

Talking to children when the news is scary

While modern technology is beneficial and helps you know what is going on throughout the world, it's become all too easy for children to be exposed to upsetting news.

Whether it's coverage of community violence, the latest natural disaster or countries at war, children have trouble fully understanding and processing news events. They can become frightened and begin to worry, with anxious emotions that can last long after the news broadcast is over.

Discussing the news and current events with kids

Whether you are a parent, teacher or caregiver, there are several ways to help children make sense of local, national and world events.

Give age-appropriate facts and proper context

Begin a conversation with reassuring words. "I know the news is scary (or sad). You are safe here with me." Ask what children know about the situation and address any misinformation. Inquire how it makes them feel and share that every emotion they are experiencing is normal and okay. Each child may ask different questions and need different responses from you. Depending on the child, it may be a visual support, a brief explanation or just a hug and reminder that you are here for them.

Avoid labels

When children ask, "Why did this happen?" try not to use descriptions such as "bad people" did "something evil." Doing so may lead to more fear or confusion for the child. You may not always have the answer when tragic things occur and it's perfectly okay to say, "I don't know why." Depending on a child's age, it may be beneficial to explain that people can make bad decisions when acting out of pain, fear or are not well.

Check in regularly with your child

After your discussion, check in with the child during a quiet moment. Talk during meals, in the car or at bedtime. Ask "What are you thinking about or feeling?" Open-ended questions allow the child to reflect, talk about what may be bothering them and ask more questions that may have come to mind. Try to address their concerns without dismissing or minimizing.

Focus on the good around you and in your community

When talking about current events, it's important to balance negative news by focusing on the positive, as well. Talk about the good in your community, nation and the world. Explain there are many people who are helping others. Highlight examples of good things others are doing to help or to heal.