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Gun Violence and Mass Shootings

Table Talk: Family Conversations About Current Events



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Talking with Children about Gun Violence

The issue of gun violence and mass shootings is in the news frequently. Young people are usually aware of what is happening and will want to talk about it.

However, it is a sensitive, scary, and potentially painful topic. Before raising the

matter with children, consider your child's personality. Will the conversation ease your child's fears or add to it?

For some youth, it is better to be proactive and raise the topic without their prompting. For others, following their lead and their questions is a better approach. When you discuss this topic with children, here are some things to keep in mind:

- Be prepared yourself so you can be there for them emotionally. Make sure you have set aside enough time to hear children's thoughts, questions, and feelings.
- Provide accurate information about their school's safety procedures and reassure them that they are safe.
- Be careful when describing the perpetrator. Do not stereotype and make assumptions about the person. Mental health is an example. One in four adults experience mental health issues annually. The majority of people with these issues are not violent.
- Emphasize the helpers, including those who took care of and helped the victims. It is helpful to convey to children your concern and compassion. You can then think together with them about something you can do to help.

Mass shootings and their impact: El Paso, Texas

On August 3, 2019, an active shooter opened fire at a Walmart store in a shopping center in El Paso, Texas. Twenty-two people were killed, and dozens were injured. This shooting is considered one of the deadliest in the history of Texas. Law enforcement confirmed the shooter wrote a four-page manifesto that embraces white supremacist and anti-immigrant views. Police disclosed that the suspect admitted he was targeting Mexican people.

Another shooting in Dayton, Ohio

Less than 24 hours after the El Paso murder, another deadly shooting took place outside a bar in Dayton, Ohio. At least nine people were killed and sixteen people were injured. The alleged gunman was shot dead by the police.

Tree of Life Synagogue Shooting

On October 27, 2018, a gunman, identified as Robert Bowers, armed with an assault rifle and several handguns, entered the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, PA and yelled, "All Jews Must Die" as he opened fire. Described as the deadliest attack against the Jewish community in the U.S., eleven congregants were killed; four police officers and two others were wounded.

Shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas HS in Parkland, Florida

On February 14, 2018, seventeen people--including students and adults--were killed in a shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. The gunman, Nikolas Cruz, was a nineteen-year-old former student of the school. Authorities reported that he was armed with a semiautomatic assault rifle and countless magazines. People were killed both inside and outside the school. The Parkland shooting is among the ten deadliest mass shootings in modern U.S. history.

Other mass shootings

In recent years, there have been a variety of mass shootings. On October 1, 2017, a gunman at a Las Vegas hotel fired a barrage of gunfire into a crowd of concertgoers at the Route 91 Harvest Festival, resulting in the killing of 59 people and injuring hundreds of others.

On June 12, 2016, a gunman named Omar Mateen, an American-born man, pledged his allegiance to ISIS. He then went into a gay nightclub in Orlando, FL and shot and killed 49 people and injured 53 others.

On December 2, 2015, two assailants opened fire at a center for people with disabilities in San Bernadino, California; 14 people were killed and 21 others were wounded.

That deadly mass shooting came on the heels of another tragic event on November 27, 2015, in which Robert Lewis Dear embarked upon a deadly shooting spree at a Planned Parenthood clinic. Two people and a police officer were killed and nine others were wounded.

On October 1, 2015, a mass shooting at Umpqua Community College in Oregon left nine students dead and another nine injured. The gunman, Christopher Harper-Mercer, killed himself after an exchange of gunfire with the police.

What can be done about gun violence?

Mass shootings often raise a lot of feelings that range from sadness and heartbreak to anger and frustration. They also usually lead to a public conversation about gun laws and what our government can and should do. In 2012 after the mass shooting of twenty young children and six adults at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, CT, President Obama proposed legislation to overhaul gun laws. The proposals included universal background checks, new and expanded assault weapon and high-capacity magazine bans and other measures to prevent mass shootings. Several months later, it failed to pass the Senate.

