

Talking to Children About News Events



Children's lives are touched by difficult news on a regular basis. It is very difficult to shield children from bad news so it is important to talk to our kids about what is happening. **Taking an active approach and discussing difficult events in age-appropriate ways can help a child feel safer and more secure.** Children often learn or know when something sad or scary happens. If adults don't talk to them about it, a child may misjudge the danger or misunderstand adults' silence. So, be the first to bring up the difficult topic to reduce stress and worry in kids.

Where to Start

Parents can start by asking a child what they've already heard. Most children will have heard something, no matter how old they are. After you ask them what they've heard, ask what questions they have. Kids of all ages benefit from straightforward information. Older children and teens may have more questions or wish to have more detailed conversations.

Avoid Graphic Details & Exposure to Media

In general, it is best to **share basic information** with children, not graphic details, or unnecessary details about the news. It's best to keep children away from repetitive graphic images and sounds on [television](#), radio, social media, computers, etc.

With older children, try to review, listen, read or watch information together so you can stop and discuss the news as needed. Older children often have access to the news and graphic images through social media and other applications. Be aware of what's out there and take steps in advance to talk to children about what they might hear or see.

Guide the conversation

Think about what you want to say. It's OK to practice in your head, to a mirror or with another adult. Some advanced planning may make the discussion easier.

Find a quiet moment. Perhaps this is after dinner or while making the next day's lunch. This is time and place where your children can be the center of your attention.

Find out what they know. Ask them "What have you heard about this?" And then listen...

Share your feelings with your child. It is OK to acknowledge your feelings with your children. You can teach your child that emotions are natural and help us get through difficult times,

Tell the truth. Lay out the facts at a level they can understand. Avoid graphic details and it's ok to say, "I don't know."

Above all, reassure. At the end of the conversation, reassure your children that you will do everything you know how to do to keep them safe and to watch out for them. Reassure them that you will be available to answer any questions or talk about this topic again in the future. Reassure them that they are loved.

Take care of yourself

Difficult news and tragedies can be exhausting for us all. Remember to take care of yourself:

- Turn off the news
- Turn off notifications on devices
- Take a break.
- Engage in physical activity.
- Do something that will lift your spirits and those of your family.

Signs a Child Might Not Be Coping Well

Some of things to look for are:

- **Sleep problems:** Watch for trouble falling asleep or staying asleep, difficulty waking, [nightmares](#), or other sleep disturbances.
- **Physical complaints:** Children may complain of feeling tired, having a [headache](#), or generally feeling unwell. You may notice your child eating too much or less than usual.
- **Changes in behavior or emotions:** Look for changes like becoming more irritable, clingy, withdrawn, sad or fearful.

Seek Professional Help

If you are feeling stuck, overwhelmed or your child shows persistent signs of stress, you may want to consider talking to someone who could help. Your child's pediatrician or a licensed mental health professional can assist you in making a plan. .

Information borrowed from American Psychological Association Help Center (APA.org) and American Academy of Pediatrics Healthy Children (www.healthychildren.org)

Additional resources

- [Tips for Talking With and Helping Children and Youth Cope After a Disaster or Traumatic Event – a guide for parents, caregivers, and teachers \(PDF, 300KB\)](#) - SAMHSA.gov
- [Explaining the News to Our Kids](#) - CommonSenseMedia.org
- [Children & Grief: Guidance and Support Resources](#) - Scholastic.com
- [The Road to Resilience](#) - APA.org
- [Promoting Adjustment and Helping Children Cope](#) (AAP.org)
- [Communicating with Children and Families: From Everyday Interactions to Skill in Conveying Distressing Information](#) (AAP.org)