

BEING THE CALM

If there is anything that all parents have in common is an insatiable desire to protect our children. It is an instinct unlike no other. Just a quick scroll through the news or social media instills an unfathomable fear of impending risk to our children and with that fear is a deep knowing that there is literally nothing we would not do to protect them.

When frightening things happen in the world, or even in our community, we are often torn about what to say and how much information to share to reassure our children that they are safe. Honesty is **ALWAYS** best. Stick to the **facts** and what we know to be true. Consider the **age** and **maturity** level of the child. Not every child can handle all the details of every scary or stressful situation.

In 24 years of crisis and trauma work with families, the most common needs I hear children express:

Am I safe?

Can I trust the adults in my life?

When can things go back to normal?

How we discuss frightening situations with our children can impact their beliefs about the world we live in. Will we focus on fear and all the bad things that **COULD** happen? Or will we focus on the good people who are working at keeping the world safe? As the safe adults in our children's lives, our message should be: scary things may happen in this world but together, as family, school, community, we are strong enough to handle it.

WHAT CAN WE DO TO CREATE CALM FOR OUR CHILDREN?

We can point out the good we see everyday, particularly amidst a crisis: look for the **heroes** and the **helpers**; look for **kindness**, **bravery** and **courage**.

We can remind our children that most people are **good** and **kind** and have no intention of hurting them.

- ❖ We can monitor the amount of negative news and social media we ingest as a family.
- ❖ We can take time to self-reflect about our own feelings and behaviors. We are the models for our children and they will follow our lead.
- ❖ We must ask ourselves: are we adding to the stress or are we creating calm?
- ❖ We can ensure that our words match our behaviors. Are we saying to our children that everything is okay and not worry, yet they watch us cry or act angry? If our children do hear our voice tremble or see tears, it's important we are comfortable with our emotions and concerns, then explain our feelings **AND** reassure them we love them and will support them always.
- ❖ We can be sure to keep the focus on our children's feelings and not to make stressful situations about **US**.

- ❖ Most importantly, as parents, our children need to know that we are *always available* to them, *check in with them often* and *answer* their questions honestly and appropriately.

If you find your feelings of anxiety and fear do not go away, access professional and community resources. Kids's Help Phone www.kidshelpphone.ca/resources-around-me or call 1-800-668-6868, Mental Help Line 1-877-303-2642 or crisis support www.alberta.ca/individual-family-crisis.



This article was submitted by Tammy Charko BA, BSW, RSW. Tammy is Northern Gateway Public School's Student Support Facilitator. She is a support for schools, students, parents and caregivers to encourage success in school. Tammy advocates for students and provides a link between the student and other supports within the community. Tammy has been a social worker for over 24 years and is a mother to 4 children.