

Discussion Guide from the [Bildung, Familie & Jugend in Graz](#) (City of Graz)
when speaking to children about the recent school shooting in Graz
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Tips for adults:

Adults should share their true feelings with the children, but strive to provide the basic sense of security and calm that the child needs for their well-being.

Listen to the child.

If the child has difficulty expressing themselves, allow them to draw a picture or tell a story about what happened.

Give the children a sense of security by paying attention to them and maintaining daily routines.

Make sure that the children have understood the answers to their questions.

Listen to the children when they talk about their feelings and accept them; also talk honestly about your own feelings in an age-appropriate way.

Remember that children can react in the same way as adults, for example, by displaying unusual behavior, and may experience sudden mood swings.

Help the children talk to each other about bad events, and let them tell you how they feel.

First and foremost, it is important to establish positive and reassuring contact with the child and to appear confident and calm.

Dealing with older children and young people

The reactions of older children and adolescents are often a mixture of adult and childish reactions. It is especially important to be aware that adolescents may display more risk-taking behavior after an emergency. After such events, adolescents can be more difficult to "handle", may withdraw, or have difficulty expressing themselves.

Encourage them to talk or write about the event, e.g. in a diary.

Stick to the truth, but give children the information in such a way that they can understand it in an age-appropriate way.

Briefly summarized:

Provide a sense of emotional security

- **Maintain routines:** The rhythms of everyday life provide stability. Fixed mealtimes, bedtimes, and rituals help to convey a sense of security.
- **Show affection:** Physical closeness (e.g. hugs), playing together, or reading aloud strengthen the feeling of security.
- **Allow feelings:** Encourage children to talk about fear, anger, or sadness - without judging them.

Offer creative forms of expression

- **Painting, crafting, writing:** Children often process experiences better in creative ways than through language.
- **Emotional diary or "anger ball":** Try these simple tools that enable children to express and regulate their emotions.

Promoting media literacy

- **Watch the news together (age-appropriate)** and explain what you see and hear together.
- **Help them learn to recognize fake news:** This is especially important for older children to avoid the fear caused by rumors.

Strengthen social support

- **Encourage friendships:** Letting children play together or meet up helps them process the situation.
- **Involve school contacts:** Teachers, school social workers, or psychologists can provide help if you have questions or specific issues.

Provide children with information that can help them act

- **Explain safety and emergency exercises:** Why these exist and how they help.
- **Identify support systems:** Who can children talk to if they feel unsafe? (e.g. teachers, parents, emergency numbers)

Using books and materials

There are many books available (also at the City Library) that are suitable for children and can help them deal with difficult topics such as fear, violence, or loss.