



TALKING WITH CHILDREN ABOUT DIFFICULT THINGS IN THE NEWS

During times of tragedy and difficulty in the news, we may think - or even hope - that children are unaware of what is happening. However, children are more aware than we know and are especially sensitive to the moods and conversations of adults around them. Here are some ideas and considerations for supporting children when the news in the world is difficult:

- When the world feels uncertain and the news is scary, we can help children feel safe by letting children know we will always care for them and love them, no matter what.
- Proactively talk with children about major events you expect they will hear about in school, see online, or overhear in adult conversations. Given how quickly news is shared, you may not be the first person to let a young person know about major news. Even still, you can share what you believe is important for the child to know and help them see that the difficult news is not something they have to know or wonder about alone.
- Do your best to limit a child's exposure to upsetting images and commentary intended for adults. And, know that it may not be possible to completely stop a child from hearing or seeing things that are not appropriate for them to witness. This reality makes it even more important for caring adults to take care to limit media intake and directly talk with children about the feelings and thoughts they might have about what they see and hear.

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"When children bring up something frightening, it's helpful right away to ask them what they know about it. We often find that their fantasies are very different from the actual truth. What children probably need to hear most from us adults, is that they can talk with us about anything and that we will do all we can to keep them safe in any scary time."

- Fred Rogers, September 2001

- Let children know you are always open to their questions. Before you answer a question, it can help to ask the child, “What do you think?” or “What have you heard?” Sometimes, children may understand more than we realize, may have heard incorrect information, or may even have a much simpler question than we assume. If you know more about what the child is wondering, it can help you give a simple and honest answer.
- It’s okay if you don’t know an answer to the child’s question. You can let them know, “I wonder about that, too” and that you will share as you learn more. It can help to ask the child more about what they are feeling. Simply listening to the child’s feelings around their uncertainty can help them feel safe.
- Let children know that their feelings are always safe with you, whether they are feeling worried, angry, sad, or anything at all. As Fred Rogers reminds us, *“anything that’s human is mentionable, and anything that’s mentionable can be more manageable.”*
- Difficult news takes a toll on all of us. To care for the children in our lives, it is important to care for ourselves. Set boundaries around your own news intake, take moments to rest, and find a support network for yourself.
- Even when you are overwhelmed, unsure of what to say, or are struggling, your presence and openness to a child’s thoughts and questions are what let them know they are not alone. As Fred Rogers reminds us, *“When the gusty winds blow and shake our lives, if we know that people care about us, we may bend with the wind...but we won’t break.”*

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“I have been terribly concerned about the graphic display of violence which the mass media has been showing recently. And, I plead for your protection and support of your young children. There is just so much that a very young child can take without it being overwhelming to him. I have been, very frankly, quite concerned about it. And that’s one of the reasons that I wanted to talk with you today. The best thing in the world is for your children to be included in your family’s ways of coping with the problems that present themselves anytime but particularly now, in this very difficult time in our nation.”

- Fred Rogers, June 1968

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