

# How to help kids with scary and tragic news?

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All of us here at *Screenagers* have teens and tweens. Lisa, my co-producer of *Screenagers*, has a son in college in Pittsburgh, so she got alerts from him right away about the shooting. When her daughter woke up, Lisa immediately told her about the incident. Lisa said, "I wanted to tell her about what was going on before she saw it on social media or got a text from one of her friends concerned for her brother." The digital age makes it key that we get in front of these conversations quickly.

The president of the American Psychological Association (APA), Jessica Henderson Daniel, Ph.D., says in response to Pittsburgh's shootings that "Hate crimes are the most extreme expression of prejudice. Compared to other crimes, hate crimes have a more destructive impact on victims and communities because they target core aspects of our identity as human beings."

I find the American Psychological Association's [guide](#) to talking to your kids about the difficult news to be helpful. They, as do I, encourage parents to share their feelings with their children. It is not about burdening them with one's anxiety or sadness or other emotions. It is about naming feelings and discussing them. This approach has been shown to be highly effective in helping youth develop greater emotional intelligence.

The APA says "It is OK to acknowledge your feelings with your children. They see you are human. They also get a chance to see that even though you are upset, you can pull yourself together and continue on."

Psychologists generally say that small children, less than 5 years old, do not need to be told about these types of events. But, young kids now have such easy access to information on devices so we need to be mindful that they might be seeing much more than we know.

For older kids, the APA recommends: "Tell the truth. Lay out the facts at a level they can understand. You do not need to give graphic details."

I believe it is important that we all make sure kids know how rare these tragedies are. In homes where news is on a lot, or where news alerts are readily visible on screens, youth get an inaccurate perspective of the frequency with which tragedies occur. Yes, bad things happen, but the key is letting our children know that for every negative thing, there are thousands of positive things happening. And, be sure at the end of the conversations that you reassure them that they are safe and that you are there for them to talk further.

For this TTT, let's talk about difficult news. Here are some questions you may find useful.

- What feelings are coming up for all of us in this time of tragedy?

- When you feel scared or concerned about news how do you process those emotions?  
Talk to friends? Write posts? Write in a journal? Talk to your family?
- What can we do to honor and support those in need?