



## Talking to Children About Current Events

Our children are an *amana*, a trust, to us and how we build their character in times of difficulty and troubles will be what we give them as tools for their lives. As teachers, caregivers, and parents, we must strike a balance between having them be knowledgeable and engaged with the world around us and protecting their sense of peace and well being.

We realize that parenting is a conscientious process; we are each day asked to be present, responsive, and engaged with our children so they may grow in spirit, mind and body in the best of manners. We also realize that we do what we can to protect them, and that the realities of this world will nonetheless seep in and in the end how they process these realities will help them become the people they must to make differences in the same world towards peace, justice, and goodwill.

We've collected parenting guidance on how to talk to and deal with the complexities of war, terrorism, natural disasters and related difficult issues our children at some point inevitably face. We understand that families at Al Fatih may have members suffering in some way as well as others who may have members serving in various capacities of relief, rescue, and military operations.

### Typical Responses of Children to War, Natural Disasters and Related Issues

Emotional responses vary in nature and severity from child to child. Nonetheless, there are some similarities in how children (and adults) feel when their lives are impacted by war or the threat of war:

***Fear:*** Fear may be the predominant reaction--fear for the safety of those suffering as well as fear for their own safety. Children's fantasies of war may include a mental picture of a bomb being dropped on their home or an earthquake or flood ravaging their neighborhood. While their worries are probably exaggerated, they are often based on real images of terrorist attacks, war scenes or disasters. When children hear rumors at school and pick up bits of information from television, their imaginations may run wild. They may think the worst, however unrealistic it may be. Any publicized threat of war or terrorism close to home may also add to their fear.

***Loss of control:*** Military actions and natural disasters are something over which children--and most adults--have no control. Lack of control can be overwhelming and confusing. These feelings were experienced by most people in the immediate aftermath of the terrorist or military attacks. Children who know of these events may grasp at any control that they have in their own lives including refusing to cooperate, go to school, part with favorite toys, or leave their parents.

***Anger:*** Anger is a common reaction. Unfortunately, anger is often expressed at those to whom children are closest. Children may direct anger toward classmates and neighbors because they can't express their anger toward terrorists or countries with whom we are at war. Some children may show anger toward parents who are in the military, even to the extent that they do not want to write letters. Knowing that those who are involved in the military are volunteers only helps to justify anger. Patriotism and duty are abstract concepts, especially for younger children who are experiencing the concrete reality of separation from a loved one.

***Loss of stability:*** Constant exposure to current events interrupts routines. It is unsettling. Children can feel insecure when their usual schedules and activities are disrupted, increasing their level of stress and need for reassurance.

***Isolation:*** Children who have a family member in the military or family members effected by war or disaster may feel isolated and think that only they know of these events. This is especially true if parents are constantly involved in some way and children are not excluded from phone calls, news media, discussions about the issue. Such children may feel jealous of friends' undisturbed families and may strike out at signs of normalcy around them.

***Confusion:*** This can occur on two levels. First, children may feel confused about terrorist attacks and war, what further dangers might arise, and when the violence will stop. Second, children may have trouble understanding the difference between violence as entertainment and the real events taking place on the news. Some of the modern media violence is unnervingly real. Youngsters may have difficulty separating reality from fantasy, cartoon heroes and villains from the government soldiers and real terrorists. Separating the realities of war from media fantasy may require adult help.



Find out what your child knows about the news.

Listen to what your child tells you.

Ask a follow-up question.

Shield children under age eight from disturbing news.

Avoid repeated TV viewings of the same news event.

Monitor older children's exposure to the news

Develop an ongoing dialogue with your child about what's happening in the world.

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*Somewhere deep inside each one of us human beings is a longing to know that all will be well. Our children need to hear from us adults that we will do everything we can to keep them safe and to help them grow in this world .*

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### Duas for Asking Allah's

#### Protection and Help

Hasbiya Allahu la ilaha illa huwa Aalayhi tawakkaltu wahuwa rabbu al-Aarshi al-Aatheem.

‘Sufficient for me is Allah; there is no deity except Him. On Him I have relied, and He is the Lord of the Great Throne.’

Source: Quran 9:129

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‘O Allah, there is no ease except in that which You have made easy, so make easy that which is difficult.’

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Ya hayyu ya qayyumu bi rahmatika astaghithu

‘Oh the Ever-Living One, the Self-Subsisting Source of all beings, I invoke Your help.’

