



SCHOOL DISTRICT No. 23
(CENTRAL OKANAGAN)

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"Together We Learn"

November 2, 2016

Dear Parents and Guardians:

The Central Okanagan School District is deeply saddened by the act of violence that occurred yesterday at Abbotsford Senior Secondary School. This tragedy has rocked that community and our entire nation to its core. As we reflect on this tragedy, our hearts go out to the family and friends of the victims and all those in that community that are impacted by this event.

As the shock subsides, thoughts turn to our own schools and our own students. It is understandable that there will be some anxiety throughout the School District about this incident. While the potential for such an incident taking place in the Central Okanagan is extremely remote, school staff will be reviewing school safety procedures and ensuring that they are all up-to-date. Student safety is our top priority. This tragedy is receiving significant media attention and your child may be impacted by it. Staff members have been asked to watch for student reaction and to offer support if needed. Here are some strategies parents may wish to consider that will enhance meaningful connections and support your children through this time of grief and anxiety:

- Be yourself and demonstrate your natural concern calmly and in your own words.
- Be available and spend time with your child. Attempt to distract your child by reading, walking, playing a game, or other normal family activities that you can do together.
- Listen and let your child express his/her thoughts, concerns, feelings, and perceptions in a nonjudgmental, emotionally safe environment.
- Explain about what you know in short, truthful statements. Don't be afraid to admit that you do not have all the answers and avoid speculation.
- Develop resiliency by letting your child know that they will get through this difficult period and that the risk is remote that a repeat incident will occur here. Our schools are safe places to learn.
- Provide comfort when needed using physical gestures. Remember a gentle reassuring touch or hugs can be great healers.
- Pay attention to physical manifestations of trauma. Children will often complain of headaches, stomach aches, and backaches or demonstrate other physical symptoms such as loss of appetite, anxiety and sleep disturbance. Monitor these symptoms and determine whether medical intervention is required. See a doctor if in doubt.
- Maintain regular routines as much as possible. We are creatures of habit and derive comfort from regular routines.
- Monitor media exposure and limit your child's exposure to media reports, especially preschool and elementary age children.
- When appropriate seek additional support that is available through local community support agencies.

Please contact your child's school if you think extra help is needed, or if you have any questions or concerns. Together we will move forward in the most positive and compassionate way – keeping our schools safe places to learn.

Sincerely,

Kevin Kaardal
Superintendent of Schools/CEO