

How to Make Sense of Tragedies Happening in the World: How to Take Care of Yourself and Your Children in Difficult Times

Tragedies that occur around the world can affect all of us, whether you hear about them on the news or belong to a community that is directly impacted. Here are some tips on how to take care of yourself and navigate conversations about difficult events with your children.

Manage Your Own Reactions

It's okay, and expected, that adults are going to have our own reactions to these events. It's also okay to let children see our range of reactions. Your children will be watching you and taking their cues from you. It's okay to let children know you're worried or upset – but be sure to show them how you can stay calm and let them know what helps you feel safe. If you are experiencing strong reactions, try processing with another adult before sharing them with children.

Listen to What They Are Saying

Ask your children what they've heard about the situation. Let them tell you in their own words and answer their questions in an age-appropriate manner. Sometimes it helps to have these conversations during an activity, such as drawing, mealtime, or driving with you in the car.

Spend time listening to understand what children already know.

Answer their questions and explain what's going on using simple words and concepts they can understand.

For Younger Children

Briefly acknowledging the events and providing reassurance may be what they need in the moment.

For Older Children

Kids may be seeing news on social media, so help them make sense of it by finding reliable sources of information together.

Focus on Safety

Help children of all ages to manage their worries by emphasizing that while it is important to know what is going on around the world, these frightening events are occurring far from home. Let them know you will always do your best to keep them safe. Offer reassurance that there are many people focused on ending the situation and helping people who are impacted.

Monitor and Consider Limiting Media Access

Limit media viewing and repeated exposure to distressing images, particularly for younger children. Monitor older children and adolescents' access to media and engage them in conversations with you about what they are seeing and hearing.

Maintain Routines

Sticking to a daily structure helps us all to feel safe and in control. Help children of all ages to maintain their daily routines, while knowing that some flexibility may be needed during this time to help children meet their needs.

Keep the Door Open

Encourage children to come to you with questions or concerns anytime. Let them know that their fears and questions are normal and you will always make time for them.

Practice Self-Care

Engaging in activities that bring us comfort and joy are especially important during challenging times. Consider ways to take care of yourself, and to support your children in practicing their own self-care. Engage in self-care strategies that help fill you up and recharge your battery. Some strategies include spending time with friends and loved ones, taking a walk, engaging in breathing or mindfulness exercises.

If it is meaningful to you, don't hesitate to seek out religious and spiritual support from your religious leaders and community members. Engaging in meaningful prayer can also be soothing in distressing times.

Watch for Behavior Changes

Children may show you through their behavior that they are struggling with what they have seen or heard. They may have physical complaints or regressive behaviors that include nightmares or sleep problems.

If you are concerned about your own or your child's reactions, seek out support from your physician or child's pediatrician, school, or a counselor.