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Shootings in Ottawa

Dear editor:
Re letter sent to Upper Grand students, staff and families:
We are shocked and saddened by the tragic events that happened yesterday (Oct. 22) in Ottawa. We are keeping our thoughts focused on those affected and the bravery and service of the emergency personnel who reacted so quickly to protect the community. Events like this are rare and there is no local safety concern for our area. But we know this has impact on all of us, children, staff, families and friends. Everyone has a different reaction ? sadness, grief, helplessness, anxiety and anger. Whatever you feel is OK. The most important thing now is to help provide support to children. These tips are designed to help you in this important role as a teacher, staff member, administrator and family.
? Children may be concerned that something bad may happen to themselves, family or friends. We need to reassure them that safety measures are in place and that you and other adults will take care of them.
? If your child is not focused on the tragedy, do not dwell on it. Adults should try not to have conversations among themselves in front of children. However, be available to answer questions to the best of your ability and the age of the children. Pay attention to children's behavioural changes or social interactions as they may not be able to express themselves verbally.
? Limit exposure to media coverage. Images of a crisis can be overwhelming, especially if watched repeatedly. A younger child may not be able to distinguish between images on television and their personal reality. Older children may choose to watch the news and you should be available to discuss with them what they see to help put it in perspective.
? Routines as a family and at school are important. Children feel more secure when they have the normal routines reinforced at school and at home.
? You have needs too. If you feel grief, anxiety or anger, talk it out with family, friends, a faith leader or mental health counsellor. Your own sadness is important for children to see, because you will be better able to help support them by expressing your own emotions productively. Children take their clues from adults.
? Our top priority is the well-being of our students and staff and we take this responsibility very seriously. Our crisis response team is here to help. Please contact them if your school needs assistance. If, as a family member, you have concerns about a child, talk to your school's principal and support will be there.
Thank you for supporting our students and each other.
Martha Rogers
Director of Education
Upper Grand District
School Board