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Column: Children can be traumatized by tragedy, even far away



Let me begin by saying I do not want to dwell on the event that prompted this article. Nor will I make any statements about politics or policy, laws or rights. Rather, I want to focus on what's known as vicarious trauma — how people, in this case children, can be traumatized by events which may not have happened to them personally but which might still cause them to feel fear, anxiety, depression and distress.

The school shooting in Uvalde, Texas, is such an event, and it may be traumatizing to children all over the U.S., including here in Georgia, more than 1,000 miles away. Parents and caregivers need to be aware of the signs that a child has been traumatized — directly or indirectly — because there are actually many things they can do to help children cope and heal.

In a recent article in Time magazine online, Kira Riehm, a postdoctoral fellow at the Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health, explains that even when children aren't directly involved in school shootings, they are deeply affected by them and often experience anxiety and depression as a result. "The root issue is this concern and fear that this could also happen at your school or another school," Riehm said.

Further, in a mass media culture, coverage of a mass shooting can be difficult to avoid. A generation ago, news coverage of a national tragedy was largely confined to newspapers and TV news broadcasts at specific times of day. But today, coverage of such events is nearly ubiquitous on 24/7 cable news channels, online streaming services and social media. In other words, in the wake of a tragedy, children may be bombarded with images and information — not all of it factual — simply by logging on to do their homework.

But parents and caregivers can do their homework too, and the first step is being able to recognize if your child may be experiencing trauma-related symptoms. According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), such signs could include:

- Feelings of anxiety or worry about the safety of themselves or others.
- Complaining of physical problems such as stomachaches or headaches.
- Nightmares or other sleep problems.
- Trouble concentrating.

- Increased irritability or anger.
- Loss interest in usual activities, social withdrawal.
- Fixating on the event, feelings of guilt or thoughts of revenge.

But in addition to any of the specifics listed above, trauma might also be non-specific — which is to say, as a parent you likely know when something about your child just isn't right. and if you notice that, there are things you can do to help your child talk about his or her feelings, even if they may find them difficult to articulate.

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (www.nctsn.org) is an excellent resource for parents, teachers, caregivers and healthcare providers to learn about trauma generally, and also how to talk to children about the trauma that may result from a school shooting or other tragedies. NCTSN has recently published a fact sheet called "[Parent Guidelines For Helping Youth After the Recent Shooting](#)" that is available on its website and which provides 15 specific actions parents can take to help their children cope with trauma that may result from the school shooting.

I would encourage every parent to download this resource. It may be something you can share with your child to start a conversation. and during this time of shock and mourning, it is also important to remember that no one is immune from trauma. Be sure to assess your own feelings, too.

Our hearts go out to the children, parents, families, teachers and community of Uvalde, Texas. We share in your grief. But our hearts must also be with our children in Georgia. They need our support, compassion and understanding right now, too

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https://www.northwestgeorgianews.com/polk_standard_journal/opinion/column-children-can-be-traumatized-by-tragedy-even-far-away/article_a36153ac-e437-11ec-9620-c772ae70e863.html