

TALKING TO CHILDREN WHEN THINGS GO BAD

Hardly a day goes by when something happens that grabs the attention of the world or of our country. It stays in the media and is reported on the news channels all day long until something else comes along to grab our attention. Around the clock reporting and social networking makes “new” news “old” pretty fast.

As parents we are left to decide how, when, and what to talk to our children about. A world that appears out of sync has become the daily diet we have all come to expect. The world is smaller. The only news that is reported is the most outrageous or sensational. It captures the day and the headline whether it is on TV or Face Book or Twitter.

Unfortunately much of it is not positive, uplifting, or optimistic. No, it is rather negative, and instills in all of us a rather pessimistic view about the future. Floods, hurricanes, nuclear meltdowns, war, and the death of one that has murdered thousands, are what the public listens to and reads and is therefore what the media reports on.

How is this affecting our children? It can't be positive. Surrounded by this all day, every day, it is normal human behavior for any ten year old or teen to form a negative opinion about what is happening and what they will inherit tomorrow.

What's the best way to keep them optimistic? Can we celebrate the death of an evil person in a way that our children understand? Do we even bring up these topics or hope they will simply go away?

Much of what to do depends on the age of a child and what we see them exposed to. If they are glued to the TV and pictures of these negative and catastrophic events, it may be a good idea to sit down and talk to them about how they feel about all of this. Just asking the question

might bring about some discussion even when you don't have an answer.

If your children are under six just leave the complex stuff alone. Children of this age can't possibly process such complicated events. It's best to let it go by without any comment or questions. But what if they are older? What about nine year olds and teens?

I don't think that we can remain quiet and hope that it just goes away. For these kids you have to have some conversation even if there. They see it and have formed some opinion.

The death of Bin Laden may be the most difficult to handle. It is not easy to explain justice or consequences to kids this age but you have to try. Our country was founded on the principles of freedom that a terribly misguided man violated many times and most often against innocent human beings. Processing his death at the hands of the country that paid so dearly is no easy task.

We have all read, and talked, and studied our own emotions about how best to handle these types of events. We were literally taken to the scene of this event as we watched our leaders deal with what they had to do. I have read a number of ways to think about this, and still come away on how best to explain it to those that may not have even been born at the time of the attack on 9/11 or are too little to explain the horror.

The sheer lack of any feeling for others was totally missing. He took away a peace of mind for many of us and the freedoms that we stand for. Yet it happened. The world will always produce people that are criminals to the rest of the human race.

I think we try to explain this fact to these kids who are trying to make sense of it all. Evil will always be present in our world, and it needs to be addressed if we are to remain civil to other human beings that we share this planet.

History is not necessarily on our side. In some part of the world one group or another has been at war for at least the last 4000 years. Many of these wars took place when one group attempted to force their own set of beliefs on others

So maybe the discussion with your kids is around the simply concept of “good” and “evil.” I wonder if talking about “right” and “wrong’ makes some sense to them. And in the attempts to explain others “misery” we show how we are also capable of “compassion”.

Most of us know these, even though some of us might not practice it as much as we should. Good and evil, right and wrong, and misery can be handled without getting bogged down in complicated words or language.

If we at least try to open up the communication channels with are kids we at least can feel good about trying to do the “right” thing. And that’s a “good” start. Responding to events is sometimes very tough. We need to use our best judgment.