

ENGAGING CHILDREN DURING & AFTER A CRISIS

Unless a tragedy has directly touched a child, most younger kids probably aren't aware of the event. Therefore, be careful about the media exposure and adult conversations you allow your kids to be exposed to over the days following a public tragedy. Yes, they'll hear things, and it's almost impossible to fully shield today's child from traditional and social media outlets, but we should be ready to have meaningful conversations with our children.

Following are some ideas to help parents and ministry leaders engage with children during and after a crisis.

1 Be Sensitive

GOD GIVES US A SENSE OR A TUG (in the person of the Holy Spirit) that leads us when we are intentional to listen. Be especially sensitive to His guidance during tragedy and crisis.

Start with prayer. Pray before you talk with your child, then pray with your child. It's OK that kids know you are dependent on God to help you through difficult situations too. Beg Him to lead you as you offer advice and comfort. He wants you to be successful. He wants you to say the right thing. Ask Him, and then be sensitive to His guidance.

2 Be Talkative

TALK WITH YOUR CHILDREN. Include them, when appropriate, in family discussions regarding the crisis. Kids need to express their feelings in safe places with safe people.

Find opportunities to talk about the situation (around the dinner table, when tucking your child in bed, in the car while driving to school). Most children are talkative by nature. Take advantage of this time to share and talk.

3 Be Honest

TELL THE TRUTH. Don't deny that something bad has happened. Be honest with your child and be honest with yourself.

Recognize that you have feelings regarding this crisis too. Know how you feel and understand that your feelings play a part in shaping your child's feelings.

4 Be Respectful

REALIZE THAT KIDS HAVE REAL FEELINGS, and their feelings deserve our respect.

Ask your child how they feel about the crisis and be respectful of their feelings. Give your child permission to feel whatever it is they are feeling while gently leading them toward truth.

5 Be Age-Appropriate

EVERY CHILD DEVELOPS UNIQUELY. As a parent, you know your child and their level of understanding, so be intentional about talking with him appropriately. Most young kids think concretely, if you tell them something, they take every word literally. So, a good rule of thumb is to avoid euphemisms and complicated explanations.

Answer questions but be careful not to overload your child with too much information. Children have short attention spans and may be unable to engage fully in long conversations. If they want to know and you've created an atmosphere of freedom to ask, they will!

6 Be Reassuring

AFTER HEARING OF A TRAGEDY, many children may fear leaving your presence. Assure them that they are safe and it's going to be OK. Assure them that you and those to whom they have been entrusted are concerned with their safety.

Understand that kids will take on your posture concerning the tragedy. If you're visually frightened, your child will likely assume your fears.

7 Be Hopeful

SUPPORT YOUR CHILDREN as they work through the emotions of this crisis. Expect them to be concerned but offer them the hope we have as Christians. Explain that God is in control.

He can use this tragedy for His good. We may not fully understand, but we can trust His heart. Pray with your child. Teach him to seek God for His strength, especially in a crisis.

Allow this time to lead kids closer to Jesus. Allow this time to bring you closer to Him as your Deliverer and Savior. Allow God to use this time to bring you closer as a family. Use these tender moments to demonstrate that the faith we teach is real.

