

Helping Our Children in Difficult Times

What can we say to children when public tragedies and upsetting events occur? Should we shield them from the news? How can we reassure them and help them feel safe? Here is some advice from early childhood experts that may be helpful.

1. Listen and talk to your child.

- There is no need to tell young children about disastrous world events. However, children often pick up information at preschool, on TV news, or from adult conversations. You may want to find out what your child has heard by asking: *Did you hear anything about ...?*
- Respect your child's attempts to make sense of what happened. You want your child to feel comfortable talking with you about confusing things.
- Children often express thoughts and worries through their play. Listen and watch. You may want to gently join in and help your child work through the scary parts.
- Answer questions honestly but briefly. Use simple words.

2. Help your children feel safe.

- The most important thing for children to know is that they are safe and that you will take care of them.
- Enjoy lots of family togetherness, talking and cuddling.
- Children may be aware that you are worried and upset. This can make them feel scared. Talk about your feelings. Acknowledge that a bad thing has happened, but try to be reassuring and optimistic.
- Keep daily routines as normal as possible. It helps children feel comfortable. Do chores, read stories, and watch favorite TV shows together.
- Avoid adult conversations about disasters in front of young children.
- Protect young children from seeing violent images on TV news.

3. Become a helper.

- Help your child notice the many things caring people in your family, community, and the world are doing to help others.
- As your family reaches out to others, try to find ways your child can also participate. For example, children can donate outgrown toys to family shelters, do simple chores for elderly neighbors, or participate in a community park clean-up or walk for hunger.
- Violent events remind us how important it is to find ways to solve our problems peacefully. Help your child learn to respect others, appreciate diversity, and find healthy ways to resolve daily conflicts.



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