

Talking to Your Child about Tragedy

General tips that may help when talking to your children about devastating events

It may be difficult to find words to discuss tragedies that happen in our country. Far too often, children are left alone without information on why bad things happen and don't know how to feel. Adults may struggle to find ways to explain tragedies and how to support our children. The following are ways that may help lead a discussion when talking to children about tragedies.

Provide a Space to Talk

- Try to gauge how much your child knows about the event
- Invite discussion by prompting, "Has anything happened today that you have questions or feelings about?"
- It's OK for them not to know about their feelings
- Providing a space lets children know that they can express any concerns, fears, or feelings
 - Reassure children that they are safe
- Be prepared to add information if asked
 - Answer in an age-appropriate and honest way
 - Be patient

Respond

- Limit exposure to media coverage, adult conversations
- Discuss safety, if it is a concern
 - Address safety concerns with safe places and people they can turn to

Encourage Expression of Feelings and Thoughts

- Encourage children to find ways to express themselves: through talking, art, journaling, sports
- Express your own emotions of grief and model that it is okay to express your feelings
- Find ways that fit your children's needs – note that if you have multiple children they may all be different

Care for Yourself and Your Children

- Maintain a normal routine
- Make sure to get plenty of sleep, regular meals, and physical exercise
- Model ways to cope by talking to people you trust, and care for yourself in tough times
- Encourage and engage in soothing activities, such as listening to music, taking a bath, reading together