

Day of Remembrance

Conversation Tip Sheet

The first Day of Remembrance for the Annunciation community can bring a wide range of emotions for students, staff, parents, and parish members. Some people may want to talk about what happened, while others may prefer to honor the day quietly. There is no “right” way to remember.

Guiding Principles for All Conversations

✓ DO:	X DON'T:
Listen more than you speak.	Share graphic details.
Let the person lead the conversation.	Force conversations.
Be honest and age appropriate.	Assume everyone had the same experience
Recognize that the day may increase distress for some.	Compare one person's response to another's.
Validate feelings, even if they differ from your own.	Tell someone how they “should” feel.
Remind people that all emotions are normal.	Force someone to participate in planned activities.
Focus on safety, support, and community	Minimize or dismiss their experience.

Age-based Conversation Guide for Families, Educators, Staff, and Parish Members

Preschool Ages 3–5

What They May Understand

Young children often do not fully understand a day of remembrance or the details of what happened. However, they notice changes in routines and are very aware of adults' emotions. Some preschoolers may remember that adults came into their classrooms, or that the day felt frightening or confusing. Others may only recall that the day felt different.

Helpful Messages

- “Today is a day when our school remembers something sad that happened.”
- “Some people may have big feelings today.”
- “You are safe, and there are adults here to help you.”
- “It’s okay to feel happy, sad, scared, or confused — or to not be sure how you feel.”
- “We can talk to God anytime, just like talking to someone who loves us.”

Conversation Starters

- “How are you feeling today?”
- “Have you noticed anything different about today?”
- “Is there anything you’d like to ask?”

If Asked About the Event

“Something very scary happened at our school. Many adults worked together to help keep everyone safe. Today we are taking time to remember and care for one another.”

Keep Routines Steady

Familiar routines are one of the most reassuring things you can offer a young child. Keep mealtimes, bedtime, drop-off and pick-up as normal as possible, and tell your child in advance what the day will look like. Plan something ordinary and comforting for the evening rather than over scheduling. Bedtime is often when young children bring up what they’ve been holding or keeping in all day.

Watch For

- Increased clinginess or difficulty separating from caregivers.
- Regression to earlier developmental behaviors (bed wetting, thumb-sucking, baby talk).
- New or heightened fears, such as fear of the dark, being alone, loud noises, sleeping in their own bed.
- Trouble falling asleep or bad dreams/nightmares.
- Stomachaches or headaches.
- More tantrums, irritability, or crying more than usual.
- Less interest in play or activities they usually like.
- Being startled easily.

Elementary School

Ages 6–10

What They May Understand

Many elementary-age students may remember the day clearly. Others may have pieced together their understanding from conversations since the event. Avoid telling them what they experienced or suggesting what they should remember, rather, allow their understanding to develop over time. The day of remembrance may bring back worries, questions, or memories.

Helpful Messages

- “It’s normal if today brings up memories or feelings.”
- “Everyone experiences remembrance differently.”
- “You can always talk to a trusted adult.”
- “You are not alone.”
- “You can talk to God about anything, even if you are angry or confused.”
- “Sometimes we light a candle to help us remember people we love.”

Conversation Starters

- “What does today mean to you?”
- “How have you been feeling about the Day of Remembrance?”
- “Is there anything you’ve been thinking about lately?”

If They Express Fear

“It’s ok to feel worried sometimes. There are many adults working every day to help keep our school safe. You can always tell someone if you’re feeling concerned.”

If Asked About the Event

“That’s a hard question. I may not have all the answers, but I’ll be honest with you about what I know. There are many people working to make our school as safe as possible, and you can always come to me when you have questions or concerns.”

Increase Routine and Predictability

Plan something ordinary and comforting for that evening rather than over scheduling and expect that bedtime is when younger children often share what they’ve been feeling.

Helpful Reminder

Children often communicate emotions through behavior rather than words. Extra reassurance, patience, and opportunities for connection can be helpful. However, children should never be forced to participate in activities related to the Day of Remembrance.

