



HOW TO DISCUSS CURRENT EVENTS WITH CHILDREN AND TEENS

There are major events happening around the world and in our community every day. It can be hard to know how to, or even if you should, talk about them with your children. Try these tips to help navigate these challenging conversations.

Ask Questions: Sometimes youth know more than we give them credit for, and they also digest information differently based on their age and experience. Try to meet them where they are, by using similar language and working within their worldview.

Be Open and Brief: Regardless of their age, many young people prefer the “Cliff Notes” version of explanations. Focus on the most important parts you want to make sure they receive, and then offer to clarify based on their questions and processing abilities.

Limit Media Exposure (if possible): If children see something that they respond strongly to, help them understand that most media aims to create an emotional response to increase viewership. There is also a lot of “fake news,” so this can be a chance to discuss how to understand what sources are reliable and fact-based.

Validate Emotions: Try phrases such as “I’m angry about this, too,” or “You’re right, it’s not fair,” or “You have every right to feel this way.” Help them feel empowered and like they have a voice by working together to answer questions such as, “What should we do?” or “How can we help?”

Create a Safety Plan: Remind children that you will always do your best to keep them safe, and make sure they have the phone numbers for family members or friends. Encourage them to speak to a trusted adult if they see something that does not seem right. It can feel scary to talk about these things with kids, but many children actually feel safer when they know what the plan is.

Special Considerations by Age or Life Experience
Younger Elementary: Reinforce safety and help them “find their calm” when their feelings are overwhelming.

Older Elementary and Middle School: Offering transparency about appropriate details helps them better identify what things they do not need to worry about. Help them re-regulate when big feelings come up.

Teens and Young Adults: Encourage critical thinking about questions such as the source’s agenda and pros and cons to different responses to the problem.

Individuals Who Have Experienced Trauma: Individuals with a trauma history may respond differently, including in their ability to accurately judge the safety of a situation, strong responses to seemingly minor obstacles, or resorting to unhealthy coping strategies that once kept them safe.



CINDY SMITH, LPCC-S

Associate Director of Clinical Training and Development