



Providing Information to Children after Traumatic World Events

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When sudden, traumatic, and shocking events occur in the world we may be unsure of how to share information with children. There may be questions about what to share, how much is age-appropriate, and how to answer the inevitable questions that will follow.

Why should I share this information with my child?

By sharing information with your child, you are able to help define facts, answer questions, and assist your child in coping with the knowledge of the events that have transpired. You continue to demonstrate that you are a trusted source of information and that you are available to discuss even the most difficult of things. Your child is also reminded that although they may have heard the news through school, social media, or other sources, that you believe it is important enough to have a direct conversation with them about it.

Where do I begin?

It can be overwhelming to know where to begin when a sudden event has occurred. As adults, we often struggle with the events that have taken place, so it makes sense that it would be challenging to translate this into age-appropriate information. The first place to begin is with yourself. Take a moment to process what has happened and to feel the feelings associated with that. You might feel angry, sad, fearful, confused, or worried. Give yourself the time to take care of yourself in the moment and to get extra support if you need it.

What do I tell my child?

When determining what to share with your child or teen, consider what you believe he or she needs to know. This will likely be specific facts of what occurred, such as the location, the event, the result, and what is happening right now. Each of these can be tailored to your child's age.

***Example:** "You might have heard about this before already, but I want to tell you what I know and then try to answer the questions you have. Today we learned that there was a sad, unexpected event in [place]. While all of the information is unclear at this time and the authorities continue to learn more, we do know that [facts of the event]. Unfortunately that means that [impact of the event, such as injuries or fatalities]. Right now there is an investigation happening and [how those impacted are being helped]."*

Remember that you do not need to know everything to provide information to your child. Because there is often much speculation and uncertainty around sudden events, consider reminding your child that while there is some information now, more information will be learned more over the coming days.

After sharing the facts, what do I say?

After providing your child with the factual information, assure your child that while more information is being gathered about the event there are safety plans and precautions in place to help protect those impacted. It is also helpful to assure your child about the ways that you and other important people help to protect your local community.

Ask your child what further questions they have. This allows your child to set the pace for additional information that they believe they need to know. It is possible you might not know the answers to their questions, and it is okay to say so. Ask your child if it would feel helpful to talk about the events again when you know more information. Respect your child's decisions and remind them how they can get support when they need it.

Now what?

Continue to serve as a role model to your child for how to respond to these events. This may mean being open about your own feelings about the event and encouraging your child to share with you about their feelings. Model ways of caring for yourself and help your child to do the same. Consider limiting exposure to media coverage of the events and instead keep an open dialogue available for your child.

What resources are available to my child and family?

Providence Hospice & Home Care of Snohomish County
(425) 261-4807

Providence Hospice of Seattle: Safe Crossings
(206) 320-4000

Providence SoundHomeCare and Hospice
(360) 493-5928

National Child Traumatic Stress Network
www.nctsn.org