



Know! To Talk About The Attack On The Capitol

When one of the world's most secure buildings recently came under siege, many young people witnessed the live images of protestors creating chaos and engaging in acts of violence. With the pandemic causing many families to be homebound, more young people were likely to have watched the assault taking place in real time. In addition to traditional TV media coverage, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok and other social media outlets were quickly flooded with not only live images, but videos, memes, and individuals and groups sharing every viewpoint possible.

It was difficult for many of us adults to process, and likely even more so for our youth. In a recent survey, 63% of tweens and teens said watching the news makes them feel afraid, angry, sad and/or depressed. With all the disturbing and despicable acts that took place and were shown on the news that day and the days to follow, there was plenty to invoke fear and anger, in addition to worrying about what may happen next.

Following the Capitol attack, psychiatrist Dr. Janet Taylor and parenting expert and author Rachel Simmons appeared live on "Good Morning America" to share advice on talking with young people with these five tips:

1. Validate your children's feelings: Validate that such images are really disturbing. Let them know that it is okay to feel scared and unsettled. We are not supposed to see chaos in a place that we should see stability.
2. Explain what is happening in language they relate to: Explain that people have every right to protest, to speak out against their government, to assemble lawfully and peacefully protest. People do not, however, have the right to be violent and commit acts of crime, which is what occurred that day at the Capitol.

3. Use the news as a learning opportunity, not entertainment: If your child is sensitive or anxious, have them sit out this news cycle. But if you feel your child is equipped to watch news coverage of current events, sit down with them, and talk with them about it instead of letting them watch and process it on their own. Share your perspective. Talk about your values. Talk about what it means to live in the United States. Be their guide.
4. Talk to your children about their feelings: Check in with questions like, “What have you seen on social media or on the news about what happened at the Capitol? What is your opinion and how do you feel about what you have seen?” By talking with them you will not only gain a sense of what they are thinking and feeling, but you will have the opportunity to share your insights as well. However, be sure to listen attentively, and to not dismiss what they say.
5. Watch closely for warning signs of anxiety and stress, including: not being able to function normally; loss of pleasure in things they enjoy; too much or not enough sleep; overeating or undereating; and difficulty focusing. If they are not engaging in their normal activities, and are showing signs of anxiety, the experts say it may be time to seek outside help.

Nearly half of young people ages 10 to 18 say they get their information through online sites. 63% of tweens and teens, however, say they get their information from family, teachers or friends. With that in mind, take the opportunity to be their number one source of information, instead of them acquiring misinformation and outside viewpoints that do not match with your family values. Children will also take cues from parents, and other caregivers, including teachers. So, choose your words and actions carefully, and be aware of your body language when discussing this topic with your children. While we may not have a good explanation for such acts of violence, it is critical that we talk with our children about this and any other type of national or world event that may cause them stress and anxiety. Young people need to be able to process what the images they witness, talk through, and share their feelings, have an understanding of misinformation that they may come across, and continually be reassured that they are still safe and secure as our country and our families move forward.

Sources

[Common Sense Media, News and America’s Kids: How Young People Perceive and Are Impacted by the News. Mar 8, 2017.](#)

[Good Morning America, Katie Kindelan, Family: After deadly US Capitol breach, 5 tips to talk to kids and ease their anxiety. Jan 7, 2021.](#)

[NBC Boston, Alysha Palumbo: Talking to Children About the US Capitol Chaos. Jan 7, 2021.](#)

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