

---

# Parenting, Media, and Everything In Between

---

## Explaining the News to Our Kids

Kids get their news from many sources, which are not always correct. Here are tips on how to talk about the news -- and listen, too.

[Caroline Knorr](#) • 7/8/2016 • Categories: [Screen Time](#), [Violence in the Media](#)  
*Senior Parenting Editor | Mom of one*



Shootings, terrorist attacks, natural disasters, end-of-the-world predictions -- even local news reports of missing kids and area shootings all can be upsetting news for adults, not to mention kids. In our 24/7 news world, it's become nearly impossible to shield kids from distressing current events.

Today, [kids get news](#) from everywhere. This constant stream of information shows up in shareable videos, posts, blogs, feeds, and alerts. And since much of this content comes from sites that are designed for adult audiences, what your kids see, hear, or read might not always be age-appropriate. Making things even more challenging is the fact that many kids are getting this information directly on their [phones](#) and laptops. Often parents aren't around to immediately help their kids make sense of horrendous situations.

The bottom line is that young kids simply don't have the ability to understand news events in context, much less know whether or not a source of information is credible. And though older teens are better able to understand current events, even they face challenges when it comes to sifting fact from opinion -- or misinformation.

No matter how old your kids are, threatening or upsetting [news can affect them emotionally](#). Many can feel worried, frightened, angry, or even guilty. And these anxious feelings can last long after the news event is over. So what can you do as a parent to help your kids deal with all this information?

### Tips for all kids

**Consider your own reactions.** Your kids will look to the way you handle the news to determine their own approach. If you stay calm and rational, they will, too.

### Tips for kids under 7

**Keep the news away.** Turn off the TV and radio news at the top of the hour and half hour. Read the newspaper out of range of young eyes that can be frightened by the pictures (kids may respond strongly to pictures of other kids in

jeopardy). Preschool kids don't need to see or hear about something that will only scare them silly, especially because [they can easily confuse facts with fantasies or fears](#).

**Stress that your family is safe.** At this age, kids are most concerned with your safety and separation from you. Try not to minimize or discount their concerns and fears, but reassure them by explaining all the protective measures that exist to keep them safe. If the news event happened far away, you can use the distance to reassure kids. For kids who live in areas where crime and violence is a very real threat, any news account of violence may trigger extra fear. If that happens, share a few age-appropriate tips for staying and feeling safe (being with an adult, keeping away from any police activity).

**Be together.** Though it's important to listen and not belittle their fears, distraction and physical comfort can go a long way. Snuggling up and [watching something cheery](#) or doing something fun together may be more effective than logical explanations about probabilities.

### Tips for kids 8–12

**Carefully consider your child's maturity and temperament.** Many kids can handle a discussion of threatening events, but if your kids tend toward the sensitive side, be sure to keep them away from the TV news; repetitive images and stories can make dangers appear greater, more prevalent, and closer to home.

**Be available for questions and conversation.** At this age, many kids will see the morality of events in stark black-and-white terms and are in the process of developing their moral beliefs. You may have to explain the basics of prejudice, bias, and civil and religious strife. But be careful about making generalizations, since kids will take what you say to the bank. This is a good time to ask them what they know, since they'll probably have gotten their information from friends, and you may have to correct facts.

**Talk about -- and filter -- news coverage.** You might explain that even news programs compete for viewers, which sometimes affects content decisions. If you let your kids use the Internet, go online with them. Some of the pictures posted are simply grisly. [Monitor where your kids are going](#), and set your URLs to open to [non-news-based portals](#).

### Tips for teens

**Check in.** Since, in many instances, teens will have absorbed the news independently of you, talking with them can offer great insights into their developing politics and their senses of justice and morality. It will also help you get a sense of what they already know or have learned about the situation from their own [social networks](#). It will also give you the opportunity to throw your own insights into the mix (just don't dismiss theirs, since that will shut down the conversation immediately).

**Let teens express themselves.** Many teens will feel passionately about events and may even personalize them if someone they know has been directly affected. They'll also probably be aware that their own lives could be affected by violence. Try to address their concerns without dismissing or minimizing them. If you disagree with media portrayals, explain why so your teens can separate the mediums through which they absorb news from the messages conveyed.

### Additional resources

For more information on how to talk to your kids about a recent tragedy, please visit the [National Association of School Psychologists](#) or the [American Psychological Association](#).

