

# TALKING TO KIDS ABOUT TRAGIC EVENTS

## YOUR RESPONSE WILL SHAPE YOUR CHILD'S CORE BELIEFS

The conversations you have with your kids—as well as the conversations you avoid—will impact their core belief about themselves, other people, and the world in general.

For example, will your child decide the world is a terrifying place filled with bad people who want to hurt her? Or will she grow to believe that there are a few bad people out there, but for the most part, there are good people who are working hard to keep her safe?

That doesn't mean you should share every detail of a tragic event. Instead, it means you should carefully give your kids as much information as they can safely handle and use it as a teachable moment to build their Faith, mental strength and resilience.

## BIBLICAL CORE PRINCIPLES TO BUILD UPON

**John 16:33** - <sup>33</sup> *I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.*"

Life IS hard and difficult. Bad things do happen, BUT Jesus promises to help us.

**John 3:16** - <sup>16</sup> *"For this is how God loved the world: He gave[a] his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.*

**Ephesian 2:8,10** - <sup>8</sup> *God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God.* <sup>10</sup> *For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.*

Jesus died so that if we believe and trust Him to be our Savior (aka. Believe in Him and ask Him to be your forever Best Friend – in child speak) we can live in Heaven forever. AND while we live on earth, He will help us to be the Good of this world and help make it better by our actions of love and forgiveness. Just as he loves and forgives us when we trust in Him.

**1 John 4:4** - <sup>4</sup> *But you belong to God, my dear children. You have already won a victory over those people, because the Spirit who lives in you is greater than the spirit who lives in the world.*

Once we trust in Jesus, we now have a power and love in us that is greater than any evil or bad that is in the world

**Psalms 23:4** - <sup>4</sup> *Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me. Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me.*

Even though things may get tough or scary, we can move or continue forward with Jesus's strength, power and protection

## 2 TOUGH, BUT COMMON, QUESTIONS TO ANSWER

### 1. Why did God allow this to happen?

God allows all of us to make choices. It's called "free will" or "freedom to choose". We can choose to do good or choose to do bad/evil.

God wants us to choose to do good. So when we do good, we are doing exactly what God wants us to do ("His Will"). Like when we choose to help a friend... or be respectful to our parents... or spend time praying for our classmates.

Other times people choose to do things that God doesn't want them to do. Unfortunately, these are the choices that hurt the person making the bad decision and those around them. This breaks God's heart because He wants us to do things that follow His Word.

God allows both types of choices in the world. This is because He wants us to follow and love Him by choice and not because He forces us. When people decide to do things that hurt others, God is there with us every step of the way to help us stay strong.

## 2. Am I safe?

Think about your favorite toy or item that you own. Do you have it in your mind? Now imagine this... God loves you a billion times more than you love that toy. He made you special and unique... there's nobody in the world like you. The Bible says that you are His masterpiece - the best work He's ever done. You matter to God. He watches over you and is always there right by your side.

He is super strong... knows everything about you inside and out... and never lets you out of His sight. There's no need to be afraid of what might happen because God promises He will be there no matter what.

## WHAT IF I STILL HAVE QUESTIONS?

It's ok to have questions. Choose someone you trust and ask them. If you still don't understand ask again. Feel like crying? That's ok too. Take all the time you need to feel better. Just know that the people around you love you and are here for you no matter what. Best of all? God is there with you too.

## WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP MY CHILD COPE?

*(As recommended from Mayo Clinic)*

You can take steps to help your child process what happened. For example:

**Remain calm.** Your child will look to you for cues about how to react. It's OK for children to see adults sad or crying, but consider excusing yourself if you're experiencing intense emotions.

**Reassure your child of his or her safety.** Point out factors that ensure your child's immediate safety and the safety of the community. Consider reviewing your family's plans for responding to a crisis.

**Limit media exposure.** Don't allow young children to repeatedly see or hear coverage of a tragedy. Even if your young child is engrossed in play, he or she is likely aware of what you're watching — and might become confused or upset. Older children might want to learn more about a tragedy by reading or watching TV. However, avoid repetitive loops of news information once you have the facts. Constant exposure to coverage of a tragedy can heighten anxiety.

**Avoid placing blame.** If the tragedy was caused by human violence or error, be careful not to blame a cultural, racial or ethnic group, or people who have mental illnesses.

**Maintain the routine.** To give your child a sense of normalcy, keep up your family's usual dinner, homework and bedtime routine.

**Spend extra time together.** Special attention can foster your child's sense of security. Spend a little more time reading to your child or tucking him or her in at night. If your child is having trouble sleeping, allow him or her to sleep with a light on or to sleep in your room for a short time. Extra cuddles might help, too.

**Encourage the expression of feelings.** Explain that it's OK to be upset or cry. Let your child write about or draw what he or she is feeling. Physical activity might serve as an outlet for feelings or frustration. If your child is acting out, explain that there are other ways of coping.

**Seek out school resources.** If your child's school offers counseling after a tragedy, take advantage of the opportunity to meet with a counselor.

**Do something for those affected by the tragedy.** Consider ways that you and your child can help victims and their families. You might take your child to your place of worship or write thank-you notes to first responders.