

Dear 'Gators Families,

We are deeply saddened by the tragic events that transpired yesterday in Parkland, FL. Our thoughts and prayers are with all those affected.

We want to assure you that our top priority is the safety and well-being of our students. This is a responsibility we take very seriously.

We have proactive plans and procedures to protect our students. We frequently conduct practice drills and constantly improve measures for responding to emergency situations. We work closely with area law enforcement to continuously review, evaluate and strengthen security at our schools.

We also want to share some tips for helping your children cope with news of such events:

- Take care of yourself as a parent – make sure you have a trusted friend or family member with whom you can talk in order to process your own feelings.
- Maintain consistent structures and support for your child – children feel the safest when their routines remain intact.
- Let your kids take the lead in the discussion. Invite them to ask their questions so that you are only addressing their concerns and sharing that which is necessary to help them feel safe.
- Encourage your child to express their feelings, not suppress them. It is important that your child feel safe in sharing their thoughts and feelings with you, even though doing so might be uncomfortable.
- Validate your child's feelings while helping them to develop healthy ways to deal with emotions such as anger, fear or sadness.
- Assure your child that they are safe, but don't over promise concerning what may happen in the future. Instead, affirm that they are loved and cared for, and that there are people working to keep them safe.
- Limit your child's exposure to the news – after a tragedy, media sites are filled with images and stories that can be difficult for children to process. Also, pay close attention to the social media sites your child may be visiting, as these sites can quickly fill with stories related to a tragedy.

Ultimately, if you are concerned about your child's response to this or any tragic event, reach out to the school counselor for additional resources and support.

*The best means to keep schools safe is to maintain healthy and open relationships between adults and children at all times.* Help us remind students that they have an obligation to bring information about situations that cause them concern to adults at the school so that we can respond quickly and appropriately to protect their safety.

Students and parents can also report concerns about student or school safety to our anonymous tip line, (919) 856-1911.