

Books and Resources to Help Children Navigate Our Political Landscape

As we move forward into November, it is possible that children may be aware of what is happening around them through media coverage or local events. There may be questions about what is happening or why things may look different. The news and media have us all anticipating unrest in response to the election. We are all hoping for the most peaceful outcome, yet we wanted to provide some resources to guide parents on how to have conversations with their children about what may happen or what changes may occur. Find a calm time to answer questions and talk to children in simple terms about what they see and try to link unfairness to empowerment.

For example, we may see an increase in protests which may spark many questions from children. Sachi Feris, blog post contributor, www.raceconscious.org, states the following: “These people are protesting because they think there is something unfair that they want to change.” Remind children that they are safe, and the adult’s taking care of them will keep them safe. Give plenty of time for questions, conversation, and sharing feelings.

If you would like some specific tips for how to talk with children about the election, refer to the Kid Connects handout entitled, “Storytelling to Help Children Cope with Scary Things” or look at this website, which includes great information on how you approach the topic of an election in a developmental appropriate manner. <https://mailchi.mp/ahaparenting.com/election-day?e=0e54159670>

Here are a few books that link the idea of unfairness to empowerment through focusing on listening, accepting unexpected changes, and marching or protesting to create change.

The Rabbit Listened by Cori Doerrfeld (ages 3-5)

A sweet book about what to do when something sad or expected happens. Great for adults too.

Saturday by Oge Mora (Preschool - 3)

How to make accept changes when plans get canceled.

Sometimes People March by Tessa Allen (Preschool -3)

Beautiful pictures with a positive message of solidarity.

Call our Warm Line at (303)245-4418 for additional support.



Coping with Election Anxiety

Feelings are contagious. “We are wired for we.”¹ We strive to be in connection with one another and our brains are highly attuned to each other’s emotions. Your child may not understand the election or its significance, but your child will pick up on any of your worries and anxiety. It is an anxiety provoking time, so it is normal to have fears and worries. Here are some tips to help you manage your worries and help support your child’s concerns.

1. **Awareness of body and mind.** Take inventory of how you are feeling on a consistent basis. Note how you are physically, mentally, and emotionally feeling. Take a few mindful breaths and do a body scan. Try this body scan exercise: <https://elishagoldstein.com/videos/3-minute-body-scan/>
2. **Limit news.** For your mental health and the mental health of your children, limit the news. Find a balance between staying informed and managing your family’s anxiety. Limit yourself to checking the news in the morning, mid-day and after work.
3. **Be mindful of what you can and cannot control.** We cannot control the outcome of the election or the events following. Focusing on the things that we cannot control produces anxiety, stress and fear. We can shift our focus to what we can control. This shift can reduce stress. When presented with a stressor, ask yourself is this within my control? If no, what is in my control?
4. **Find a time during the day to do what helps you relax.** It’s important to do this as a family but equally important to allow for time alone. Allowing for alone time will support feeling recharged and less overwhelmed. Go outside, be active, do a craft, take a hot bath, make a meal together, watch your favorite comedy! Do what brings you joy and relaxation.
5. **Take it day by day and have compassion for yourself.** It is hard to predict what will happen tomorrow, next week or in a month. Thinking of all the what-ifs associated with the future can generate stress and anxiety. Take it day by day and do so with compassion. Be nice to yourself!
6. **Talk to your children about election in an age appropriate manner.** Children are looking to adults for guidance on how understand and react to stressful situations. Calmly providing an age appropriate explanation and reassurance will put children’s worries at ease.

“We are voting for a president. Many people are talking about the election. Sometimes people talk in a way that seems angry or stressed. You may feel worried when you hear conversations about the election. The election may not go the way we want it. You may feel angry, disappointed, or confused. I am here to talk to you and help you make sense of what you are hearing and feeling. “

7. **Name feelings and provide comfort.** During this time of stress, parents and children will experience a range of intense emotions. Talking about feelings in relation to the election will help. Research shows that naming emotions supports children (and parents) in feeling seen, heard and understood. In addition, it helps regulate emotions so that we can regain capacities to think and problem solve, which are essential during these times.

- “Mom is feeling stressed about the election. You may feel stressed when I am stressed. You don’t need to worry about Mom, she is going to take some deep breaths to calm down.”
- “Dad and I may talk a lot about our fears with the election. I can see how that may scare you. It is okay to feel scared and Mom and Dad are here to keep you safe”

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¹ Siegel, D. J. & Bryson, T.A. (2012). The whole-brain child. New York: Bantam Books Trade Paperbacks

Storytelling to Help Children Cope with Scary Things

Talking with children about things that stimulate fear in them is something parents and caregivers must do quite often. From going to the dentist for the first time, or starting a new school, to explaining crisis and natural disasters, helping children process fear is important. Creating a narrative or a story is important because it can help to break down their complex feelings in simpler ways, as well as create reassurance! Story telling or narration can be done verbally when talking about the event causing a child fear. It can also be done by creating a short book and writing the words of the story on blank pieces of paper, then asking your child to draw the pictures. Alternatively, you could use your child's favorite action figures or dolls to act out the story.