You could say: “It is ok to remember. It is ok to be sad. It is ok to laugh, play, or go about your normal activities, or not think about what happened for part or all of the day. Feeling ok does not mean that you do not care.”

Watch For

- Reluctance to go to school or complaints about not feeling well in the morning.
- Stomachaches or headaches.
- Trouble falling asleep, nightmares, or wanting to sleep with a caregiver.
- Changes in appetite.
- Difficulty concentrating; drop in quality or completion of schoolwork.
- Increased worry about safety of parents, siblings, or friends, which may include frequent checking in or fear of separation.
- Irritability, anger, or emotional outbursts more than usual.
- Not wanting to play with friends or do things they typically enjoy.
- Repeated questions about the incident or refusal to discuss it at all.
- Heightened alertness to noises, doors, or people entering a room.

Middle School Ages 11–13

What They May Understand

Middle school students may remember the event vividly and may have a deeper understanding of its impact on themselves, classmates, teachers, staff, parish members, and the broader community.

Helpful Messages

- “The day of remembrance can bring up difficult memories and emotions.”
- “There is no right or wrong way to feel.”
- “You do not have to talk if you don’t want to.”
- “You do not have to participate in any of the planned activities if you don’t want to.”
- “It is okay to ask for support.”
- “Having questions about God right now doesn’t mean you are losing your faith.”
- “You can pray for someone even when you don’t know what to say.”

Conversation Starters

- “What has this week been like for you?”
- “What thoughts have come up as the Day of Remembrance approaches?”
- “What helps you feel supported?”

If Asked About the Event

“That’s a hard question. I may not have all the answers, but I’ll be honest with you about what I know. There are many people working to make our school as safe as possible, and you can always come to me when you have questions or concerns.”

Encourage Healthy Coping

- Talking with trusted adults
- Spending time with friends and family
- Prayer or reflection
- Creative activities
- Physical activity
- Taking breaks from social media

Watch For

- Reluctance to go to school or complaints about not feeling well in the morning.
- Stomachaches or headaches.
- Trouble falling asleep, bad dreams, or nightmares.
- Changes in appetite.
- Difficulty concentrating; drop in schoolwork or completion.
- Irritability, anger, or conflict at home or with friends that seems out of character.
- Pulling away from friends, teams, or activities they used to care about.
- Persistent worry about safety – reluctance to attend school, assemblies, or crowded spaces.
- Risk-taking or rule-breaking that is new for them.
- Early experimentation with alcohol, vaping, or other substances.
- Excessive focus on social media coverage.

High School Ages 14–18

What They May Understand

Teenagers often think deeply about loss, trauma, resilience, and community. Some may feel pressure to appear strong or support younger siblings and friends.

Helpful Messages

- “You don’t have to compare your experience to anyone else’s.”
- “It’s okay if your feelings have changed over the past year.”
- “Healing isn’t a straight line.”
- “Seeking help is a sign of strength.”
- “Faith doesn’t mean having an explanation. It means not feeling alone.”
- “It’s okay to bring anger or confusion into your prayers.”

Conversation Starters

- “How are you doing as the Day of Remembrance approaches?”
- “What feels most important to remember?”
- “How can the community best support one another?”

If Asked About the Event

That’s a hard question. I may not have all the answers, but I’ll be honest with you about what I know. There are many people working to make our school as safe as possible, and you can always come to me when you have questions or concerns.”

Another response could be, “I do not know the answer to that, and I don’t want to guess. But I am willing to talk about it with you.” Ultimately it is important to acknowledge and validate and respond honestly.

Watch For

- Reluctance to go to school or complaints about not feeling well in the morning.
- Physical complaints, such as stomachaches or headaches.
- Increased anxiety or depression.
- Withdrawal from friends/family or activities they used to care about.
- Irritability or anger.
- Changes in sleep or appetite.
- Difficulty concentrating; drop in grades, or completion of schoolwork.
- Increased drug or alcohol use.
- Excessive focus on social media coverage.
- Persistent worry about safety – reluctance to attend school events, assemblies, or be in crowded spaces.