*Marie-Louise Mares, Associate Professor in the Department of Communication Arts at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, contributed to this article.*

### Related posts



[Teaching Kids Media Smarts During Breaking News](#)



[Talking About "Sexting"](#)



[Scary Movies Tips](#)

Related top picks

[Political Movies](#)

[History TV](#)

[Hilarious History Movies](#)

[Games That Teach History](#)

---

---

## About Caroline Knorr



As Common Sense Media's parenting editor, Caroline helps parents make sense of what's going on in their kids' media lives. From games to cell phones to movies and more, if you're wondering "what's the right age for...?"... [Read more](#)

---

---

Add comment

[Sign in](#) or [sign up](#) to share your thoughts

---

## Comments (39)

**Kid, 11 years old** July 8, 2016

Personally, I take news seriously, I am always mature about the topic if any terrorists and many other topics that are usually inappropriate for anyone at my age. I get scared but I stay calm and understand the problem. It depends on your child's personality, sensitivity, maturity and sometimes age.

**Teen, 13 years old** written by [wackywert](#)

April 2, 2016

This generalizes kids so much I want to cry. I for one actively read the news when I was 8. Not all kids are the same, I've never been sheltered from the news, and I feel it's been good for me. I have developed into a teenager who can determine my own feelings about the world with out relying on my parents to tell me what to think, a rare occurrence these days.

**Teen, 14 years old** written by [PJC15](#)

March 25, 2016

I do not know how someone can write so patronisingly about children in this way, any teenager will understand what has

happened in the news, sometimes more than their parents. I for one know more about the background of wars ongoing in the Middle East than my parents as I constantly find myself explaining to my parents about these times.

**Teen, 13 years old** written by [mcracco](#)

November 16, 2015

I just feel that you shouldn't have to come up with ways to tell your kids just tell them what . Happened like with Paris just tell them that bad people bombed Paris I mean all kids want to hear is the truth with no sugar coating because they are eventually going to find out what actually happened.

**Educator and Parent of a 14 year old** written by [dmag](#)

November 15, 2015

I am praying for France and all the victims and their families just like everyone else, but honestly I feel sad when I see how much people and the media care about the attacks in Paris and no one cared about the attacks in that college in Kenya back in April where 147 innocent people died, or the attack at a school in Pakistan back in December where 145 people, mostly children died. Are third world country people less important than Europeans? I just don't get it. Thanks

**Teen, 16 years old** written by [Superepicpizza](#)

November 16, 2015

It may sound cold, but some of the third-world countries that get bombed daily, while being tragic and horrible, are things that have been going on for years and years now, it's like if the news decided to report "In other news, the internet is still up, and has been for years!" every day.

**Educator and Parent** written by [jeannev1](#)

November 16, 2015

I don't think that third world countries are lesser important than European countries. I believe, however, that there is much more shock when something happens where many Americans have visited. Paris is, after all, one of America's darling destinations. People dream of visiting on a honeymoon, etc.; there is a plethora of photographs; it's more familiar. The attacks in Beirut, Kenya, Pakistan, and daily in Syria and Iraq are just as disturbing, however, these places are less familiar to the average American.

**Parent** written by [Walt L](#)

November 15, 2015

My daughter was 6 when 9/11 hit. We lived in New Jersey and she had just been to the mall there a few weeks prior for a book signing. Wasn't much of an option to hide the news in that case, but she handled it pretty well. Built lego towers and crashed planes into them, then 'talked' to the pilots. Kids are more resilient than most people give them credit for. Make sure they know you're there to protect them - that more than anything else will make them feel safe.

**Teen, 16 years old** written by [Maya16](#)

November 14, 2015

It is impossible to keep this from kids. I know it is the least expected thing to happen at a concert venue. Even the band U2 who were supposed to be in Paris did not perform this weekend.

**Adult** written by [isaaclee](#)

November 14, 2015

if you want to teach your children about new, why start slow and introduce events like, someone winning a race, an

upcoming election and who won, etc. As your child gets older, then you can introduce them to news about certain tragedies, murders, etc. your children will eventually get older and learn the truth. they can either choose to be scared because the truth is scary or they can just live their life but keep updated so they know better on ways they can protect themselves so they won't be as scared.

