

Explaining the News to Our Kids

Children's lives are touched by trauma on a regular basis, no matter how much parents or teachers try to keep the "bad things" away. Instead of shielding children from the dangers, violence or tragedies around us, adults should talk to kids about what is happening.

The conversation may not seem easy, but taking a proactive stance, discussing difficult events in age-appropriate language can help a child feel safer and more secure.

As much as adults may try to avoid difficult topics, children often learn or know when something sad or scary happens. If adults don't talk to them about it, a child may overestimate what is wrong or misunderstand adults' silence. So, be the first to bring up the difficult topic. When parents tackle difficult conversations, they let their children know that they are available and supportive.

Check in. Since, in many instances, teens will have absorbed the news independently of you, talking with them can offer great insights into their developing politics and their senses of justice and morality. It will also help you get a sense of what they already know or have learned about the situation from their own social networks. It will also give you the opportunity to throw your own insights into the mix (just don't dismiss theirs, since that will shut down the conversation immediately).

Let teens express themselves. Many teens will feel passionately about events and may even personalize them if someone they know has been directly affected. Try to address their concerns without dismissing or minimizing them. If you disagree with media portrayals, explain why so your teens can separate the mediums through which they absorb news from the messages conveyed.

(Common Sense Media: <https://www.common sense media.org/blog/explaining-the-news-to-our-kids>)

Guide the Conversation

Think about what you want to say. It's OK to practice in your head, to a mirror or with another adult. Some advanced planning may make the discussion easier. You won't have to think about it off the top of your head.

Find a quiet moment. Perhaps this is after dinner or while making the next day's lunch. This is time and place where your children can be the center of your attention.

Find out what they know. Ask them "What have you heard about this?" And then listen. Listen. Listen. And listen more.

Share your feelings with your child. It is OK to acknowledge your feelings with your children. They see you are human. They also get a chance to see that even though upset, you can pull yourself together and continue on. Parents hear it often: Be a role model. This applies to emotions, too.

Tell the truth. Lay out the facts at a level they can understand. You do not need to give graphic details. Say, "I don't know." Sometimes the answer to the question is "I don't know." "Why did the bad people do this?" "I don't know" fits.

Above all, reassure. Reassure your children that you will do everything you know how to do to keep them safe and to watch out for them. Reassure them that you will be available to answer any questions or talk about this topic again in the future. Reassure them that they are loved

(American Psychological Association: <https://apa.org/helpcenter/talking-to-children.aspx>)