

Protecting Children from Disturbing Media Reports During Traumatic Events



It is normal to seek information during and after disasters, accidents and other traumatic events. Children's ability to understand disturbing news reports and images about such events is different from that of adults; their comprehension depends on their age and maturity. The repeated viewing of violent and horrific TV, Internet and newspaper images of traumatic events can upset them, and negatively affect the way they feel, behave, and perform in school.

The following tips can help you to protect your children.



KNOW HOW CHILDREN UNDERSTAND DISTURBING NEWS IMAGES

Ages Six and Younger

- Believe that what they see on television is happening live; while they are watching it.
- Think that a traumatic event is happening over and over again when they see repeated images of it.
- Find images of people suffering, crying, or being attacked very upsetting.

Ages Seven to 12

- Understand that the news is only made up of reports about events that have already happened.
- Find disturbing media images upsetting.
- May become anxious for their own and their family's safety.

Ages 13 and Older

- They can be scared and horrified by the same things as younger children.
- They can become deeply worried and anxious for their own and their family's safety and future.
- They may want to know why the bad things they see on the news are happening.



MONITOR YOUR CHILDREN'S REACTIONS

Be aware of signs suggesting that the news images may have disturbed your children.

Children may complain of headaches, stomach aches and chest pain without actually being sick. In addition, their appetite may change. They may have sleeping problems or nightmares. The event can make them afraid, anxious, or sad, and their behavior may change. They can become clingy (especially the younger ones), aggressive, and have problems with their school work and peers. Your children may express a variety of these age-specific feelings and behaviors.

Tips for Caregivers

The repeated viewing of media reports of traumatic events can upset and negatively affect children.

The information in this tip sheet will help you understand what you can do to protect your children from the negative impact of disturbing media reports.



LIMIT THEIR EXPOSURE

Try to limit the amount of news they watch, as exposure to too much news about a disaster or other traumatic events on TV, in the papers, or on the Web can make children worried and confused.

- Limit their exposure to TV, Internet and newspapers coverage of traumatic events, especially before bedtime.
- Do not let your children watch TV coverage of disasters or other traumatic events alone.
- Do not leave newspapers with disturbing images in sight.
- Encourage your children to participate in other activities.
- Limit your own exposure to disturbing stories and images. That may also help you to cope better with these events.



WATCH THE NEWS WITH YOUR CHILDREN AND EXPLAIN WHAT IS HAPPENING

After watching news about disasters and other traumatic or violent events, your children may feel confused and afraid, and may have many questions. Don't ignore their worries. Spend extra time with them. Answer their questions and explain the facts in a way that they can understand. To reduce their worries:

- Watch the news with them and explain what they are seeing.
- Explain that some images may be shown repeatedly, but that the event happened only once.
- Talk to your children about the event but tell them only as much as they need to know, in a way that they can understand.
- Answer their questions and correct any misunderstandings about the event.
- Be aware of their fears and assure them that they are safe.
- Explain to them that the news is often about bad things, but most people are good.



KNOW WHEN AND WHERE TO SEEK HELP

If your children are having difficulty coping, call 1-800-LIFENET, a 24-hour, free and confidential hotline providing mental health information and referrals.

You are not alone.

Help is available!

1-800-LifeNet
1-800-543-3638
(English)

1-877-Ayudese
1-877-298-3373
(Spanish)

1-877-990-8585
(Chinese)

1-212-982-5284
(TTY)