**Educator and Parent** written by [pumphouse3](#)

May 16, 2015

News is not always bad. So it may not be the best approach to keep them shielded from news and current affairs. It is important for kids to know that reading the news can help them know what is going on in the world and this in turn can help them with their reading and writing skills. Of course the news has to be selected for their age group, but it can get them into the habit of reading news which will in turn help them with their literacy skills. We have developed an online news media platform which delivers child appropriate content. It was trialled with 250 kids and in the space of two weeks, 550 kids responded to the news articles with their written reports on the articles. So there is a need there for kids to have the means to read age appropriate news, but which also rewards their involvement in responding with their views as well.

**Teen, 14 years old** written by [reds1999](#)

October 7, 2014

The news can be scary sometimes.

**Adult** written by [Senser123](#)

September 19, 2014

I personally feel we need more good news stories than ever at all levels especially financially and politically and socially like say when a president announces he or she has signed a bill into law that will cause changes for the better instead of the worse or has lived up to a campaign promise.

**Parent of a 8, 10, and 12 year old** written by [helpfulparent](#)

August 22, 2014

My daughter was in sixth grade last year (kids 10-12-mostly 11 and 12). She had current events every week. She had to research things like Malaysian Airlines Flight 370, situation in Egypt, Greece's riots and bankruptcy, spread of STDs, Ukraine and Russia, etc. In seventh grade, it is a mandatory part of the curriculum.

**Kid, 11 years old** April 17, 2013

I'm in fifth grade, and today I overheard some of my classmates talking about the "Boston Marathon tragedy". Even though half of the kids in my class are obnoxious, I think that they are mature enough to handle the subject matter... it all depends on your child. Some kids are more sensitive than others. I agree with the user who said that kids know more than you think. Probably everyone in my class knows what sex is thanks to the media glamorizing those things. In fact, once a girl in my class called a boy sexist (he's honestly an idiot) and he was ignorant enough to say "EWW, (GIRL'S NAME), YOU'RE DISGUSTING!!!". And many kids today may also grow up thinking sex is disgusting, when it is actually a very beautiful thing (Hmmm.... How were we conceived? Although I assume they have not matured yet, as most kids begin having sexual thoughts as they begin puberty).

**Adult** written by [Shar12](#)

December 19, 2012

With teens it might be a good idea to discuss their feelings about safety in their own school. Do they see any policies or practices they think should be in place? Are there any policies or practices that they feel don't really contribute to keeping them safe? Administration might not be able to explain everything and unfortunately budget limitations are a

consideration but students and parents should feel free to address security and safety issues. Sometimes they can get further than teachers can.

**Educator and Parent** written by [ice wizard08](#)

December 18, 2012

when a tragedy happens, and there is many that happen a lot. I am so thankful I have my parents to rely on they always explain to me what has happen and reassure my safety that always makes me feel safe, that I can question something and get a honest answer. 3rd grade thanks Mom and Dad!!!!

**Kid, 12 years old** December 15, 2012

Now this was some scary stuff. I heard about this from a kid in my class who used no details whatsoever and made everyone think it was at the elementary schools that went to our school. So yeah I was SCARED.

**Parent of a 5 year old** written by [CSM Screen name...](#)

December 14, 2012

This article is extremely helpful. <http://www.handinhandparenting.org/news/32/64/Helping-Children-Exposed-t...> Keith dd 5

**Teen, 14 years old** written by [reds1999](#)

August 30, 2014

I agree!

**Teen, 13 years old** written by [Rango813](#)

December 14, 2012

I agree with lovehopelife's comment. I understand that Common Sense Media's main purpose is to inform parents on upsetting events (such as this, the TDKR massacre, and maybe even Columbine if the site had existed then) and media's content, but kids know a LOT more about sex, violence, and language than this site lets on. I feel as though the people who write these believe that children are whimpering, unknowledgeable little creatures that need to be reassured with everything that is happening, which is true, but only for SOME children, say, 5 to 8? That is the time where most children have extremely overactive imaginations, so they might need the most reassuring. Don't get me wrong, I have an overactive imagination, too, and I'm 13! I saw TDKR on the day of the massacre and I was freaking out, but I think that is because I watch too many crime shows. Let's have an example: A seven year old hears about a minorly upsetting event on Fox News (my favorite news channel) about how the environment is dying. Would you people, as parents, prohibit news watching if the only event your child had seen was about recycling and helping the planet? I wouldn't, but then again, it depends on what they see. I remember when I was around seven or eight or nine, the Vanessa Hudgens controversy was just making headlines (anyone else remember?). What I admire about my parents is the fact they were not overprotective and all like, "Oh you poor child! Let us not show you the news anymore, because the news is terrible for young minds like yours!" They just told me that it was very bad and that I should never do it. And I listened. So please, parents, use your own judgement and use the news as a learning experience for your young children as to what is moral and immoral (right and wrong). Thank you for your time.

