



Image by Ken Hayman

## Talking with Young Children about Deportation Worries

There is no magic answer to help children understand something that even the adults are struggling to understand. Children and families are worried about their safety in these uncertain times. Donald Trump has made some very disrespectful, frightening, and racist statements particularly about our immigrant communities. It is understandable that young children are scared and worried for the safety of their families.

Each parent knows their child best. Here are some guidelines to help families support their young children.

### Children need to feel safe.

In times of crisis, children want to know who will take care of them. They're dependent on adults for their survival and security. They need a clear message that their parents are doing all they can to take care of them and to keep them safe. Let your child know your safety plan and let them spend time with adults who may care for them if you are taken into custody.

"Momma is working with our church and friends to make sure we have a plan if something scary happens."

"It is the Momma and Daddy's job to keep kids safe. We will worry about what to do so you can feel safe and play with your friends."

### Limit your child's exposure to news and information.

The younger the children are, the more likely they are to be drawn to high intensity expression of feelings. The news and images on TV are most often much too graphic and disturbing for young children. **Turn Off the TV**

When there's something tragic in the news, many parents get concerned about how to talk to their children. It's even harder than usual if we're struggling with our own worries.

In times of crisis it is normal to turn to the news for information. However; too much of this can make us feel hopeless, insecure, and even depressed. It is helpful to limit television viewing. Our children need us to spend time with them.

### Don't pretend that nothing is happening.

Young children have little ears but big worries. They listen to their parent's worries and conversations on the phone. They know that something is happening. Young children will almost always imagine the worst when not given support and guidance. Talk with your children and ask them how they are feeling.

You can share in simple terms how you feel. This will help your child learn to talk about how they feel.

"I'm sad about the news, and I'm worried. But I love you, and I'm here to care for you."

It is important to let children know it's okay to feel sad and scared. They certainly don't need to hear all the details of what's making us sad or scared, but if we can help them accept their own feelings as natural and normal, their feelings will be much more manageable for them. Angry feelings are part of being human, especially when we feel powerless. One of the most important messages we can give our children is, "It's okay to be angry, but it's not okay to hurt ourselves or others."

**Answer their questions to the best of your ability, at an age appropriate level, but use as few words as possible.**

Preschool aged children need simple sentences repeated often. They need you to do your best to show them that you are calm, strong, and there for them. You are all that your children know of safety so even if you don't feel safe do your best to help your child see that the adults are looking out for them.

"Sometimes scary things happen; but Momma, Abuela, Daddy, is here to keep you safe."

"Daddy had to go back to Mexico but we will talk to him on the phone and try to come back together again soon. Daddy always loves you even if he is far away."

**Children might act out in ways that do not seem to directly connect to their worries.**

Play is one of the important ways young children have of dealing with their concerns. Of course, playing about violent news can be scary and sometimes unsafe, so adults need to be nearby to help redirect that kind of play into nurturing themes.

A young child may have a harder time at preschool saying goodbye, they may be clingier, they may cry more often. They may have troubles going to sleep at night. This is a normal response to fear. This is often a way that children ask for more comfort from the adults in their life. Hold your children tight, assure them you love them, and remind them that you will do everything you can to stay with them and keep them safe. Little by little, as the adults around them become more confident, hopeful and secure, our children probably will, too.

**"When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, "Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping." To this day, especially in times of "disaster," I remember my mother's words and I am always comforted by realizing that there are still so many helpers – so many caring people in this world." Mr. Rogers**



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