
Violence & Disasters

How can we be helpful to our children in response to social violence and natural disasters that can shatter a child's innocent sense of safety?

Call 253.299.6556 for an appointment.

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and...

1. Do not try to hide anything from the child. Parents sometimes believe that if they do not talk about tragedies then it will protect a child from fear. But children, in one way or another, know as much, if not more, about what is happening in the world than their parents. So not talking about an event only increases a child's inner, unspoken anxiety. And parental silence tells the child that the parent cannot be reliable a source of trust and support.

2. Talk about the event from the child's perspective. Parents often believe that "not talking about" something means telling the child what they themselves believe. But usually, the parents are more anxious than the child, and so they end up making the child anxious. The fact is, children think about things that might not even occur to an adult. For example, hearing that an entire family was killed in a terrorist attack, a young child might not be concerned at all about his or her own death but might be worried about who will take care of the family cat that will be left alone in the house without food if anything happened to the family.

3. Help the child express emotions. Children need help putting complex emotions into words. By listening carefully to the child's concerns, parents can help the child distinguish anger from fear from anxiety from vulnerability from frustration from sadness and so on. Of course, you, the adult, are perfectly capable of sorting out your own emotions, aren't you? Aren't you? We all could use help at times.

4. Do not overwhelm, or "brainwash," a child with your own anxiety. Parents who become overly protective of a child after a tragedy only instill a sense of paranoia in the child. If a child is kidnapped in your city, bolting the doors, keeping the drapes closed, and refusing to let your child out of the house only cause additional trauma in your child.

5. Speak of positive and good things. Bad things happen, yes, but far more good things happen each day. Thousands of airplanes take off and land every day without incident. Hundreds of millions of children go about their lives every day without getting hit by cars, abducted, or shot at. Teach your child to trust in the good, not to fear the bad.

6. "Why do bad things happen?" Parents often freeze when a child asks this question, or they offer a cynical answer that reflects their own bitterness. There are many ways to give an honest answer to this question such as "I don't really know." However, for many Americans who believe in God, an acceptable answer reflected in Christianity could be as follows:

God is love, and God created the world to share that love with us. But love can not be commanded; if we are to love, we must love by our own free will, and that means we must have the capacity to not love. Therefore, God gave us free will, and with it came the freedom to do evil. So the more you see evil around you, the more you should be reminded to love from your own heart.