Holiday Greetings,

It will be a very sad holiday season for many this year. The news coming out of Connecticut is devastating to all of us. Even though we ask ourselves how could such a horrific thing happen in our country, in a school very similar to our own in Adventist education? We know that this is just a foreshadowing of things to come in the times that we live in. As we ponder these things we must remember that the children we minister to have heard this news, also and will have a huge array of reactions. Their reactions will be anywhere from scared to hardly paying attention at all. But this is an opportunity for us as children's ministries workers to provide them with the hope and comfort that scripture provides.

Many publishers and children's workers around the world are partnering with you in this difficult time. The suggestions below come from Kidsmatter and as a Chaplain I found them to be right on target. Please consider them as you prepare to be with your children this Sabbath. Spending some time in prayer and thinking through how you are going to handle this unique situation will prepare you to lead as God would have you.

1. Listen.

If the kids want to tell you what they heard about the killings in Connecticut, then let them put it into words. As they voice what is bouncing around in their heads, it's a good step in bringing some order to their thoughts. It will also make you aware of any misinterpretations or false information.

2. Pray.

Listen first, so you have a reading on what the children are feeling. Then, go to prayer-fervent prayer of humility. This is the perfect time to teach kids that we start out praying. It's not our last resort. As a group, begin praying today for the families and the other kids at the Connecticut school, and continue to pray for them in the weeks ahead.

3. Talk in small groups.

The emotion of a large group, as kids fill in the details they have overheard, can cause more harm than good. This Sabbath, it would be wise to have extra helpers available to talk with small groups of children in an orderly fashion. This will also give more children the opportunity to speak their thoughts.

4. Allow them to be sad, or mad, or angry.

If squelched now, those feelings will find a way to come out eventually. Acknowledge that this incident makes us feel a lot of different ways. God is not afraid of our emotions-He made them for our benefit-and they have their time and place.

5. Be truthful. Don't pretend to have all the answers.

You don't, so be authentic with the kids and admit that you're working through this along with them. Tell them how your heart was crushed and your eyes welled with tears when you heard what had happened to these children.

As a child asks a question, a whole dissertation is flashing through your mind. Keep your answers very short, because that's really what they want at this point.

7. Don't displace your reactions on the children.

Children easily pick up drastic reactions, comments, and emotions of people they look up to. Be cautious with what you say, in front of them or what they may overhear.

8. Assure them that you will do everything in your power to keep them safe.

All the safety measures that you have in place are because you love them and want them to be safe.

9. Watch for children who display extreme anxiety over this incident.

You see children in a different environment than parents normally do, and kids' church or Sabbath School may be the place where anxiety is more easily noticeable. Don't hesitate to talk with a parent in private if a child is displaying reactions far beyond what the other children are.

10. Remind them that this was NOT from God.

Help kids understand that there is evil in the world, and it was that evil that brought this about.
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