

## The American Counseling Association's "*Counseling Corner*" Weekly Columns

### Your Children And A World Of Bad News

from the American Counseling Association

Tragic happenings have always occurred and in today's world of 24-hour news channels and constant Internet updates, most of us are bombarded regularly by disturbing news and upsetting events from around the world. Unfortunately, that increased awareness applies to our children as well.

As children overhear parental conversation, pick up snippets from TV, radio and Internet reports, and talk with friends, it can all add up to give even young children enough of an understanding that they feel threatened, insecure and upset.

Every child will display emotional responses to negative news that differ in their nature and severity, but the most common emotions in response to tragic events are fear and anxiety. They may only understand part of what has happened, but kids know it was a bad thing and may worry that it could also happen to them.

When children become frightened by some tragic event, whether it's close by or far away, they need a caring adult to help them understand and deal with the emotions they're experiencing. There are several ways a parent can help.

Start by really listening to your child, encouraging him or her to express what he or she is feeling. Don't dismiss those feelings and reactions, but instead let your child know you understand.

Respond to questions, but in an age-appropriate manner. A young child doesn't need all the details, but an older child can feel more threatened if it appears you are hiding things.

You also should be willing to discuss difficult issues. You don't have to have all the answers, but be ready to talk about what you do know or understand. Stick to factual information and avoid projecting your own fears onto your child. It's okay to stress how serious a situation might be, but don't increase your child's fears of what is happening.

Try to offer reassurances to your child, especially if he or she has been exhibiting a strong emotional reaction such as crying, having nightmares, or repeatedly asking the same anxious questions. You want your child to understand that he or she is safe and that you are there to protect and provide.

Hugs, kisses and saying "I love you" may not make all the anxiousness disappear, but will help reinforce the message that you care, that you will keep your child safe, and that you understand what he or she is going through.

*"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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