



Breaking the News

How to talk to your child about unsettling real world events

BY RACHEL RABKIN PECHMAN

Every time I turn on the TV, it feels like I'm instantly bombarded with bad news, ranging from war in the Middle East to deadly tornadoes in the Midwest. So when it comes time for my daughter to watch, I choose kid-friendly stations only—ones that never even show a preview of the nightly news. At 3 years old, my

little girl is far too young to be exposed to the tragedies of the world. Still, I wonder, at what age should I clue her in to some of the harsh realities around us—and what should I say to her?

Many parents wonder the same thing, especially considering that the 10th anniversary of the September 11 terrorist attacks is upon us. For guidance, we turned to Paul Coleman, Psy.D., clinical psychologist

and author of *How to Say It to Your Child When Bad Things Happen*. Dr. Coleman strongly emphasizes that a parent's most important job is making sure a child feels safe and protected when trouble arises. Here, he tells us how and when to broach this kind of subject.

Parent & Child: *Let's get right to it—should parents bring up 9/11 at all?*

DR. PAUL COLEMAN: If a

child seems unaware of 9/11, then an open discussion about it before age 12 may be unnecessary. However, because of the anniversary, more kids may hear about it this year. If your younger child brings it up, sees something on TV, or learns about it in school, you should address it.

P&C: *How should parents approach the topic?*

DR. COLEMAN: Always start off by asking what your child has heard. Because the attacks happened here—not in some far off country—9/11 represents a different quality of concern than other events. Under

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911memorial.org

Visit this site for information on events commemorating 9/11, see the progress of the building construction via a live webcam, plan a visit to the memorial site or take a virtual tour, and get additional expert tips on talking to your children about this tragic event.