
Parenting, Media, and Everything In Between

Explaining the News to Our Kids

Kids get their news from many sources -- and they're not always correct. How to talk about the news -- and listen, too.

[Caroline Knorr](#) • 11/13/2015

Parenting Editor / Mom of one

• Categories: [Screen Time](#), [Violence in the Media](#)



Shootings, terrorist attacks, natural disasters, end-of-the-world predictions -- even local news reports of missing kids and area shootings -- all of this can be upsetting news even for adults, much less kids. In our 24/7 news world, it's become nearly impossible to shield kids from distressing current events.

Today, kids get news from everywhere. This constant stream of information shows up in sharable videos, posts, blogs, feeds, and alerts. And since much of this content comes from sites that are designed for adult audiences, what your kids see, hear, or read might not always be age appropriate. Making things even more challenging is the fact that many kids are getting this information directly on their phones and laptops. Often parents aren't around to immediately help their children make sense of horrendous situations.

The bottom line is that young kids simply don't have the ability to understand news events in context, much less know whether or not a source of information is credible. And while older teens are better able to understand current events, even they face challenges when it comes to sifting fact from opinion -- or misinformation.

No matter how old your kid is, threatening or upsetting news can affect them emotionally. Many can feel worried, frightened, angry -- even guilty. And these anxious feelings can last long after the news event is over. So what can you do as a parent to help your kids deal with all of this information?

Tips for all kids

Reassure your children that they're safe. Tell your kids that even though a story is getting a lot of attention, it was just one event and was most likely a very rare occurrence. And remember that your kids will look to the way you handle your reactions to determine their own approach. If you stay calm and considered, they will, too.

Tips for kids under 7

Keep the news away. Turn off the TV and radio news at the top of the hour and half hour. Read the newspaper out

of range of young eyes that can be frightened by the pictures. Preschool children don't need to see or hear about something that will only scare them silly, especially because they can easily confuse facts with fantasies or fears.

At this age, kids are most concerned with your safety and separation from you. They'll also respond strongly to pictures of other young children in jeopardy. Try not to minimize or discount their concerns and fears, but reassure them by explaining all the protective measures that exist to keep them safe. If you're flying somewhere with them, explain that extra security is a good thing.

Tips for kids 8-12

Carefully consider your child's maturity and temperament. Many kids can handle a discussion of threatening events, but if your children tend toward the sensitive side, be sure to keep them away from the TV news; repetitive images and stories can make dangers appear greater, more prevalent, and closer to home.

At this age, many kids will see the morality of events in stark black-and-white terms and are in the process of developing their moral beliefs. You may have to explain the basics of prejudice, bias, and civil and religious strife. But be careful about making generalizations, since kids will take what you say to the bank. This is a good time to ask them what they know, since they'll probably have gotten their information from friends, and you may have to correct facts.

You might explain that even news programs compete for viewers, which sometimes affects content decisions. If you let your kids use the Internet, go online with them. Some of the pictures posted are simply grisly. Monitor where your kids are going, and set your URLs to open to non-news-based portals.

Tips for teens

Check in. Since, in many instances, teens will have absorbed the news independently of you, talking with them can offer great insights into their developing politics and their senses of justice and morality. It will also give you the opportunity to throw your own insights into the mix (just don't dismiss theirs, since that will shut down the conversation immediately).

Many teens will feel passionately about events and may even personalize them if someone they know has been directly affected. They'll also probably be aware that their own lives could be impacted by terrorist tactics. Try to address their concerns without dismissing or minimizing them. If you disagree with media portrayals, explain why so that your teens can separate the mediums through which they absorb news from the messages conveyed.

Additional resources

For more information on how to talk to your kids about a recent tragedy please visit the [National Association of School Psychologists](#) or the [American Psychological Association](#).

Related posts

[Teaching Kids Media Smarts During Breaking News](#)

[Talking About "Sexting"](#)