

Talking with Kids About News

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Strategies for Talking and Listening

Talking about the news with kids happens in everyday moments. Children ask questions in the car on the way to school, in between the swings, and just when you're trying to rush out the door. In one breath, they'll ask about a range of topics — from the weather president to the latest war. And when difficult questions come up, parents wonder how to respond.

To help the conversation along, this article offers flexible suggestions for answering kids' questions about the news. There is no one right way, but these strategies can help you tune in to what your child is thinking and feeling and talk it through together.

Start by finding out what your child knows. When a news topic comes up, ask an open-ended question to find out what she knows. "What have you heard about it?" This encourages your child to let you know what she is thinking.

Ask a follow up question. Depending on your child's comments, ask another question to get him thinking, such as "Why do you think that happened?" or "What do you think people should do to help?"

Explain simply. Give children the information they need to know in a way that makes sense to them. At times, a few sentences and a good analogy is how you might talk about sex," adds Nancy Carlsson-Paige, Ed. D. "You obviously wouldn't explain everything about violence and safety is similar."

Listen and acknowledge. If a child talks about a news event (like a local robbery or kidnapping) and is worried, recognize her feelings and comfort her. You might say "I can see you're worried, but you are safe here. Remember how we always lock our doors." This acknowledges your child's feelings, helps her feel secure, and encourages her to tell you more.

Offer reassurance. When a child is exposed to disturbing news, she may worry about her safety. To help her calm down, offer examples that relate to her environment like, "That hurricane happened far away but we've never had a hurricane where we live." Use actions louder than words — so show your child how you lock the door if she gets scared by a news report about robbers, point out the storm drains if a hurricane story causes fear, and explain what the security guards do at the airport after a story about terrorists.

Tailor your answer to your child's age. The amount of information children need changes [age by age](#). "A kindergartner may just want to know a hurricane is thousands of miles away. An older child may want to know how hurricanes could affect the place and may want to know what is being done to help those in need. Both ages will be reassured by doing something to help," note M.S.T., author of *Under Deadman's Skin: Discovering the Meaning of Children's Violent Play*.

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