

TERRORISM AND OUR CHILDREN

by Foster W. Cline, M.D.

The awful events in New York, make a parenting truth hit home: More than ever all parents must realize they are raising America's leaders of tomorrow...leaders who will have to cope with hard times while making difficult decisions about tough issues.

A parent asked me, "My son has seen these horrible images. What can I do to make him feel more relaxed and happy?"

It is NOT our job to raise children who are relaxed and happy about tough and terrible issues. It is our job to raise children who can face these issues squarely. Thousands of children across the United States are probably telling their parents, "I'm scared." "I can't sleep," and "I keep thinking about those people." The biggest mistake is telling the kids, "Don't be scared," or "You'll be able to sleep" or "Just don't think about the people." In other words don't tell your kids how to feel or what to do. The more you tell them to go to sleep, the more they will stay awake. The more you tell 'em not to worry, the more they will. It is better to take the tack: "Of course you think about those people in New York. People all over the United States are thinking about 'em. But you know what, of all the people in the United States, you'll probably be able to handle your thoughts better than most." You don't try to take away the problem. Instead, help your kids cope!

There are other things parents can do:

1. Children ALWAYS take their cues on how to handle difficult days by how the adults in their environment handle them. It does no good for a hand wringing parent to say, "Don't worry, honey." Frightened parents raise frightened kids, and resolute parents raise resolute kids.
2. Give reassurance to little children. Recognize that the first thing small children worry about is

whether or not THEY themselves or their parents are safe. Little children can simply be told, "Fortunately nothing like that will likely happen to us."

3. Use questions. Questions are magic. And the wording of the questions can help reassure your children. Examples include, "How do you feel about this?" and "Do you worry that this could happen to you, or do you think that it is so rare that it probably never could?"

One parent who asked her eleven-year-old daughter how she was feeling was quite surprised by her child's answer. "It's pretty horrible, mom, but I realize that I'm a part of living history!" Never assume your kids can't cope!

4. Give kids the facts. Of all the flights that take place every day around the world, hundreds of thousands have no problem at all. "Honey, if you insist on worrying about something, I think you should try worrying about slipping, and bonking your head in the bathtub. A lot more people die of that!"
5. Give your child something positive to do. Names of families that have lost members are posted on the Internet. A letter that begins like the following will help kids cope:

"I'm ten years old and live in Texas and I read about your dad and how he died trying to save a lot of other people. I want you to know that our whole family appreciates him and all he stood for. And so do other people all around the United States..."

6. Help plant the values that will make our world better. Tell your kids something like: "There are the Taliban and other dictatorships in the world who hate the United States and people of a different religion from theirs. But the United States tries to show love for all people, and here, in America, all

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religions and all different people come together to make our country strong.”

7. Invite a good Muslim family or Islamic individual in your city over for dinner. They need a little support and understanding from their fellow Americans right now!

In short, don't engage in hand wringing. Pitch in. Cope. Ask your children questions. Be factual. Give faith, love and, support. And your kids modeling after you, will help grow a strong America that will be a beacon for the world in an even more uncertain future.



The Love and Logic People

2207 Jackson Street, Golden, CO 80401-2300

1-800-338-4065 • www.loveandlogic.com