

Talking with Scouts about tragic events...

...is one way we can help relieve some of the anxiety, anger and uncertainty we all feel; lend perspective, and find constructive action in response to tragedy.

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.

Fred Rogers

I remember in 1968, when I was in the second grade, Robert Kennedy was shot and lingered in the hospital for a time before he died. The events of those days loomed large in our eight year old minds. Were we safe? Were our parents? Why did someone shoot Mr. Kennedy? I can remember how fearful and uncertain we felt.

When some great tragedy unfolds our Scouts will know about it, they will discuss it, they will wonder what we think. We can help them by doing three things:

Talk About It

Our Scouts will have seen images and stories on TV, they may grow anxious and fearful. They need to talk about these events and we need to watch for their expressions of fear or disbelief, we need to be prepared to talk about these things.

Uncomplicated explanations, reassurance and honesty are important things to hear from adults when tragic events happen, especially those that involve other children.

We should not expect or demand that our Scouts feel a certain way or draw the same conclusions. Respect their emotions and beliefs, even if you don't necessarily agree or understand them. In our role as Scouters it's especially important that we be impartial on any debatable questions, whether social, religious or political, that touch on the events.

They will want to know or explain the reasons and motivations involved. Our best answers are questions. "What do you think happened?" "Why do you think it happened?" We don't need to supply answers, just listen to theirs and help them find their own answers. We can ask how to apply the ideas of the Scout oath and law to these sorts of things.

Help Them Gain Perspective

Children see the world differently. Their sense of proportion and scale is very small, they will fear things that have happened to others will happen to them. They will discuss them with each other and form their own opinions that feed their fears and misapprehensions.

In the face of great tragedy we all tend to feel overwhelmed and anxious, to feel a heightened sense of uncertainty. We can help them think through how hearing the story of an event repeated over and over again is alarming, it can make it seem as though the event has happened again and again.

We know that these feelings subside over time, that we begin to feel better and less anxious when we talk to and listen to each other.

Find Constructive Action

Share the understanding that being afraid, angry, feeling sad or uncertain about this sort of thing is natural; we all feel that way. What's important is what we do with those feelings. We talk about them, we find constructive things to do with them. Writing a letter of support, making donations to help the victims, joining others in a prayer or moment of silence for the people who were hurt, and other constructive action is a way to join the people who help.

Listen to your Scouts, discuss these things with them and give them useful ways to express themselves that they can use for the rest of their lives.

That's how we help form the next generation of helpers.