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America Under Attack: Talking Points Parents Can Use with Their Children
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The terrifying attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon have brought normal, everyday life in this country largely to a standstill, at least for a while. But, as a parent, you know that your child's world still goes on and you have to somehow find a way to maintain structure in her life and impart a sense of security. To that end, we have put together some questions that young children across the country are likely to ask their parents, along with some replies that young children can understand.

Question: "Mommy, what's happening?"

Answer: The amount of detail and explanation you go into depends, of course, on the age of your child. For young children, you might say something along the lines of: "We don't know exactly what happened yet, but it's clear that two buildings in New York City and one in Washington, D.C., were attacked. A lot of people were hurt and it's very sad." Since your child is sure to realize that you're upset, you might want to reassure her, perhaps by saying, "I'm sorry if I seem upset, but I'm not angry with you." It's also important to keep reinforcing the message "I will make sure that you are safe."

Question: "Is it happening here, Dad?"

Answer: Children tend to personalize these events, perhaps by thinking about an airplane trip they just took or a tall building they visited. And even early school-age children begin to understand that if a bad thing happened to someone else, it conceivably could happen to them, too. The point is to make your children feel as far removed from the tragedies as possible. Most people across the United States can simply and honestly reassure their children that these events happened far, far away from their homes, and that's bound to make them feel better. But parents in New York, Washington, and Pittsburgh will have to work a little harder to make their children feel safe. They might say something like: "One of these terrible things did take place near here, but it only happened in one small area and we are all safe."

Question: "Did anybody die?"

Answer: If you are faced with this question, don't lie to your children, but don't overwhelm them with details and explanations. Say as little as possible. Start with a simple "Yes, I think so." If they press you for more information and ask how many, you can try saying that you don't know or simply "A lot of people, I'm afraid." Acknowledge how sad it is, and then, once again, stress that you are all safe and that it happened far away.

Question: "Are things going to be OK?"

Answer: No matter what doubts or fears you might harbor, you need to act positive and offer your children a sense of security. Simply telling your children that you love them, that you will protect them, and that grown-ups are making sure that nothing else bad will happen is often enough to put a young child's mind at ease.

Find more information online: <http://www.drspock.com/topic/0,1504,677,00.html>

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