

SCHOOL ADMINISTRATIVE UNIT #2
Office of the Superintendent of Schools

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Dear Ashland Families,

The recent events in Florida leave all of us deeply saddened; our hearts and sympathies are with the entire Parkland community. This event and the many other recent tragedies create anxiety and concern for our community. In order to help reassure our families, I would like to share our ongoing efforts to establish and maintain a safe environment within our schools, which includes building a nurturing and caring culture.

School Safety

Our School District has a Safety Committee, which includes representation from First Responders including local Police and Fire Departments, Administrators, Teachers, and Support Staff. This Committee meets regularly to review and address safety needs. Additionally, Ashland Elementary School has an established, up-to-date active Emergency Plan. As part of each plan, emergency responses have been defined and appropriate actions outlined. Each response is described on the second page of this document. Throughout the year, school staff and students practice the various responses. In addition to Emergency Plans, physical adjustments to our school building have been made and continue to be updated as needed.

Positive School Culture – Students Feel Safe, Valued, Respected & Included

A positive school culture, one where students feel safe, valued, respected and included, is one of the greatest proactive steps schools and communities can take to create a safe environment. Achieving this culture is done through our daily one-to-one interactions with students and families and through specific efforts that include *Steps to Respect*, an evidence-based curriculum designed to increase empathy and care for others, reduce bullying and meanness, and foster positive social norms and youth development.

Developing genuine and authentic relationships with our students is an essential key to a successful school experience on all levels including safety. Such relationships mean that students feel safe and comfortable expressing concerns. When adults know of concerns, steps can be taken to address issues in productive and safe ways. Additionally, strong relationships with our families mean that parents/guardians are more likely to contact us if problems arise, which allows us to assist with positive resolutions. The motto being shared throughout our State and nationally is “***see something, say something.***” Never hesitate to contact Dr. Bartlett, Principal, or your child’s teacher with a concern. Working together, we create a culture of care and support.

Guidance/Support

The New Hampshire Department of Education has shared advice that families may find helpful; it is included at the end of this correspondence. If you would like additional information or suggestions on how to support your child, please contact Mrs. Sanborn, Guidance Counselor and/or Dr. Bartlett.

Please know that we take the daily well-being of our students as our highest priority. As a school community, we remain vigilant about ensuring a safe environment and building a culture where all students feel safe, valued, respected and included. As always, please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns.

Respectfully,

Mary A. Moriarty

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Emergency Plan Responses/Descriptions	
Emergency Response	Description
Evacuation	This procedure is activated when there is a concern for an inside hazard (e.g. fire). Depending on the nature/length of the evacuation, the school community may relocate to another facility.
Reverse Evacuation	This procedure is activated when there is a concern of an outside hazard (e.g. a wild animal). Students and staff re-enter the building as a result of the hazard.
Secure Campus	This procedure is activated if there is a concern beyond the school campus. Students and staff stay within the building and normal operations continue.
Shelter-in-Place	This procedure is activated if there is an airborne hazard (e.g. smoke from a fire off school property). Students and staff stay in their location and take precautions to protect the air
Drop/Cover/Hold	This response is activated if there is a concern for falling objects or items that may become projectiles (e.g. severe wind/weather event).
Lockdown	This response is activated when there is a serious internal or external threat to safety. Students and staff follow the lockdown procedures for their location.
Scan	This response is activated when it is necessary for staff to look around an area for an item that does not belong.
Parent/Guardian Child Reunification	If an emergency occurs that might affect the area around one of our schools (such as a hazardous material release), students may need to be taken to an alternative location. In the event of this type of whole school dismissal, Parents/Guardians would be informed through a Honeywell Instant Alert with directions on where students are and how they will be dismissed.

Advice from the NH Department of Education

High-profile acts of violence, particularly in schools, can confuse and frighten children who may feel in danger or worry that their friends or loved ones are at risk. They will look to adults for information and guidance on how to react. Parents and school personnel can help children feel safe by establishing a sense of normalcy and security and talking with them about their fears.

1. Reassure children that they are safe. Validate their feelings. Explain that all feelings are okay when a tragedy occurs. Let children talk about their feelings, help put them into perspective, and assist them in expressing these feelings appropriately.
2. Make time to talk. Let their questions be your guide as to how much information to provide. Be patient; 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. Some children prefer writing, playing music, or doing an art project as an outlet. Young children may need concrete activities (such as drawing, looking at picture books, or imaginative play) to help them identify and express their feelings.
3. 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.
4. ***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.***
5. Review 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.
6. Observe children's emotional state. Some children may not express their concerns verbally. Changes in behavior, appetite, and sleep patterns can also 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. Children who have had a past traumatic experience or personal loss, suffer from depression or other mental illness, or with special needs may be at greater risk for severe reactions than others. Seek the help of mental health professional if you are at all concerned.
7. Limit television viewing of these events. Limit television viewing and be aware if the television is on in common areas. Developmentally inappropriate information can cause anxiety or confusion, particularly in young children. Adults also need to be mindful of the content of conversations that they have with each other in front of children, even teenagers, and limit their exposure to vengeful, hateful, and angry comments that might be misunderstood.
8. 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.