

How to Talk to Your Child about Current Events

Nowadays, exposure to worldwide events are easily accessible. Children are going to see and hear about current events, even if we try to shield them from the media. Providing a safe, calming space to open a dialogue with your child can help ensure that they are getting accurate information, and allows for them to talk about the many fearful and upsetting emotions they may be feeling.

The following tips may help you when discussing current events with your child.

Educate yourself before speaking to your child

Before speaking with your child, try to ensure that you have accurate information. By understanding what is happening, you will be able to offer simple, clear, and appropriate knowledge to your child in a way that also addresses any misconceptions they may have.

Begin by asking your child what they know

Give your child a chance to voice what they believe has happened and why. This will allow you to listen for any misinformation, address areas needing clarification, and hear what concerns or fears your child is currently processing.

Try to ensure that your message is age-appropriate

Children process information differently depending on their age. While young children will likely hear about events, the details may be too overwhelming or intense for them to deal with. Older children may need more information and details in order to draw their own responses and conclusions. For this reason, it's important to use language your child understands, and contextualize these events in the world that your child is living in.

Reduce media access

Try to limit your child's exposure to images and videos of this event. Being inundated with violent or hateful images can be stressful for adults, teenagers, and young children. While you should still access information, try to limit how much and how graphic the news reports are. To stay up-to-date on information without keeping the tv on, sign up for news alerts on your phone.

Ask questions, and encourage your child to ask too

It's important that you allow your child to absorb the information you're giving them and give them time to respond. Asking your child questions that addresses how the event and what they've heard about it made them feel, can give your child the opportunity to talk about their emotions without your influence. Additionally, allowing your child to ask questions will encourage them to speak freely about their concerns without judgement, while establishing trust for future conversations.

Validate their feelings

Violent and traumatic events can cause us to feel fear, confusion, shock, anger and more. These responses are normal and valid. Be patient as your child finds their words to describe how they are feeling. By allowing your child to talk about their emotions, you are acknowledging that it is ok to feel many conflicting and intense emotions, while also granting them the time and space to process, acknowledge and voice how they have internalized these events.

Share your feelings and experiences

It is often helpful to share your own feelings and responses surrounding the events. If you have experienced discrimination, discuss that experience, how it made you feel, and what you did to overcome. This can add perspective to your child's experience, and can reassure them that they will get through these feelings and fears.

Look at positive outcomes together

Talking about situations in the past which may have stemmed from prejudice, but were overcome by those who fought for equality, acceptance, and inclusion, can affirm for your child that there are many people who oppose hatred and discrimination. While children may internalize hateful words and images leading them to feel afraid; acknowledging that these sentiments are felt by a minority of people can help your child to feel safe and supported, particularly if you focus on positive events in your community.

Additionally, try talking to your child about the different ways they can contribute positively to change. This can mean talking about being kind to others, contacting their school or community organizations to discuss ways they can help, or collaborating with other families in your community to create a safe space to talk. By allowing your child to look at ways that they can contribute, you are empowering your child to move forward.

Express affection and support

Ensure that you use supportive words ("It will be okay," "You are safe,"). Hearing these words can help your child to cope with their fears and be reassured. Asking for a hug, can also alleviate fear and help to calm an anxious mind.

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