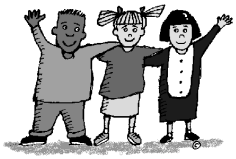

SCOTT PSYCHOLOGY TIMES

Your Source for School Psychology Ideas and Insights *Spring 2007*

Tips for Talking to Students About Violence

High profile acts of violence, such as the recent events at Virginia Tech, can confuse and frighten students who may feel in danger or worry that their friends or loved-ones are at risk. They will look to adults for information and guidance on how to react. You can help students feel safe by establishing a sense of normalcy and security and talking with them about their fears.

- **Reassure children that they are safe.** Emphasize that schools are very safe. Validate their feelings. Explain that all feelings are okay when a tragedy occurs. Let students talk about their feelings, help put them into perspective, and assist them in expressing these feelings appropriately. Ensure students know how to access emotional support at school (e.g., guidance staff, school psychologist, etc.).

- **Observe students' emotional states.** Some students may not express their concerns verbally. Changes in behavior, appetite, and sleep patterns can indicate a child's level of anxiety or discomfort. In most students, these symptoms will ease with reassurance and time. However, some students 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 have special needs may be at greater risk for severe reactions than others. Consult with parents or school-based mental health professionals if you are at all concerned.

- **Make time to talk.** Let their questions be your guide as to how much information to provide. Be patient. Students do not always talk about their feelings readily. Watch for clues that they may want to talk. Some students 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.

- **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 students 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** students 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 made by students or community members, etc.), and communicating any personal safety concerns to school administrators.

- **Review safety procedures.** This should include procedures and safeguards at school and at home. Help students identify at least one adult at school and in the community to whom they can go if they feel threatened or at risk.

- **Limit television viewing of these events.** Encourage parents to limit television viewing at home and be aware if the television is on in common areas of the school. Developmentally inappropriate information can cause anxiety or confusion, particularly in young children. Adults also need to be mindful of the content of conversations that they have with each other in front of children, even teenagers, and limit their exposure to vengeful, hateful, and angry comments that might be misunderstood.

- **Maintain a normal routine.** Keeping to a regular schedule can be reassuring and promote physical health. Encourage parents to ensure their children get plenty of sleep, regular meals, and exercise. Encourage students to keep up with their schoolwork and extracurricular activities but don't push them if they seem overwhelmed.

Adapted from Talking to Children About Violence: Tips for Parents and Teachers, *National Association of School*

Online Resource

www.nasponline.org/resources/crisis_safety/index.aspx

The National Association of School Psychologists provides numerous resources to promote children and youths' ability to cope with traumatic events.

Intervention Central

Classroom Interventions for Struggling Students

Mathematics-Related Cognitive Processes

Research shows that 5-8% of children have learning disabilities in the area of mathematics. While the body of research on mathematics disabilities is not as detailed as in the area of reading disabilities, we do know that they are often related to difficulties with cognitive processes.

Understanding the factors related to a child's learning disability can help teachers and other school professionals design and implement successful intervention techniques. Cognitive processes that can impair a student's mathematics skills include:

Memory
Children may have difficulties encoding or retrieving math information into their memory.

As a result, they may have difficulties with the following:

- Memorizing (storing and remembering) basic arithmetic facts quickly.
- Recalling the steps needed to solve word problems, recalling the steps in solving equations, or remembering what specific symbols mean.
- Knowing a series of math facts one day, but being unable to remember them the next.

Processing Speed
Children may have challenges processing information quickly, efficiently scanning information visually, or making rapid comparisons.

This could lead to difficulties with the following:

- Taking timed tests (e.g., "math minutes").
- Quickly processing the signs associated with math calculations (e.g., recognizing the difference between + and - on a worksheet of computations).

Visual-Spatial Ability
Visual-spatial problems may interfere with a child's ability to perform math problems correctly.

Examples of visual-spatial difficulties include:

- Misaligning numerals in columns for calculation.
- Understanding place value involving the base ten system.
- Reading maps, graphs, and charts.
- Understanding geometry.

Adapted from Math Disability: An Overview *by Diane Pedrotty Bryant, Charles and Helen Schwab Foundation and* Woodcock-Johnson III: Reports, Recommendations, and Strategies *by Nancy Mather and Lynne Jaffe, John Wiley & Sons.*

Intervention Strategies: Visual-Spatial Ability

As noted above, a student's difficulty in the area of visual-spatial ability can affect his/her performance in mathematics. The following are suggestions may help the student increase his/her success:

- If the student has difficulty ordering numbers in rows and columns, provide him/her with graph paper to organize math problems. The student can write one number per box. If the student lacks control to make numbers in a single box, expand the box size by lining over a four box square with a marker. Boxes can also be given tactile boundaries by outlining the boxes with glue (this creates a "speed bump" boundary).
- If the student has difficulty copying math problems from a text book, overhead, etc., have him/her write the problem with a colored fine-point marker but work the problem in pencil. The color contrast may help his/her distinguish between the digits in the problem and his/her own computations.
- For timed math fact drills, use flashcards instead of worksheets and test the student individually. Alternately, the drill could be done orally. With either method, consider a fact automatic if the student responds correctly within three seconds.

Adapted from Woodcock-Johnson III: Reports, Recommendations, and Strategies *by Nancy Mather and Lynne Jaffe, John Wiley & Sons.*

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