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# Mind and Matter



A publication of the University of Miami Faculty and Staff Assistance Program

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# Talking to Your Children about Tragic Events in the News

by Rosario Zavala, MSW, LCSW, CEAP

Children of all ages are exposed to violence, tragedy and natural disasters often unfolding in real time through constant access to news and social media outlets. These outlets seem to impart a one-sided message that destruction and despair are all around us. As parents it is important to be able to discuss these difficult events in an age-appropriate manner that can help children feel safe and secure while also understanding the incidents that are taking place to place them into perspective. It is significant to keep in mind that small children may misunderstand or overestimate the events that have transpired; believing these are happening in their towns, schools or backyards. When parents undertake these difficult conversations, they are letting their children know they are available, understanding and compassionate.

The American Psychological Association has these suggestions to guide the conversation:

- **Take a break from the news** - Round-the-clock coverage of the news can be too much for anyone; leaving adults and children to feel anxious and scared.
- **Reflect on what you want to say** - Rehearse what you are planning to discuss. You may want to do this in front of the mirror, with another adult or as you drive home from work.
- **Look for a quiet moment** - This might be after dinner or while you are preparing for the next day. Make sure that your children will be the center of your attention.
- **Ask what your child has heard about the events** - Do not assume you know. An example is "What have you heard about this?" This is particularly important after a national tragedy where they might have overheard other adults discussing or talk within the playground. And then make sure you listen to them. And listen some more. Oftentimes children misunderstand the news and may think that the event is happening everywhere or much closer than it really is. Clarify this.
- **Share your feelings** - Acknowledge your feelings with your children. This will allow them to see that you are human. This will also help them see that even though you may be upset you can pull yourself together and carry on with your regular routine. In doing so, you will be role-modeling effective management of strong emotions for your children.

- **Tell the truth** - Discuss the facts at a level they can understand. Do not feel you have to give unnecessary details. Remember that “I don’t know” sometimes may be the best answer to the question “Why did the bad people do this?”
- **Reassure** - Make sure to end the conversation on a positive note. Reassuring your child that you love them, will do everything you can to keep them safe and will be available to answer any questions they have about the topic in the future. And finally, remind them that there is always more good than bad in the world.



*“When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, ‘Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.’” - Mr. Rogers*

Source: <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/talking-to-children.aspx>

## FRIENDS AND COMMUNITY ARE GOOD FOR YOU

Source: Workplace Response

You might know that spending time with your friends is fun and relaxing when you're doing it. But, did you know that it's good for your physical and mental health? The emerging field of "connectedness" tells us the experience of feeling close to people and belonging to a group can help you live longer, be less likely to experience anxiety and depression, and have higher self-esteem.

But what if you are someone who doesn't naturally make connections? You're shy, an introvert, someone who needs lots of time alone. That's OK. Even engaging a little bit can be helpful. Try these three important steps.

1. *Volunteer/Give back.* If you are committed to a cause, such as animal rights or a political candidate, you will meet like-minded people and feel like you're making a difference. You can also try a job with direct outreach such as tutoring a recent immigrant in English.
2. *Take care of yourself.* If an occasional coffee with a friend lifts your mood, shoot him or her a text and arrange to meet.
3. *Ask for help if you need it.* People love to feel needed, and will likely be happy to help you out. You'll build a valuable connection by showing your own vulnerability and accepting another person's help.



## FEATURED SEMINAR *Dance Therapy for Stress Relief*

This part of our FSAP Mind, Body, Spirit, seminar series invites participants to engage in dance movements. This seminar will be facilitated by Carol Kaminsky, Dance Program Director at the Frost School of Music.

April 10-12, 2018

Search our website [www.miami.edu/fsap](http://www.miami.edu/fsap) for campus locations.

UPCOMING SEMINARS: First Time Home Buyers, Chair Yoga, Relax and Restore, Managing Crucial Conversations, Enhancing Your Emotional Intelligence, Repair and Rebuild your Credit, Mindset Matters, Let's Take a Stress Break.

Two kinds of  
**GRATITUDE:**

The sudden kind we feel for what we take; and the larger kind we feel for what we give.

Poet Edwin Arlington Robinson

## DID YOU KNOW?

The number one reason for failed New Year's resolutions? Lack of a clear goal. People make more resolutions to start or increase a behavior (84%) than to stop or decrease something (16%).



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Mind and Matter is a quarterly publication from the UM Faculty and Staff Assistance Program that provides helpful tips and articles regarding work-life balance, health and well-being.

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