer when we work together as students, parents, staff and community members.

Sincerely,

The Superintendents of Gratiot and Isabella County Public Schools:

Paul Hungerford, Gratiot-Isabella RESD  
Stacey Criner, Alma Public Schools  
Traci Gavenda, Ashley Community Schools  
Jennifer Verleger, Mt. Pleasant Public Schools  
Thomas Torok, Fulton Schools

Terry Starr, Shepherd Public Schools  
Jennifer McKittrick, St. Louis Public Schools  
William Chilman, Beal City Public Schools  
Wade Slavik, Breckenridge Community Schools  
Steve Netzey, Ithaca Public Schools

## Beal City Schools

**"In Harmony with Home and Community" ~ "No Better Place to Learn"**

Beal City Public Schools does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, age, handicap, or veteran status in the provision of educational opportunities or employment opportunities and benefits in compliance with Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973



NASP

## Talking to Children About Violence: Tips for Parents and Teachers

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF  
School Psychologists

High profile acts of violence, particularly in schools, can confuse and frighten children who may feel in danger or worry that their friends or loved-ones are at risk. They will look to adults for information and guidance on how to react. Parents and school personnel can help children feel safe by establishing a sense of normalcy and security and talking with them about their fears.

1. **Reassure children that they are safe.** Emphasize that schools are very safe. Validate their feelings. Explain that all feelings are okay when a tragedy occurs. Let children talk about their feelings, help put them into perspective, and assist them in expressing these feelings appropriately.
2. **Make time to talk.** Let their questions be your guide as to how much information to provide. Be patient; children and youth do not always talk about their feelings readily. Watch for clues that they may want to talk, such as hovering around while you do the dishes or yard work. Some children prefer writing, playing music, or doing an art project as an outlet. Young children may need concrete activities (such as drawing, looking at picture books, or imaginative play) to help them identify and express their feelings.
3. **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 practiced 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 (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.
4. **Review safety procedures.** This should include procedures and safeguards at school and at home. Help children identify at least one adult at school and in the community to whom they go if they feel threatened or at risk.
5. **Observe children's emotional state.** Some children may not express their concerns verbally. Changes in behavior, appetite, and sleep patterns can also indicate a child's level of anxiety or discomfort. In most children, these symptoms will ease with reassurance and

time. However, some children may be at risk for more intense reactions. Children who have had a past traumatic experience or personal loss, suffer from depression or other mental illness, or with special needs may be at greater risk for severe reactions than others. Seek the help of mental health professional if you are at all concerned.

6. **Limit television viewing of these events.** Limit television viewing and be aware if the television is on in common areas. Developmentally inappropriate information can cause anxiety or confusion, particularly in young children. Adults also need to be mindful of the content of conversations that they have with each other in front of children, even teenagers, and limit their exposure to vengeful, hateful, and angry comments that might be misunderstood.
7. **Maintain a normal routine.** Keeping to a regular schedule can be reassuring and promote physical health. Ensure that children get plenty of sleep, regular meals, and exercise. Encourage them to keep up with their schoolwork and extracurricular activities but don't push them if they seem overwhelmed.

### **Suggested Points to Emphasize When Talking to Children**

- Schools are safe places. School staff works with parents and public safety providers (local police and fire departments, emergency responders, hospitals, etc.) to keep you safe.
- The school building is safe because ... (cite specific school procedures).
- We all play a role in the school safety. Be observant and let an adult know if you see or hear something that makes you feel uncomfortable, nervous or frightened.
- There is a difference between reporting, tattling or gossiping. You can provide important information that may prevent harm either directly or anonymously by telling a trusted adult what you know or hear.
- Although there is no absolute guarantee that something bad will never happen, it is important to understand the difference between the **possibility** of something happening and **probability** that it will affect you (our school community).
- Senseless violence is hard for everyone to understand. Doing things that you enjoy, sticking to your normal routine, and being with friends and family help make us feel better and keep us from worrying about the event.
- Sometimes people do bad things that hurt others. They may be unable to handle their anger, under the influence of drugs or alcohol, or suffering from mental illness. Adults (parents, teachers, police officers, doctors, faith leaders) work very hard to get those people help and keep them from hurting others. It is important for all of us to know how to get help if we feel really upset or angry and to stay away from drugs and alcohol.
- Stay away from guns and other weapons. Tell an adult if you know someone has a gun. Access to guns is one of the leading risk factors for deadly violence.
- Violence is never a solution to personal problems. Students can be part of the positive solution by participating in anti-violence programs at school, learning conflict mediation skills, and seeking help from an adult if they or a peer is struggling with anger, depression, or other emotions they cannot control.

**NASP has additional information for parents and educators on school safety, violence prevention, children's trauma reactions, and crisis response at [www.nasponline.org](http://www.nasponline.org).**

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