College-Age Young Adults

What They May Understand

Young adults may be processing their personal experiences while also reflecting on how the event affected the larger community. Some may feel unexpected emotions despite being in a different stage of life.

Helpful Messages

- “A Day of Remembrance can bring up feelings we don’t expect.”
- “Your relationship with what happened may continue to change.”
- “It’s okay to revisit supports that were helpful in the past.”
- “You can hold grief and faith at the same time.”

Conversation Starters

- “What has been on your mind lately?”
- “Has your perspective changed over the past year?”
- “What feels meaningful to you on this Day of Remembrance?”

Helpful Reminder

Being away from the community on the Day of Remembrance can bring unexpected feelings of isolation or disconnection. Consider reaching out to people who shared the experience or understand its significance – but again, to what degree people engage, is up to them.

Helpful Approaches

- Encourage connection with friends and family.
- Honor personal ways of remembering.
- Focus on both remembrance and hope.

Adult-to-Adult Conversations

What Adults May Experience

Parents, staff members, volunteers, parish members, and community supporters may be carrying their own memories while also helping children and others cope. Some adults may experience stronger emotions than they expected as the Day of Remembrance approaches.

Helpful Messages

- “This week may bring up a lot of emotions.”
- “Everyone’s experience of that day was different.”
- “It’s okay to revisit grief, fear, gratitude, or other feelings.”
- “You don’t have to carry this alone.”
- “You are allowed to be affected even when your role is to support others.”

Conversation Starters

- “How are you doing as we approach the Day of Remembrance?”
- “What has helped you over the past year?”
- “What feels important to remember today?”

Supportive Responses

- “Thank you for sharing that.”
- “That makes sense.”
- “I can understand why you’d feel that way.”
- “There is no right or wrong way for you to feel.”
- “You’re not alone.”
- “I’m here to listen.”

Avoid Saying

- “You should be over this by now.”
- “Others had it worse.”
- “At least...”
- Anything that minimizes someone’s experience or feelings.

Helpful Reminder

A temporary increase in memories, emotions, sleep difficulties, irritability, physical complaints, or desire for connection around a significant date can occur and does not necessarily mean someone is experiencing a setback. Additionally, reactions do not follow a calendar. Some people may feel relief after the Day of Remembrance, and others may experience stronger emotions afterward. Continue to make support available in the days and weeks that follow.

When Someone May Need Additional Support

Children, teens and adults may show some of these signs leading up to and around the Day of Remembrance, and most will ease over the following weeks. Reach out for help if these changes are intense, persist beyond a few weeks, or are interfering with school, work, sleep, eating, or friendships.

Consider connecting with a counselor, mental health professional, clergy member, or trusted support person if someone is experiencing:

- Persistent anxiety or panic
- Nightmares or sleep difficulties
- Significant withdrawal from activities or relationships
- Difficulty functioning at school, work, or home
- Ongoing emotional distress that feels overwhelming
- Feelings of helplessness/hopelessness

For all school children and parents, support is available at Washburn@annunciationmsp.org. For parish and community members, support is available through Community Outreach for Psychiatric Emergencies (COPE) at 612-596-1223.

If Someone Talks About Hurting Themselves

Take it seriously, stay with them, and connect them to a school counselor, mental health professional, or the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (call or text 988) the same day. Asking a young person directly whether they are having these thoughts does not put the idea in their head.

A Final Thought

The Day of Remembrance is not about reliving what happened. It is an opportunity to honor those affected, acknowledge the strength of the Annunciation community, support one another, and remember that healing looks different for everyone. Whether someone chooses to talk, reflect quietly, pray, participate in memorial activities, or simply be present, each person's experience deserves respect, compassion, and care.



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