

April 2018

## Talking With Your Child about Violence & Disasters

Catastrophic events are no longer limited to the morning papers or local news, but they're on the radio in the car, the podcasts we listen to as we make dinner together, or on the Facebook pages they see. Kids talk about these events in school, on the bus and the playground. Kids *know* these things are happening, and as adults, we need to know how to talk with them about terrorism, disasters, and violence.

First, all children need to feel safe. As adults, we know that we can never fully protect them. Natural disasters will destroy homes and unfortunately, terrorists will attack innocent. In response, we need to be prepared to communicate with children the things they need to hear:

- **Tell them that they are loved and that although terrible things happen, you and others work so hard to keep them safe.** "You are so loved, and yes, some really awful things happen in the world, things that even we as adults can't understand. But it is our job, and the job of adults, to keep you safe."
- **Acknowledge that there are people who do hurt others, but their numbers are so much smaller than those who help.** "There are some bad people out there, but there are so many more good people, such as police, doctors, teachers, moms and dads, friends and family, who will take care of you." For younger children, talk about all the people in their lives who love them and care about their well-being. Talk about times when good people have helped you, such as a time when your car was in an accident and someone called 911 for you, or about the person who found your lost cat.
- **Let them know that there are things they can do to help.** Talk with them about all the different ways that people help, such as the volunteers who provided showers, cooked food, brought in blankets and toys and clothes for those impacted by a disaster. Show them stories about children who have raised money or run a food drive or collected items for those in need, and talk about ways that they might want to help too.

We need to acknowledge the violence and suffering and fear and hate. But we cannot forget to talk about strength and the goodness in people, about helping one another. We can't protect our children 100% of the time. But we can help them feel safer and empowered so that they are not crippled by fear of the unknown. When children feel like they can help, they will be more inclined to believe that when they are scared or hurting, others will help them. This is also how we can build resilience in our children.

Modified from: <https://blogs.psychcentral.com/your-life/2017/10/talking-with-your-child-about-violence-terrorism-and-disasters/>

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