

Tuesday, October 10, 2023

Dear Families:

As we process the happenings in Israel, we continue to find ways to support one another through this difficult time. Watching our youngsters enjoy a day of school and experience learning and friendships helped center my thoughts. The most important job we have as adults is to reassure our children they are safe and to keep life as normal as possible.

We are sharing this letter from Lauren Macchio, our social work consultant, to help guide your interactions with your children during this time.

Pamela B. Schwartz
Director of Penn Family Early Childhood Center

Dear Parents,

One of the toughest things we face is talking to our children about difficult subjects. Your instinct tells you to protect and preserve their innocence and foster their trust in the world. After all, they are children only for a short time.

You are the first line of support for your children, and during hard times, you want them to turn to you for guidance and reassurance. And while establishing open lines of communication about tough issues helps your children develop coping skills and deepens their trust in you, **this does not mean you should be opening the conversation. Listening for questions or observing imaginary play may point to your child's trying to figure out what is transpiring in the world.**

It's not seeing your distress that worries your children; it is not talking about your distress that worries them.

Here are some tips for explaining your feelings to your children.

Let your children know that their perceptions are real.

- Provide a story.
- Tell your children that they are not to blame for your feelings.
- To make your children feel safe, tell them that even when you're upset or sad or angry you still love them and will take care of them.
- Leave room for questions and feelings.

Putting it all together might sound like this:

"I know you saw me crying earlier today. Just as we talk about your big feelings, adults have big feelings, too. I learned about really sad things happening in Israel, and crying is something I do when I feel sad. You didn't do anything to make me cry. And here's the thing: Even when I'm

sad, I'm still your strong Mommy/Daddy who will take care of you. I will still give you a bath and read you books.”

Then, take a deep breath and give yourself grace. This feels hard because it is hard. So allow yourself to lean on the people around you for support.

If you have older children, here are some more tips.

- Limit exposure to the news.
- Maintain routines and structure. Stick to daily routines as much as possible to provide a sense of normalcy. Engage in activities that promote relaxation, such as reading, playing games, or spending time together.
- Encourage empathy and compassion. If your children bring up the topic, help them develop empathy and compassion by discussing the impact of the events. Talk about ways they can contribute and support those in need, such as organizing donation drives, volunteering, or writing letters of encouragement.
- Be a role model. Manage your emotions and reactions to distressing news events. Demonstrate resilience, compassion, and optimism, as your actions will serve as powerful examples for your children.
- Finally, don't worry about knowing the perfect thing to say--there is no answer that will make everything OK. **Focus on listening.** As Mister Rogers said, “Anything that’s human is mentionable, and anything that is mentionable can be more manageable. When we can talk about our feelings, they become less overwhelming, less upsetting, and less scary.”

Below are more resources. Your children’s reactions to frightening news events may vary. The tips I’ve provided are general. You know your children best. Trust your instincts and adapt these suggestions to suit your children..

We, as a school community, are committed to supporting your children during challenging times. Let’s work together to foster resilience, empathy, and well-being among them.

Lauren Macchio

Resources

“It’s Okay to Not be Okay -- Adults Get Big Feelings Too” by Danielle Sherman-Lazar

<https://www.amazon.com/Its-Okay-Not-Be-Feelings/dp/1913615456>

What to Say to Kids When the News is Scary

<https://www.npr.org/2019/04/24/716704917/when-the-news-is-scary-what-to-say-to-kids>

Explaining the News to Our Kids

<https://www.commonsemmedia.org/articles/explaining-the-news-to-our-kids>

Helping Children Cope with Frightening News

<https://childmind.org/article/helping-children-cope-frightening-news/>