

How to Talk To Your Children About Tragedy

This is a sad and difficult time for our nation as we respond to the tragic situation in Connecticut. Jewish Family Service offers these points about talking to your children about tragedy.

1. Find out what they have heard and validate their feelings.
2. Dismissive statements are not helpful such as "Everything is going to be fine."
3. You never want to dismiss their feelings or make them feel wrong about how they feel.
4. You have to be patient and give them time to process what they are feeling.
5. Let them take the lead. Let them ask questions. You can use your faith, spiritual support or other coping tools: listening, empathy, patience.
6. Once conversation has taken place: safety plans can be discussed.
7. It is important that children feel they are safe and adults will take care of them.
8. It is appropriate to say that sometimes bad things do happen and we don't know why. It is okay to say you don't have all of the answers. "I don't know" is an appropriate response.
9. Discuss what to do in an emergency: Teaching children how to call 911, know their address, phone number, name, and let them know that they are protected.
10. Be aware of secondary trauma which means that even though you may be far from the trauma, the news, television, radio can affect everyone.
11. The Center for Grieving Children (Maine) recommends the following:
 - a. Each one of us may be experiencing emotions: sadness, despair, anger, confusion about basic ideas of safety.
 - b. Talk honestly about the magnitude of what has happened.
 - c. Take breaks from the news.
 - d. Be patient with your child-they may need to revisit their feelings and ask questions.
 - e. Let your child's questions lead the way-answer the best you can.
 - f. Children will feel as if they are not safe-discuss how events like this take place but all measures to keep them safe are in place at home and at school.
 - g. Be honest about your own feelings-share your feelings with your children -- it gives them courage to express themselves.
 - h. Plan family activities together.
 - i. A crisis often manifests itself through behavior: normal behaviors include: aggression, fatigue, destructive behavior, reversion to earlier developmental stage, lack of appetite, insomnia.
 - j. Talk to your child about what you observe and discuss their feelings. Be patient.
 - k. Arrange for physical methods for children to express their feelings of anger, fear, anxiety: clay, painting, creating a collage, blocks.
 - l. Reach out to others in your community for support.
 - m. Access spiritual resources.
 - n. Keep in touch with your child's school to understand safety plan.
 - o. Give lots of love and hugs.

Our hearts and prayers are with the families of Newtown.

For additional help and resources, contact Jewish Family Service, 713-667-9336.