

SCHOOL VIOLENCE: OUR RESPONSE MUST MATTER

April 2022 / By Steve Minick, LPC



#ResilientEriePA

An event like a school shooting will have an expansive and long-lasting ripple effect on students, school personnel, families, first responders, and community members.

Each of our responses to traumatic stress will be unique, and each of us will have a different path to healing. Most will heal with the natural supports and protective factors they have in place.

Others may have a traumatic stress response characterized by a sense of powerlessness, lack of control, and unpredictability, sometimes impacting negatively how we view ourselves, others, and the world.

TOP RESOURCES

Crisis Services at Safe Harbor Behavioral Health of UPMC Hamot

Call 24/7/365: 814-456-2014
Warmline: 1-877-550-4007

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

Call: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

PA Text Line

Text 741741

United Way of Erie County

Dial 211

*Additional resources can be found at
TraumaInformedErie.org,
theChildMindInstitute.org &
[National Child Traumatic Stress Network NCTSN.org](http://NationalChildTraumaticStressNetwork.org).*

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Of course, reactions will vary across the community.

- Immediate responses have called for greater safety and security measures
- Some people are cynical and skeptical that anything will change and or that we can do better

- Some people are focused on school failures and “bad” students
- Many people are eager to jump in and support the students, school, and the community
- Some will commit to ensuring that this crisis does not pass without seizing opportunities to make things better

Our Response Must Matter - Take Action Now



People throughout the community will also understand and think about the events that unfolded in a larger context. This school shooting is not a singular event but connected to a cultural and environmental context involving decades of unaddressed or under addressed community adverse experiences such as violence, poverty, and inequity . Until we face this context, long lasting meaningful change will elude us. Whatever progress that can be made will also depend on the importance of listening to the voices of lived experience within our communities.

Erie Public Schools, concerned community leaders, and community members will need to mobilize both acute short-term strategies to deal with the immediate concerns of establishing safety, and long-term strategies to address the underlying/root causes that continue to contribute to school and community violence. ***It is everyone's responsibility*** to explore what part we can play in those strategies as they evolve.

For now, the remainder of this column focuses on tips and gentle reminders of ways to aid the healing of our students.

Parents, teachers, helpers, or anyone that encounters youth can influence their healing with your comfort, support, and reassurance. ***There is no more important intervention for our youth than a safe relationship.*** (Please note that to do this you need to be aware of your own needs, care for yourself and use your own supports. If we cannot regulate our own responses, we cannot help co-regulating the responses of others).

Here are some common tips to help children of any age:

- Act calm, youth will follow your lead and look to your example,
- Maintain routines as much as possible, mealtimes, bedtimes, family rules regarding behavior,
- Help them enjoy themselves, play, do activities with others distraction is good for them,
- Share information honestly/answer questions/look for natural openings. Follow their lead, they may not be focused on or worry about same things, be brief, too much detail is not necessary. Limit exposure to news coverage/social media
- Help identify, acknowledge, and validate their feelings - saying do not worry, or you are young you will get over it, will minimize and discount their feelings
- It is ok not to have all the answers, questions will persist, youth will process on their own timetable, check in and have multiple conversations
- Students with special needs may need additional help or support
- Help them cope and relax, teach skills like breathing and other coping exercises
- Know when to seek additional help (is the reaction too little, too much, or too long) educate yourself and watch for signs of trauma
- Create space to take care of yourself

Throughout our individual and collective responses to the recent school shooting, let us keep our focus on the common values that ***harming others is unacceptable, and fairness is required.***

The Erie Coalition for a Trauma Informed Community (ECTIC) is dedicated to trauma-informed, resiliency-oriented conversations.