

Five things you can do to help your children deal with bad things in the news

In a month where the news is covering terrorist bombings, school shootings, decade-long kidnappings and an attempted kidnapping practically in our own backyard, it is very difficult to shelter your kids from all the bad things in the news. When they hear about it at school or hear snippets on TV, you need to have a plan on how to talk to them. It's not realistic to think that you can shelter them from the information. So how do you deal with it?

1. **Limit Media Exposure.** That said, it's helpful to limit media exposure. Even when younger children appear to be engaged in play, they often are aware of their surroundings and hear what is being said on the television, computer or radio. Repeated exposure to the scary sounds and frightening images can be confusing and difficult for children to understand. Turn off the TV when your child is present and try to limit your own exposure to the 24-hour news cycle. Children's reactions to frightening times are strongly influenced by how their parents and caregivers respond to the bombings. Ongoing and repeated exposure to these events can make us feel helpless, vulnerable, and anxious and children can sense when their parents are distressed.
2. **Talking and Listening.** We need to acknowledge that our children are hearing things and that they need to be able to talk to their parents about it. We want to gauge what they know and what they want to know. We want to send the signal that the door is open to talk about it and meet them where they are at, just like in the "birds and bees" talk. It's important to understand that the reactions will be different based on each individual child. Talk about the event with your child. Social media makes it very difficult to monitor your child's exposure and it is very likely your child is already aware of these incidents. By bringing up the topic, you have the opportunity to gently correct any inaccurate information or misconceptions they may have. Ask your child what they already know or what they think happened and takes the time to give them correct information in simple, age-appropriate language. Encourage them to ask questions and remember that it's ok to say, "I don't know" if you don't have the answer to their questions. Let your child know that it's ok to feel **sad, scared**, or even **angry** about scary events. Try to avoid having these conversations too close to bedtime. Some kids have strong emotional reactions like shock, anger, sadness, fear, and anxiety about their safety and the safety of their loved ones; children may also experience sleep and eating difficulties and physical complaints, such as headaches and stomachaches, in the aftermath of a traumatic event. Some children will have difficulty paying attention or concentrating, while others may become irritable or defiant, physically aggressive, or begin acting out. Children may also become clingier, have difficulty separating from their caregivers, wish to sleep in their caregiver's bed, or ask to stay home from school. Most of these reactions generally diminish over time but knowing what to look for and expect now can help with early intervention.

3. **Provide comfort and physical affection.** Physical comfort can go a long way toward providing inner security for your child and also provide nourishment for you as well. Remind your children that their parents and caregivers are doing all they can to take care of them and to keep them safe.
4. **Keep regular routines and maintain family expectations and rules.** Maintain regular mealtimes, bedtimes, and extra-curricular activity schedules. Stick with family rules about curfews, chores, homework, and checking in with caregivers when away from home. Regular and familiar routines can be comforting for both children and adults.
5. **Focus on the helpers.** Remind your child that there are so many helpers who are involved in the immediate aftermath of difficult events. Focus their attention on the many police, firemen, doctors, soldiers, and good citizens who help us. Reassure them that there are many more caring people in the world who are doing all that they can to help others in this world than bad guys.

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