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How to Talk to Your Children About the Boston Marathon Bombings

Most of us spent yesterday afternoon and evening following the news coverage of the Boston Marathon bombings. I had the TV on and followed Twitter and Facebook simultaneously, which led to an overload of fear and sadness.

At one point, I feared a friend and her family were hurt when I saw her husband's name in the list of runners from Montclair—thankfully everyone is safe. I hugged my children tighter, read them extra bedtime books. I didn't sleep well and woke with a heavy heart. My children don't know what happened. I want to shield them from the hate that caused suffering to so many. But many children do know what happened, or they can sense something is wrong by the way their parents are feeling. It's important to know how to talk to children during times of tragedy.

Dr. Gerard Costa, Director of [Montclair State University's Center for Autism and Early Childhood Mental Health](#), offers these tips to parents regarding the Boston Marathon bombings:

- Events like yesterday's bombings can lead adults to become more anxious and vigilant, and these feelings can be transmitted to infants and children through gestures, pacing, interactions and words. Adults need to monitor their own states and help children to feel safe. If a parent is too anxious or reactive, the child is likely to become so as well.
- Monitor the images and reports with children. For infants and young children, limit exposure to the media, and shut off the TV, particularly as the images and descriptions of what happened to the victims are often quite graphic. With older children, aged 7 and older, who may hear and see reports about the bombings, sit and watch limited reports with them and answer their questions plainly with what they need to know. Again, avoid interpretations or attributions to "types" or "classes" of people, assure them that those who were injured are being helped, and that they are safe. Constantly reassure your children that even though bad things can happen, these are exceedingly rare and they are safe with you.
- "Feel with" your child, so their emotions are shared and validated, and be sure to support the child's ability to stay calm and regulated, through regular routines.
- Allow children to "tell their story", correct errors and offer plain explanations about what you know.
- Talk with your child's teachers to see if the center or school will be speaking with the children about these events, and ask the educators for resources.
- Contact our center and other similar programs for any information or concerns about your child.

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