**How To Cover a Mass Shooting in America**

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1. Use the phrases *shots rang out, gunfire rained down, the community is stunned*, and *a seemingly endless series of shootings.* There is no need to get creative.

2. Show, on a loop, medium shots of law enforcement rushing to the scene. FBI, DEA, ATF, SWAT teams; all the letters. Show them all carrying assault weapons, in armored vehicles, with radios, with bullet proof vests, rushing rushing, talking talking. Milling. Looking busy. Good guys with guns looking busy. Intersperse long shots of the store where it happened. Or the campus. Or parking lot. Or church/synagogue/driveway/stadium/school/restaurant/car/dance studio/massage parlor/bus stop/park/ice cream shop/gas station/funeral home/intersection/bank/beach/apartment complex/hookah bar/birthday party/nightclub.

3. Mention the age range of the victims who were killed. The bigger the range, the greater the impact so make sure to mention it more than once if time allows. Refer to older victims as *grandfather of two* or *grandmother of six* whenever possible. Identify other adults by their occupations. As a last option, mention religious activities, i.e. *Avid churchgoer.*

4. Be careful when you mention children. You can say: *The man handed his two-year-old to a stranger so he could attend to his dying wife.* Or, *The woman hid her children in a dumpster in an alley in the hopes they would not be shot.* But don’t address the trauma this may have inflicted. If you mention it at all, say *the child had nightmares after the shooting*. Or *the child dreamed of being Batman so he could overtake the killer.* Don’t dwell on the terror they must have felt. Don’t detail what a gun like that does to a small, soft body. Avoid this. People will stop reading.

5. Thank law enforcement for their hard work apprehending the suspect. Even if apprehending the suspect mean driving to his mother’s house and pulling him out of the basement where he was playing video games, having showered and made a sandwich after the shooting.

6. Thank law enforcement for their bravery and for rushing in to stop the shooting. Even if they didn’t rush in. You can change that later. Or not.

7. Do not refer to people who were almost shot or just ran for their lives or hid in fear as *victims* even though they will spend the rest of their lives reliving this day/evening/night/experience. Focus on the dead.

8. Don’t bring up Newtown. If you do, don’t give the stats. 20 dead first graders was supposed to be a watershed event. It wasn’t. No one wants to think about that. If you’re forced to mention it, don’t run those school photos again. Those smiling close ups, those beautiful faces. It’s too much. Really, it is.

9. Similarly, avoid focusing on Columbine. If you have to mention it though, since it was the first of these sorts of things, mention that protocol for dealing with school shooters changed to be more proactive after Columbine—that the standard operating procedure is now to confront the shooter immediately. Don’t follow this up with what happened at Uvalde. Your story isn’t about accountability.

10. Interview someone who says they *Never thought it would happen here.* Don’t ask why they never thought that. Interview someone who says *I thought it was firecrackers. I thought it was a car backfiring. I thought it was a speaker malfunctioning.*

11. Quote a lawmaker (Congressman, Governor, Mayor) as saying this was *a lone wolf,* *a loner, a one off* or someone who *struggled with their mental health.* Imply that this was the work of a disturbed individual completely divorced from outside influence and therefore random. Therefore unpreventable. A true tragedy.

12. Quote a lawmaker or law enforcement person saying it is *Too soon to talk about policy change* in terms of how we handle the access to weapons in America. Briefly mention assault weapons bans. Or red flag laws and how *some people believe* they may have helped prevent this. Don’t mention that, if put into effect, these laws would result in too many police officers being disqualified from carrying their service weapons due to domestic violence charges. Don’t mention the connection between DV and people who commit mass shootings.

13. Don’t say *thoughts and prayers*. This is polling badly.

14. Quote someone saying *God Bless America*. Or *God Bless* (fill in latest community name). Quote someone saying they’ll *Come back stronger*. *More united*. Mention resiliency. Film a banner or a sign or a t-shirt saying (fill in latest community name) *Strong* or (fill in latest community name) *United*. If you can film this at a candlelight vigil, all the better.

15. Quote family members as saying the victims *Lit up every room they entered.* Or *Always had a smile for everyone.* Or *were taken too soon*. Reference angel imagery i.e. wings or praying hands or clouds or heaven.

16. Interview people who believe the answer is more guns. Interview people who believe the answer is thicker doors or see through backpacks or metal boxes big enough for children to hide in.

17. Do not talk about how America was founded on genocide. Founded on massacre. Don’t connect the dots across the centuries of hatred and entitlement that allows us to think our right to carry weapons supersedes our right to keep children alive.

18. When you mention mental health and the lack of funding in this area don’t talk about the children as canaries in the coal mine. As indicators of how lost we actually are. How frightened. How too many boys and men harbor these violent fantasies and why that might be. Be vague when you mention mental health. As if enough therapists could solve this problem. As if enough crisis lines or hospital beds could fix this. As if it’s not about something insidious and deep that the guns are expressing.

19. Keep it under 1000 words. Attention spans are dwindling.