



Talking with children about the Bondi Beach tragedy

Children respond to conflict and trauma in a range of different ways. Some may be able to talk about their experience or ask questions; some may express their feelings through their behaviour; while others may appear dismissive or disinterested.

What is common to all children is that they look to the trusted adults in their life for help to make sense of the world around them.

This resource provides some strategies for parents and other adult caregivers supporting a child or young person impacted by the tragedy at Bondi Beach.

Remember that children's needs may vary over time as they seek to make sense of what is happening. Caregivers should be prepared to check in regularly. If you or your child are in need of further support, please reach out.

Share limited, age-appropriate information

Share information simply and minimally, using age-appropriate language.

Children take their emotional cues from adults. Try to speak calmly and gently.

Some children are more sensitive or prone to anxiety than others. Watch their reactions and be guided by them. You know your child best.

Let them know that it is okay to ask questions

It is normal for children to experience and show a range of reactions. Questions may come now, or later; they may ask many questions, or none.

Answer as best you can, with consideration to their age, development and temperament. It's perfectly okay to say "I don't know."

Avoid adding unnecessary information; wait to see if your child asks further questions, rather than offering additional detail yourself.

Protect them from distressing information or images

Be conscious of where and how children receive information. As much as possible, protect them from distressing images in news or social media. Encourage your child to talk to you or another safe adult if they see or hear something that doesn't feel okay.

While it's important for adults to be able to talk and debrief together, avoid distressing conversations where they may be overheard by children.

Acknowledge their feelings

It's important not to dismiss or minimise a child's concerns. Reassure your child that it is natural and okay to feel however they are feeling; for instance, "I know it might feel a bit scary right now" or "We feel so sad when people are hurting."

Let them know you are there to listen and talk when they are feeling worried or scared. Help them find ways to soothe their big feelings, like deep breathing or other relaxation activities.

Reassure them that they are safe

Children may find it hard to separate the things they see, hear or imagine from their own reality, and look to their caregivers for safety and security. As much as you can, reassure your child that they are physically safe, even if they feel very worried or scared right now.

Keeping to your usual routine and everyday activities as much as possible can help children to feel safe and secure.

Support them to frame their thinking

It's important for children to know that adults are in charge and are working hard to help. Emphasise the ways that people and communities are coming together.

For instance, "There are lots of good people who are working hard to keep people safe" or "Our community is joining together to do everything we can to help". Reassure them that they don't need to feel guilty about doing the things that make them happy.

Help them find practical ways to respond, if they want to

Feelings of helplessness can be particularly challenging. Some children may want to channel their energy into something purposeful.

Be guided by your child. If they want to, help them to explore the different actions they could take. This might involve raising funds for tzedakah; drawing a picture or writing a letter; saying tehillim; lighting a candle together; or other acts of kindness.