

Supporting Young People During Increased Federal Law Enforcement Activity

Supports for What to Say to Young People

Young people see and feel what's going on around them, especially in moments of intense community conflict like what has been happening in the Twin Cities and across the state. The recent events have resulted in protests, school closures, widespread media coverage, and increased fear. All of which are very much visible to youth.

Big events like these are stressful for everyone in our community. Young people might feel this especially strongly because they are still learning how to understand and cope with hard things they see or hear. Talking about it in a calm, honest way helps youth feel safer and supported.

Below are some ways you can think about supporting young people as they process this kind of trauma and uncertainty.

1. Acknowledge What They're Seeing and Feeling

Young people may be confused, scared, or angry because:

- They have seen news stories or social media videos including violent images.
- They are noticing more law enforcement presence in neighborhoods or near schools, which can make everyday life feel unsafe.
- Adults around them may be upset, protesting, or talking about fear and unfairness.

What to say:

- "I know this feels like a lot to take in."
- "It makes sense to feel scared or upset when people in our community are affected."
- "It's okay to have many different feelings about this."

Letting young people know their feelings are normal helps them feel understood and supported.

2. Have Open Conversations (in an Age-Appropriate Way)

Rather than avoiding the topic, share information in a way they can understand:

- Explain what happened using simple, factual language.
Example: "A woman in our city was killed during a federal enforcement action, and many people are feeling sad and angry about it."
- Invite them to share their thoughts by asking:
 - "What have you heard about this?"
 - "How does it make you feel?"
 - "What worries you the most?"
 - "Is there anything you're worried about?"

Listen without interrupting. Feeling heard is often more important than having answers.

3. Help Separate Feelings from Facts

News and social media can be emotional, confusing, or incomplete. Young people may:

- See upsetting videos or images online

- Hear adult conversations without full context
- Get mixed information from friends

You can help them separate what happened from speculation or fear-based rumors.

- “Some videos or posts don’t show the whole story.”
- “Not all information is shared right away, so it’s okay to have questions or feel unsure.”
- “Different sources may tell different parts of what happened, and sometimes what’s reported by officials isn’t the full story.”

Staying calm, even if you’re upset, helps young people feel safe asking questions.

4. Talk About Safety and Who They Can Turn To

Events like this can make young people worry about their safety at home, school, or in the community.

You can help by:

- Reassuring them about what is being done to keep them safe right now.
- Naming trusted adults they can talk to, like parents, caregivers, teachers, counselors, or program staff.
- Making a simple plan, such as:

“If something on the news or online scares you, come talk to me.”

Having a plan helps young people feel more in control.

5. Encourage Healthy Ways to Express Feelings

Young people cope in different ways. Some want to talk, while others may pull back or act differently.

Support healthy expression through:

- Drawing, writing, music, or journaling
- Small group conversations with peers, guided by a trusted adult
- Physical activity, play, or creative breaks when the news feels overwhelming

There is no one “right” way to process big feelings.

6. Support Through Community and Routine

Regular routines, like school, time with friends, and activities, help young people feel grounded and safe. When routines change, such as canceled classes or staying home for safety, anxiety can increase.

Keeping some structure when possible and helping young people stay connected to caring peers and adults can help them feel more secure during uncertain times.

7. Talk About Action and Hope

When young people feel helpless, they often want to do something.

You can help by pointing to positive, safe ways people are supporting one another, such as:

- “Some people are gathering peacefully to honor those affected.”
- “Community members are checking on neighbors and helping each other.”
- “There are ways to care about what’s happening and support friends while staying safe.”

Helping young people see acts of care and solidarity can build hope, even during hard times.