



## Help Your Child Feel Safe in an Unpredictable World

### *Strategies to Maintain Calm*

- **Control the conversation**

Children's stress levels increase when learning about disasters, violence or scary stories on the news. They may experience heightened anxiety when repeatedly exposed to them.

- **Limit exposure**

By age 18, the average child in the US has seen 16,000 simulated murders and 200,000 acts of violence via media. Young children cannot distinguish real from acting. This may leave them feeling like their world is scary or bad things might happen at any moment.

- **Minimize access to violent images**

Controlling images helps children feel safer and more secure and less likely to engage in aggression themselves.



- **Discourage "they" against "us" attitude toward cultures and countries**

This is where fears develop into prejudice.

- **Manage (don't over control) communication**

Be aware of what your child is exposed to. Tweens and teens should have some freedoms AND it's important to know how they are engaging.

- **Invite children to talk**

Ask if they have worries and listen to understand. Be honest. If they ask, "Why do people kill other people?" Say, "I don't know," if you really don't.

- **Acknowledge guessing or assuming** Stress the importance of noting fact vs fiction. Help children learn how to discern the difference.

- **Keep conversations appropriate for age level**

Only provide details your child needs to know. Let them take the lead if you aren't sure. Might want to ask your child, "I wonder why you are thinking about that today?"



- **Be your child's calm center**

Role model self-regulation. It's important for adults not to overwhelm children with adult's own worries.

- **Use reflective listening to normalize emotions**

Validate your child's ideas and questions – "Sounds like you feel worried about what happened yesterday. Tell me about your biggest concern."

- **Recognize your child's strength and your family's strength**

Notice when your child makes healthy and safe choices (for example, holding your hand to cross the street, calling you when stuck at a party and scared) and celebrate what your family is doing well.

- **Recognize when your child/family needs professional help**

Notice if your child is exhibiting repeated red flags for an extended period of time (changes in sleep, eating, social interactions, aggressive or passive behavior, withholding, withdrawn, academic changes)

