

Resilience Strategies for Educators:

Techniques for Self-Care and Peer Support
Train-the-Educator

TRAININGS BY REQUEST

Listen, Protect, Connect Model & Teach: Sample Dialogue

Words to Say/What Not to Say

Background Scenario: The school shooting took place in the cafeteria. When school resumed, security was increased, but most security was focused on the entrance of the school, not in the acreage behind the school where the teacher's parking lot was located. Julie, the seventh grade English teacher, had just returned from a two month maternity leave. She had heard the shots and the screams of the children on the day of the shooting. She was detained for questioning because one of the shooters had been in her English class and had made a number of questionable journal entries. Julie was terrified to return to school. The most difficult part of her day was parking her car and walking alone to her class.

PFA Colleague: (Acknowledge that there seems to be a problem, and ask about it) Julie, I'm concerned about you. When you come into school in the morning, you are shaking. What's happening?

Julie: I don't know. I'm having a hard time coming back to school after the shooting

WHAT NOT TO SAY: You always were kind of a wimp.

PFA Colleague: We've worked together for a couple of years and I know this is a big change from the way you usually are. You're usually pretty upbeat, especially since you had the baby. Is everything ok with her?

Julie: Oh, the baby is great. It's not that.

PFA Colleague: (Beginning of the Listening phase to gain more understanding) What changes when you come to school? What are you thinking about?

Julie: I know this is stupid, but I'm thinking about the day of the shooting.

WHAT NOT TO SAY: Are you kidding??? That was weeks ago

PFA Colleague: Where were you that day? What do you remember?

Julie: It was so horrible...the gunshots...I thought they were firecrackers...then the kids started screaming. I knew it was something terrible. I didn't know what to do so I just locked the door to my classroom. I had the kids push a bookcase and chairs against the door. Then we crouched down under the windows.

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PFA Colleague: (Do not probe and cause her more trauma; move to the Protect phase to validate her experience) Julie, what you did was amazing. My classroom was pretty far away from the cafeteria. I don't know if I would have been able to think as clearly. What you did helped save the kids' lives.

Julie: Well, maybe...I guess I didn't think of it in that way.

PFA Colleague: So what's the most difficult thing for you to deal with now?

Julie: It's parking my car and walking to class. All I can think about is...what if it happens again? What if it happens when I'm walking alone to class? What's going to happen to my baby?

WHAT NOT TO SAY: Get over it Julie. You're only making things harder on yourself by thinking this way.

PFA Colleague: (Connect phase questions) Julie, what would help you right now? Feeling safe is so important.

Julie: I don't know.

WHAT NOT TO SAY: Well if you don't know, how can anyone help you?

PFA Colleague: Is there something the administration can do to help?

Julie: They've done as much as they can. They have more school resource officers, but they seem to be at the front of the school and not at the back where the parking lot and the sports fields are.

PFA Colleague: Well, I think they would modify the plan if they knew that teachers would appreciate a patrol car or officers around the parking lot when they come to school in the morning and at the end of the day when they leave school. That's not so much to ask, and it makes perfect sense.

Julie: I guess that would help me feel better.

PFA Colleague: What can I do to help? We come to school and leave around the same time.

Julie: I know...on those days I see you getting out of your car in the morning, I feel so much better.

PFA Colleague: Julie, that's easy. Let's plan to meet in the parking lot at 7:30 a.m. every day this week. And come to my classroom after school and we'll walk out to the lot together.

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Julie: I feel stupid talking about this.

WHAT NOT TO SAY: Yeah, well...

PFA Colleague: (Model and Teach) You shouldn't feel stupid. You know, I heard a talk that the social worker gave after the shooting and she said that there were a lot of normal reactions to a traumatic experience. It's the experience that's abnormal. But you are talking about normal changes in your own behavior and emotions that everyone who survived this shooting has gone through.

Julie: You have to be kidding. I thought it was only me.

WHAT NOT TO SAY: It is only you...I don't know what your problem is.

PFA Colleague: No, it isn't just you...and that's another common experience after traumatic violence—you think you're alone in how you think and feel.

Julie: That's a relief. My husband says that I haven't been the same since the shooting at school. He wants me to quit teaching and focus on the baby.

WHAT NOT TO SAY: That's not a bad idea. Maybe you should stay home.

PFA Colleague: Is that what you want to do?

Julie: No, I still want to teach. The kids need me, and I need them.

PFA Colleague: What I've learned is that recovery takes time and it is different for each person. I'm glad we had the chance to talk. You may feel this way now, but from what I have heard, it gets easier with time and support. We are here for the kids, and you are doing a great job.

WHAT NOT TO SAY: Most people are over it Julie...Get on board.

Julie: Thanks, PFA Colleague...You're AWESOME!

PFA Colleague: We're here to help each other out!

WHAT NOT TO SAY: Yeah, I am, but then I roll that way.

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