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How to Talk to Children About the News

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There can be many scary stories and images on the news, including school violence, terrorist attacks, natural disasters, and most recently, epidemics. Watching these news reports can make kids worry that they or their loved ones may experience similar events. Parents can help kids work through these feelings and deal with the disturbing stories they see on the news in a healthy and calming way.

Some children, depending on their age and/or maturity level, do not quite understand the difference between fantasy and fact. This can cause them to worry when they see disturbing stories on the news, or even in commercials, TV shows, or movies. Media sometimes makes the world seem more dangerous than it really is. For kids who feel scared or worried about current events, there are several things adults can do to help them work through these feelings:



1. Wait until they are older:

Unless kids bring up difficult topics, it is recommended to only address these topics once kids are approximately 7 years old. Younger children may not be able to handle the tough news until they are older.



2. Keep it black and white:

It might be easier to describe difficult things to kids in a “gray” or vague way. But they need to be comforted that the cruel things they see on the news won’t happen to them. This may be difficult for parents to tell kids because they may feel like they are lying; however, no one can be completely sure of what the future holds, so it is more reassuring for kids to keep things black and white.



3. Ask questions:

Don’t assume you know how kids feel. Ask questions to gauge their understanding of difficult topics and to find out if they are afraid or just curious. This will help you to correct any wrong beliefs and offer a positive viewpoint on the events.



4. Don’t label feelings as wrong:

Never make kids feel bad about their emotions. Validate their feelings and let them know it is okay to be scared, nervous, or any other emotion they are feeling. Encourage kids to talk openly about what scares them.



5. Use it as a teaching moment:

Having discussions about bad things can lead to talking about compassion. These discussions might include talking about donating to a relief organization or making dinner for a neighbor who uses a wheelchair. Finding ways to help those affected by a tragic event can give kids a sense of control and security.



6. Monitor kids’ TV and online viewing habits:

Watch the news together with your kids to screen frightening or inappropriate stories. If you are uncomfortable with the stories on the news, turn the TV off.



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(cont.)

There are many scary things that happen locally and around the world that can make kids worry or feel unsafe. It is important to talk to kids about these events in a way that is appropriate for their maturity levels, validates their feelings, and calms their fears. These difficult situations can be turned into great teaching moments to help kids understand how to help and serve others. Kids will look to adults as examples of how to cope with difficult things they see on the news, so it is important to know how to handle these situations when they arise.



Resources:

- "5 Tips on Talking to Kids About Scary News," Parenting, accessed May 15, 2018, <https://www.parenting.com/article/5-tips-on-talking-to-kids-about-scary-news>
- "How to Talk to Your Child about the News," KidsHealth, accessed March 3, 2020, <https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/news.html?WT.ac=p-woar>
- "School Violence and the News," KidsHealth, accessed June 12, 2017, <https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/school-violence.html?WT.ac=p-ra>

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