

Explaining Terrorism To Your Children

from the American Counseling Association

As parents, many of us have seen how recent terrorist acts can frighten our young children. Between the Internet, TV news, and the talk among friends, even fairly young children may worry that what has happened elsewhere might happen to them.

While there's no rational explanation for the recent horrific acts, don't simply dismiss your child's questions or fears about such incidents. Most young children can't really understand what has transpired, but will often personalize it, imagining it as something that could easily happen to them.

When children have to face things they don't understand, their imagination can take over. A tragic event, such as the senseless attacks in Paris, may have happened on the other side of the world, but that won't stop children from wondering why it won't happen right here.

Many of us may have asked that same question, but in terms of communicating with your children it's important to be positive, calming and reassuring, not to increase their fear levels.

You don't want to be dismissive, treating the child's question as absurd or not worth considering. A child's fears are always very real to the child and won't disappear simply because Mom or Dad says that's a "silly" thing to be worried about.

Instead, it's more helpful to explain to your child what has happened in age-appropriate words with an emphasis on reassuring the child. Let your child to know that he or she is safe and that you are there to protect. Yes, that bad people made the bad event happen, but that there is no connection to him or her, or your family.

Try to limit the information input. Don't let the kids watch the TV news and don't discuss your own concerns in front of them.

If your child is a bit older you might want to provide some detail on the "why" behind what has them scared. Yes, there are people in the world who are not sane, or who have no regard for the lives of others, but it's also important that the child understands such people are few in number and usually far away.

It would be nice if there were no bad things in the world to have to explain to our kids, but since that isn't the case, try to be as understanding, supportive and reassuring as you honestly can be when addressing their fears.

Counseling Corner is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACACorner@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org.

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