

In Response to the Robo Call Initiated Lock-Downs
Thoughts for parents and teachers

The words “youth” “child” and “student” are interchangeable.

It is critical that we talk with children and youth about the recent lock-downs caused by the computer-generated voice calls. It is not uncommon for both teachers and students to have some level of anxiety just practicing lock-downs even when it is announced ahead of time. Many won't mention it because, as lock-downs and drills become more commonplace, there is an unsaid subscript that says, "This is how the world is now, and we all need to be able to just handle it."

Often, adults don't want to bring it up because they're concerned that:

- bringing it up will upset youth who, at this point aren't worried
- if you can't say something that for sure makes it safe, it will only make it worse
- we're not at all sure how to start the conversation or where to go with it
- seeing our own children's fear is uncomfortable, makes us feel like we aren't good enough as parents, or that we somehow aren't doing enough

Youth often don't tell us how upset they are because:

- They think they're the only one who is having such a difficult time and peers or adults will think they're crazy or weak, etc.
- They are great observers of the adults around them, and they're really loyal. If adults don't bring it up, they assume:
 - Parents and teachers are just as fearful as they are and don't have any support to offer
 - Nobody is noticing, so it must not be bothering them, therefore I really AM weak or crazy or inept
 - If I bring it up they'll be even more overwhelmed so I shouldn't

Whatever the reason we don't bring it up with them, the fall-out is negative. Youth make up stories to fill in the blanks. Stories such as:

- This is actually normal –people burst into places with guns – and they just never told me, so now I know. This is what I should always be afraid of...
- I should bring my own gun to school to protect myself.
- I should tell my mom I'm sick whenever I think this might happen again.
- My teacher always used to say that the school tries to keep us safe, but now I'm thinking that I shouldn't believe too much in what teachers/adults say
- I am totally on my own on this

There is a bit of a formula that can help you bring it up:

- Statement of observation:
 - ***We have had to go into lock-down recently, which is unusual. (Or, for parents, you were on lockdown at school...)***
- Statement of assumption:



- *When things like that happen, both adults and youth have a range of uncomfortable feelings, ranging from mild anxiety to full-blown panic.*
- *Sometimes those reactions make it difficult to sleep, give us bad dreams or make it difficult to go back to school.*
- What you can do:
 - *I wish I could do something to make sure you (we) didn't have to go into lockdown again, but you know, the police are really working on catching the person behind this. But it really does help when we don't feel alone, so what I want to do is just to listen to how this is for you.*
- –Ask clarifying and expanding questions. The goal is to keep your child (student) telling you more, the goal is not to solve the problem, because there isn't a real solution. Where you're going is to make sure your child doesn't struggle with fears all alone, or feel isolated.
 - *How often do you have that fear?*
 - *When did you first think that?*
- Give the them the floor, sometimes using questions about other kids to make it easier for your own child to respond:
 - *What kinds of fears do you think your classmates might be having?*
- Ask how adults could help:
 - *What could I do that might make a difference for you right now?*
 - *What could your teachers (parents) be doing that could help you feel safer/better?*

Youth can only get as well as the adults around them. Our own desire to stuff it down or turn away or hope that we're seeing things as "back to normal" has a powerful effect on stopping communication from the youth.

The biggest mistake administrators make is to look at the hubbub in the hallway and say, "Looks like they're doing OK." Of course it does, without investigation! The biggest mistake parents and teachers usually make is to hesitate to bring it up because they're afraid that, if they can't solve the problem they think that bringing it up might make it worse or instill new fears. But you know that if you ask your child if they're afraid of the dark in their bedroom at night, you aren't going to make them afraid of that again if they've mastered that fear. They just say, "no."

Our deepest fear is being bereft of all human connection or support. Even teenagers who are busy pushing parents away know beneath it all that they need you. This is a real opportunity to have a deeper conversation with your child/student than usual, and your child's/students sense of well-being hinges on it in some cases.

Youth make up stories to fill in the blanks. Those stories are often worse than the reality. The operational question here is, "What can I/the adults in your world do that would help you feel better?" The police are dealing with the cause. Our job is to provide the comfort and support that helps kids through this in the best way possible.

*** You are all they have! Engage and connect! ***

