



Parent & Family Education Today

An e-news bulletin for practitioners who work with parents and families or teach about parenting, child/youth development, marriage and family relationships.

*Joan K. Comeau, Ph.D., CFCS, CFLE,
Director & Editor, Summer 2004*

What's On My Mind: Greetings from Joan

Protecting Our Children from Graphic Horrors in Iraq

I have been very concerned about protecting our children from the horrific news from Iraq and the graphic nature of the prison issue and the retaliation which I am not going to name because even saying the words has such a negative effect on me. It's time for us to remind parents to take great care with ANY media exposure regarding these events for young children. And we need to sit down with our older kids who have free access to television or the internet and be VERY CLEAR that we are asking them NOT to go on the internet in search of the "real videos" because of what it does to one's heart and soul when we see evil. We are just beginning to understand what this kind of trauma does chemically to our immune systems and our psyches. We can talk with our children about the news and answer questions honestly (taking into account the child's age), but let's agree as a family that we are going to protect ourselves from exposure to sickening, traumatic images. Period.

I asked some of the members of our **Family Information Services National Panel of Advisors** to comment on this to share with you. Experts agree that children need to be protected from these images and that adults should protect themselves from overexposure to the ongoing barrage of graphic discussions and images.

Dr. James Garbarino is Co-Director of the Family Life Development Center and Elizabeth Lee Vincent Professor of Human Development at Cornell University. ***Raising Children in a Socially Toxic Environment; Lost Boys: Why***

Your Sons Turn Violent & How We Can Save Them; No Place To Be a Child: Growing Up in a War Zone; Parents Under Siege. His response is the following:

"Joan, I think it is important to protect children from horrific images. These images can invoke traumatic responses from children. This was evident in Kuwait when videotapes of Iraqi atrocities were shown to children and stimulated traumatic responses in some of them. The same can be said of movies that overwhelm children with images of horror — all too frequent in this day and age. I share your concern and urge parents to shield young children from these images to the greatest extent possible."

I also asked **Dr. Donna Fiedler, LCSW, FAAETS, CFLE, ACSW**, to respond. She is Assistant Professor and Coordinator of BSW Field Practicum program, LaSalle University and an expert on traumatic events in the lives of children (and adults). Dr. Fiedler created a wonderful trauma workbook for children (***It Happened to Me***) featured in our 2002 Collection (January). Her response was as follows:

"We are once again in a crisis period. With the news full of commentary and some pictures on the prisoner situation in Iraq it is time to take precautionary measures regarding the impact of exposure to the prisoner information."

It is wise for children not to view the pictures and not to listen to repeated broadcasts. The best way to share the information, which is advisable for older elementary children, is for the parent to provide what information they wish to share. Children do NOT need all of the details, an overview of the stories and the parents' own commentary should be sufficient. Respond to questions as they are asked. Since the material is probably being dealt with in school it is important to be sure to educate children in the

manner in which parents have some control. Unless young children are going to be exposed to the content it is unnecessary for them to deal with the prisoner material. Parent discretion is always advised.

The prisoner information can also be traumatic to adolescents and adults. Once again, discretion needs to be used. Neither should sit and continuously watch or listen to the material and more that one or two viewings of the pictures are not necessary, in fact it can be detrimental. Teens and adults should not be forced to view or listen to the material.

What to do with feelings. *Recognize that the information may bring up negative feelings — feelings or reactions to almost anything. Feelings and reactions have this nasty habit of generalizing and pushing them down or ignoring the feelings will only create an environment where the feelings can get out of control and then our behavior is impacted. Remember, all feelings are OK; it's our behavior that gets us into trouble.*

Talk with your children about their feelings or reactions and give them a venue by which to cope with feelings. Be sure to structure the situation so it is safe and has a feeling of security. Try to tap into the different ways that the child learns or expresses his or herself. Is the child a talker, does he/she like to write, is the child an experiential learner? These are all different learning styles that need to be recognized. Also, remember that you the adult/parent are also being impacted so good self care is also indicated."

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