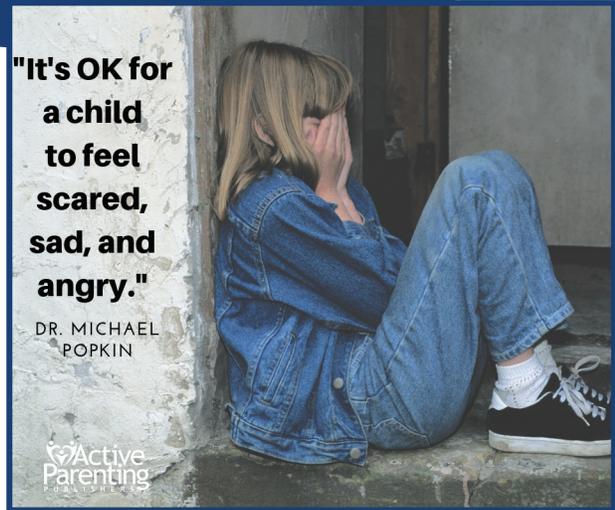


6 Tips for Active Parents when Talking with Children about Tragic Events

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When tragedy strikes far away, it's a parent's job to act as a filter for their children. Hours of emotional news coverage can create a distorted understanding of the world, and children are not intellectually equipped to assess the facts. A very young child, for example, might come away from an hour of weather reports terrified that a devastating tsunami is imminent—even if he lives thousands of miles away. The "active parent" uses good parent-child communication tools to step in with explanations and answers about who, why, where, and what now.

Here are six suggestions to help parents take control of the news their children hear, and to explain it in a way that is true to their family values.



1 Manage your own emotions first.

Your child will pick up on your feelings whether you think you are sharing them or not. So, calm yourself and find your own internal courage to face adversity before talking with them.

2 Reassure young children.

Most children under the age of about six are too young to understand the complexities of violence in our society, so keep it simple and reassuring, if you say anything at all. That means keep them away from television if possible after a tragedy, and avoid talking about it in front of them. If they do find out what happened or ask questions, keep your answers honest, but general. *What happened was very sad. A lot of people got hurt.*

3 Emphasize the positive as well as the tragedy.

I really like the way people helped each other after this happened. It could have been a lot worse, but they pulled together.

4 Help your child identify her feelings.

It is okay for children to feel scared, sad, and angry or other emotions. Let them know that. But also help them through those emotions. For example: *This can be pretty scary. That's why we have rules to keep us all safe, and why we try to be careful.*

5 Help older children make sense of what happened.

This will depend on your own values and spiritual beliefs. For example: *Still, sometimes things like this happen, so we have to be there for each other and all work together to stay safe.*

6 Give them a big hug and let them know how much you love them, and why keeping them safe and healthy are the most important things to you.



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