

Talking to your children about Disasters or Terrorism

In response to disasters and terrorist attacks the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) would like to offer some advice on how to communicate with children and adolescents during times of crisis.

It's important to communicate to children that they're safe. Given what they may have seen on television, they need to know that the violence is isolated to certain areas and they will not be harmed. Parents should try to assure children that they've done everything they can to keep their children safe.

Adolescents in particular can be hard hit by these kinds of events and parents might want to watch for signs such as: sleep disturbances, fatigue, lack of pleasure in activities enjoyed previously, and initiation of illicit substance abuse.

Overexposure to the media can be traumatizing. It's unwise to let children or adolescents view footage of traumatic events over and over. Children and adolescents should not watch these events alone.

Adults need to help children understand the significance of these events. Discussion is critical. It should be stressed that the terrorist acts are ones of desperation and horror - and that they're not about politics or religion. Children should know that lashing out at members of a particular religious or ethnic group will only cause more harm.