



Tips for parents on media coverage of violent events

While the media (television, radio, print, and the internet) can help inform and educate you and your children about current events, such as civil unrest, terrorism or shootings, media coverage unfortunately also has the potential to upset and confuse. As parents, you can protect your children by helping them understand media coverage while limiting their exposure to distressing images.

The impact of media coverage will be different depending upon whether you are a family who:

- Has loved ones in the affected area
- Has been affected by a recent loss or trauma in the past
- Is not directly threatened but is viewing news about the impact of this event on others (individuals killed, injured, or suffering)

Understanding media exposure

Media coverage can produce increased fears and anxiety in children. The more time children or teens spend watching coverage of the unsettling or tragic events, the more likely they are to have negative reactions. Keep in mind that:

- Graphic images and news stories of chaos, injury, and death are especially upsetting to children.
- Very young children may not understand that the coverage and repetition of images of the events is a replay. They may think the event is continuing to happen or is happening again.

What parents can do to help

Limit your children's exposure to media coverage:

- The younger the child, the less exposure she or he should have.
- You may choose to eliminate all exposure for very young children.
- Play or watch their favorite shows or movies instead.
- Consider family activities away from television, radio, or Internet.

Watch and discuss with children and teens:

- Watch what they watch.
- Discuss the news stories with them; asking about their thoughts and feelings about what they saw, read, or heard; and correct any misunderstandings or confusion.
- Ask older children and teens about what they have seen on the Internet or what they have heard through social media technologies (text, Facebook, Twitter), in order to get a better sense of their thoughts, fears, concerns, and point of view.

Seize opportunities for communication:

- Use newsbreaks that interrupt family viewing, or use newspaper and web images, as opportunities to open conversation.
- Be available to talk about children's feelings, thoughts, and concerns, and reassure them of their safety and of plans to keep them safe.

Monitor adult conversations:

- Be careful of what you and other adults say about the recent event or the media coverage in front of the children.
- Remember that children often listen when adults are unaware and may misunderstand what they hear.

Let your children know about successful community efforts:

- You may want to share positive media images, such as reports of individuals helping those in need.
- Reassure your children and teens that many people, organizations, and governments are working to help the people. This will give them a sense that adults are actively taking steps to protect those who are currently suffering.

Educate yourself:

- Learn about children's reactions to traumatic events.
- For more information, see the National Child Traumatic Stress Network website.

When your family is part of the story

Know your limits:

- Decide if it is a good idea for you or your children to talk to the media. While it's natural to want to tell your story, the media may not be the best place to do so.
- Think about what you are willing and not willing to discuss. You have the right to set limits with reporters.
- Ask the reporter for the purpose of the story and its content.

Protect your children:

- Make sure the reporter has had experience working with children in the past.
- Talk it over with your children before they are interviewed. Assure them that there are no wrong answers.
- Let them know they can say no to any question, and they can stop the interview at any time.
- Be present when your child is interviewed. Stop the interview if he or she becomes upset or distressed in any way.
- After the interview, discuss the experience with your children. Praise them for doing a great job, and listen carefully to any concerns they have.
- Prepare your children that the final media story may be very short or may be edited in ways that do not reflect their experience.

Source(s):

¹ National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN). (n.d.). Tips for parents on media coverage. Retrieved August 22, 2019, from <https://www.nctsn.org>

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