

# Kids & the MEDIA

## HELPING CHILDREN COPE WITH DISTURBING NEWS



During uncertain and traumatic times, the media play a substantial role in helping us understand complex events, including natural disasters, taking place throughout our world. Whether it's television, newspapers, magazines, films, or the Internet, the media are an integral part of children's lives for entertainment, information, and education. Media literacy is educating children to better interpret, cope with, and understand the media by providing them with tools to learn how to watch carefully, think critically, and navigate safely.

"It's crucial to engage in meaningful discussions regarding media literacy with children" says Linda Millar, a 30-year educator from Ottawa and education consultant for Concerned Children's Advertisers (CCA). "This not only keeps the lines of communication open, it lets them know they can ask questions about information they are receiving and images they are seeing in the media."

Millar reminds us that disturbing media images have the potential to evoke many different feelings in our children. She offers these tips for parents to help their children deal with disturbing images and information portrayed through the media.

**Watch the news with your kids.** Talk to them about the images and sounds they are seeing and hearing. Correct misconceptions and speak in simple language with age-appropriate terms they can follow.

**Be aware of your children's reactions and conceptions.** Encourage them to ask questions about what they see in the media and don't understand.

**Be sensitive.** Remind your children that many of their classmates, neighbours, and friends may have family or friends that live in the area of conflict. Discuss how important it is to be sensitive when talking about disturbing images, including natural disasters, around other individuals.

**Let their questions be your guide.** Respond with honesty in a manner that is age-appropriate. Monitor conversations with

friends and family to be sure that they are not repressing their feelings.

**Put things in context.** Explain that the media have a responsibility to report on all world events—good and bad—and that even though they may see the same images multiple times, in reality each has happened only once.

**Clarify the facts.** Children often misconstrue information. Encourage them to ask a grown-up they trust (a parent or teacher) to find out if what they're hearing is true.

**Encourage your children to find a creative way to express their feelings.** Help them choose an activity such as writing a letter to a community newspaper, a government official, or an organization to voice their feelings. They might also want to contribute as a volunteer or start a project at

school to help others feel better in these difficult times.

**The world is a large place.** Take out a world map and show them where the images they are seeing are coming from and how far away it is from their home.

**Remind your children how important they are to you and your family.** Make a plan to do something special—go for a walk, a drive in the country, visit relatives, or call them on the phone.

**Check out CCA's TV&ME and Long Live Kids programs.** Parents interested in additional information and resources about helping children cope with the media and other issues, including bullying, poor self-esteem, substance abuse, peer pressure, and healthy active living, can refer to the following website: [cca-kids.ca](http://cca-kids.ca). 🐾

"Above all, trust your instincts about how your child is feeling and follow those instincts when responding to those feelings," says Millar. "You know your child better than anyone else."