



SANTA FE INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Leigh Wall, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools



May 18, 2018

Dear Santa Fe ISD Parents,

Our community has suffered a terrible tragedy. We mourn the loss of ten members of our Santa Fe ISD family, eight students and two teachers. Our hearts go out to the parents and family members who lost loved ones. We are all feeling the overwhelming grief of this horrific event. We are committed to ensuring that all of our students, families, and staff receive the care and support they need during this tragic time.

District administration will continue to gather information for teachers and staff in anticipation of our students' return. All campuses in Santa Fe ISD will be closed on Monday, May 21, and Tuesday, May 22, 2018. We will update you as soon as a plan for returning to school is finalized. In addition, we know that your seniors may have special concerns. We want them to know that their graduation status will not be impacted by today's tragedy.

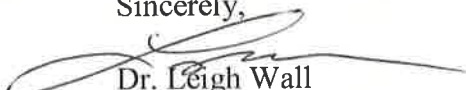
Our students and staff will need support to help them grieve and recover. Mental health support and school nurses will be available throughout the district, for students, staff, and faculty. To support our community through this tragedy, a special toll-free crisis hotline number has been created, 1-800-595-0869. Telephone coverage is provided by qualified mental health professionals and is available 24 hours a day.

We also want you to know that a community assistance center will be provided for our entire community beginning today, Saturday, May 19 from 9:00 a.m.–6:00 p.m. at Aldersgate United Methodist Church, 13217 FM 1764, Santa Fe, Texas, 77510.

It will be important for parents to talk with their children about today's events. I have attached a document, *Talking to Children about the Shooting*. This will provide you with ideas of how to talk to them about their feelings and answer their questions.

We will continue to keep you informed as we receive additional information. Please continue to pray for our SFISD community.

Sincerely,


Dr. Leigh Wall
Superintendent of Schools

Talking to Children about the Shooting

The recent shooting has evoked many emotions—sadness, grief, helplessness, anxiety, and anger. Children who are struggling with their thoughts and feelings about the stories and images of the shooting may turn to trusted adults for help and guidance.

- **Start the conversation.** Talk about the shooting with your child. Not talking about it can make the event even more threatening in your child's mind. Silence suggests that what has occurred is too horrible even to speak about or that you do not know what has happened. With social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, text messages, newsbreaks on favorite radio and TV stations, and others), it is highly unlikely that children and teenagers have not heard about this. Chances are your child has heard about it, too.
- **What does your child already know?** Start by asking what your child/teen already has heard about the events from the media and from friends. Listen carefully; try to figure out what he or she knows or believes. As your child explains, listen for misinformation, misconceptions, and underlying fears or concerns. Understand that this information will change as more facts about the shooting are known.
- **Gently correct inaccurate information.** If your child/teen has inaccurate information or misconceptions, take time to provide the correct information in simple, clear, age-appropriate language.
- **Encourage your child to ask questions, and answer those questions directly.** Your child/teen may have some difficult questions about the incident. For example, she may ask if it is possible that it could happen at your workplace; she is probably really asking whether it is "likely." The concern about re-occurrence will be an issue for caregivers and children/teens alike. While it is important to discuss the likelihood of this risk, she is also asking if she is safe. This may be a time to review plans your family has for keeping safe in the event of any crisis situation. Do give any information you have on the help and support the victims and their families are receiving. Like adults, children/teens are better able to cope with a difficult situation when they have the facts about it. Having question-and-answer talks gives your child ongoing support as he or she begins to cope with the range of emotions stirred up by this tragedy.
- **Limit media exposure.** Limit your child's exposure to media images and sounds of the shooting, and *do not allow your very young children to see or hear any TV/radio shooting-related messages.* Even if they appear to be engrossed in play, children often are aware of what you are watching on TV or listening to on the radio. What may not be upsetting to an adult may be very upsetting and confusing for a child. Limit your own exposure as well. Adults may become more distressed with nonstop exposure to media coverage of this shooting.
- **Common reactions.** Children/Teens may have reactions to this tragedy. In the immediate aftermath of the shooting, they may have more problems paying attention and concentrating.

They may become more irritable or defiant. Children and even teens may have trouble separating from caregivers, wanting to stay at home or close by them. It's common for young people to feel anxious about what has happened, what may happen in the future, and how it will impact their lives. Children/Teens may think about this event, even when they try not to. Their sleep and appetite routines may change. In general, you should see these reactions lessen within a few weeks.

- **Be a positive role model.** Consider sharing your feelings about the events with your child/teen, but at a level they can understand. You may express sadness and empathy for the victims and their families. You may share some worry, but it is important to also share ideas for coping with difficult situations like this tragedy. When you speak of the quick response by law enforcement and medical personnel to help the victims (and the heroic or generous efforts of ordinary citizens), you help your child/teen see that there can be good, even in the midst of such a horrific event.
- **Be patient.** In times of stress, children/teens may have trouble with their behavior, concentration, and attention. While they may not openly ask for your guidance or support, they will want it. Adolescents who are seeking increased independence may have difficulty expressing their needs. Both children and teens will need a little extra patience, care, and love. (Be patient with yourself, too!).
- **Extra help.** Should reactions continue or at any point interfere with your children's/teens' abilities to function or if you are worried, contact local mental health professionals who have expertise in trauma. Contact your family physician, pediatrician, or state mental health associations for referrals to such experts.