

Talking to your young child about terrorism

Aetna Resources For LivingSM

It's natural to want to shield your child from harsh realities such as terrorism. Yet at some point, he or she is likely to hear about it. And it can cause worry. Your child may have questions like, "How often does this happen?" and "Can it happen to us?"



A child who's worried about terrorism may have¹:

- Changes in sleep patterns or trouble sleeping
- Changes in behavior
- Fixated thoughts about a negative event
- Fear of separation or other signs

If you're having a tough time dealing with your own reactions, that can make it tougher to recognize stress or anxiety in your child. He or she may not show clear signs. Or it may take more time before reactions develop.¹

So you might choose not to talk about it. You might even shut down your child's attempt to discuss it because you're worried it could be upsetting. Yet it's possible that talking about it can leave your child feeling safe and comforted.

You can reassure your child that everything possible is being done to protect him or her. You can point out safety measures at home, school and other places.¹

You can also help your young child by¹:

- Giving reassurance that you're going to make sure he or she stays safe
- Letting him or her know the people who've been hurt are getting helped
- Avoiding worst case scenarios
- Having a family disaster plan
- Taking extra time to be sure he or she understands the possible danger without being overly scared
- Letting your child express what he or she is feeling
- Validating his or her concerns
- Being patient with any behavior changes
- Keeping routines as normal as possible
- Helping to focus on positive things
- Talking with your child's daycare providers, preschool or school teachers to find out how they're helping the children cope

By taking care to talk to your child about terrorism, you can help him or her have a healthy level of awareness while putting undue worries to rest.

¹Talking to young children about terrorism. Available at: www.pennbehavioralhealth.org. Accessed February 9, 2016.

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