

## Helping kids make sense of the MH 17 air disaster



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Reports of the recent shooting down of Flight MH17 over Ukraine air space has saturated newspapers, television and the Internet for the last week. The events were shocking and many of the images shown on our television screens have been quite confronting. Worldwide outrage has been the result.

But what about the impact of the event and the subsequent media coverage on children and young people?

As adults we all want our children to live carefree lives and keep them from the pain and even horror of such tragedies and natural disasters. In reality we can't do this.

So what is a parent, teacher, or other caring adult to do when such events fill the airwaves and the consciousness of society? Here are some ideas:

- 1. Reassure children that they are safe.** The consistency of the images can be frightening for young children who don't understand the notion of distance and have difficulty distinguishing between reality and fiction. Let them know that while this event is indeed happening it will not affect them directly.
- 2. Explain what happened.** Sounds obvious but it's important not to simply assume that children and young people understand what's happened. Be calm and stick the facts, using a map to show older children where it happened.
- 3. Be available.** Let kids know that it is okay to talk about the unpleasant events. Listen to what they think and feel. By listening, you can find out if they have misunderstandings, and you can learn more about the support that they need. You do not need to explain more than they are ready to hear, but be willing to answer their questions.
- 4. Help children process what they see and hear, particularly through television.** Children are good observers but can be poor interpreters of events that are out of their level of understanding.
- 5. Support children's concerns for others.** They may have genuine concerns for the suffering that will occur and they may need an outlet for those concerns. It is heartwarming to see this empathy in children for the concerns of others.
- 6. Let them explore feelings beyond fear.** Many children may feel sad or even angry with these events so let them express the full range of emotions.
- 7. Avoid keeping the television on all the time.** The visual nature of the media means that images are repeated over and over, which can be both distressing to some and desensitizing to others.
- 8. Be aware of your own actions.** Children will take their cues from you and if they see you focusing on it in an unhealthy way then they will focus on it too. Let them know that it is happening but it should not dominate their lives.

Children's worlds can be affected in ways that we can't even conceive of so adults need to be both sensitive to children's needs and mindful of what they say and how they act in front of children.

In difficult times, it is worth remembering what adults and children need most are each other.

You'll find more ideas and advice to help you raise happy, confident kids at [parentingideasclub.com.au](http://parentingideasclub.com.au)