

Tips for Caregivers:

Helping Kids Process Tragedies Happening Around the Globe

1. Allow yourself time to process the tragedy yourself

- Reflect on your own well-being and state of mind, “How am I feeling about this?”
- Engage in activities you find calming and grounding.
- Consider yourself as the medium of communication to your child and how you might be best prepared to discuss difficult topics.

3. Start by inquiring about what your child already knows

- Allowing space for your child to explain what they know and are experiencing, will allow you to gauge where they are coming from and what emotions they are dealing with.
- “What have you heard?”

5. Remind them that you are there for them as their safe place

- If your kids don’t want to talk, that is OK. Remind them that you are in their corner, no matter what.
- “It is ok to not have immediate reactions to things happening around us. If some thoughts or feelings come up for you later, I am here for you.”
- “Sometimes it is easier to talk to your friends or school counselor. It is OK if you rather do that. Just know that I am here too.”

8. Offer reassurance

- Offer reassurance in a way that is the norm in your family—a hug, a walk, a meal together, an activity to distract, a movie, etc. Look for ways of grounding.

2. Pick the right time for your child

- Think about where your child will be able to express themselves fully—in their room? Alone? With other family members present? On a walk?
- Think about when your child will be able to process and engage in a conversation—have they eaten? Are they distracted by something?

4. Listen calmly and validate all their feelings

- “It is totally normal for you to feel all of these things. I am so appreciative and proud that you are able to share with me.”

6. Ask if they want clarity on something they have heard

- Ask if they want clarity on something they have heard in the media or from friends.

7. Role-model vulnerability

- Share your own feelings, as a way to role-model vulnerability. Save strong emotions for your adult support system.

Should you have concerns about your child’s thoughts and feelings, contact your pediatrician, mental health professional, or school counselor.

The tips and pointers above have been provided courtesy of Doc Wayne Youth Services, an award winning non-profit headquartered in Boston that seeks to reimagine mental health through the lens of sport.

For more support, training, or information contact: Rebekah Roulier, LMHC at support@docwayne.org.

Helping Kids Process Tragedies Happening Around the Globe

Engaging an Older Child

- Older teenagers want agency and a simple “how can I help” is a great way to engage them in conversation.
- Brainstorm with them ways that they can limit/streamline media and social media consumption.
- Assist with some action steps. Children often feel empowered by learning about advocacy and can contribute through fundraisers or writing letters to decision-makers.
- Name for them that they may have feelings of guilt surrounding doing things they love or having fun. Acknowledge that it is OK to feel bad for others and enjoy life/take care of themselves.

Supporting a Younger Child

- Use simple language. For example “someone hurt people”
- Limit exposure to media and social media as a way to shield their limited capacity to make sense of violence they see in the media.
- Suggest a few things you could do together as a positive distraction- arts and crafts, writing, unstructured play, other creative modes of expression.
- Stick to a typical routine.