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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Dec. 1, 2021

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MDHHS shares mental health resources available for those impacted by Oxford school shooting

LANSING, Mich. – The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) is extending heartfelt condolences to all those affected by the tragic shooting at Oxford High School yesterday and sharing resources in support of anyone impacted by this horrible event.

“A school shooting is something we hope would never happen anywhere, but tragically occurred in our state this week,” said Elizabeth Hertel, MDHHS director. “While no parent or child should have to experience this, it is important to take care of the mental health needs of survivors and those impacted by this tragic event. We encourage parents and caregivers to use available resources as their children navigate grief and process this traumatic event.”

According to [The National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#) shootings are extremely traumatic experiences, and coping can be stressful. Children and teen’s reactions are influenced by how adults including teachers, parents and other caregivers respond. Common reactions include, but are not limited to, feelings of anxiety, fear and worry about safety of self and others; fear that another shooting may occur; changes in behavior such as increases in activity levels, decreases in concentration and increases in irritability; physical complaints such as headaches, stomach aches, or other aches and pains; and trouble staying focused and increased sensitivity to sounds.

“In the wake of the tragic shooting at Oxford High School, our hearts break for the community and families struggling to understand the loss of their beloved children and the toll of the injuries — both physical and mental — to so many others impacted by yesterday’s events,” said Dr. Debra Pinals, MDHHS medical director for behavioral health and forensic programs. “As we move forward step by step as a community, the questions and worries can be overwhelming. With anxiety and depression rates already heightened in the context of the pandemic, a tragedy like what happened at Oxford High School will need to be processed, and people will need to communicate about their concerns, even if they may be reluctant to do so. There is no shame in accessing support for emotional stress and trauma, and we encourage those who need that support to reach out to a health care provider or call 2-1-1 for local resources that can meet your needs.”

Take steps below to speak with your children about violence and help them cope through tragedy:

1. Reassure children that they are safe. Validate their feelings and let them know all feelings are okay when a tragedy occurs.

2. Make time to talk. Be patient and let children guide how much information you share by the questions they ask. Young children may need other activities like drawing or playing to identify and express feelings.
3. Keep explanations developmentally appropriate based upon age.
4. Review safety procedures both at school and at home.
5. Observe your child's emotional state. Note that children may not be able to verbally express grief and may need the help of a mental health professional.
6. Limit television viewing of the events.
7. Maintain a normal routine. A regular schedule can help with healing and aid in managing grief.

MDHHS also offers the Michigan Crisis and Access Line (MiCAL) in Oakland County. Residents can call or text 844-44-MICAL (844-446-4225) 24/7 for free behavioral health crisis triage, support, resource information and referral to local services. Chat is also available through Michigan.gov/MiCAL.

To learn about speaking to your children about safety, visit HopkinsAllChildrens.org.

To learn about speaking to your children about violence, visit NaspOnline.org.

If you or a loved one is concerned about suicide, call 800-273-8255 or visit SuicidePreventionLifeline.org.

To help your children manage distress after a shooting, visit Apa.org.

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