

Founded by Fred Rogers, Family Communications, Inc. is a nonprofit company that creates a wide range of materials dedicated to children, their families and those who support them. From its roots as the producer of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, it has expanded to design educational materials in many media that support healthy emotional, social, and intellectual growth at all ages, and that embody the philosophy and values of Fred Rogers.

*Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* is seen daily on PBS, dealing with themes important in the lives of children and families.

*During his lifetime, Fred Rogers became known for his reassuring way of helping families of young children deal with difficult times, beginning with his response to Robert Kennedy's assassination. Over the years since then, there have, unfortunately, been other tragic events during which parents and educators turned to him for his calming and thoughtful insight and guidance. Fred Rogers' wisdom is timeless, and his messages continue to be valuable for children and the people who care for them, as we deal with the events of today's world.*

For more information for parents, caregivers and teachers, visit our website at [www.fci.org](http://www.fci.org)



4802 Fifth Avenue  
Pittsburgh, PA 15213  
412-687-2990

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## Helping Young Children Deal With Tragic Events in the News

### Thoughts from Fred Rogers for Parents, Caregivers and Teachers



by Fred Rogers  
with Hedda Bluestone Sharapan

*It is certainly understandable that parents, teachers, and caregivers struggle with feelings about how to communicate with children about tragic events in the news. Anything that involves great loss and devastation is bound to reawaken previous fears and significant losses in our own lives. As with all concerns about childhood, there aren't magic answers. However, we are glad to share with you some of our thoughts for helping children cope with the fears and uncertainties that these events may arouse, and we hope they may be helpful for you.*

### **Help children feel secure**

Let children know that we adults and our government are doing our best to keep them safe and to care for their needs. We can also do our best to keep things as normal as possible. Familiar routines comfort children and can go a long way toward providing security.

### **Focus on the helpers**

When I was a boy and would see scary things on the news, my mother would say to me, “Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.” To this day, that’s where I focus my attention — on the many caring people in this world.

### **Limit children’s television viewing of the news events**

Even very young children drink in television images, and the younger the children are, the more likely they are to be interested in close-up faces. Televised images of tragic events are too graphic and disturbing for young children.

### **Limit your own television viewing**

It’s very tempting to get drawn into watching news around the clock, but adults must resist that temptation because it can lead to a feeling of hopelessness and despair, which their children tend to sense.

### **Be a good listener**

Even if we wanted to, it would be impossible to help young children understand about devastating news events. If they ask questions, your best answer may be to ask them, “What do you think happened?” If the answer is “I don’t know,” then the simplest reply might be, “I’m sad about the news, and I’m worried. But I love you, and I am here for you.” If parents don’t bring up the subject, children may be left at the mercy of their misinterpretations. Parents may want to ask their children what they have heard. They might be surprised at how much they have heard from others. Listening doesn’t only happen through our ears. Children have many ways to let us know that something upsets them. Some children hold in their sad and angry feelings at first. They may let those feelings out weeks or months later.

### **Monitor children’s play**

Play is one of the important ways children can work through their concerns. Of course, some play can be scary and unsafe. At times like that, adults should be nearby to redirect the play into caring and nurturing themes, perhaps by suggesting the building of a hospital for the wounded or making a pretend meal for the emergency helpers.

### **Help your children learn to handle anger constructively**

One of the most important messages we can give our children is, “It’s okay to be angry, but it’s not okay to hurt.” Anger is a natural and normal feeling, in families and among friends. Besides allowing children the right to their anger, we can also help them find constructive things to do with their angry feelings -- things that don’t hurt others or themselves or damage things. By showing children how to deal with their angry feelings in healthy ways, we are giving them useful tools that will serve them all life long and helping them to be the world’s future peacemakers.