**Teen, 14 years old** written by [burned00](#)

December 16, 2012

I completely agree with this

**Parent** written by [Nan7472](#)

December 16, 2012

Even before TV and computers KIDS knew a lot more about sex and violence and everything else in this world than parents ever gave them credit for. But I also remember thinking, at 13 years old, that I knew everything. What more was there to learn anyway, once you learned about sex and the violence people can do to each other? With age comes a little more wisdom, and you realize that the more you know and learn, the more you realize just how little you really know. Children should be included in these conversations, at tragic times like this, and allowed to speak and question. Some of my most enlightening times as a parent were when my son sat me down to talk with me at any age....3 or 4 even, at 6 or 11 years old, as a teen ager, as an adult, and even now when I am a grandmother. Communcation is our greatest gift to one another, but the greatest of all is that of a good listener.

**Kid, 11 years old** August 26, 2012

Hey!!! i'm only 11 years-old. BUT i understand wayyyy to much i love movies and video games but, well, they have to much SEX in them. Most parents don't know it but kids in between 8 & 14 know way more than they should. I wish i didn't know about all this sex and stuff, like... "when a mommy and daddy love each other very much" stuff, I HATE IT WHEN there's an ad on TV for bra's or underpants :( EWWWW why do they even advertise that on kids channels? I HAVE A SERIOUS PROBLEM RIGHT NOW! because i looked up where baby's come from because i'm an only child and my mom said that a stork brings it to the mommy, but how did it get into her stomach.....? So i looked it up on google and i wish i did not search it SO when all of us are living in a world like this, how do i tell my mom that i searched that? Because if i do "SHE'LL KILL ME!" what should i do? A lot of parents don't know what kids like us are finding online out of curiosity. I'm a boy so i still think girls are kind of icky, but..... Why do baby's have to be born THAT WAY why can't they just fall out of the sky? PLEASE REPLY TO ME ANYBODY!!! -szgn1

**Educator and Parent** written by [mymedia](#)

July 26, 2012

In my opinion TV is loaded with ADULT content. Whether it is the news, reality TV, Violent movies, shows with inappropriate language, bad behavior, etc. Even commercials can be violent and filled with inappropriate messages for Kids. I find it appalling that I can not watch a show with my 11 and 12 year old without a preview of some violent movie or a Victoria Secrets commercial. Television and the internet do not seem to filter content with kids in mind. I do not allow my 11 and 12 year old to watch the news and I gave very few details about the Auroa shooting but I had to talk to them about it because they saw it on TV at a friends house. Kids should be kids and not be so full of anxiety and worry about bad and scary things. Kids need parents to be better role models and use more common sense when they allow their children to see and hear ADULT situations. I believe the PG-13 movie rating is a joke. For one thing the majority of these movies should be R (restricted) because of the violence that they contain. And also, parents do not adhere to the ratings because many allow their young children (4-14 years old) to view these movies. It is NOT OK!

**Parent of a 8 and 14 year old** written by [valmay67](#)

December 18, 2012

I know that this post is old, but it is still relative to this unfortunate event. I agree with this persons post. Our children are made to be adults way before they are ready. They never had a chance to be kids. They are exposed to so much from the media whether it is tv, internet or gaming. Even if they are watching a supposed good channel like "ABC Family", which is a total joke, tshowing commercials for older audiences like Pretty Little Liars and more. Plus, let's talk about sports. How many of your children love NFL Football or Pro Basketball or Hockey? They are exposed to Viagra commercials giving us all the warnings of erections lasting more than 4 hours and to seek medical attention! Thank you so much for sharing this information with ALL of us. Sports are not just for older men, us women and children enjoy watching as well! And yes, the Victoria Secret commercials are leaning toward pornography as well. I also agree that TV and movie ratings are a joke, you are correct. I am not old fashioned or a prude, I just think that

there is a time and place for everything, and just let kids be kids for a little while longer. They will be adults for the rest of their lives, why rush into it? I'm 45, and I wish I was a kid again sometimes. Thank you for reading.

