



Talking to Your Children About Violence

These tips were developed by the staff of the Family Resource Center, adapted by Family Information Services, after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack on the U.S.

Children are exposed to numerous accounts of violence against kids, such as abductions, murder, and random acts of terrorism. Events such as the nationally publicized school shootings, the Oklahoma City Bombing, and now the terrorist attacks on the U.S. in New York and Washington, D.C. will affect kids in a variety of ways depending on their age, their vulnerability, the reaction of their peers, their exposure to the media, and how adults help them process the event and their reactions. The following are some guidelines for parents to help their children deal with the crisis:

- ♥ Be honest about the situation. Give your children information at their own level and put it in context. Explain that even though frightening things happen to children every once in awhile, most children go about their day with no harm. Don't describe scenarios that would unnecessarily frighten your children.
- ♥ Encourage kids to express their feelings and concerns. Ask them what they are hearing and how their friends and teachers are talking about the event.
- ♥ Listen well and reassure them about their own safety. Assure them that concerned adults are doing everything they can to ensure their school is safe and tell children what they can do to enhance their own safety.
- ♥ Monitor their exposure to media particularly with young children if the images are very upsetting and repetitious. Limit the amount of exposure to violent movies, videos, or computer games. The impact of violence for children is cumulative.
- ♥ Provide extra emotional support for your children. Teach your children that they should go to an adult that they trust if they feel threatened in any situation.
- ♥ Avoid "infecting" your children's lives with your own anxiety. If you are feeling overwhelmed by anxiety, take steps to deal with your own feelings. You can express sadness and concern for those who lost loved ones without being horrified and afraid. Young children are extremely sensitive to emotions of the adults around them.
- ♥ Don't overdo it. Maintain normal routines for eating, sleeping, and play. Keep an eye open for any signs of anxiety.

The *Family Resource Center at Children's Hospitals and Clinics* suggests additional resources including the following books:

Creighton, Allan & Kivel, Paul. ***Helping Teens Stop Violence***, 1992, Hunter House.

Miller, Maryann. ***Coping with Weapons and Violence in School and on your Streets***, 1996, Rosen Publishing Group.

Steckler, Greg & Deskin, Gerald. ***When Nothing Makes Sense, Disaster, Crisis, and their Effects on Children***, 1996, Fairview Press.

Source: **Family Information Services**, Minneapolis, MN. Phone: (800) 852-8112 or website: www.familyinfoserv.com

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