



Did You Know?



FAMILY SERVICES NEWSLETTER
Mandala Children's House • Anne Kangas, L.C.S.W.

Helping Your Child Feel Safe in an Uncertain World

With constant news of violence, we have all been robbed of the basic sense of security that we once knew. As parents, we are severely challenged to find new ways of handling our own fears, let alone those of our children. How do we do our important job of giving children the feeling of safety that they need to grow and develop? How do we help them cope? Here are a few thoughts...

Keep In Mind...

- Fear of separation (losing you) is a young child's *worst* fear. Trauma and stress activate this fear.
- Children worry deeply about YOU and whether you will be able take care of them.
- Children take their cues from you. They listen to you, watch your face, look for your body reactions, and sense your emotions, especially your distress.
- Even infants and toddlers react to a parent's stress.
- Children view the world very narrowly—and only from the perspective of what they know about themselves.
- Young children think in simple terms of "good" and "bad."
- Preschool children *confuse* facts with their fantasies and their fear of danger.
- Seeing images of violence or destruction on television can increase children's fears.
- Viewing the same event over and over makes them think it is happening again and again, which only heightens their fear.
- When children feel threatened, they can regress back to younger behaviors.
- Children may bring things up or want to talk at unexpected moments. (Not necessarily when you do!) Be open and listen carefully. Then reassure.
- Young children may "play war" or violent games even more after a tragic event. Repetitive play at this age is children's way of mastering their fears. It can be a healthy coping strategy.

❖
Sometimes the only action we can take to defeat violence is to create **islands of peace** within ourselves, our family, and our community.

Be a Model

- ❖ I can teach my child to do something life-giving.
- ❖ I can teach my child to find a safe sanctuary within.

You Can Help By...

- Turn off the TV and radio around young children. It's *TOO MUCH* exposure. They cannot handle being flooded with that kind of

emotional intensity in both images and adult talk.

- Challenge your fears. Calm your own anxiety so it does not wound your child.
- Watch for cues from your child. If he has seen or heard something traumatic, talk with him about it.
- Give the truth in simple words: *“A bad person hurt some people. He is dead and cannot hurt anyone now. You are safe.”*
- Don’t force the issue. If it doesn’t seem to make an impact, especially with younger children, then let it go. Just stay observant.
- Rituals and touch comfort young children. Keep building strong family rituals. Even those small, repeating family practices are daily rituals that are incredibly reassuring to young children.
- Spiritual practices also give children consolation. A belief in something larger than themselves or a sense of belonging to a larger supportive community can increase their feeling of security.

Listen, Encourage, and Reassure

- *“It’s scary to see all those pictures, but that is far, far away.”*
- *“I love you and I am here to take care of you and keep you safe.”*
- *“Sometimes people do bad things. I know that’s scary. I’m sad about it. But we are OK. I’m here with you.”*
- *“You seem worried that Mommy won’t come to pick you up, but Mommy always comes back.”*
- *“Mommy and Daddy will always take care of you.”*

Model a Different Way

- Don’t give into the darkness that violent events can generate. Be a beacon of light in your own small way.
- Let your child know – again and again – that you are a family that loves each other and takes care of each other.
- Do something active in some way – to foster change, to honor victims, to give meaning to life.
- Talk with your child about how we treat people with respect and dignity. Watch the words you use.
- Show your kindness to strangers, as well as family and friends.
- Involve your child in doing some small act of service for someone else to build compassion and empathy.
- Use breathing and relaxation to help your child find his own “safe place” inside where he can go at any time to feel peaceful and calm.
- Talk about your values and what you believe. Remember that you are your child’s greatest teacher.

When I do something
ACTIVE in my own
life, I am no longer a
passive victim.



Examples...

Write a letter, make a
donation, gift someone,
light a candle, say a prayer,
offer a gesture of kindness
to someone, give a smile.

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