



*Dear Friend,*

*We are living in very difficult times. This past week was a storm of personal heartache and nationwide outrage. The violent threats against media and democratic supporters and politicians, the racially motivated murders in Kentucky and the antisemitic massacre of eleven people in the Pittsburgh*

*synagogue is too much to bear. It feels like the insult is added to injury when our political leaders don't take responsibility for their role in providing space for this hate to thrive. For those of us raising children or have children in our lives, it is even more complicated. My daughters are different ages and so at different stages of readiness to talk about challenging subjects. However, after doing this work for a decade I know that even very young children are impacted by the stress around them. This week, I wanted to just share with you four basic tips I share with my clients who are concerned about how to communicate with children at this time.*

1. Process your feelings first.

My legal team was in Charlottesville assisting protesters when Heather Heyer was killed by a white supremacist ([I wrote about it at the time](#)). I was devastated and had to take some time before sharing it with my oldest daughter. The most important step is that the adults have an opportunity to process their emotions even for a few minutes. Take a walk or a shower even go into another room and journal, so you can have your initial thoughts and feelings outside of the view of little minds and hearts.

Adults often process by watching television or listening to media coverage over and over again. Be aware that young children can't distinguish between something be repeated again and again and happening again and again. Keeping coverage to a minimum is advised.

2. Use age appropriate words.

That does not mean you should not engage in intentional conversations. This is the part where most parents feel nervous. They don't want to say more than their children can handle. What researchers tell us is even very young children are aware when their caregivers are nervous or worried. Very young children can understand a message like "some people we don't know were very hurt today and mommy is very sad." An older child can hear more details, but the emphasis should always be to open a dialogue and allow the child to ask questions. Let the child lead the conversation through their questions. Be prepared for your child to double back and have more questions.

### 3. Talk about your emotions—Modeling

Most parents feel their role is to shield their children from pain. In the process, don't deny them very important opportunities to understand and process their emotions. Telling your child you are scared or angry tells them it's ok to have feelings when hard things happen. Far too many children learn to be ashamed of negative feelings and therefore stuff them instead of processing them. If you can it's important to also tell your children how you are handling your feelings. "I'm sad so I decided to (write a letter, spend time with family, volunteer)" By talking through your process you model for your child that despite our emotions, we are not helpless.

### 4. Empower your child to be a helper.

At times like this, many people quote what Mister Rogers said his mother told him when bad things happen to "Look for the helpers." That is very wise and true, especially for young children, but there's more to the quote than just "looking." Talk to your child about why we help during challenges and that THEY are helpers too. Brainstorm with them ways they can help. Drawing a picture, writing a letter, volunteering or donating are all the things young children can do or have involvement. For sure, in and of themselves, these actions can have an impact but you are also teaching your child a valuable lesson about activating their own power in times of crisis.

*I hope these tips are valuable to you. Feel free to reach out to [me](#) if you have specific questions. I am offering my [Courageous Conversations with Children](#) as an add on option to [Courageous Confident Conversations](#) which begins November 13.*

*In solidarity,*

*Nicole*