



In times of crisis



IMAGINE STEPPING INTO
YOUR CHILD'S WORLD AND
SEEING THINGS FROM HIS
OR HER POINT OF VIEW.

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Helping your child cope during times of violence

News of school violence and shootings frightens children. Adults know that these events are rare, but children do not. Children often think that the same thing will happen in their school or home. As parents, we need to help our children deal with their fears or confusion.

I am concerned about my child becoming stressed over the violence happening around us. What can I do?

Have open *talk time* with them. Let them talk about the things that they fear and don't understand. Tell them what has happened in a way that they can handle. Try not to scare them, but be honest. If children think that you are hiding something, they may become scared and lose trust in you. Tell them that it is all right to feel a little scared and that you will do what you can to keep them safe. Talk about other people who can help keep them safe like teachers, police officers, soldiers, firefighters, as well as the President.

Children feel less afraid when they think that they have some control in their world. Let them pick out what they will wear the next day or choose what to eat for dinner. Think about letting them volunteer in your community.

Keep to your normal schedule as much as possible. Children like and need routines.

Be careful about how much news they watch. (See *Helping children cope with the media during times of unrest* in this series for more information on this subject.)

Help your child continue to enjoy life and have fun in daily activities. In fact, it is important that they do so.

My nine-year-old son has become very worried and uneasy after shootings in our city. What can I do to help?

How have you reacted to these events? Children pick up on their parents's feelings and copy them. They often reflect how we feel. If you are worried, they will be too. It's all right to let your children know that you are feeling sad and worried, but not powerless or hopeless. This turns their world upside down and frightens them. Parents need to show children that they can still handle things even if they don't know all the answers.

It is normal for children to worry about violence. Deep sadness, worry, and high anxiety are not normal. If you see this behavior for several weeks, you might want to seek help.

Our seven-year-old daughter has had several nightmares about terrorist events. She dreams that the bad men will fly into our house. Should we be worried?

It is normal for children to have dreams about what is happening around them. This is a time when extra love and attention are important. Give her extra hugs and kisses or back rubs. Spend more time with her doing things that are comforting. For younger children, try spending more time putting them to bed, brushing their hair or sitting with them until they go to sleep. Extra stuffed toys or an extra night-light may also help.

This is a time to really listen to her so that you understand how she feels. During times of crisis, we are so busy with our own problems that we may forget to listen to our children. Let your child know that it is all right to be sad or angry and that it is okay to cry. Ask your child if there is anything that you can do to help her feel better.

What should I think if my daughter refuses to talk about the recent school violence that killed one of her friends?

Some children try to hide how they feel about painful issues by refusing to talk or pretending not to care. You can't force your child to talk, but you can give her opportunities. Very young children often find it easier to talk while playing. Use puppets, stuffed animals or drawing to help your child talk to you. Older children may open up if they are riding in a car, playing a game of catch, or washing the car. Talk with the school to see if they plan to offer grief counseling for the students.

The sooner you are able to get your child to open up and talk about her feelings the sooner she can heal. Respect your daughter's way of coping. Try writing her a note to say why you think she should talk to someone. Give her some options, including: *who to talk to* (parent, clergy, counselor, other family member, etc.), *when to talk* (today, tomorrow, next Tuesday?), and *where* (alone in the family room, in a larger family meeting, while taking a walk, etc.).

I am a single parent who was sent overseas right after a school shooting in our community. My child is living with her aunt while I am gone. How will this affect my child?

Although it is not easy for a child to be away from a parent, if they are with an adult that they know and trust, they should be able to work through problems. It will help for them to stay in touch with their parent. The school may have ways to help students. It is hard to tell how any child will respond to community events. The caretaker (her aunt, in this case) should watch your child for any problems.

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