

How to Help your Children Understand the Election Stress

Elections often lead to a wide range of reactions. How can we best help our children if they are feeling stressed by what they are hearing, reading, or experiencing?



Explain the Election in an Age-Appropriate Manner

Hopefully parents/guardians will be the first to talk with children about the current events. Explain in simple, clear terms what is going on, using words and concepts they are likely to understand.



Listen to What They Are Saying

Ask what they've heard about the situation. Let them tell you in their own words and answer their questions at an age-appropriate level. The easiest way to have this conversation might be during an activity, such as drawing, mealtime, or driving with you in the car.

Details that may be obvious to adults may not be to children. Be truthful, but it's best not to tell them more information than they can handle for their age.



Focus on Their Safety

Once you understand their perception of current events, be clear that you will always do your best to keep them safe. Let them know adults are working hard to make sure they will be alright.



Pay Attention to your Own Reactions

Your children will be watching you carefully and taking their cues from you. If you can manage your anxiety in response to current events, your children will be more easily reassured. It's okay to let children know you're anxious, upset, or concerned – but be sure to show them how you can stay calm and let them know what helps you feel safe.



Monitor Access to Media

Older children and adolescents can engage in conversations with you about your reactions to what you see in the news. For adolescents, focus on positive, solution-oriented websites and messages. Ask your older children what they are seeing or hearing on social media.



Watch for behavior Changes

Your children may show you through their behavior that they are struggling with what they have heard or seen. They may have physical complaints or regressive behaviors that include nightmares or sleep problems. They may feel guilty they are somehow to blame, and the best thing to do is reassure them that they are not responsible.



Maintain your Routines

Sticking to a daily structure like mealtime, bedtime, etc. can reduce anxiety and help children feel more in control. Continue to help your children understand what to expect these days. Also if you have familial or cultural routines that your child finds comforting, be sure to use these.



Keep the Door Open

Encourage your children to come to you with questions or concerns and do not assume the questions will stop after a few days or even a few weeks. Let them know their fears and questions are normal and you will always make time for them.



A Teachable Moment

This is a good time to impart your family values. Help children understand that our country and democracy are strong and have gone through changes for hundreds of years. Take kind and compassionate action in your community.

Created in partnership with Riverside Trauma Center.