

## How to Talk to Our Children when bad things happen in our world

**Be willing to talk.** Make time for it, if you can. However, we all know that kids don't talk on our schedule, they talk on their own. So this means being available when they are ready to talk. Sometimes, that's tricky to figure out or to make happen. Try the small moments, like when you are in the car or out for a walk together.

**Be curious and interested in what they are thinking and feeling.** There is a really good chance that your child will have heard about what has happened when a tragedy strikes. Likely even know more about it than you do. Kids talk with each other. Older kids are going to see everything that we see online, in social media, on TV.

Ask questions—what have you heard? What are you thinking about it? How are you feeling about what happened? Ask about their opinion about what they are hearing—do you believe all that? What do you think about what is being said on social media? In the news? Answer questions, too, if they ask. Try to answer honestly and simply. Keep your answer to the question asked as, often, children are satisfied with one piece of the picture. Too much information can be overwhelming, particularly for younger children.

**Try to “read” your child during the conversation and follow their lead.**

Maybe your child will just want to say one thing and be done. Maybe they will want to talk now, maybe later. Don't be afraid to bring it up and ask what they have been thinking but also don't worry if they don't want to talk. Kids deal with their emotions in very different ways.

**Honour and respect their ways of expressing themselves.** Children often draw what they are thinking and feeling. Sometimes the drawings can be very graphic and disturbing but it is important to accept them. Help your child to talk about the drawing, what they were thinking as they drew it. If they don't want to talk, that's ok. Just thank them for sharing the picture with you and invite them to talk anytime they would like.

**Show empathy and understanding.** For any of us, when we feel truly heard and understood, we feel naturally better. [Brene Brown](#) tells us that “empathy fuels connection” and we know that connection with someone we love and trust, makes the world feel safer and our distress more manageable. Simple comments such as “I can see that you are feeling really sad about this” or “I understand how upsetting this is for you” are very powerful messages of love and support.

**Ask if there is any way you can help.** Or if there is anything they would like to do with you, as part of dealing with their feelings. Can you draw a picture together? Do an activity that you both enjoy? Whatever will help, it is important that we ask and not assume what our child wants. Sometimes, that is the hardest part—especially if our child says no to any help. It is important to respect that, while adding “I am here if you need me.”

**Be aware of our own feelings and reactions to the situation.** We can't hide these feelings from our children. It's ok if they see that we are upset, too. The trick is to be sure our feelings do not become the focus of our conversations with our children.

**Seek outside help, when needed.** Talking with a counsellor or a trusted friend can make a big difference. Your children may not want to do this, but you can. And, when you talk with a counsellor or friend, your feelings can very much be the focus. We all need this, sometimes! There are some helpful resources listed below.

**Be kind to yourself.** It is hard to get these conversations right. It takes practice. We make mistakes. A colleague of mine told me, “there is a lot of pressure on parents to do things ‘right’. I say, blunder through and hope it works out!” What matters is that we are willing to try....and try again.



Loss and tragedy. Sadness. Fear. They're real emotions and real experiences and when we have the chance to talk about our thoughts and feelings surrounding these kinds of events, we can begin to make sense of what we are feeling. It does not make them go away or make things “better”. But it does help us feel connected. That's true, no matter how old we are.