

## **8 ways to talk to kids about disasters**

Given the 24-hour news cycle, kids are some of the first to see or hear about tragedy and disaster around the corner or around the world. But as kids are increasingly exposed to disturbing news footage, Twitter updates and Facebook posts, they're going to go to their parents, teachers and pastors with questions. Here are some suggestions on how to talk with children about disasters and their impact.

### **1. Start by listening**

Find out what your child already knows. You can then respond in an age-appropriate way. The aim is not to worry them with the devastating details, but to protect them from misinformation they may have heard from friends or disturbing images they may have seen on television.

### **2. Provide clear, simple answers**

Limit your answer to the question asked and use simple language.

### **3. If you don't know the answer, admit it**

If your children ask questions that you can't answer, tell them so, and then do some research to try and help them sort it out. If they ask "Why did this have to happen?" don't be afraid to say "I don't know." If you are part of a faith community, the reassurance offered there can be invaluable in helping your child sort through the truth that awful things happen.

### **4. Follow media reports or online updates privately**

Seeing or hearing about the horrifying details of the quake may be more than children can cope with. Adults, too, should ensure they are dealing with their own emotions by talking to others, so they can continue to respond well to their children's needs.

### **5. Concentrate on making children feel safe**

When tragedies occur, children wonder if the same event could happen in their hometown. If it was an act of nature that could not be repeated in your area, tell children that. Placing themselves in the situations of victims is not all bad—it is a sign of empathy, an essential life skill, but watch for signs of excessive worrying.

### **6. Give children creative outlets**

Some children may not be prepared to speak about what they have heard, but may find drawing or other creative activities helpful to deal with their emotions and stress. Their drawings can be helpful starting points for conversation.

### **7. Model involvement and compassion**

Tell your child that, as a family, you will be helping those affected by the disaster through prayers or donations to reputable charities.

### **8. Give your child a chance to be involved**

Being involved in the solution may help relieve some anxiety. Invite children to contribute to your family's efforts to help.