

SPEAKING WITH YOUR CHILD ABOUT A CRITICAL INCIDENT OR TRAUMATIC EVENT

Here are some suggestions for dealing with questions and concerns that may arise at home:

1. Bring up the topic at a time and place where a discussion can occur. If there are distractions, a shortage of time or if either you or your child are too tired or busy, the conversation may be interrupted.
2. Begin by questioning and listening. Open-ended questions are better than specific ones. It is better to ask, "How are you feeling about what happened?" than "Are you scared because of what happened?" Let your child tell you what they believe they know, how they learned it and how they are feeling. Don't rush to correct or reassure. Allow them to finish their thoughts.
3. Respond to what your child tells you. Their concerns may be specific or general, concrete or abstract, closely related to the crisis or related very little. Address what they are concerned about and try not to overload children with information or solutions. Talk to them with ideas they can handle at their age. If you help them with their concerns today they will likely share more in the future.
4. Be aware that new stresses may open old wounds. When a child is confronted with a crisis, losses and upsets from the past may be remembered. The child may, or may not wish to talk about these old issues.
5. It is normal for people to try to make sense of things when a serious loss occurs. Allow your child to share his or her ideas and speculations. Help them to separate what they know from what they are guessing about.
6. Talk about specific things you can do to make your child feel secure. Go over your home safety plan. Make sure they know that you and other adults will always be available. Revisit street proofing. Reassure realistically.
7. When a crisis hits close to home we all feel vulnerable. Certain tragic events, while extremely upsetting, are rare. It can be helpful to remember that this type of event is very rare and almost certainly will not happen again in the neighborhood.
8. Children deal with stress in many different ways and at different paces. While your child may not wish to talk today, he/she may wish to talk in weeks or days to come. Do checkups at least once a week for the next few weeks. Follow up discussions may be helpful.
9. Try to continue normal routines. Reaffirm family goals and spiritual values.