Why does storytelling/narration work?

We have two sides to our brain, the right and the left, that function very differently. The right side of our brain specializes in emotions, images and personal memories. The right side of the brain communicates by sending and receiving nonverbal communication such as eye contact, body posture and tone of voice. The left brain is logical, linear, literal and linguistical. It likes facts, words and order. Children, especially children under the age of 3, are right brain dominated. When children become upset, they become even more right-brain dominated. Storytelling or narration help bring together the right and left side of the brain.¹ As a result, you see children calm. In addition, storytelling can help children understand what is happening and what will happen next, leaving them feeling safe and less anxious. More importantly, it is an opportunity for you and your child to connect.

What to include in your story?

1. **Name the Change:** For example, when talking about the election, "There is a big election going on in our country today. You may see protests and yelling on the TV or in our downtown. There are a lot of people who feel very strongly about who they want to be our next president. It is ok that not everyone agrees."
2. **Name the Feeling:** "You may have lots of feelings come up when you hear the news, hear grown-ups talk about the election, or see different things going on in our town. Maybe you are feeling worried, scared or anxious about all this. It is ok that you are feeling this way."
3. **Provide Reassurance:** "No matter what happens, your grown-ups will keep you safe."
4. **Name what is consistent:** "Even though a lot of things are changing in our world, for you, most things will stay the same. You will still live in the same home and still go to the same school."
5. **Offer support and skills:** "If you become upset, you can always talk to your grown-up, take a deep breath, and you can remind yourself that lots of grown-ups care about you and are working to keep you safe."

¹ Siegel, D. J. & Bryson, T.A. (2012). *The whole-brain child*. New York: Bantam Books Trade Paperbacks

How to use storytelling

Some children may need to hear the story multiple times. They may even need to hear it multiple times a day! It may be helpful to share the story in the evening and in the morning before school. As you tell the story make sure that you pause to ask and answer questions. Be present and enjoy this time together.

Be their safe place

“Make safety and connection your top priority, especially in the first days; you can always add academics, chores and such later. Notice whatever your child is doing and join in their play. Go outside and play. Get down on the floor and play. Wrestle. Giggle. Snuggle. Hug, high five and enjoy. Connection isn’t just good for your mood; it builds neural connections in your child’s brain and increases cooperation.”²

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² Bailey, B. (2020). “COVID-19: Five helpful responses for families.” Conscious Disciple. https://consciousdiscipline.com/covid-19-five-helpful-responses-forfamilies/?mc_cid=89fc7c1740&mc_eid=7b2ae2409a

What to Do to Increase Your Preparedness for When Things Are Out of the Norm and Scary:

1. Build a kit¹²

Some common safety kit items include:

- Water
 - Non-perishable foods and manual can opener
 - Flashlight and extra batteries
 - First aid kit and medications
 - Hand sanitizer/soap and toilet paper
 - Warm clothing and blankets
 - Cell phone chargers
 - Face masks
- You may also consider:³
- Filling your car up with gasoline
 - Grocery shopping as soon as possible – maybe order groceries online for pickup!
 - Include some of your family’s favorite foods to bring comfort to your home environment!
 - Setting up online banking on a computer or your bank’s mobile app

¹ The American National Red Cross. (2020). *Survival kit supplies*. American Red Cross. <https://www.redcross.org/get-help/how-to-prepare-for-emergencies/survival-kit-supplies.html>

² Ready.gov. (2020, January 23). *Build a kit*. Ready. <https://www.ready.gov/kids/family-emergency-planning/build-a-kit>

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020, September 11). *Running errands*. CDC. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/essential-goods-services.html>

2. Make a safety plan⁴⁵

In the event things become out of the norm and/or scary, what will your family do?

- Who will you contact for help/support/to let them know you're safe?
- Where will your family meet?
- What is each family member's responsibility? Work as a team!
- Practice!

Have a family conversation about your plan, so all family members are prepared with the same steps to follow. Converse with children regularly about the plan to increase their preparedness and memory of the plan.

This "Family Communication Plan" may be a helpful guide when creating your family safety plan:
https://www.ready.gov/sites/default/files/2019-06/family_communications_plan_kids.pdf⁶

3. Stay informed about what's happening in your local area

- *In moderation and with credible news sources*

4. Practice self-awareness and co-regulation

- Stay mindful of how you are feeling and how your child(ren) may be feeling
- How might you model emotion regulation with your child(ren) to support their emotion regulation?

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⁴ Ready.gov. (2019, August 8). *Make a plan*. Ready. <https://www.ready.gov/kids/family-emergency-planning/make-a-plan>

⁵ The American National Red Cross. (2020). *Make a plan*. American Red Cross. <https://www.redcross.org/get-help/how-to-prepare-for-emergencies/make-a-plan.html>

⁶ Ready.gov. (n.d.). *Family communication plan*. Ready. https://www.ready.gov/sites/default/files/2019-06/family_communications_plan_kids.pdf

