

There is such notoriety and pervasiveness about this tragedy that the story will eventually filter down to most kids, even the very young. With that in mind, parents should take a pro-active approach. Young children should hear about the story from people they know and trust, who love and know them. Kids often take their cue from how the adults around them handle tragedies and emergencies. So, in a mood of serious and sad calmness, and considering your child's age and experience (You will have to speak separately to kids of different ages.), using age-appropriate language, create a safe and honest atmosphere where kids can feel free to express feelings and ask questions. Keep in mind that young kids need to know "something" but not "everything". If you choose to wait until they hear about the story and then talk with them, plan ahead for they probably will hear about it.

I would begin with a prayer; for Christians, our faith sustains us. Take your time and say something like: "Sometimes...not very often... bad people want to hurt other people. A couple of days ago, a bad man went into a school far away with a gun and shot and killed 20 kids. The bad man was also shot and killed so he won't hurt anyone else. Have you heard about this? (If so, let them talk. Respect their feelings.) Many people are very sad now and will really miss the kids and adults who were killed." We know that those kids are safe forever with Jesus, but their parents will still be very sad for a long time." These kinds of conversations are heart-wrenching.

You might want to watch a little of the memorial service on TV with your kids, explaining and praying for the people who are grieving. Give your kids LOTS of physical touch and reassurances. Work to maintain routine and structure; these will help provide an on-going sense of security. Include the families of the kids in your nightly prayers; this helps kids have a great sense of "doing something" to help. Lay your hands on your kids daily and pray for their safety; such acts model for your kids where you put your trust and your mood of calmness.

On the practical side, remind your kids that there are many adults at their school who work hard every day to keep them safe...doors are locked, teachers know what to do when something bad happens, the police are close, lots of adult have cell phones they can use to get help etc. Ask your kids if they have any questions and answer them as honestly and simply as you can. Remember that kids will often ask the same question multiple times; that's OK, they are processing. Keep in mind that night time is often scarier for kids. If your child doesn't seem to get over this event, seek professional counseling help.

Bottom line: there are no guarantees in this world of safety; no 100% effective strategies for always protecting our precious little ones; no wonderful answers that will make everything better. Heaven is for that. That's also why our hope of heaven through Christ is so powerful! Of course, we parents would like to spare our little ones as much of this kind of pain and awareness as we can. Sadly, this is a time when our sinful and fallen world intrudes too quickly into the lives of our precious and innocent little ones...we are forced to do "damage control" too early in their young lives. Yet, there is also great opportunity that God gives us to hug our kids a little tighter, listen to them a little more deeply, touch them more often, say our "I love you's" with more conviction, spend more time, pray harder, open our Bibles more often and equip our kids for life in a sometimes dangerous and fatal world knowing that there is far more to existence than this life. The wonder of our Savior gives us the courage and hope to go on.