**PRINCIPALS’ DIGESTS**

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**DEALING WITH SCARY TV NEWS**

Many families sit down and watch the evening news together and much of it is very graphic. Violence is vividly described and often shown. Children often need help to understand what is happening and how it might affect them. Our 24/7 news culture — in conjunction with easily accessible iPads, cell phones and televisions — provides a window to events that both children and adults can struggle to understand. And when bad things happen on the world’s stage, it is very natural and healthy for children to bring up questions at home or in the classroom. Decisions about what to say, and what not to say, are best guided by a child’s developmental age.

**Tips for parents and teachers**

1. Listen to children to understand how *they* understand the trauma. What you’re scared about, as an adult, may not be what they’re scared about and this is likely to be different for children at different ages.
2. Answer the *why* questions that will inevitably come. Children are inclined to ask, for example, “Why did the bombers do this?” The answer should be tailored to a child’s age. To a 7-year-old, you might say, “There are bad people in the world, but there are lots of people who are protecting us from bad people”. A good piece of advice: When I was a boy and I saw scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, “Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.”  There are still so many caring people in this world.
3. Protect your child from seeing traumatic visual images over and over again.
4. Develop a safety plan with your child. If a child is scared about being in crowds or being in the city centre, try to think about how a child might be safe. Talk about safety in groups, or provide a phone number to call should they need encouragement when facing a situation that triggers fears.
5. Self-soothing techniques can be helpful. If children are feeling upset, deep breathing, exercise, listening to music and other strategies for calming down and managing anxiety can help.
6. Modelling how you manage through tough times also helps to build resilience in children. Your children watch how you respond to scary events and they take cues from you. Often events that are scary for kids are scary for adults, too, but when they see you calmly going about your normal activities they feel more secure.
7. The guiding principle is to talk to children in ways they understand, while being careful to not provide too much detail to a younger child. Think about how to talk to your children in a way that will help them understand and make sense of events that may otherwise feel unpredictable and overwhelming.

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