What are mass shootings?

Understanding mass shootings, typically defined as the murder of four or more people, school shootings and other gun-related deaths, is complex. According to a [Congressional Research Service](#) in 2013, there had been 78 mass murders carried out with guns during the thirty-year period of 1982-2012. Because there is not one standard way to tally the number of mass school shootings, in the period between 2000 and 2013, the [FBI identified](#) 160 active shooter incidents, where one or more shooters were actively engaged in killing or attempted killing

in a confined and populated location. It used this definition to describe instances like Sandy Hook or the [Virginia Tech](#) shooting in 2007. Since 2011, the rate of [mass shootings](#) has tripled.

The second amendment

Defenders of gun rights say that proposed gun regulations violate the Second Amendment. The second amendment states: “A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.” After the Newtown shooting, the president of the National Rifle Association, (NRA) a national nonprofit organization that advocates and lobbies for gun rights, spoke about the incident. He said, “The only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun.” Indeed, many people believe that guns prevent crime from happening.

Gun violence in the U.S.

In addition to mass shootings, there are other relevant numbers about gun violence in the states. More than 32,000 people per year are killed by guns—which translates to approximately 88 gun deaths per day. Compared to [peer nations](#), including Germany, England and Canada, people are much more likely to die from guns in the U.S. than in other countries.

According to the Pew Research Center's [2017 public opinion poll](#) on gun proposals, the percentage of the public who agree that we should:

- Prevent people who are mentally ill from purchasing guns: 89%
- Implement background checks for private sales and gun shows: 84%
- Bar gun purchases by people on no-fly or watch lists: 83%
- Create a federal database to track gun sales: 71%
- Ban assault-style weapons: 68%
- Ban high-capacity magazines: 65%

When mass shootings occur, people frequently search for the reason and often mental illness is cited as the culprit. It is much more complicated than that; it is difficult to come up with one reason or risk factor. There are usually a multitude of reasons for these shootings including but not limited to: domestic terrorism, availability of guns, romanticism with violence and multiple risk factors operating simultaneously (e.g., depression, narcissism, alienation, lack of trust, poor coping skills, fascination with violence-filled entertainment, revenge fantasies, attempted suicide attempts in the past, etc.).

Age

13 and up

Questions to Start the Conversation

- How do you feel about what you know and have heard about gun violence and mass shootings? What else do you want to know?
- Do you know people who have different opinions on gun violence? What do they say and how does this influence (or not) your point of view?
- What do you think should be done to keep people safe from gun violence?
- Why do you think so many people feel it is important to protect people's right to own guns?
- Why do you think there are so many more mass shootings than there used to be?

Questions to Dig Deeper

- What can we do "to get our government to do something about gun violence" as President Obama urged after the 2015 school shooting in Oregon?
- How is the NRA successful in making their case that guns should not be regulated more than they already are?

- Why do you think that Congress has not been able to pass the legislation to try to prevent mass shootings?

Ideas for Taking Action

Ask: What can we do to help? What actions might make a difference?

- Write a letter to your members of Congress (or to the school or local newspaper) that conveys your position about gun violence and what you think should be done about it.
- Educate others about this topic by sharing information on social media, engaging in personal conversations or organizing an educational forum or debate in school.
- Join with or hold a fundraiser to support gun violence prevention advocacy organizations such as [Newtown Action Alliance](#), [Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence](#), [Everytown for Gun Safety](#) and [Moms Demand](#).

Additional Resources

- [11 essential facts about guns and mass shootings in the United States](#) (The Washington Post)
- [Guns and Gun Control](#) (The New York Times Topics)
- [Gun Control](#) (Pew Research Center)
- [Gun-control overhaul is defeated in Senate](#) (The Washington Post)
- [Resolution On Addressing Gun Violence Prevention](#) (ADL)
- [U.S. Police Chiefs Call For Background Checks For All Gun Purchases](#) (Huffington Post)