

Sometimes, news events can evoke many emotions such as sadness, grief, helplessness, anxiety, and anger. Children who are aware of sensitive media content may be struggling with their thoughts and feelings about the stories and images.

Below are tips to discuss issues in the media:

## Ways to Talk to Kids About Sensitive Issues in the News

1. **Decide which adult will start the conversation, as well as which family members will be a part of the discussion.**
2. **Choose a space at home that is comfortable for your child.**
3. **Find out what your child already knows about the incident. Sometimes they are not sure, or they have part of the story.**
  - First, make sure the discussion is necessary. With preschoolers and kindergarten-aged children, unless they are talking about it or showing signs that they have heard about the incident, you do not have to mention it, says child psychologist Tamar Chansky, Ph.D., author of *Freeing Your Child from Anxiety: Powerful, Practical Solutions to Overcome Your Child's Fears, Worries, and Phobias*.
  - Older kids are more likely to hear about incidents from friends or through the media - you should definitely address the issue. Start with an open-ended question like, "Did you hear anything about what happened in the news on....?"
4. **Fill in the missing parts.**
  - This allows you to find out what your child already knows and whether you need to clear up any misinformation.

## 5. Comfort Your Child

- Even if an incident has occurred hundreds of miles away, your child will likely have some feelings about it. Ask what they think and let them share their emotions. Reveal some of your own feelings, such as, "I feel bad for the victim," will help him or her to understand that sadness, confusion, and anger are normal and valid feelings. Give lots of hugs and attention and let your child know you love them and will take care of them.

## 6. Be Open to Kids Fears

- After learning of such an event, your child might worry that something similar might happen to them or someone they know. Provide emotional support by saying, "It's okay to feel sad -- or to not even know how you're feeling."

## 7. Monitor media consumption

- You may be tempted to glue yourself to the TV to find out as much information as you can, but because the graphic nature is unpredictable, it's best to change the channel or turn the TV off when children are present. Images may be inappropriate, and some young children do not realize the report they are seeing on the five o'clock news and then again on the six o'clock news are reshapes of the same event. Young children do not need to see any coverage of the event; it is best for you to provide the information. Because adolescents are more independent (and may search out information on their own), it is okay if they watch an episode of the news and then discuss it.

## 8. Allow Them to Help

- Some children are better able to cope with a tragedy if they feel they are doing something to make it better. If your child is interested, help him or her think of ways to advocate for the victim or comfort the family. Doing things like sending cards to the family, writing a letter, or saying a prayer for the injured can make children feel they are doing some good. Older kids may want to explore youth activism and ways they can get involved in making changes about issues they believe in.

## 9. Save strong emotions for your adult support community.

- You don't have to be a “robot,” but avoid displaying strong emotions related to the tragic incidents around young kids. Kids often get scared when they do not know why parents are upset. Make sure to say, "I'm upset about what I heard on the news. It's not you."

## 10. Watch for Signs of Stress

- Tragic events are difficult for adults to comprehend, it can be even more so for kids. It's normal for children to show some fear and be a little down for a few days after hearing the event. You should also expect your child to ask questions periodically (and sometimes repeatedly). If your child shows signs of extreme stress or anxiety related to the event, such as changes in appetite, difficulty sleeping, aggression, withdrawal from social activities, or trouble concentrating or resistance or prolonged anger or sadness, please seek professional help.

## RESOURCES

- ❖ **Name it, Tame it: Identifying Emotions** - Did you know that learning to identify emotions can help your child build relationships and manage their emotions? In [this](#) video, you'll learn to build your child's emotional vocabulary at any age. <https://vimeo.com/141589159>
- ❖ **Stress Less: Calming Strategies** - Have you ever felt stressed, angry, or frustrated? Have you had a hard time managing those emotions? Chances are, you have. And so, have your children. In [this](#) video, you will find strategies to help your child (and you!) calm down. <https://vimeo.com/141585174>

### Books for kids that deals with Trauma, Grief, and Fear

- The Breaking News by Sarah Lynne Reul (Ages 4-10)
- A Terrible Thing Happened by Margaret Holmes, Sasha Mudlaff and Cary Pillo (Ages 4-8)
- Good People Everywhere by Lynea Gillen (Ages 4-8)
- Whimsy's Heavy Things by Julie Kraulis (Ages 6-11)
- Stories for a teen's heart by A. Gray (Ages 13 and up)
- When Sadness is at Your Door by Eva Eland (All Ages)