



**INCM**

# Creating Felt Safety for Kids:

A Guide for Processing Traumatic  
Community Experiences

# Helping Your Kids Feel Safe and Secure

## Introduction

When a child experiences a traumatic event, most times they look to the adults in their lives to find the security they are missing.

These events can be as simple as a natural disaster like an earthquake, the death of a loved one, a mass shooting, or a car accident that rocks a community. These events can leave us as adults reaching for handles on how to respond, what questions to ask, or what can we do to help. This resource will help you guide and process these events with your child. Use it as you feel necessary.

## Find Out What They Know

**If your child is starting to ask questions or is exhibiting fearful behavior, it is important that you first ask them what they know about a current event before you respond.** Your child might know a little or a lot about the event. They might only know a false narrative overheard or shared at school. It is important as parents/caregivers that we hear what they know first, and refrain from over-sharing details that they are too young for.

### QUESTIONS TO ASK

- What did you hear about (insert event)?
- Where did you hear about it?
- What did they say?
- What do you think about these events?
- How do you think these things happen?

## CONSIDER THE AGE AND DEVELOPMENT OF YOUR CHILD

Most children under the age of six struggle to know fact from fiction. If they see a news report it can be hard for them to understand that it is a real event and not another TV show. A child over the age of seven can start to discern the difference and may require a more targeted series of questions.

### • Things to consider

- How much “news” is your child watching?
- Can they verbally describe the difference between fairytale and non-fiction?

### • For Younger Children

- Most children under the age of four don't realize death is permanent.
- Drawing can help a younger child express insecurities.

## LET YOUR CHILD LEAD

Your child may have no idea about what is happening outside of their everyday life. They may not be interested or want to talk about it when you do. The best practice is not to push them. They will let you know when they want to/ or need to know more.

### • Keep in Mind:

- If your child has been impacted they may show signs of fearfulness or insecurity before expressing a word.

## Answering Questions— Be Truthful and Concise

**SHARE ONLY AS MUCH AS YOUR CHILD NEEDS TO KNOW, BUT REMAIN TRUTHFUL.**

It is important that we as parents do our best to try to calm fears and create a space for safety to be felt. Children do not need any more details than what they have expressed an interest in.

### **LISTEN**

For a child, overhearing about a traumatic event or natural disaster might make them worry, "Could I be next? Could that happen to me?" Older kids may have more focused questions. Focus on what your kids ask so you can help them cope with their fears and help them to feel secure. An adult's willingness to listen sends a powerful message.

### **IT'S OK TO SAY YOU DON'T KNOW THE ANSWER**

If your child asks a question that you cannot answer, say you will try to find the answer. Ask if you can have some time to look into it. Depending on your child's age, you can also invite them to do the research with you. Use age-appropriate websites and spend time together looking for an answer.

### **TALK ABOUT YOUR FEELINGS AS A PARENT**

Depending on your child's age, hearing that you as an adult have feelings of fear help to let them know that it is normal to feel afraid. Fear is a normal feeling, and how we respond to it can help to create a feeling of security when the world around them feels chaotic. Hold onto your faith. Share with your child what tools and practices you use as an adult when faced with a traumatic event. Prayer is always a good place to start.

## Help Your Child Feel in Control

**PROVIDE SPACES FOR YOUR CHILD TO TALK AS THEY ARE READY.**

If your child is exhibiting behaviors of fear or has expressed feeling afraid, ask about it. When kids cannot control an event — like a tornado or earthquake — having an opportunity to share their thoughts and emotions with you can help them. Some children might not know how to express what they are feeling. It is always a good practice to start with a conversation. This will help to create a safe space to express any fears or even realize they are feeling afraid. Encourage conversations around non-traumatic events. Ask questions like "What do you think about these events?" or "How do you think these things happen?" Remember to keep the conversation going. Traumatic events impacting their community take time to process.

### **LOOK BEYOND A NEWS STORY**

Use the news as a tool. Once a story is broadcast, take some time to look for stories about people like you who are helping. Talk through how you as a family can help those that are suffering. If the event affected your community, make a plan to join the efforts to help those in need. This helps children see that even in the face of a traumatic event, they can help.

### **TALK ABOUT YOUR PLANS**

Sharing plans with your child can help them feel prepared rather than panicked. Not all events can be prepared for, but we should prepare for the ones we can. Emergency kits and evacuation plans can be helpful for some children to build a sense of security.

If you do not have a plan or a kit, allowing a child to help build it makes room to feel secure in case they experience a traumatic event like a natural disaster.

- **Helpful links to make a plan or create an emergency kit:**

- [Make A Plan | Ready.gov](#)
- [Build A Kit | Ready.gov](#)

### **LIMIT EXPOSURE**

Decide what and how much news is appropriate for your child. Think about how old your kids are and how mature they are. It is okay to tell your child that you do not want them to be constantly engrossed in difficult and traumatic news. Ask older children to take breaks from following the news, especially when the topics are difficult. When you feel it is appropriate, sit down with your child and watch a news story together. Make sure to create space for conversation. (A child's age should be considered before watching any newscast.)

- **Tips**

- Set limits
- Take notice of how often you are discussing the news in front of your child
- Turn the TV off
- Keep the conversations going

### **WATCH FOR STRESS**

Traumatic events can be internalized in some children. It is important to watch for behavior changes. If a dramatic change in behavior is a concern, call your child's Pediatrician/Doctor or a behavioral health care provider. They can give advice, help your child manage their anxiety, and offer tools to better cope with feelings of fear and stress.

- **Things to watch for**

- Not sleeping or eating
- Not wanting to be around people
- Worrying all the time

### **PRAY**

Sometimes, as parents, it is hard to know the words to say. When there are no words, ask your child to join you in prayer. Praying is a great way for you and your family to express feelings to God and bring peace.

- **Things to pray for**

- Pray for the safety of those impacted
- Pray for the leaders making decisions
- Pray for the people handling relief efforts
- Pray for the recovery of the land
- Pray that those who feel unsafe would turn to Jesus