

Tragic Times, Healing Words

Suggestions and guidelines for parents and caregivers

Offered by ***Sesame Workshop***

It's never easy to know what to say to children after a crisis. We have developed some suggestions for ways of talking to your child about the recent tragedy. These suggestions are not intended for children whose family members did not come home after September 11th horrible tragedy. If your family was directly affected by this tragedy, we recommend that you talk with a professional, and the Workshop sends best wishes in this tragic time.

Acknowledge that bad things happen

First, it is important to tell the truth and acknowledge that bad things do happen. If preschoolers do not ask questions, they do not need to be told about the event. If they are exposed to the event say that they are safe with you and that good people are in charge to keep everyone safe. If your older child asks questions, explain that this tragedy did happen and use words to describe the event based on what you feel your child can handle. This is important in maintaining your child's trusting relationship with you and other adults.

Reassure your child that your family is safe and give them close contact

Children need to be reassured that their parents or caretakers have this situation under control. As stated by Dr. Rosemarie Truglio, VP of Education and Research for Sesame Workshop, "In times like these, it's important to maintain close contact with your children. Reassure them that everyone in your family is okay and tell them that you—their parents and caregivers—will keep them safe." Hugs help too! Your children may be clingy or more in need of attention than at other times. That's Okay. Try to spend time with them and be reassuring about your presence and their safety.

Limit exposure to media

Preschoolers should be shielded from exposure to the images of this tragedy. Try to turn off your television and radio when they are close by, and limit their exposure to newspaper images. Such images are frightening to young children.

Good things can come out of the bad things that happen

In addition to reassuring your child that her environment is safe, children can be given the message that sometimes, good things can come out of bad events. Look for stories in the news to tell your children about the heroes that are in their world. For example, volunteers have helped out with the World Trade Center tragedy by giving blood or donating their time in handing out water to firefighters.

Try to keep a normal routine

Children will fare better if life is as stable and predictable for the child as possible. Teachers, relatives, and other adult friends can help children by being available to them. This will help children to keep calm.

Share your feelings

When talking to your child about the tragedy it is important to remember that all children are different and that your goal is to be understanding, reassuring, and accepting of children's feelings. Some children may have shown few emotional reactions and many may not ask any questions about the tragedy. That's okay, there is no need to press for more. Others will bounce in and out of feelings of grief or worry. If you have a young child who does not appear to be impacted by the event, they should not be given information that they do not need to know. However, if your child does have questions or concerns, you can help them by giving them simple answers that are appropriate to their age. Specific suggestions are given below.

What to Say When Your Child Cries, "I'm Scared!"			
AT...	BEGIN TALKING...	SAY TO YOUR CHILD...	FOLLOW UP BY...
2 years and below	Only if your child asks a question. Most likely you won't need to take this step, because toddlers are usually too young to grasp what is happening in the news.	"Mommy and Daddy love you, and we'll keep you safe." Because: If they ask at all, toddlers are more interested in how a tragedy affects their world. Details may just frighten them.	Shielding your child from the news. For instance, don't watch TV during dinner; wait until your child is asleep to watch the news. If you have a caregiver, make sure she observes the same rules; ask her to keep you informed if your child happens to overhear something.
3 to 5 years	If your preschooler asks questions about what he may have inadvertently seen on TV (via news bulletins that interrupt children's programming, for instance) or heard from older kids at the playground. But don't bring the tragedy to your child's attention unless you know	"It's OK to feel angry, but we need to use words to say we are sad or mad." Because preschoolers are just beginning to learn how to handle their emotions. Use this moment as an opportunity to teach them how to express their anger in a healthy way.	If you are watching the news, make sure that your preschooler is in another room watching age appropriate programming. Stay close to home for the next few days as young kids feel more comfortable knowing their parents are near. If your child has trouble expressing himself but is clearly upset by what he has seen on TV, invite him to sit and draw with you about what he has seen. Then discuss the

	he's aware of it.		emotions apparent in the pictures: "Tell me about what you drew."
6 to 11 years	As soon as you can, because older children have probably already seen something on TV or gotten wind of it through other kids.	"Have you heard about what happened in New York City and Washington, DC?" or, "Have your teachers talked about it?" Because: It's best to start with a question to find out how much your child knows and begin from there. Your child's answer may also give you a clue as to what she is really concerned about.	Showing your child that people are not powerless. Point out how many people are volunteering to give blood and help in any way they can. Suggest that your youngster write letters to children who might have been affected. Perhaps your family can donate money through the Red Cross or clothing through Goodwill or the Salvation Army. Encourage your children to do creative activities such as writing a song or making a drawing that promotes world tolerance. Use stories from history that reflect how people triumphed in difficult times such as <i>The Sound of Music</i> or share family member's personal stories.

This advice was developed with help from Sesame Street Research, child psychologists Dr. Joanne Joseph, Dr. Lawrence Balter, Dr. Charles Flatter, and family therapist Meri Wallace.