



CANADA'S CENTRE
FOR DIGITAL AND
MEDIA LITERACY

Talking to Kids about the News

It's important to pay close attention to what children see in the news because studies have shown that kids are more afraid of violence in news coverage than in any other media content. By creating a proper perspective and context for news and current events programs, we can help kids develop the critical thinking skills they need to understand news stories and the news industry.

Here are some tips for helping children to understand and cope with the news.

- **Discuss frightening and disturbing news events with children.** Don't assume they haven't heard about a disturbing news event - ask first and, if they have, discuss it. Talking honestly and reassuringly to kids about traumatic events will go a long way in assuaging their fears. Reassure children by giving them the facts. For example, explain that terrorist threats are very real in certain places, but not likely to happen in their community.
- **Understand what news frightens children at different ages.** School-age children are beginning to distinguish fantasy from reality and to worry about real-life dangers. Help them to develop a realistic sense of danger by explaining that traumatic events such as fires, fatal car accidents or plane crashes are rare, which is why they're considered newsworthy. As children get older, the closer an incident is to the reality of their lives, the more disturbing it will be to them. For example, a story about a high-school shooting may be more disturbing to a teenager than a younger child.
- **Encourage older children to watch the news and discuss current events with you.** It's important that young people understand what is going on in the world and their community. Watch the news with older children and use it as a springboard to discuss difficult topics such as racism, sexuality, AIDS, war, death, drug and alcohol use.
- **Create "teachable moments."** Keep a map handy when watching the news to look up countries or areas mentioned in stories. Because news items often lack context or thoughtful analysis, search online to get more in-depth information about an issue or a country that kids show interest in.
- **Try to find positive news stories.** Call attention to stories that emphasize positive actions and people making a difference - stories about new medical research, peace accords, activism on social or environmental issues and exceptional achievements in sports, the arts or sciences.
- **Explain the business of news.** News media provide a valuable public service but they are also businesses that, in most cases, depend on advertising revenues to support them. In the search for images and stories that will attract audiences, the news media tend to focus on either sensational crimes, tragedies and disasters or "soft" news, such as entertainment and lifestyle features.



- **Discuss bias and stereotyping in the news.** Although most journalists try to be objective and factual in reporting events, there is no such thing as a news story without a point of view. Bias can be unintentional or deliberate, depending on the motives of news gatherers, the sources of information they rely on and the political leanings of the media outlet's owner. As well, reporters often work under tight deadlines and may not have time to present several sides of an issue.

