

IMPORTANT THINGS TO KNOW WHEN A THREAT IS ALLEGED

Safety Plans

BVPS works very closely with all emergency services. In fact, emergency personnel work with administrators to develop safety protocol, advise in the development of School Crisis Plans, and review all Safety Audit Plans. These plans are required by federal law to be updated and reviewed annually. Each year, School Crisis Plans and Safety Audits are reviewed by the School Board. Some of the information contained in the plan are made available to the public. Some of the information is not shared with the public in an effort to maximize safety.

A School Resource Officer is stationed at each of our schools.

Communication

One of the most helpful things to do to prepare for such an event is to ensure that you have the means to receive information when they are released related to the event. Bristol Virginia Public Schools (BVPS) communicates with its stakeholders in several ways. You may want to evaluate which of these notification tools you are currently using:

- BVPS app
- Dr. Perrigan's Twitter feed
- BVPS Facebook
- Automated phone messages
- Email

In the event you are not receiving any of the above notifications from the division, you should contact your child's school and ensure your contact information is up to date. If you change a phone number, updates will not be made unless we are made aware. If you need assistance in signing up for any of the notification tools, please call your school's secretary.

Threat Assessment

It is the desire of BVPS to be as transparent as possible. There are occasions when things may be unfolding quickly, and information may not be shared as fast as one may wish. Please know that information is given in a timely fashion as it can be shared. School Board policy **EBB** requires each school to have a Threat Assessment Team. When matters arise involving a student posing a threat, the threat assessment team is assembled and threat assessment protocol is used. A Threat Assessment Questionnaire is utilized to help determine the level of threat.

<http://www.bvps.org/ourpages/auto/2019/8/13/27283469992423235092/EBB.pdf>

Confidentiality/FERPA

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) protects students' confidentiality. When emergency situations arise, everyone wants to know the details. In some cases, due to privacy laws, information regarding a student cannot be shared.

It is at those times, that we ask you to trust the school division. At times, we find ourselves in a difficult, bound by law to withhold confidential information.

Parent Resources

When emergency situations occur, it is important for families to understand how to communicate with their child. Highlands Community Services, a partner of our school community, has offered the following suggestions to families. It is natural for everyone to share a certain level of stress as the situation warrants concern. As parents, the best thing we can do to help our kids cope with violent issues is to be available to talk, give reliable and accurate information, model appropriate coping skills ourselves and monitor our children.

- **Talk to your child**

Find out what your child knows. Talk about the threat, violence, lock-down, or scary event. If you do not talk about it, it can make the event even more threatening in your child's mind. Silence suggests that what has occurred is too horrible even to speak about or that you do not know what has happened. Research on anxious thoughts tells us that without the correct information, children often fill in the gaps with something even worse.

With social media and texting, your child may hear a version of the event that may not be accurate or up to date. As we all know, information from friends may be very different from the reality. If that is the case, you will need to gently and accurately correct any misinformation. Focus the discussion on the facts, being careful to not make assumptions.

It may be appropriate to shift the conversation to mental health and about how this someone was troubled, and needed help.

- **Allow your child to ask you questions**

For example, he/she may ask if it is possible that it will happen again, whether other schools are at risk, or if you or his/her siblings are safe. Be aware, that by asking these questions, he/she is also asking if he/she is safe. Having question-and-answer talks gives your child ongoing support for a variety of fears.

- **Review plans for keeping safe.**

Take the time to review the safety protocols at school. Let them know who are supports at school. Encourage them to seek out a teacher, school counselor or trusted adult at school if they do not feel safe. Reassure them that school personnel are trained to deal with these situations and in ways to keep all of the students safe. Above all, discuss the importance of your child following the directives of school personnel at all times, but especially if there is a threat.

You can remind your child of the quick response by teachers, principals, or law enforcement. You can remind your child that no one was hurt (if that was the case) because of the careful responses of these people.

If people were harmed, you can express gratitude for the school personnel, medical personnel, or law enforcement agents that did their job well and responded so quickly.

- **Be a healthy role model.**

Consider sharing your feelings about the events with your child/teen, but at a level, they can understand. It will be important to stay calm and centered. **When parents worry, so do their children.** Take the same advice that you are giving your child. **Remember, we cannot expect our children to do better at coping than we are.** If you are worried, it is always ok to call your child's school and get more information about how they are responding to the incident or threat.

- **Don't let your child/teen avoid school.**

Attempt to maintain a sense of normalcy and routine. Under these circumstances, it is better to return to school and get back into the routine than to avoid things. The longer we avoid feared situations, the more the fear grows. As a result, it takes longer and longer to return to normal.

- **Talk to your child about things they can do to help.**

For example, encourage your child to tell you about any threats of violence that they encounter in person or through social media. These incidents are always very important to report, even if they think the threat is not likely.

Likewise, if anyone ever reports suicide or self-harm, these events are also very important to let someone know. Suicidal threats mean that someone needs help.

Finally, encourage your child to be a helpful bystander. If someone is being bullied, threatened, or intimidated, it will be very useful to step up and assist, or find a trustworthy adult.

- **Monitor Media Exposure**

Limit exposure to violence. Research has proven that children who watch a lot of violence on TV, movies or video games feel less safe than those that don't may become desensitized to violence.

Limit exposure to social media during the threat, which often circulates inaccurate or incomplete information that can instill more fear.

- **Recognize Warning Signs**

If after a few weeks, you sense your child is still struggling, behavior deviating from what is normal for your child, reach out to your child's doctor, school counselor, or other mental health professional.

Code of Conduct

BVPS has a Code of Conduct for all students. When students break rules, a range of consequences are used. School Board policies **JGD/JGE** and **JFC** details these guidelines. If you wish to review School Board policies, you may click on the links below:

http://www.bvps.org/ourpages/auto/2019/11/18/58396729440161744901/JGD_JGE_R_Option_1_Student_Suspension_Expulsion_Regulation.pdf

<http://www.bvps.org/ourpages/auto/2016/9/5/75134154394933755421/JFC.pdf>

Media Disclaimer

When emergency situations arise, it is important to understand that all media sources are not up to date or accurate. BVPS tries to share information as timely, accurately, and completely as possible. At times, when news is not available, parties may draw conclusions that may or not be accurate. Passing along information that may not be accurate and may actually hinder the investigation.