



# Supporting Children After the U.S. Capitol Attack

The recent attack on the U.S. Capitol has evoked several emotions including shock, fear, anxiety, worry, confusion, and anger, as well as upset our beliefs about safety in our country. This is compounded by continued concerns and stressors about COVID-19, economic hardships, racism, and social injustice. Most children have heard about this event and its aftermath through the media (e.g., television, radio, print, and the Internet) or through social media. Just as you may be struggling to make sense of what you are seeing and hearing, so too are your children. They will be turning to trusted adults for help and guidance. Help them navigate what they are seeing and hearing by having a conversation with them, acknowledging their feelings, and finding ways to cope together.

The impact of this event and its aftermath will be different depending upon whether you are:

- A family directly impacted by this attack.
- A family who has been affected by a similar event in the past (e.g., death/injury of a loved one from a violent event, racism, social injustices).
- A family who has served in our military and/or our government.
- A family not directly impacted who is viewing news about the impact on others.

## Understanding Media Exposure

- Media coverage of negative events, like the riots and civil unrest, can produce increased fears and anxiety in children.
- The more time children spend watching or seeking coverage of the attack on the U.S. Capitol and its aftermath, the more likely they are to have negative reactions.
- Graphic images and news stories about the violent aspects of the event may be particularly upsetting to children.
- Very young children may not understand that the coverage and repetition of images from the event is a replay. They may think the event is continuing to happen or is happening again.
- Excessive exposure to the media coverage may interfere with children's recovery after this event.

## What Parents Can Do to Help

- Limit Your Children's Exposure to Media Coverage and Social Media Messaging about the Attack on the U.S. Capitol and its Aftermath
  - The younger the child, the less exposure they should have.
  - You may choose to eliminate all exposure for very young children.
  - Play their favorite shows or movies instead.
  - Consider family activities away from television, radio, or Internet.
- Start the Conversation
  - Check in by asking what your children know about the situation. It is highly unlikely that your school-age children and teens have not heard anything from media outlets, teachers, or friends.
  - Use newsbreaks or alerts on mobile devices as opportunities to open conversation or check in again. Be available to talk about your children's feelings, thoughts, and concerns, and reassure them of their safety, if needed.
  - Do NOT presume you know what your children are thinking. Ask if they are worried and discuss those worries with them, reassuring them as needed.
  - Talk to older children and teens about democracy and how the U.S. government operates. They may also want to talk about divisions in our country. This can be an opportunity to share your values, identify ways to discuss differences, and find non-violent ways to make their voices be heard. For example, they may want to write a letter together to legislators to register their opinions.



- Clear Up Any Misunderstandings
  - Listen and ask questions to find out if your children understand the situation accurately. They may think they are at risk when they are not.
  - Often times, immediately after an event, there is misinformation being reported. Clear up any misinformation and confirm reports from reliable social media and news sources. Let your children and teens know that as the situation unfolds and investigations continue, information may change. Let them know you will tell them if you hear anything different from what you discussed but they can ask you as well.
- Monitor Adult Conversations
  - Watch what you and other adults say about the attack or the media coverage in front of the children. Children often listen when adults are unaware and may misconstrue what they hear, filling in the blanks with more inaccuracies that may increase their distress.
- Let Your Children Know about Successful Community Efforts
  - You may want to share positive media images, such as reports on how the community comes together to support one another or that our government is still doing its job. Let them know that democracy continues.
  - Reassure your children that many people are working together to keep you safe. This will give them a sense that adults are actively taking steps to protect them.
- Educate Yourself
  - Learn about children's common reactions to trauma and violence.
  - Know that many children are resilient and cope well, but some may have continuing difficulties. These reactions vary with age and exposure to the event. (For more information, see [age-related reactions to traumatic events](#)).
- Keep to routines
  - In times of stress, routines can be comforting for children and teens. As much as possible, keep to your routines and schedules in the face of current events. Routine can also decrease ongoing stressors related to the pandemic.

### When Your Family is Part of the Event

- Address Safety Concerns
  - Your children may have questions about what happened to you during this event or might see images/videos. Answer questions truthfully. Reassure them that you are safe now.
  - If you are required to return to the Capitol building, address any worry your children may have and let them know about the additional security measures being put into place.
- Being Interviewed
  - Decide if it's a good idea for you or your children to talk to the media. While it's natural to want to tell your story, the media may not be the best place to do so.
  - Think about what you are willing and not willing to discuss. You have the right to set limits with reporters.
  - Ask the reporter for the purpose of the story, its content, and what outlet story will be published. Decide if the answers match your intent for telling your story.

*Further information about children, families, and trauma can be found at the website of the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, [www.NCTSN.org](http://www.NCTSN.org).*