



Responding to Scary Events

Helping Preschoolers Cope with Scary Events

We can't prevent scary events from happening, but we can do our best to know what and how much information our children are being exposed to about the events. Children are often frightened by uncertainty, change, and adult emotional responses. The following tips help children cope during scary times:

- Turn off the radio, TV or electronic devices to prevent children from being overwhelmed by images and discussion about the situation or event.
- If you do watch or listen with your children, be prepared to discuss it with them and answer their questions.
- Notice changes in their behavior such as aggression, withdrawal, loss of appetite, difficulty with sleep, separation or sadness.
- Keep your family routines and daily schedules to provide a sense of security and comfort.

Take Good Care of Yourself

Children are always watching and learning from adults around them. It shows them what is acceptable and what is not. Consider the impact of the scary event on yourself and notice the response you are having in your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. It is okay to also be challenged by the event or situation, but giving yourself the time you need to manage your own responses will not only help you, but set an example for your children to handle the current situation and future situations they encounter.



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Emotion Coaching - Label, Empathize And Problem-Solve (LEAPS)

When we notice changes in children's behavior it is often the result of emotions that they are working through. Preschool children often lack the words to express their feelings and thoughts. Using a strategy called Emotion Coaching, adults can help children understand and respond to their feelings in a healthy and helpful way.

Try these steps:

- Notice and **Label** feelings - "It sounds like you are feeling ____."
- **Empathize** with your child to help them know their feelings are ok and that you care - "It's normal/ok to feel ____ when ____."
- **And Problem Solve** - help your child come up with solutions or ideas - "I wonder if it would help to ____ or to ____."

Building Resilience in Challenging Times

Consider these ideas:

- Find people or things around you to be grateful for - make a list or write a letter to someone you are grateful for.
- Reframe the event or situation by using the Mr. Rogers method of looking for the helpers and talk about the good these people are doing.
- Talk openly about feelings, read books or watch movies to notice and discuss the feelings and responses of characters.
- Move your body - being physically active releases the feel good chemicals in our brains.
- Spend time outside and just notice the natural world around you.
- **PLAY!** Children learn, share, and interact best through play - when adults and children play together they both benefit.



Photo by Juliane Liebermann on Unsplash

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