

Questions to Ask

At MACMH, we hold the children, families, and educators impacted by impacted by gun violence and community tragedy in our hearts. And we remind parents and caregivers: your presence, your listening ear, and your ongoing support are what will help children navigate their fear and begin to heal.

0 – 5

Preschool Age Children (Under 5 years old)

(Simple, concrete, focused on feelings and reassurance)

- + Did anything today make you feel scared or worried?"
- + Can you show me with your face how you are feeling right now?"
- + Do you want a hug or some quiet time together?"
- + Is there anything that would help you feel safe right now?"
- + Would you like to play or draw about how you're feeling?"

6 – 10

Elementary School-Age Children (6–10 years old)

(Gentle, reassuring, encouraging expression through words, art, or play)

- + What have you heard about what happened at the school?"
- + How did you feel when you heard about it?"
- + Do you have any questions about what happened?"
- + What helps you feel safe when you're worried?"
- + Would you like to draw, write, or talk about your feelings?"
- + Who are the people you trust at school or home when you feel scared?"

11 – 13

Middle School-Age Children (11–13 years old)

(More open-ended, allowing for reflection, validating their growing awareness)

- + What are kids at school saying about what happened?"
- + How are you feeling when you hear the news or talk about it with friends?"
- + Is there anything that feels confusing or hard to understand?"
- + Do you ever feel nervous about being at school? What helps you when you do?"
- + What do you do when you start to feel overwhelmed or scared?"
- + How can I best support you right now, listening, spending time, or helping you with something?"

14 – 18

Adolescents (14–18 years old)

(Respectful, validating, encouraging independence and coping strategies)

- + What are your thoughts about what happened?"
- + How is this affecting you personally?"
- + Do you feel like you can talk about this with friends, teachers, or me?"
- + What do you do when the news feels overwhelming?"
- + Do you ever feel pressure to 'be strong' when you don't want to?"
- + What helps you feel most supported right now, privacy, conversation, or connection?"
- + What gives you hope or helps you feel grounded when the world feels scary?"

Key Reminder for Adults

With all ages, the goal isn't to "fix" their feelings right away. It's to listen patiently, validate their emotions, and remind them they are not alone.

Responses to Give

Age-appropriate responses and statement that parents, caregivers, and youth workers can use in conversation with children and adolescents.

0 – 5

Preschool Age Children (Under 5 years old)

(Keep it simple, concrete, and reassuring. Focus on safety and feelings.)

- + "You are safe here with me."
- + "It's okay to feel scared. I'm here to help you."
- + "The helpers: like teachers, police, and doctors are working to keep everyone safe."
- + "Would you like a hug or for me to sit with you?"
- + "We can draw or play together if you're feeling worried."

6 – 10

Elementary School-Age Children (6–10 years old)

(Provide honest but gentle reassurance; validate feelings; encourage expression.)

- + "I know hearing about this is scary. You can always talk to me about how you feel."
- + "The adults at your school are working very hard to keep you safe."
- + "It's normal to feel upset when something like this happens. You're not alone."
- + "It's okay if you don't want to talk right now. I'm here when you're ready."
- + "If you feel worried at school, you can tell a teacher or a trusted adult right away."

11 – 13

Middle School-Age Children (11–13 years old)

(Recognize their growing awareness; validate their emotions and questions.)

- + "I can see this news is upsetting. It's okay to feel sad, angry, or confused."
- + "Even though bad things happen, there are many people working to keep schools safe."
- + "You don't have to carry these feelings by yourself. I'm always here to listen."
- + "It's okay to not have all the answers right now, we can figure this out together."
- + "If things feel too heavy, let's find ways to take breaks, like going for a walk, listening to music, or spending time together."

14 – 18

Adolescents (14–18 years old)

(Respect independence; be open, honest, and acknowledge their perspective.)

- + "I know this is hard to process. How you're feeling is valid and important."
- + "It's okay if you're angry, sad, or numb. Everyone responds differently."
- + "Even though tragedies happen, schools and communities are working hard to make safety a top priority."
- + "You don't need to have it all figured out right now. Talking through it can help, and I'm here anytime you need me."
- + "If you want space, that's okay. If you want to talk, I'll listen, no judgment."
- + "If it ever feels overwhelming, we can also connect you with other supports, like a counselor or therapist."

Key Reminder for Adults

The goal is not to remove fear immediately. It's to help children feel heard, cared for, and reminded they are not alone. The tone should be calm, patient, and consistent.