



Talking with Your Children After the Riots at the U.S. Capitol

It might be happening now – your children are looking to you to help them understand what's going on, but you're trying to figure it out and process it yourself. You are not alone.

In the days and weeks following the attack on the U.S. Capitol, some parents and guardians may wonder how to talk to their children about what happened. Not being sure where or how to start is normal in light of the situation, so do not feel embarrassed, frustrated, or guilty for not knowing exactly what to do and say. Having an open and honest talk with your children is important, but it's also important to also take a moment for yourself before embarking on this journey.

Here are some suggestions for how to start talking about this with your children and answer some of their questions.

- ❖ **Gauge your children's needs: Do my children need reassurance or are they ready to have more advanced discourse on this week's events?**
 - Think about your children's age and how they best get information. [Some psychologists](#) are recommending that parents and guardians of young children (7 and under) simply remind them they are okay, offer a brief explanation of what happened, and most importantly, maintain a routine. For older children, you may want to give them a chance and a safe space to express any feelings, concerns and ask questions they may have.
- ❖ **Prepare for what may turn into a very long conversation.**
 - Try to pick a time where no one feels rushed or leaves the conversation incomplete due to jobs, errands, schoolwork, or chores. The conversation could last a while, so timing should be an important factor.
- ❖ **Remind your children that they are safe.**
 - Whether something happens down the street or a thousand miles away, violence can feel like a personal and scary matter – especially with social media. Remind your children they are safe.
- ❖ **Try to limit social media or TV use.**
 - Watching videos, images, or reading about violence can lead to more worry and stress. Parents should monitor what media their children are seeing and consider limiting.
- ❖ **Talk about feelings.**
 - After you share facts about what happened, ask about your children's feelings. Understand that children will respond in different ways. Some might find themselves angry, sad, or confused. Some might feel indifferent. Help them understand that their feelings are okay and find ways to cope with difficult feelings.
- ❖ **Understand other's feelings and perspectives on what happened.**
 - For older children, it may be helpful to talk about how other people may be feeling about the attack on the Capitol. Many images included the Confederate flag and police dressed in riot gear. Help them understand that these images may be upsetting to others, such as persons of color or those who have had bad experiences in the past.
 - If your children ask why it happened or why some police and/or public responses are different in this situation than in other racially or politically sensitive instances, this could be a moment to discuss bigger topics about justice, equity and equality.
 - For more information on how to talk with your kids about racism and racial justice, visit <https://www.savethechildren.org/us/charity-stories/tips-teach-explain-racism-to-children>.
- ❖ **Keep an eye out for some emotional or behavioral changes.**
 - Monitor any changes in eating, sleeping, emotional volatility, social changes and more. For younger children, it is not unusual for them to process in expressive ways such as acting out scenes in reenactment or drawing.
- ❖ **Be patient with yourself as a parent or caregiver. It's okay to not know. There's no one solution or perfect response to a situation like this.**
 - It's okay to not know all of the answers to your children's questions. Some questions may center around fairness or how to fix social and structural issues, which can be hard questions for anyone at any time.

If you or a loved one are feeling stress, anxiety or depression-related symptoms after the attack on the Capitol, call or text the Disaster Distress Helpline at 1-800-985-5990 to connect with trained emotional distress counselors 24/7, 365 days a year.