

# NEWSLETTER

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## WHERE WAS GOD WHEN OUR BABIES WERE TAKEN FROM US AT SANDY HOOK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL?



In light of the recent tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut, the following information is offered to help adults and our children cope. While in church on Christmas day, I kept thinking about how those grieving families must be dealing with the presents under their trees that will never be opened and the traditions never shared with their precious babies up in heaven. I was slightly comforted to know that these beautiful angels were seated on Jesus' lap, listening to his stories and smiling down on their families through a video-like picture.

I listened from the pulpit during Christmas Mass of how we should not be angry with God and blame him for this tragedy- nor should we ask why it was allowed to occur. Instead, the message was that the world was a beautiful place when it was first established and we need to pray long and hard for the restoration of our once paradise.

I agree and truly believe that we need to pray for the well-being of the world, our country's leadership, neighbors, friends and family. We need to pray for the replacement of the evil with true peace and compassion for our fellowmen. For those old enough to remember, John Lennon advocated this same message twenty years ago, prior to his senseless death as well.

As a Licensed Educational Psychologist, I have studied the following *Five Stages of Grief* developed by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross in 1969. I have lived through the five stages when faced with the death of my father:

- 1) Denial: This can't be happening to me!
- 2) Anger: Why is this happening and who is to blame?
- 3) Bargaining: Make this not happen and in return I will ...
- 4) Depression: I'm too sad to do anything.
- 5) Acceptance: I'm at peace with what has happened.

During my own grieving process, I often wondered why my father was taken away so suddenly when we all needed him so much. I finally realized through readings and talking with others, that I experienced the significant loss of someone close to me, so I would know how to help a grieving friend and family member.

So, how do adults help our children to feel safe? Parents, school administrators and the community should encourage reach out to psychologists, counselors and teachers to share how their children are feeling and inform them of strategies that may work for them. School

personnel must support all students that may have been affected including those with special needs, emotional disturbances and who may not show outwardly their confusion and pain.

Each day, I visit different schools, observe classrooms and discuss with personnel their curriculum and programs. I applaud those schools that have implemented comprehensive programs and training, addressing both bullies and victims, to reduce school violence and increase social-emotional competence. I also applaud those schools with proactive Student Study Teams (SSTs) identifying and implementing effective interventions for the poor performing, isolated and behaviorally challenged students. Perhaps more schools would have intervention programs and training, if they receive performance ratings for their programs, just as they do for their test scores.

How can we help the school accomplish this goal? It takes a village and we must all work together as a cohesive team using the talents and strength given to us to heal our children so they grow into productive citizens. We need to provide effective supports and services to prevent future innocent lives to be swept away so unnecessarily and easily from this earth.

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### A National Tragedy: Helping Children Cope What Schools Can Do

1. **Assure children that they are safe** and that schools are well prepared to take care of all children at all times.
2. **Maintain structure and stability within the schools.** It would be best, however, not to have tests or major projects within the next few days.
3. **Have a plan for the first few days back at school.** Include school psychologists, counselors, and crisis team members in planning the school's response.
4. **Provide teachers and parents with information** about what to say and do for children in school and at home.
5. **Have teachers provide information directly to their students,** not during the public address announcements.
6. **Have school psychologists and counselors available** to talk to students and staff who may need or want extra support.
7. **Be aware of students who may have recently experienced a personal tragedy** or a have personal connection to victims or their families. Even a child who has merely

visited the affected area or community may have a strong reaction. Provide these students extra support and leniency if necessary.

8. **Know what community resources are available** for children who may need extra counseling. School psychologists can be very helpful in directing families to the right community resources.
9. **Allow time for age appropriate classroom discussion and activities.** Do not expect teachers to provide all of the answers. They should ask questions and guide the discussion, but not dominate it. Other activities can include art and writing projects, play acting, and physical games.
10. **Be careful not to stereotype people or countries that might be associated with the tragedy.** Children can easily generalize negative statements and develop prejudice. Talk about tolerance and justice versus vengeance. *Stop any bullying or teasing of students immediately.*
11. **Refer children who exhibit extreme anxiety, fear or anger to mental health counselors** in the school. Inform their parents.
12. **Provide an outlet for students' desire to help.** Consider making get well cards or sending letters to the families and survivors of the tragedy, or writing thank you letters to doctors, nurses, and other health care professionals as well as emergency rescue workers, firefighters and police.
13. **Monitor or restrict viewing** scenes of the event as well as the aftermath.

#### Additional Resources

[National Association of School Psychologist](#)  
[School Community Tool Kit](#)