

Helping Children Cope After A Traumatic Event



With all the media coverage surrounding current events, do you ever wonder how much our children are taking in – how much they understand about what is going on? Have you ever thought about the impact traumatic events, such as the loss of a friend, gun violence, or the pandemic, are having on our children? As parents and caregivers, how do you respond – do you have open conversations with your children? For many of us, it can be difficult to find the right way to move through these conversations or respond appropriately.

Seven Strategies to Initiate Conversation

- Let the child lead the discussion
- Clarify any misconceptions
- Limit exposure
- Don't dismiss feelings
- Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know."
- Look for the helpers
- Take positive action together

Starting the conversation

Our children have important jobs to do as they grow up - discovering the world, learning who they are and how to manage such "big" feelings and/or emotions.

- **Let the child lead the discussion.** Ask children what they have heard and how they feel about it.
- **Clarify any misconceptions.** This is particularly important for young children. For example: If kids see a video clip being replayed on the news, they may not realize it is the same footage. They might think it is happening in real time, over and over again.
- **Limit exposure to breaking news.** We can control the amount of information and the amount of exposure.
- **Don't dismiss how a child feels.** For example, if children say they're anxious, don't tell them they have nothing to be anxious about. If they're anxious, ask why. It could be because they're afraid it could happen to them or a loved one. It is important to do some exploring first.
- **Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know."** Sometimes we don't have the answers to all of these whys. It's important for parents to say ... I don't know why it happened.
- **Look for the helpers.** Fred Rogers, the beloved children's TV host, famously passed on this advice from his mother: "When something scary is happening, look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping."
- **Take positive action together.** In other words, don't just look for the helpers ... be the helpers.



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