



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

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In times of crisis

How to help your children cope during times of uncertainty

How much should I tell my children about a tragic event?

Well-meaning adults may try to protect children by sheltering them from current events. However, it is impossible to keep children from knowing about something bad that happens. It is especially difficult when talk of tragedy is on nearly every TV and radio station. It is important to note that children—especially young children—do not benefit from watching footage of the violence or by hearing graphic, detailed descriptions. Although adults may want to watch ongoing news coverage of a tragic event, children have a limited ability to understand what is happening. Therefore, children may become even more upset as footage continues to be broadcast and information is updated.

Overhearing adult discussions about news events can scare and confuse children. However, children can benefit from knowing basic, accurate information about what is happening. Children also need a chance to understand the information they hear at school, at a friend's house, or in the media. Parents need to show children that it is okay to share their feelings about the tragedies. We can encourage our children to ask us questions and to share their feelings with us or another trusted adult. Talking about tragic events is an important way children and adults can begin to cope with them.

I have tried to ask my child how he feels about tragic events, but he doesn't seem interested. Should I insist that he talk to me?

It is important to encourage children to share their feelings. It is just as important to understand when they don't want to talk. The fact that children continue to play and have fun can be comforting to parents. It is healthy for children to act normally.

- Make sure children know you are approachable. Tell them that they can talk to you about their feelings. If you cannot answer their questions, you can look for the answers together.
- Help children find creative outlets. Drawing, dancing, music and playing with puppets and dolls are all ways that children can express themselves. Sometimes children can't put their feelings into words. Creative play might help them find an outlet for their emotions.

Tragedies can seem overwhelming. How can I help my children keep going?

In times of crisis and tragedy, it is important to keep things as normal as possible. Keeping the same meal times, bed times, and other daily routines can help children feel secure because they know what to expect. Allow some flexibility for any extra needs your child might have. For example, a child may want to add a prayer for the victims to his/her bedtime routine. Or, if extracurricular activities are cancelled, the child may want to spend that time drawing pictures or writing letters about the crisis.

I feel scared and angry. How do I hide my feelings from my children?

- Share your own feelings with your children. This shows them that it is okay to share feelings. Children can benefit from hearing that you, too, are upset, sad, scared, and angry. However, be careful not to overwhelm children.
- Share your feelings with other adults. Adults should not lean on children for support. They look to adults for security. A child can benefit from seeing a parent's emotions. However, showing too much emotion can scare a child. Therefore, it is important that adults have their own support system.

How can I help my child feel safe?

Children need reassurance. Be honest but comforting. Tell children what you are doing to keep them safe. Ask them what would help them feel safer. Most importantly, remind children that you love them and always will.

My child feels really bad for the victims and their families. How can I help him deal with these feelings?

Children may be very worried about people hurt in the tragedies. It is good for children to feel for others. Children may want to help. They may want to write letters or draw pictures to express their feelings. They may want to help organize a fundraiser. Let children be creative and support their efforts to be helpful.

What other feelings might my child have?

Besides fear, children may feel angry and sad. They can also feel confused or guilty. Children think that the world revolves around them. They may feel responsible when bad things happen.

Help children feel comfortable and encourage them to share their feelings. Ask your child how he feels. Help him identify his emotions. Once you learn what is making him feel badly, you can help him feel better.

How can I teach my child that tragic events are not caused by a whole religion or ethnic group of people?

This is a good time to teach children about prejudice. It is important for children to learn that it is wrong to blame a whole group of people for what one person, or a few people, may have done.