



**Bucks County
Intermediate Unit**

Caregiver Training

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Navigating the Conversation



- Please remain muted throughout the presentation so that everyone can hear the speakers.
- If you have any questions, please type these in chat. We will have time at the end of the presentation to address your questions.
- We may not have answers to all your questions and will do the best we can to address them or share them with the appropriate persons who will be able to answer.

Tonight's Agenda



- Share facts about the crisis.
- Talk about common reactions to crises.
- Present ways to help your child develop healthy coping strategies.
- Share how to respond when your child has ongoing or intense reactions to the trauma.
- Discuss supports that will be offered in school when students return on January 4th.

What Happened



Addressing Grief in Children



- Grief is personal
- There is no right or wrong way to grieve
- How people grieve can be influenced by:
 - Developmental level
 - Cultural traditions
 - Religious beliefs
 - Mental health
 - Disabilities
 - Family
 - Personal characteristics
 - Previous experiences

Common Grief Reactions in Children



Children's grief reactions differ according to age and developmental level:

- **Preschool** - Acting out, regressive behaviors, being more quiet than usual, increased anxiety (nervous, concern, worry).
- **Elementary** - Difficulty in school and/or attendance; sleeping, eating; irritability, aggression, and disruptive behaviors; social withdrawal; guilt, depression, and anxiety; repeated retelling of events.
- **Middle and High School** - Difficulty in school performance or attendance; avoidance, withdrawal, high-risk behaviors; difficulty with peer relations, nightmares, flashbacks, emotional numbing, and/or depression.

How To Help



- Have a discussion with your child
 - Stick to facts; use school-released information
 - Ensure safety; what happened is a rare event
- Maintain normal routines (as much as possible)
- Ask questions to determine the child's understanding of the event and emotional state

How to Help Continued



- Share your own reactions; your own reactions will likely impact your child, stay focused on the child
- Give the child permission to grieve
- Provide age and developmentally appropriate answers/support
- Connect the child with professionals and other trusted adults
- Help children adopt healthy coping strategies

Initiating the Conversation



When a tragedy like this occurs, your child will have questions. Remember that your child's sadness or worry is caused by the situation and not caused by talking about it. The following are things to keep in mind when you talk with them:

- It's ok to admit that you don't have all the answers
- Different children will react in different ways like crying, feeling angry or scared, being quiet, having a hard time concentrating or doing fun things, or even not having much of a reaction at all. However, what your child is feeling is normal
- The way that your child reacts is part of a healthy process and how he or she moves forward to heal and feel better

Initiating the Conversation Continued



- Right now, you want to listen more and talk less. The most important thing that you can do for your child is to invite or leave space where he or she can come to you to share feelings, memories, worries, or ask questions
- The reassurance that you want your child to feel can come from your willingness to be available. This might change over time as they are back to school or other activities with their classmates
- Trust that you know the people your child will turn to for support. Encourage those connections
- If you are worried about your child's reactions, there is help at school and there are organizations that can further help your child and your family – information will be covered at the end tonight

Conversation Starters



- Some children will respond to something as simple as, “I heard about the King family and wanted to let you know that I’m here to listen and support you. Everybody reacts differently and however you are feeling is ok.”
- Some children will need something more direct, such as, “I heard about the King family and wanted to see how you are feeling. I am here for you if you want to talk.”

Conversation Starters Continued



- For older children, even if they have been talking to their friends or on social media, you can still check in saying something like, “this is a difficult time and I am always available to talk or just spend time with you if you are feeling low.”
- When you want to reassure your child, you might say, “We’re all sad right now and these feelings are normal. I am feeling sad too”
- Some of you have already started these conversations and may continue to have them over the coming days and weeks.

Things To Avoid



- Stay away from descriptions when referring to the deceased, such as “They are sleeping,” or “They went away” or “Passed”
- Minimizing the loss: “you didn’t know them well”
- Imposing a time frame to complete the grieving process
- Overidentifying (e.g., “I know how you feel”)
- Oversharing (e.g., When I lost...)
 - Not everyone handles loss and grief the same way
 - The student’s grief should remain the focus

Additional Attention



- Children exhibiting the following might require additional attention
 - Loss of interest in daily activities
 - Changes in eating and sleeping habits
 - Wishing to be with the deceased individual
 - Fear of being alone/excessive fears
 - Significant decreases in school performance or attendance
 - Increased physical complaints
 - Uncontrollable crying/hysteria
 - Thoughts of self harm or harming others

Coping Strategies for Children



- Plan family times together
- Talk with others who have been through the same experience
- Have an adult available to talk to
- Ensure that they are eating, drinking, sleeping and keeping up with hygiene
- Express themselves through writing, drawing, playing
- Add physical exercise into daily routine
- Avoid alcohol or drugs
- Avoid excessive amount of time on social media

Coping Strategies for Children Continued



- Maintain normal routines (going to school, extracurricular activities)
- Surround yourself with support (parents, grandparents, coaches, friends, pets)
- Continue what you love to do (do not feel guilty about having joy in your life at this time)
- Practice some stress management techniques (deep breathing, yoga, stretching, guided imagery)
- Embrace your religion, spirituality, or other helpful belief systems
- Enjoy nature
- Find ways to laugh (but allow yourself to cry)

What to Expect on January 4th



- Teachers from Richland and Strayer (all schools as well) are being prepared for what to expect on Tuesday and provided information on ways that they can support your child, including what to look for if a child is struggling. They are also being supported through their own grief and loss.
- District counselors from Quakertown Community School District, the IU, Bucks Department of Behavioral Health and other agency providers in the county will be available to support students in all the schools on Tuesday, with extra people at Richland and Strayer.

January 4th continued



- Classroom meetings will be held in Patrick and Liam's classes, led by mental health professionals. Teachers will be present during these meetings.
- Students identified as close friends of the boys, or witnesses to the fire will be offered support (individually or in groups).
- All students will be provided the opportunity to talk to someone at the school

January 4th continued



- Richland and Strayer will maintain their routines and schedule with emphasis on student well-being as recommended by the PREPaRE model.
- There is recognition that some students will need to go back to the normal routine of learning and will be provided work
- Parents/guardians will be notified if their child has sought out support.
- School will rely on parents and teachers to identify students who are struggling and may need extra support.
- Further support during the week will be added as needed

Care For The Caregiver



- Reestablishing and utilizing our natural supports are the most powerful tool that we have to help us recover.
- Monitor your own reactions and take care of your own needs.
- An individual's history may make them more susceptible.
- Examples of areas to monitor:
 - Can't stop thinking about the event, difficult making decisions
 - Physical reactions such as tiredness, stomach aches/head aches, difficulty sleeping or eating
 - Excessive worrying, numbing, increased irritability or anger
 - Increase in substance use, withdrawal from close contacts

Ways to care for yourself



- Physical self-care
- Social care and connection
- Acknowledge a need for additional help

Supports



- Supports are ongoing and will continue into the New Year when school reopens on January 4th.
- You will also be able to find updates on the QCSD main webpage.
- If you are in need of assistance, there are county and regional organizations for support. You are not alone.
- List of agencies are included on the next slide.

Resources



- Bucks County Crisis- 1-800-499-7455
- Lenape Valley Foundation Mobile Crisis- 1 877 435 7709
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline- 1-800-273- TALK (8255)
- Crisis Text Line- Text BCHOPE to 741741
- Bucks County LIFE- 888-442-1590
- Bucks County NAMI (Support for family and individuals)-
namibuckspa.org
- Penn Foundation: 215 257-6551

Questions



Please type any questions you have in chat, and we will try our best to answer what we can.