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# INSIGHTS

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FOR FAMILIES

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## Talking with your children about the news

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❖ **INSIGHTS FOR FAMILIES** is provided by your child's school in recognition of your role as a partner in education. Adapted by Judy McDaniel, communications consultant, from an article published on [www.childrenow.org](http://www.childrenow.org).

Why is it important to talk with your children about what they see on the news?

Newspapers, TV newscasts, cable news networks, news radio, and Web sites presenting graphic footage and accounts of the latest happenings in the world are being delivered right into our homes 24 hours a day. This constant barrage can be overwhelming for adults, but it can be especially confusing and frightening for young children.

As a parent, only you can decide what news is appropriate for your children. Used properly, the news can teach children many positive things about the world. Knowledge and understanding of news events can teach children a sense of belonging and social responsibility.

At the same time, the daily news can perpetuate stereotypes, confuse, anger and even frighten children. By talking with your children early and often about the stories and images to which they are exposed, you can help them better understand the world around them.

❖ **Explore the age appropriateness of the news you allow your children to see.**

Here are some generalizations to consider, but keep in mind they may not be true for all children. Preschool age children have a limited ability to discern the fantasy of an entertainment show from the reality of news. Children between the ages of six and ten may know the difference between fantasy and reality, but may lack perspective. Adolescents have a better understanding of fact and fiction and are expanding their own perspective on a daily basis, but their constant exposure to media and peers can lead to conflicting information and confusion.

❖ **Watch or read the news with your children.**

You will know what your children are being exposed to and can talk with them about it. If you see something that may be upsetting to your children, don't be afraid to strike up a conversation on the subject.

❖ **Create an open dialogue.**

The best way to make sure children know they are safe is to talk with them about what they see and hear. Additionally, let your children know not to be ashamed or afraid to talk with you whenever they see something they don't understand. Use the news as an opportunity to discuss tough issues with your children.

*(Continued)*

- ❖ **Let your children know the difference between news and reality.**  
Make sure your children know that just because they saw it on the news, it doesn't mean it is likely to happen to them.
- ❖ **Acknowledge your children's fears.**  
It is important to reassure children that there are people working to make sure their personal world will remain safe.
- ❖ **Explore the facts with your children.**  
At times it may be necessary to provide your children with more factual information than is provided in a brief news report.
- ❖ **Acknowledge the complexity of the news.**  
Even the most informed parent is sure to have difficulties explaining why people fight wars, or why politicians don't always tell the truth. It's important to let children know that the news and the world are very complex, and that greater perspective will come with age and continued communication.
- ❖ **Select child-friendly news sources for your children.**  
All news is not created equal. Take care to select good news sources for your children.
- ❖ **Balance your children's news diet.**  
The same way a nutritious diet, rich with plenty of fruits and vegetables, helps promote healthy growth for children's bodies, a balanced news diet, rich in communication and the perspective parents provide, promotes growth for their minds.