

Helping Children Cope in Unsettling Times: Tips for Parents

The explosion yesterday is likely to elicit a range of responses and emotions in children and adolescents, based on their previous experiences and the reactions of those around them. Some may be confused or fearful that they or their loved ones are at risk. Others may be unaware of the incident, or feel unaffected.

The following guidelines can help children understand what is happening factually, how events do or do not impact their lives, and how to cope with their reactions. Children will take their cues from you, especially young children. Parents should gauge their child's need for information and reassurance and respond accordingly.

1. **Be a good listener and observer.** Let children guide you as to how concerned they are or how much information they need. If they are not anxious or focused on current events, don't dwell on them. But be available to answer their questions to the best of your ability.
2. **Acknowledge and normalize their feelings.** Allow children to discuss their feelings and concerns and encourage any questions they may have regarding this event. Listen and empathize. Let them know that others are feeling the same way and that their reactions are normal and expected.
3. **Turn off or monitor the TV and Internet.** It is important to stay informed, but watching endless news programs or constantly checking Twitter or Facebook is likely to heighten your anxiety and that of your children. Young children in particular cannot distinguish between images on T.V. and their personal reality. Older children may want to stay informed, but be available to discuss what they see and help put it into perspective.
4. **Discuss events in age-appropriate terms.** Share information that is appropriate to their age and developmental level. Update them as information changes. Young children may require repeated reassurance that adults will always take care of them. School age children can understand details and reasons behind specific actions, such as increased security but cannot absorb intense or frightening information. Adolescents may want to discuss political as well as safety issues.
5. **Stick to the facts.** Answer children's questions factually and include a positive element to answer, e.g., "Yes, there are police checking cars, but they are there to protect us." Don't speculate about what could happen.

If you have any concerns about your child, please feel free to contact your child's counselor or one of our school psychologists.

Adapted from the National Association of School Psychologists

http://www.nasponline.org/resources/crisis_safety/helpingchildrencope.aspx.