

Children and Catastrophic News

By Susan Dermond

At times when there is upheaval and instability closely connected to our reality, we need to look at how we are interpreting events for our children. We all are curious and want to know what is happening, but the ideal is to limit times for media to when the children are not around.

Children in the feeling years absorb the emotions of others. Until puberty it is really good to shelter them from harsher realities so that they can keep their hearts open and receptive to all the positive influences you are providing.

The images on television are very powerful, and it is best if children not have them stored in their brains. Please remember that children do not have the filters that we have to mitigate some of the emotions around disaster.

However, we do not live in a bubble, and we cannot protect children completely from the information they get from others and from adult conversations. If they have heard or seen tragic news, we can help them to deal with it actively by sending images of light to the victims and aid workers.

Of course, you help your child the most by avoiding falling into worry and fear yourself. When I was with my niece and her 15-month-old in South Carolina this summer, an acquaintance of hers dropped by. Just to make conversation, the friend brought up a story in the news about a speedboat accident that injured a young girl. Voices lowered and the energy became heavy. It is not as if any of us knew this girl or were going to help in any way; I felt the conversation was not helpful to anyone, but also really inappropriate to have with a little boy in the room. Children are sensitive and absorb the downward energy communicated through voice tones and facial expressions, even when it is not directed at them.

It was difficult to change the subject without seeming heartless. I did as soon as possible, and you can too when your children are present. Perhaps you can say you would prefer to speak of hopeful and heroic actions when children are within hearing.

The older the child, the more conversation about events can reassure. It might be helpful to talk about how we would want to handle a disaster and how part of our psychological survival would be in helping others when we can.

For much more on this subject, I recommend Lorna Knox's book, *Scary News: 12 ways to raise joyful children when the headlines are full of fear*. Yes, I'm biased because Lorna is a friend, but it is also a very helpful book. Lorna's three children range from age 8-17; she has much practical experience.