**Teen, 14 years old** written by [burned00](#)

December 16, 2012

Most kids over 9 can handle news and PG-13 movies

**Adult** written by [davyborn](#)

July 25, 2012

Kids are smart. With all of the resources all around us, and with all of the modern technology that surrounds us, even kids as young as 5 or 6 will eventually find out some way or another. Still, I really do believe that it is very important to let them know when the facts that they heard were true, and when they were completely false.

**Kid, 10 years old** July 22, 2012

I am always scared about how the world is going to be. I am probaly the most scared 10 year old in the world. I am afraid that I will be one of those people. I am pretty big so I am not very fast and I am worried!!!!!!!!!!!!!! People need to TAKE A STAND FOR THE GOOD SIDE!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

**Parent of a 8, 10, and 12 year old** written by [helpfulparent](#)

August 22, 2014

The chances of that happening to you are very slim. Your parents will protect you. Relax...

**Kid, 12 years old** July 22, 2012

I hope my mum reads this. Maybe she'll turn of the news when I'm there cause it always upsets me. Nowadays al news it bad news. :(

**Teen, 15 years old** written by [Kingdestroyah](#)

July 22, 2012

Alright, I'm 12, and the fact that you treat people that are 12 like they are idiots in this article is fairly offending. You treat us like we're 6 on this website. STOP DOING THAT. You probably think kids my age will be scared to go to TDKR because of the massacre. We are not. Stop acting like we are so much younger than we are.

**Teen, 14 years old** written by [Beeblebrox](#)

March 27, 2016

THANK YOU. As a thirteen year old, I feel that this website does not credit my personal, and my friends personal knowledge. We all know about sex, and the majority of my friends are avid news watchers. I think that it is important for kids of any age to watch the news, especially as they reach the ages of 9 and above (for an averagely mature child in today's society), because it opens children's eyes to the fact that tragic things happen in this world, and it allows for children to develop skills by, as I do often in school, debating over certain news issues. It also allows for development of empathy, as the tragic story of the many refugees, and the conditions they face, allows children to empathise, and to see that they are privileged. Thanks.

**Kid, 12 years old** July 22, 2012

that event was a sad traguic event that shouldint be talked about to kids and im sorry if they know god bless the victums

**Teen, 15 years old** written by [sisterwhocares](#)

May 5, 2012

A tip for parents, teens, and kids: in the media, and especially in the news, there is going to be PLENTY of bias and political favoring towards a certain party/politician. Always be skeptical, and do not automatically believe everything that they say about politicians on the news. Do your research, but don't do "opposing viewpoints" research if you are easily swayed by people's POVs. Search up FACTS. If you aren't quite sure whether something is fact or fiction (believe me, it's actually really, really hard to tell the difference sometimes), then ask others, or ask yourself questions. What is the problem? Why is it such a big deal? Is the brought-up solution what is right to do, or is it just what people want to hear? Asking questions can help you discern political facts from the bias.

**Teen, 14 years old** written by [Beeblebrox](#)

March 27, 2016

And this is why it gives such a great opportunity for children. It allows parents to teach children about says bias, and attempt to teach them about separating the facts.

**Teen, 13 years old** written by [lovehopelife](#)

April 8, 2012

Im suprised Adults dont already know that kids know way more than you think. We know things that we shouldnt know till were 21 i think. So open your eyes Adults and Perents were smater than we may come across as.

written by Anonymous

July 22, 2012

Point taken lovehopelife, but adolescents notoriously think they know everything - quite naturally, it being a function of age that their brand-spankingly shiny new opinions have yet to be informed by the softening and weathering that experience brings..... Often, when we are older, we learn to cringe with embarrassment at the memory of our adolescent selves; indeed, some of us may also lament that we give such a poor impression of our abilities and intelligence when we express our views in writing to the world, and regret that we failed to learn stuff like grammar, punctuation and spelling when we were at school. A 16th century Frenchman, Henri Estienne, is often quoted (in France) as saying: "Si jeunesse savoit; si vieillesse pouvoit"..... roughly translated, it means: "If only youth had the knowledge; if old age had the strength".

**Teen, 15 years old** written by [LukeTheGreat](#)

July 21, 2012

Being a teenager myself, I can say that lovehopelife's comment is technically true, but doesn't set a very good example for his claim to our overall intelligence. Either way, I think that this is talking more about children who are legitimately too young to comprehend motivations behind the Aurora shooting or other such depravities. If lovehopelife had actually read the whole thing, he'd have seen that it acknowledges that teens are generally mature and intelligent enough to handle these sorts of issues.

