



Protecting Children From Disturbing Media Reports **During Traumatic Events**

When children see media reports of traumatic events, it can upset and negatively affect them. This handout provides information on how to protect your children from the negative impacts of disturbing media reports — including news, videos and images — of traumatic events. For free, confidential mental health and substance use support today, call or text **988** or chat at nyc.gov/988. Trained counselors are available 24/7 to speak with you and connect you to services, and counseling is available in more than 200 languages.

Age-Related Tips for Parents and Caregivers

It is common to seek out information during and after disasters, accidents and other traumatic events locally and globally. But repeat viewing of disturbing media reports of traumatic events on TV, on the internet — including on smartphones and social media — and in newspapers can upset children and negatively affect their feelings, their behaviors and the way they perform in school. Children have different abilities to understand disturbing media reports, and their understanding depends on their age and maturity. They may express one or more of these age-specific feelings and behaviors:

Children age 6 and younger:

- Believe what they are seeing on television is happening live while they are watching it
- Think a traumatic event is happening over and over again when they see repeat images of it
- Find images of people suffering, crying or being attacked very upsetting

Children age 7 to 12:

- Understand the events reported have already happened
- Find disturbing media reports upsetting
- May become anxious for their own and their family's safety

Children age 13 and older:

- Can be scared and horrified just like younger children when viewing disturbing media reports
- Can become deeply anxious and concerned for their own and their family's safety and future
- May want to know why the bad things they see in media reports are happening

Monitor Children's Reactions to Disturbing Media

Be aware of signs suggesting media reports, including news, videos and images, may have disturbed your children. Signs include:

- Complaints of headaches, stomachaches and chest pain even though they are not sick
- Changes in appetite and sleep patterns (such as nightmares)

- Fear, anxiety or sadness, or changes in usual behavior or personality, such as young children clinging to parents or caregivers or aggression in school or directed at peers

Limit Children’s Exposure to Disturbing Media

You can help children by using these strategies:

- Limit the number and intensity of media reports children watch on TV, on the internet — including on smartphones and social media — and in newspapers.
- If children do encounter disturbing media reports about a traumatic event, do not let them watch alone, especially around bedtime.
- Do not leave disturbing reports on TV or in the newspaper in plain sight.
- Encourage your children to participate in activities that reduce their exposure to disturbing media reports when they happen.
- Limit your own exposure to disturbing media reports, including news, videos and images. This can help you cope better too.

When Traumatic Events and Disturbing Media Reports Happen

When traumatic events happen and children see disturbing media reports, do not ignore their anxieties or worries. Instead, spend extra time with them:

- Watch media reports with them and explain calmly what they are seeing.
- When explaining events, tell children only as much as they need to know for their age and in a way they can understand.
- For younger children, explain to them that some images may show repeatedly, but the event happened only once.
- Answer their questions and correct any misunderstandings about the event.
- Be aware of their emotions and feelings, and assure them they are safe.
- Explain that media reports are often about bad things, but most people are good and there are good things happening in the community and world.

Finding Support

If you need support in coping with stress or trauma or helping children cope, you should consider seeking support.

- Call or text **988** or chat at nyc.gov/988, or visit nyc.gov/988 for more information.
- In addition, professionals can also help determine if you or your child has a condition such as depression or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). If you need help finding a health care provider, call **311** or 844-NYC-4NYC (844-692-4692) — there are services available for all New Yorkers regardless of insurance, ability to pay or immigration status.