

A Tragedy Averted:

Easing Children's Fears after the Recent Discovery in Waseca

A major violent plot was uncovered in the close community of Waseca, Minnesota. Although there was enormous relief that an alert person's tip led to an arrest before the young man could act on his plans, adults and young people alike were reeling from the horror of what could have happened. If there are children or teens in your family, it's important to pay attention to how this news affects them and to do what you can to help them feel as safe and secure as possible. Marti offers this guidance:

I. Underlying issues

- Children of all ages may experience fear and anxiety when they hear about a plot like this. On top of other similar stories – and with each story repeated thousands of times across all media – anxiety builds, eroding children's sense of safety and security.
- Children express their feelings in a variety of ways, depending on their age and personality. For example, children may experience nightmares or sleep problems, regression to younger behaviors, restlessness or irritability. Some older children and teens may act like they don't care, but may feel anxious inside, especially if they have experienced or observed disturbing interactions or threats among others at their school.
- Children take their cues from adults and may take on their parents' fear that someone in their school or neighborhood could carry out a plot like the boy who was apprehended.

II. Tips for parents

- Limit children's exposure to the TV coverage
Seeing the images over and over magnifies the feeling of threat and makes it seem that such events happen more often than they do. Especially for young children, the news coverage can be overwhelming.
- Create opportunities for your children to talk about what they are feeling
Pay attention to whether your child is aware of the incident. Don't push conversations if it doesn't appear to be on your child's mind, but encourage your child to put feelings into words. There is power in listening.
- Reassure your children of the specific things you and other adults are doing to keep them safe
Statistically, school is one of the safest places children go. It's important for parents and children to realize that and to know what is being done to keep school safe.
- Focus on acts of heroism – in this case, what prevented this plot from being carried out
In this situation, the observant neighbor who reported suspicious behavior made all the difference in the world, as did the quick, effective action of the police. The schools, faith communities and others in the town are pulling together in support and keeping their community as safe as possible.