

TALKING TO ADOLESCENTS ABOUT TROUBLING EVENTS

Between pandemic-driven economic hardship and deaths, the intensification of racial reckoning, major environmental disasters, and violent political chaos, families are faced every day with a lot of bad news. How can we talk to our adolescents about all this in a way that acknowledges the trauma without feeding the flames, offering perspective, guidance, and reassurance?

- Test the waters before approaching tough subjects – “Have you heard much about...?” Then listen. **Let your child take the lead.** Don’t assume your top worries are theirs.
- Invite your adolescent to **open up about specific fears and anxieties** – “What are you afraid might happen...?” Try to be as concrete but realistic as possible in your reassurances about how your family will deal with big issues that you cannot fix in the moment.
- **Be open to curiosity and questions**, but stay age-appropriate and big-picture, rather than getting lost in the thorny details – perspective is key, but avoid overexplaining.
- Limit television news coverage, but if your adolescent is keen to understand current events, watch and try to learn and **process events together.**
- **Be honest about your own feelings and worries** – let them know they are not alone in their concerns. But try to keep your own emotions under adult control. **Model calm and resilience.**
- Talk about how your family can **help bring about change.** Turn frustration into action -- writing letters/op eds, joining committees, initiating projects, etc.
- Remember that at the root of parenting in the face of dark times is **helping your adolescent stay safe and feel protected.**

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