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Amish School Shooting: Pennsylvania Children's Crisis Charity Offers Tips & Tools to Help Kids and Parents Cope

BETHLEHEM, PENN., October 2 - - Following the shooting at a one-room Amish schoolhouse in bucolic Lancaster County, the Pennsylvania-based national children's crisis charity KidsPeace, is issuing expert tips to help schools, parents, and local children cope with the aftereffects of the situation. The 124-year-old nonprofit is also alerting schools and the public about the existence of a locally run resource that helps kids resolve problems before they become dangerous, and which has prevented school shootings in the past.

Tips to Schools, Parents & America's Kids: Preventing Tragedies...in the Past and in the Future

FOR PARENTS: For area children who have fears that their school is not safe or may become the target of a school shooting, KidsPeace offers 10 ways for parents and teachers to reassure and help their kids through such a crisis (SEE ATTACHMENT AT END). The tips are online at www.kidspeace.org.

FOR SCHOOLS: To help school systems see the early warning signs of danger and deal with the psychological fallout of the scare, KidsPeace has online articles (www.kidspeace.org) from its national "Healing" magazine.

FOR KIDS: Perhaps most importantly, KidsPeace and top children's experts from Harvard and Brown University have created a unique free website, www.TeenCentral.net that allows older kids and teens to work through the worries and emotional stresses of growing up today. TeenCentral.net, which gets 20 million hits a year, gives clinically screened help and hope to kids in all 50 states, at U.S. military bases worldwide, and in dozens of countries around the globe. The site helps kids identify the problems they face, from depression to school pressures, peer problems, family disputes, drugs, alcohol, smoking, even suicidal thoughts or thoughts of harming others.

School Shootings Averted in the Past

TeenCentral.net has prevented a number of mass tragedies, as well as an uncountable number of personal ones. This happened in 2002 when a California teenager wrote in to TeenCentral.net saying he was going to “go Columbine” and kill students at his school. Although the site rigorously protects kids’ identity, a vigilant online counselor at KidsPeace alerted the authorities about the anonymous threat. In cases of potential disaster, the authorities can obtain a court order to track an individual server and the massacre was prevented. Although this kind of occurrence is unusual, this was one of several instances in several states where distraught teens were prevented by TeenCentral.net from carrying out plans to kill groups of their peers.

“In today’s dangerous and alarming world, it sometimes seems there is a war on children,” says C.T. O’Donnell II, president and CEO of KidsPeace, the National Center for Kids Overcoming Crisis. “Incidents like these shake our children’s fragile sense of safety and we must do whatever we can now to both keep them safe and rebuild their sense of safety.”

“This tragedy and the other recent shootings in Wisconsin and Colorado will affect kids far beyond their school districts,” says Herbert Mandell, M.D., medical director for KidsPeace and the KidsPeace Children’s Hospital in Orefield. “It’s important we all talk to kids who are still worried.”

(TIPS FOR PARENTS FOLLOW BELOW)

10 Tips for Talking to Children About Shootings

C.T. O’Donnell II, president and CEO of KidsPeace, and the clinical experts at KidsPeace have compiled a list of tips to help parents talk to their children about what happened and look out for future signs of distress:

1. Listen to children. Allow them to express their concerns and fears.
2. Regardless of age, the most important issue is to reassure children of safety and security. Tell children that you, their school, their friends and their communities are all focused on their safety and that those around them are working for their safety. Have discussions about those dedicated to protecting them like police, teachers and other school officials, neighbors and all concerned adults throughout the community.
3. When discussing the events with younger children, the amount of information shared should be limited to some basic facts. Use words meaningful to them (not words like sniper, etc.). Do not go into specific details.
4. School-aged children will ask, "Can this happen here, or to me?" Do not lie to children. Reiterate how the community is focused on working to keep everyone safe in the community.

5. Parents, caregivers and teachers should be cautious of permitting young children to watch news or listen to radio that is discussing or showing the situation. It is too difficult for most of them to process. Personal discussions are the best way to share information with this group. Also, plan to discuss this many times over the coming weeks. Be prepared to discuss this over the coming weeks

6. When discussing the events with preteens and teens, more detail is appropriate, and many will already have seen news broadcasts. Do not let them focus too much on graphic details. Rather, elicit their feelings and concerns and focus your discussions on what they share with you. Be careful of how much media they are exposed to. Talk directly with them about the tragedy and answer their questions truthfully.

7. Although this group is more mature, do not forget to reassure them of their safety and your efforts to protect them. Regardless of age, kids must hear this message.

8. Be on the lookout for physical symptoms of anxiety that children may demonstrate. They may be a sign that a child, although not directly discussing the situation, is very troubled by the recent events. Talk more directly to children who exhibit these signs:

Headaches	Excessive worry
Stomach aches	Increased arguing
Back aches	Irritability
Trouble sleeping or eating	Loss of concentration
Nightmares	Withdrawal
Refusal to go to school	Clinging behavior

9. Parents and caregivers should often reassure children that they will be protected and kept safe. During tragedies like these, words expressing safety and reassurance with concrete plans should be discussed and agreed upon within the family can provide the most comfort to children and teens.

10. If you are concerned about your children and their reaction to this or any tragedy, talk directly with their school counselor, family doctor, local mental health professional or have your older children visit KidsPeace's teen-help web site, www.teencentral.net which provides anonymous and clinically-screened help and resources for teen problems before they become overwhelming.

KidsPeace is a 124-year-old national children's crisis charity dedicated to giving hope, help, and healing to children facing crisis. Based in Bethlehem, PA with more than 50 centers nationwide, KidsPeace directly thousands of children a day with life-saving treatment to overcome the crises of growing up. With the help of VIP leaders including its national spokesperson Leeza Gibbons, KidsPeace helps millions more each year through educational outreach and awareness programs designed to help America's kids and parents anticipate, intervene in and master crises that can affect any child – from disasters and personal traumas to family issues and neglect to life-threatening depression, eating disorders, and the many stresses of modern life. KidsPeace was named “The Outstanding Organization” of its kind in the country by the American Association of Psychiatric Services for Children and was called “a prototype of what we need for all children everywhere” by the late, nationally renowned child and family expert, Dr. Lee Salk.

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