

After a tragedy: What Family Members Can Do

As a parent, one of your most important concerns is the safety and well-being of your child.

When a horrific act of violence happens, such as this shooting at Northern Illinois University, you may be wondering how you can help. College students will react differently. Some will seem to come through the experience unscathed. Later, some may begin to have delayed reactions. Others will react strongly from the start, even though they may have suffered little loss or any sense of threat. However, most students have normal and typical reactions to these abnormal circumstances.

You can help your children by...

listening.

It may be painful, but the best thing you can do for your student is to listen to them talk about the shooting. Talking and journaling are healthy and natural ways for young adults to work through their reactions.

comforting.

Feel free to hold and comfort your student more during this time. They are reaching out to you for security right now, and a little extra love and affection won't spoil them.

reassuring.

You can also reassure your student that they are now safe. Remind them that you and university staff members are taking precautions to protect them.

not being over-protective.

This may be the most difficult for you to do, but you must fight the temptation to over-protect your child. It may be very hard even to let them out of your sight, but it's important that they return to a regular routine as soon as possible.

being a good example.

Actions speak louder than words, and, by your actions you can set an example for your student on how to handle these reactions in a productive way.

encouraging students to help.

You may encourage your student to offer help to others. For example, they may want to volunteer their time to coordinate an event to raise awareness. They can receive more information on how to help by contacting the Student Involvement & Leadership Development office.

seeking help if your children are suffering severe problems.

If your student has had serious losses, such as the death of a loved one, they may need more help. Encourage your student to see a professional if they are having extreme reactions to the shooting, such as repeated nightmares, flashbacks, crying spells, behavior problems, and panic reactions.