



ATHOL-ROYALSTON REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

1062 Pleasant Street • P.O. Box 968
Athol, MA 01331
Tel: 978-249-2400 • Fax: 978-249-2402
Website: www.arrsd.org

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Dear Athol-Royalston Families and Staff,

Darcy Fernandes

Superintendent of Schools

Julie Marynok

Administrative Assistant

Kathryn Clark

Director of Pupil Services

Mary Jane Rickson

6-12 Curriculum Director

Molly Superchi

*Elementary Curriculum
Director*

Mitchel Aho

*Principal
Athol High School*

Thomas Telicki

*Principal
Athol-Royalston
Middle School*

Michael Leander

*Principal
Athol Community
Elementary School*

Janeth Williams

*Principal
Royalston Community
School
Title I Director*

Robert Rouleau

*Facilities and
Transportation*

Lynn Bassett

Business Manager

Edward Skutnik

Director of Technology

The nation woke up this week to horrific news of the mass shooting in Las Vegas. Over the course of the last few days many of our students have been exposed to these disturbing scenes streaming across the media. This is causing students to be scared. In light of this issue the National Education Association has put out several recommendations for helping students to cope. I'm hoping these recommendations will help us all to support our children.

- **Ensure children that they are safe.** Emphasize that all feelings are ok. Let children talk about their feelings. Help children to put their feelings into perspective and teach them how to express them appropriately
- **Create time for children to talk.** Let their questions be your guide as to how much information to provide. Children and youth do not always talk about their feelings readily. Watch for clues that they may want to talk, such as hovering around while you do the dishes or yard work. Young children may need concrete activities (such as drawing, looking at picture books, or imaginative play) to help them identify and express their feelings.

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. Give simple examples of school safety like reminding children about exterior doors being locked, child monitoring efforts on the playground, and emergency drills practiced during the school day.
- **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 (e.g. not providing building access to strangers, reporting strangers on campus, reporting threats to the school safety made by students or community members, etc.), communicating any personal safety concerns to school administrators, and accessing support for emotional needs.

Review school safety procedures. This should include procedures and safeguards at school and at home. Help children identify at least one adult at school and in the community to whom they go if they feel threatened or at risk.

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. If that is the case seek counseling help for the child.

Limit media exposure. Limit television viewing and be aware if the television is on in common areas. Monitor what kids are viewing online and how they are consuming information about the event through social media.

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. Encourage them to keep up with their schoolwork and extracurricular activities but don't push them if they seem overwhelmed.