2 Reported by At-Tirmidhi

## FAMILY HALAQA ACTIVITIES FOR HOME

- **Remind children of the names of Allāh ta‘ālā** and how these are played out in difficult times— al-Wadud (The Loving), al-Hākim (The Supreme Ruler), al-Hakīm (The Most Wise), ar-Rahman (The Merciful). Al-Razzaq (The Sustainer). Mujib (Responder to Prayers), al-Quwiyy (Possessor of All Strength). Al-Mu‘id (The Restorer), al-Wali (The Protecting Friend). Al-Muqsit (The Equitable One), al-Mani (The Preventer of Harm)
- **Pray for the afflicted** – ask children to make duas out loud after family salah. Each child can say these in their own words, parents set example
- **Give generously** – find organizations for children to give funds or donations of supplies. Track what an organization is doing and involve children in seeing how these are benefiting those suffering
- **Fast as a family** – choose a day together as a reminder of how fasting is a way to connect with the suffering
- **Find the helpers**— whether it is stories of people building rafts during flooding, relief organizations setting up tents for refugees
- **Make a tangible difference in your community**—what our children can control and see positive results in are actions like picking up trash on the street, feeding the homeless, visiting the sick, helping elderly relatives with chores.

### **Listen to Children:**

- Create a time and place for children to ask their questions. Don't force children to talk about things until they're ready.
- Remember that children tend to personalize situations. For example, they may worry about friends or relatives who live in a city or state associated with incidents or events.
- Help children find ways to express themselves. Some children may not be able to talk about their thoughts, feelings, or fears. They may be more comfortable drawing pictures, playing with toys, or writing stories or poems directly or indirectly related to current events.

### **Answer Children's Questions:**

- Use words and concepts your child can understand. Make your explanation appropriate to your child's age and level of understanding. Don't overload a child with too much information.
- Give children honest answers and information. Children will usually know if you're not being honest.
- Be prepared to repeat explanations or have several conversations. Some information may be hard to accept or understand. Asking the same question over and over may be your child's way of asking for reassurance.
- Acknowledge and support your child's thoughts, feelings, and reactions. Let your child know that you think their questions and concerns are important.
- Be consistent and reassuring, but don't make unrealistic promises.
- Avoid stereotyping groups of people by race, nationality, or religion. Use the opportunity to teach tolerance and explain prejudice.
- Remember that children learn from watching their parents and teachers. They are very interested in how you respond to events. They learn from listening to your conversations with other adults.
- Let children know how you are feeling. It's OK for them to know if you are anxious or worried about events. However, don't burden them with your concerns.
- Don't confront your child's way of handling events. If a child feels reassured by saying that things are happening very far away, it's usually best not to disagree. The child may need to think about events this way to feel safe.

### **Provide Support:**

- Don't let children watch lots of violent or upsetting images on TV. Repetitive frightening images or scenes can be very disturbing, especially to young children.
- Help children establish a predictable routine and schedule. Children are reassured by structure and familiarity. School, sports, birthdays, holidays, and group activities take on added importance during stressful times.
- Coordinate information between home and school. Parents should know about activities and discussions at school. Teachers should know about the child's specific fears or concerns.
- Children who have experienced trauma or losses may show more intense reactions to tragedies or news of war or terrorist incidents. These children may need extra support and attention.
- Watch for physical symptoms related to stress. Many children show anxiety and stress through complaints of physical aches and pains.
- Watch for possible preoccupation with violent movies or war theme video/computer games.
- Children who seem preoccupied or very stressed about war, fighting, or terrorism should be evaluated by a qualified mental health professional. Other signs that a child may need professional help include: ongoing trouble sleeping, persistent upsetting thoughts, fearful images, intense fears about death, and trouble leaving their parents or going to school. The child's physician can assist with appropriate referrals.
- Help children communicate with others and express themselves at home. Some children may want to write letters to the President, Governor, local newspaper, or to grieving families.

**Let children be children. They may not want to think or talk a lot about these events. It is OK if they'd rather play ball, climb trees, or ride their bike, etc.**

## Resources for Parents

<http://www.pbs.org/parents/talkingwithkids/news/agebyage.html>

[http://www.aboutourkids.org/articles/talking\\_kids\\_about\\_terrorism\\_or\\_acts\\_war](http://www.aboutourkids.org/articles/talking_kids_about_terrorism_or_acts_war)

[http://www.aacap.org/App\\_Themes/AACAP/docs/facts\\_for\\_families/87\\_talking\\_to\\_children\\_about\\_terrorism\\_and\\_war.pdf](http://www.aacap.org/App_Themes/AACAP/docs/facts_for_families/87_talking_to_children_about_terrorism_and_war.pdf)

[http://www.nasponline.org/resources/crisis\\_safety/children\\_war\\_general.aspx](http://www.nasponline.org/resources/crisis_safety/children_war_general.aspx)

<http://www.aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/aap-health-initiatives/Children-and-Disasters/Pages/Talking-to-Children-About-Disasters.aspx>

Al Fatih Academy  
12300 Pincerest Rd.  
Reston, VA 20191

703.437.9382  
info@alfatih.org  
Www.alfatih.org

