

Dear Parents,

Mother Seton School is committed to creating a safe environment for your child. As we continue to try to process the Feb. 14, shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, FL, and other events which highlight the need for vigilance to insure the safety of our children, I want to take a moment to let you know that MSS continues to evaluate and refine our procedures and policies surrounding school safety. Last summer we conducted a safety review and audit of our emergency protocols and procedures. We have had sessions for our faculty/staff at the beginning of the school year on our emergency response plan and scenarios including active assailant threats. Coincidentally, this week we had a follow up audit of our safety measures and the consultant working with us stated that we were doing all the right things to insure protection of the precious gift your share with us – your children. Additional measures are being planned to enhance our campus security and we are now gathering proposals to implement additional measures such as additional cameras and further restricting door access as we move forward.

As we work with our children to help them process recent events, I want to emphasize that **creating a place of welcome for all children and helping children to understand the power of words and actions has an impact on those around us.** During this season of Lent in particular, as a school we are focusing on the positive actions that help create a Christ-like atmosphere in our school.

As difficult as it is to process another school shooting, it is important that we do not allow these events to overwhelm us and that we do not grow complacent during times of relative normalcy. **School safety is the responsibility of all, including students, parents, administrators, faculty, staff and the greater community. As we've all heard before – IF YOU SEE/HEAR SOMETHING, SAY SOMETHING.**

As you talk to your children about these events, or other traumatic events, the suggestions listed below are appropriate to use with elementary/middle school aged children. It is my hope they will be a reference for you. These strategies are recommended by the National Association of School Psychologists and the American School Counselor's Association. Strategies include:

1. **Reassure children that they are loved and safe.** Emphasize that schools are safe. Validate their feelings. Explain that all feelings are okay when a tragedy occurs. Let children talk about their feelings, help put them into perspective, and assist them in expressing these feelings appropriately.
2. **Make time to talk.** Let their questions be your guide as to how much information to provide. Be patient; children and youth do not always talk about their feelings readily. Watch for clues that they may want to talk, such as hovering around while you do the dishes or yard work. Some children prefer writing, playing music, or doing an art project as an outlet. Young children may need concrete activities (such as drawing, looking at picture books, or imaginative play) to help them identify and express their feelings.
3. **Keep your explanations developmentally appropriate.**
 - **Early elementary school** children need brief, simple information that should be balanced with reassurances that their school and homes are safe and that adults are there to protect them. Give simple examples of school safety like reminding children about exterior doors being locked, child monitoring efforts on the playground, and emergency drills practiced during the school day.

- **Upper elementary and early middle school** children will be more vocal in asking questions about whether they truly are safe and what is being done at their school. They may need assistance separating reality from fantasy. Discuss efforts of school and community leaders to provide safe schools.
 - **Upper middle school and high school** students will have strong and varying opinions about the causes of violence in schools and society. They will share concrete suggestions about how to make school safer and how to prevent tragedies in society. Emphasize the role that students have in maintaining safe schools by following school safety guidelines (e.g. not providing building access to strangers, reporting strangers on campus, reporting threats to the school safety made by students or community members, etc.), communicating any personal safety concerns to school administrators, and accessing support for emotional needs.
4. **Review safety procedures.** This should include procedures and safeguards at school and at home. Help children identify at least one adult at school and in the community to whom they go if they feel threatened or at risk.
 5. **Observe children's emotional state.** Some children may not express their concerns verbally. Changes in behavior, appetite, and sleep patterns can also indicate a child's level of anxiety or discomfort. In most children, these symptoms will ease with reassurance and time. However, some children may be at risk for more intense reactions. Children who have had a past traumatic experience or personal loss, suffer from depression or other mental illness, or with special needs may be at greater risk for severe reactions than others. Seek the help of mental health professional if you are at all concerned.
 6. **Limit television/computer/phone time.** Limit screen time and be aware of what your child is watching on TV or other media devices. News reports, social media and television all have a place, but at a time of a traumatic event, limiting exposure can protect your child from being re-traumatized by watching or listening to events that can trigger an emotional response. Developmentally inappropriate information can cause anxiety or confusion, particularly in younger children.
 7. **Monitor your conversation, tone of voice and unkind/angry words.** Adults need to be mindful of the content of conversations that they have with each other in front of children, even teenagers, and limit the child's exposure to vengeful, hateful, and angry comments that might be misunderstood. You are the role model for your child and set the example of what is appropriate in responding to traumatic events.
 8. **Maintain a normal routine.** Keeping to a regular schedule can be reassuring and promote physical health. Ensure that children get plenty of sleep, regular meals, and exercise. Encourage them to keep up with their schoolwork and extracurricular activities but don't push them if they seem overwhelmed.
 9. **Remind children to report warning signs** possible threats or things that don't "seem right". Help them to specifically identify adults they can talk to at home, in sports, at school. There is a difference between reporting, tattling or gossiping.

As we move through the days ahead and your family decides appropriate responses to the national dialogues taking place in the aftermath of these most recent events, I pray that you feel God's presence around you and that your faith reassures you that in every part of life, **God is with us.**