

# Conversations for Kids about Tragic Events

*This resource is intended to equip parents to engage with their children in necessary conversations about the tragic events we see on the news.. We hope this gives parents encouragement and skills to have hard conversations, answer tough questions, validate fears and promote feelings of safety and connectedness among the family.*

## All ages

- Be mindful of how you are reacting. If you become frantic, a child will most likely mirror your reactions.
- Monitor what your child sees on TV.
- Explain things in the most simple and factual way possible. (See age groups for age-appropriate information.)
- Remind kids that they are safe. Your goal is to reassure them and help them feel safe.
- If your child is fixated on what has happened but does not want to talk about it, encourage them to draw, build, or act something out with toys.
- If your child cannot seem to move on from the event, seek professional help
- Go about normal life as best that you can. .
- Pray with your child.

## Kids under 7

*Children at this age tend to think in concrete terms. They understand simple ideas best.*

- State one sentence stories. "Someone hurt people."
- If they are likely to hear additional details elsewhere, talk about what you, as a parent, believe they should know. *Remember simplicity; don't overshare.*
- Focus on the positives. Who are the people helping? What are the good things that are happening? The positive needs to outweigh the negative.
- Allow them to express emotions. If they are whiny or acting out, remember they may not be able to voice their feelings.
- Pray with your child.

## Tweens & Teens

*At this age, children are developing moral beliefs, which means they can understand more complex ideas. They will most likely receive a lot of information, and you may need to correct some of it. Provide opportunities for conversations about difficult topics while doing unrelated activities. Formal talks are not ideal.*

- Find out what they know. Ask "What do you know about...?"
- If they haven't heard anything, tell them that you need to tell them what has happened, so that they can come to you with any questions. State only the facts.
- Allow kids to set the pace. Give them the opportunity to talk about it now or later when they are ready.
- Encourage them to identify their feelings. Ask "How do you feel about...?" "What is causing that feeling?"
- Be aware of their body language. Sometimes kids handle more information. Stop the conversation if you sense them feeling overwhelmed.
- Share your feelings once you are in control of your emotions. Telling kids how you are feeling, even when they don't ask, helps them process their own emotions and helps them feel safe.
- Filter news images. Children do not need to see or hear all of the things said or shown on TV.
- Model behavior. Children watch closely and talking about the situation helps children think deeper about what has occurred. "I wonder why these things happen?" "I wonder if this will change any of our laws?" "I wonder what happens to the families, students, and teachers after something like this happens?"
- Pray with your children.