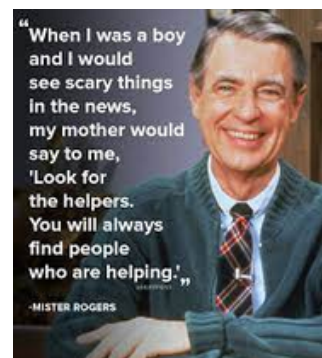


SPECIAL EDITION: TALKING TO YOUR CHILD ABOUT SCHOOL VIOLENCE

School shootings evoke a range of difficult emotions in all of us. The task of talking to your young child about these types of events may seem daunting. The Student Assistance Specialists hope to always be a source of support to you and your children in times of need. During all times, but especially during upsetting or stressful events, it is helpful to remember the four things students need the most from us to remain regulated, calm, and able to be their best. **Think about the 4 S's: Seen, Soothed, Safe, and Secure.** Below are a few suggestions on how to talk to your children about the recent school violence:

- **Be aware of your own feelings and reactions.** Children are keenly aware of a caregiver's emotions and worries. You want to ensure that the conversation supports their understanding and eases their worries. Assessing your own feelings about this before talking with them will help you proceed in a way that is best for you both.
- **Start the conversation.** Kids actually feel less scared when they get to talk about scary things. With elementary school aged kids, most experts agree that your role is to start the discussion and answer questions. For our youngest children use one-sentence stories in your own words. For example, "A bad man hurt people in Texas" or "What are some of the things you do to stay safe at school?"
- **What does your child already know?** After you introduce this topic, explore what your child may already know with an open-ended questions such as "What have you heard about this?" Kids may have heard exaggerations or misinformation or they may be confused- help them to separate fact, opinion and falsities.
- **Let them know that it is okay to have big feelings** when sad or scary things happen. While experiencing these feelings is hard, normalize this for them by sharing how you cope when you experience "big" emotions. For example, "When I feel sad or scared it helps me to think of the things that keep me safe and happy, why don't we try doing that together."
- **Validate and allow for open sharing.** If your child mentions a feeling or thought validate that you heard what they said. Try language such as "That sounds very important, why don't you and I talk about that feeling/thought/comment." Listening is also key, sometimes the best thing to do if a child makes a comment is to say "what would you like to share with me about that."
- **One way to cope is to remember that most people are good.** Young children may begin thinking of the world as full of bad people and scary strangers. Instead, encourage them to see goodness in this situation and the world. Kids need to see that most people are good and willing to help others.
- **Remind them that school shootings are very rare.** Adults can reassure kids they are safe, because kids struggle to assess risk. A small risk is easy for them to blow out of proportion. Reassure them that they are safe, that adults are doing everything they can to keep them safe, and that doing drills at school help to make them safer.
- **Take your child's questions seriously** and be prepared to answer the same question repeatedly.
- **It is ok to not have all the answers.** It is ok to recognize that you don't have the answers to every question your child may ask, and it's ok to be honest about that. You can always say "I don't know the answer to that."
- **Use this as a teachable moment to encourage your child to be kind and empathetic.** Every year, Scotch Plains-Fanwood schools participates in the Sandy Hook Promise- Start With Hello Program. The program's intent is to "honor all victims of gun violence by turning tragedy into a moment of transformation." Reminding your kids that being inclusive, a good friend and caring to others is a way they can help!
- **Focus on the heroes and helpers.** Being in Scotch Plains-Fanwood, NJ- this most recent shooting might feel more like a story than something close to home for young children. This also allows you to shift the narrative of your conversation to those who do help in times of need.
- **Remind them how much you love them and that you will always do your best to protect them.**



Click below for an additional resource
for our youngest ones:
[Sesame Street: Community and Gun
Violence](#)

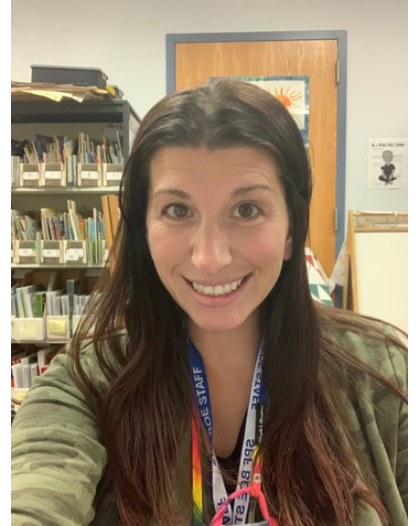
MEET THE STUDENT ASSISTANCE SPECIALISTS



Jessica Ness
jness@spfk12.org
McGinn



April Chestang
achestang@spfk12.org
Evergreen



Lori Lidofsky
LLidofsky@spfk12.org
School One



Lakendra McFadden
LMcfadden@spfk12.org
Brunner



Cailin Frantz
cfrantz@spfk12.org
Coles