May 24, 2022

Dear Martha’s Vineyard Public School Families and Community,

We are deeply saddened to hear the news of the school shooting today at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas. Our thoughts are with the members of that community. The safety of our students and our staff is always the top priority in our school system. We take seriously our responsibility to ensure the safety of your child every day. We wish to remind our families that we have emergency preparedness plans in place at each of our schools. Our school leaders work with their respective town police and fire departments and regularly practice our safety procedures with students and staff through discussions and emergency exercises.

This year, we have initiated training in the use of the Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines (CSTAG), an evidence-based model for schools to use in conducting threat assessments of students. Our school counselors, administrators, and local law enforcement were trained in this model to prevent potential violence in our schools. We will continue to grow this practice in the coming year.

In addition, we have increased our mental health literacy programs and mental health staffing so that students have increased access to mental health supports during these unprecedented and stressful times. Our greatest safety net is human information, and our student community has been amazing in coming forward with information and helping us respond to students in need. If you or your child become aware of any potential threat posted to social media or anywhere else, please report concerns to your school administration.

Our school and community counselors, and administrators are ready to respond to students as needed. As we learn more details about this tragic incident in the hours and days ahead, it will be important for you to spend time talking with your children and helping them cope with this news.

We would like to share with you a list of tips from the National Association of School Psychologists about what parents can do at times like this:

1. **Reassure children that they are safe.** Emphasize that schools are very safe. Validate their feelings. Explain that all feelings are okay when a tragedy occurs. Let children talk about their feelings, help put them into perspective, and assist them in expressing these feelings appropriately.

2. **Make time to talk.** Let their questions be your guide as to how much information to provide. Be patient. Children and youth do not always talk about their feelings readily.

3. **Keep your explanations developmentally appropriate.**
   - Early elementary school children need brief, simple information that should be balanced with reassurances that their school and homes are safe and that adults are there to protect them.
● Upper elementary and early middle school children will be more vocal in asking questions about whether they truly are safe and what is being done at their school. They may need assistance separating reality from fantasy. Discuss efforts of school and community leaders to provide safe schools.
● Upper middle school and high school students will have strong and varying opinions about the causes of violence in schools and society. They will share concrete suggestions about how to make school safer and how to prevent tragedies in society. Emphasize the role that students have in maintaining safe schools by following school safety guidelines communicating any personal safety concerns to school administrators, and accessing support for emotional needs.

4. Emphasize the importance of connection. Help children identify at least one adult at school and in the community to whom they go if they feel threatened or at risk.

5. Observe children’s emotional state. Some children may not express their concerns verbally. Changes in behavior, appetite, and sleep patterns can indicate a child’s level of anxiety or discomfort. In most children, these symptoms will ease with reassurance and time. However, some children may be at risk for more intense reactions. Seek the help of mental health professional if you are at all concerned and contact your school counselors if you need support in doing so.

6. Limit televised/social media viewing of these events. Developmentally inappropriate information can cause anxiety or confusion, particularly in young children. Graphic visuals or portrayals of intense emotions of victims and survivors can be traumatic for children and adults. Adults also need to be mindful of the content of conversations that they have with each other in front of children, even teenagers, and limit their exposure to vengeful, hateful, and angry comments that might be misunderstood.

7. Maintain a normal routine. Keeping to a regular schedule can be reassuring and promote physical health. Ensure that children get plenty of sleep, regular meals, and exercise.

As we learn more details about today’s events, we will discuss and debrief with administrators and staff accordingly so we can be ready to support your children when they return to school.

Sincerely,

Matthew T. D’Andrea, LP.D.
Superintendent of Schools