



Media Release

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Dec. 18, 2012

CRDMAC, local school districts help children feel safe amidst tragedy, uncertainty

By Brandy Gill, CRDAMC Public Affairs

FORT HOOD, Texas – Recurring threats and acts of violence in schools have become an all-too-common occurrence in the lives of students across the nation recently and children from Fort Hood and surrounding communities are no exception to this trend.



In fact, just days prior to the Sandy Hooks Elementary School tragedy, Copperas Cove Independent School District made the dramatic decision to close the entire district following a string of bomb threats at its secondary and high school campuses.

The decision, which shut down the district for three days, was made in order to ensure student and faculty safety, Olga Peña, the CCISD Public Information Officer said.

“The safety of our students and staff is most important. We have implemented several precautions in order to provide the

safe environment they deserve,” she said.

Those precautions include the combined efforts of Fort Hood Military Police and K-9 units and Copperas Cove Fire and Police Departments. Together they are providing a continuous roving guard presence at every campus throughout the district. These increased security measures will last indefinitely Peña said.

Despite the stepped-up security, some children are still concerned about safety which leaves parents wondering how they can help them regain a sense of security.

According to Lt. Col. Sharette Gray, the chief of behavioral health at Carl R. Darnall Army Medical Center, it is important for parents to recognize signs that may indicate their children are concerned.

“Some children may exhibit bedtime or separation anxiety, difficulty falling asleep, fear of going to school or they may just be more tearful, emotional or prone to increased tantrums. Physical symptoms may include nausea or decreased appetite, or stomach or headaches,” she said. “Just be patient, encourage them to talk, but don’t force them if they aren’t ready. Take your cue from your child.”

Parents and caregivers can help children regain their sense of balance and security by keeping normal schedules and modeling appropriate responses, Gray said.

“It’s really important to maintain a routine so kids can be assured that something in their world is normal and consistent,” she said. “Keep them away from the television and news, which can be distorted, inaccurate and spin up their anxieties. Be honest about your own emotions. It lets them know that it’s ok to feel afraid, sad, confused or angry. Acknowledge the emotions that come with these types of situations.”

While it’s important to recognize their concerns Gray warns children should not be kept out of school any longer than necessary.

“In the long run keeping children out of school after incidents like this only serves to reinforce their anxieties. Instead talk to them about the increased security measures that have been put in place to ensure their safety, and again, be consistent. It will help them face their fears in a real way.”

According to The Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress, a part of the Uniformed Services University’s Department of Psychiatry that is partnered with the Defense Center of Excellence (DCoE) for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury, symptoms and emotions following these types of events are often only temporary.

“While symptoms are often transient, they should be clinically treated if they persist. If you have questions contact your child’s health care or behavioral health care provider to seek advice or guidance,” the Center states.

According to Peña, CCISD school counselors are working with students to help them understand the precautions put into place so they feel more at ease as they return to their designated campuses and classrooms.

Killeen Independent School District is also offering counseling to students as needed, Leslie Gilmore, Public Information Officer for KISD said.

Additionally the CRDAMC Child and Family Assistance Center, located within the hospital on the 5th floor, can also help. Walk-ins are welcome Monday-Wednesday, and Friday from 8 -10:30 a.m.

To read more tips on helping children face their fears from the Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress visit: <http://www.usuhs.mil/csts/pdf/CSTSRestoringSenseofSafetyAfterShooting.pdf>