

Talking to Children About a Humanitarian Crisis

While many parents will try to protect their children from news about war or terrorism events and the subsequent humanitarian crisis, it may be difficult to filter out all knowledge. Children may catch glimpses of images in the news or hear about the situation from friends or via overheard conversations. Stories about children who are refugees may be especially frightening or stressful.

If you are struggling with what to say to your child about a humanitarian crisis, these tips may help:

- ▶ **Take their lead.** Wait for your child to ask you about the crisis. For younger children, it may be best to limit their access to information. For older children, let them know that you are available to talk if they have questions or worries.
- ▶ **Keep your own emotions in check.** Avoid talking to your child about the crisis when you are frightened, upset, or angry. Role model appropriate behavior.
- ▶ **Be ready for “Why?”** Children, especially younger ones, may struggle to understand events that seem unfair or cruel. Provide simple, honest answers, such as, “Sometimes people do bad things for reasons we don’t understand.” Make it clear that it’s important to be kind to others and to avoid hurtful or violent behavior.

- ▶ **Let your child express her or his feelings.** For older children, listen to what they have to say without judgment and provide factual information where appropriate. For younger children, encourage them to draw or write stories that will help them express their feelings.
- ▶ **Don’t try to make it “all better.”** There is rarely an easy fix for when children become aware of terrible things happening in the world. Focus on healthy coping skills and on your personal strategies for managing worry. Reassure your child that you are there to support them when they are afraid or uncertain.
- ▶ **Don’t make promises you can’t keep.** Avoid statements that provide false reassurance, such as, “Bad things will never happen to you.” Instead, try phrases like, “I will do everything I can to keep you safe.”
- ▶ **Watch for behavior issues.** Signs that your child may be struggling include:
 - Nightmares or poor sleep
 - Change in appetite
 - Declining school performance
 - Clingy behavior or fear of separation
 - Disobedience or aggressive behavior
 - Difficulty concentrating
- ▶ **Talk to LifeMatters.** LifeMatters can provide suggestions for how to help your child cope with fears about armed conflict or its humanitarian impact. Call 24/7/365.

Call **LifeMatters®** toll-free anytime. **1-800-634-6433**

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