



National Alliance for

Grieving Children

## Talking to Your Children about the 10th Anniversary of 9/11

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It's hard to believe, but this September 11th is going to be the 10th anniversary of 9/11. For most of us, this milestone anniversary is bound to provoke a lot of powerful emotions. As we remember back to that tragic day, many of us will be filled with images of fear, disbelief, and incredible sadness. In honor of the 10th anniversary, there is likely to be intense media coverage. In the wake of all of this coverage, how can parents help their children understand the significance of the 10th anniversary of 9/11 while at the same time reassuring them and quelling any fears that they might have?

Here are some things that you can do:

- Make time to talk to your children about 9/11. Some of your children might be too young to remember 9/11, while others might have vague memories but not really be sure about the facts. Choose a time and location that is free from distractions and one in which they feel comfortable.
- If your children are old enough to remember 9/11, begin by asking them what they know about 9/11. Ask them if they remember anything about that day or the days afterward. Encourage them to tell you what they may have learned about 9/11 in school.
- Be prepared to answer questions that your children might have about 9/11. Have factual information readily available to answer their questions. Use language that they can understand. Depending on their ages, you will likely need to break down complicated concepts into "bite size" bits of information. Correct any misinformation that your children have heard. An excellent resource for information about 9/11 is the 9/11 Memorial Website, <http://www.911memorial.org/teach-learn>.
- Your children might ask you about your own feelings pertaining to 9/11. Give this some thought in advance and decide how you are going to respond. Be open and honest with your answers, taking into consideration your children's ages and maturity level. If there are questions that you don't know the answer to, be honest and say that you don't know.
- Realize that talking with your children about 9/11 might bring up a lot of questions and emotions. As you're talking with your children, do a check in with them. Is there anything that they're confused about or anything that they don't understand? Ask them about their feelings and let them tell you. Some kids might not have any feelings about 9/11, while others might feel sad, anxious or even fearful.

## Talking to Your Children about the 10th Anniversary of 9/11 (continued)

- Your children might have questions about their own safety. If this could happen before, couldn't it happen again? Reassure them that 9/11 was a very rare event and it hasn't happened since 2001. Explain that there are many safety measures in place to help protect us, especially at airports.
- Other things to consider: limit your children's exposure to TV during this time. The images of 9/11 can be quite scary for children, especially since they might be too young to understand that a replay of the planes flying into the towers is not actually happening right then.
- If your children have had someone in their own life who has died, the images of sadness and grief that might be shown during the anniversary week of 9/11 could very well trigger their own grief. It's important to check in and see how they're doing.
- Consider going to a 10th anniversary memorial event in your town. Ask your children if they would like to attend. Explain that the purpose of going to the memorial event is to honor those who died on 9/11.
- Realize that your children may want to do something in memory of 9/11, but they might not want to attend a public event. Give them the option of doing something privately at home, like lighting a candle.
- Ask your children if they would like to create something in memory of 9/11. Plan to do this with your children. Some ideas to consider: decorating a t-shirt to wear to the memorial event, painting a picture, drawing, or writing.
- Explain to your children that 9/11 has also become a National Day of Service in the United States. On this day, people volunteer their time. Think about volunteering as a family. Or, consider making a donation to a local charity. Explain why you are "giving back" on this day.
- Tell your children about the 9/11 memorial that is being built on the ground where the Twin Towers once stood. Explain to them that when bad things happen, it's important to rebuild buildings but that it's more important to rebuild lives. Talk to them about hope for the future.
- Realize that this initial conversation might be just the beginning conversation. Often children process what they've been told and come back later with questions. You'll most likely end up having a series of small conversations. Let your children know that they can come back and ask you questions at any time.