

Caring for Students in the Aftermath of a Tragedy or Threat of Gun Violence:

Suggestions from Students & Teachers

It's vital to **connect with other survivors** after a tragedy. Reach out to us at info@teachersunify.org to begin this process.

Bring in **therapy dogs**. [Lutheran Church Charities](#) is a good place to start.

Balance giving students space to process what happened with a normal, predictable routine.

Give students **time & space to process**. Offer them journals and/or art supplies during this time. *(After the Sandy Hook School tragedy, Abbey gave her 2nd graders new journals and said, "Everyday, during writing time, you can write about anything you want — what happened to us, something you're looking forward to, or a comic strip or story." This also gave her time and space to write!)*

"Do not push it down and keep it some big 'secret,' like it doesn't exist or didn't happen." -student survivor

Many students want to talk about what happened, even though it is uncomfortable. But they might not know how to ask for help. **Create spaces of openness**. Tell them specific times they can come talk to you, or provide different ways they can communicate with you (e.g. a ("Need to Talk" Jar, email, notes, etc.).

Allow students to share healing tactics that have worked for them.

Spread out the support over time. The aftermath is long and hard and resources need to last.

"It's okay not to know what to say. Just asking and listening mean so much. Be there to listen, cry with, hug." -teacher survivor

Pay attention to the **news cycle**. It can affect students greatly — especially those who have experienced trauma.

Try to **build a strong sense of safety & provide choices**— quiet time to process, calming music, a variety of different ways to reach out to you when needed, time to process together, time for kids to talk with one another in unstructured conversations, extra time outside for fresh air.

Make sure kids know there are many available for them to talk to. Keep saying it. **Acknowledge how they are feeling and repeat it back.**

Administrators and teachers need to work with students to **plan for triggering events** (like anniversaries or other shootings on the news). Listening and inclusion are very important to those who feel powerless.

“Speak up for what the students need because a lot of the time they don’t know how.” -student survivor

Advocate for the school or district to bring in **mental health professionals** who are trained in trauma to work with your school community.

Give **space for students to interact** with one another frequently.

Show your **vulnerable** side.

Remember that **boundaries are important**. Even as you offer multiple spaces and opportunities for students to share, protect some time and space for your own processing, too. You can’t support your students if you’re burned out.

Support students in any positive way they want to heal.

Make the effort to **connect** with students on a personal level.

Don’t be afraid to have **hard conversations** – it helps people feel comfortable to talk to one another.

“Sometimes you might feel like a broken record, but just keep asking how your colleagues and students are doing and how they are feeling.” -teacher survivor