

Talking with Children About Scary Things

Tragic news stories, especially those involving schools, can be quite scary for children. Parents can help teach children about the state of the world or what's happening nearby without causing undue stress on their systems. How children receive information about violent events can greatly affect their body's ability to process this information.

Here are some suggestions to help your children learn about scary events without causing them undue stress:

REDUCE EXPOSURE TO GRAPHIC IMAGES AND WORDS—TURN THE NEWS OFF:

Turn the TV and radio off when children are around. Child brains and vocabulary just can't handle this type of information - they don't understand enough about cause and effect. Any information that needs to be shared should be delivered by you as a parent, at the child's level and with frightening images removed.

ASK, "DO YOU HAVE ANY MORE QUESTIONS?"

Provide information about the event with neutral language as I mentioned above, and then ask if your child has questions. Let your child lead you through what they need to hear.

Parents likely don't know what children have heard at school or around others so providing the child with an opportunity to explain what they have heard and asking questions they have is a great way to facilitate understanding.

BE A CALM, RATIONAL ROLE MODEL

Your children are continually watching how you handle things. If you are upset, they will be upset. Work hard to calm yourself down and talk as little as possible about the scare event to others in front of children.

Events and images, particularly ones involving harm to children, are upsetting for most parents so it is okay that we feel sad, even cry, but try to not allow yourself to get into a frenzy.

HELP YOUR CHILDREN BE CALM AND FEEL SAFE:

Remind your children that they they are safe. and. When a child has questions such as, "Why did this happen?" or "Am I safe?" remind them that although these events get a lot of press time, they are actually quite rare and usually very far away. Talk about the many people who work every day to keep kids safe, such as police officers, teachers, or the school principal.

For more info on helping your child understand and cope with violence and death, please check out these resources:

- National Association of School Psychologists on [Talking to Children About Violence](#)
- [Explaining the news to our kids](#) from Common Sense Media.

And finally, here is some wonderful and truly helpful advice from [Mr. Rogers](#): *"When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, "Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping." To this day, especially in times of "disaster," I remember my mother's words and I am always comforted by realizing that there are still so many helpers—so many caring people in this world."*