

Talking to Your Preschool Aged-Child about Charlottesville, VA

In the wake of the incidents occurring in Charlottesville, Virginia, parents and teachers alike are struggling to figure out if, what, and how to address the recent violence with their young children. Although the hashtag [#CharlottesvilleCurricula](#) has taken off on Twitter, little of that information is geared towards, or appropriate for preschool-aged children. We at the [Social-Emotional Teaching and Learning Lab \(SETL\)](#) at UIC have therefore put together a guide for teachers and parents to support the process of informing and supporting preschool-aged children during this time of crisis in our country.

As uncomfortable and intimidating as it may be for teachers and parents to discuss topics pertaining to violence, race, racism, and white supremacy with young children, avoiding the topic altogether can leave children afraid and vulnerable to false or misleading information.

As psychiatrist [Dr. Gail Saltz](#) and child psychologist [Dr. Jennifer Hartstein](#) explain, addressing the events and issues is essential because children will receive news and information from another source anyway. Talking to young children directly will ensure that children are not receiving false information, and that misleading information is corrected. Furthermore, children receive emotional cues from adults; maintaining a calm disposition while talking to children about what is happening is important so children can understand and express their own feelings towards the situation.

On the next page we summarize recommendations from experts in the field of child psychology and provide links to additional resources.

Key Tips

Tell children in a calm and reassuring manner about what has happened.

Limit media exposure; directly tell your children instead.

Be prepared to answer children's questions; frame answers in a way that does not have children fear a group of people.

Talk to your children about how people are treated unfairly based on their skin color.,

Focus on the positive: help children understand that adults work together to combat dangerous events.

Understand children's feelings by talking to them.

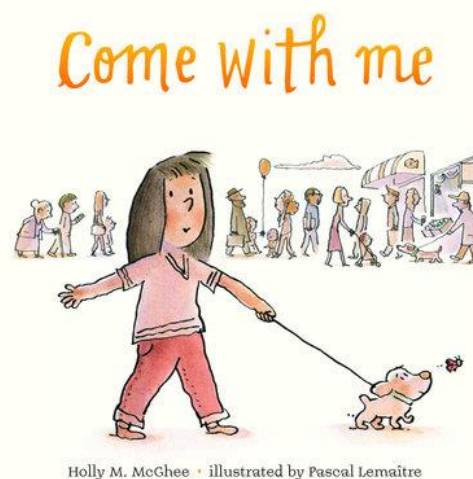
Provide children with an outlet to express fear/anger by structuring their play to be constructive.

Tell children to always report to an adult when they see someone being mistreated or when they are mistreated

Talk Honestly with Children

Regardless of whether children have heard the news or not, they need to hear it from adults with whom they feel safe. [Explain the events in age-appropriate terms to the children without giving information that they do not necessarily need to know.](#) Incorporating some information about our nation's history pertaining to slavery and the Confederacy may help children better [understand the context.](#) Unfairness is a familiar topic for young children. Explain that in our country people are not treated equally because of their skin color, [making sure to reiterate that this is wrong.](#)

Storybooks that address the issues can help children focus on the positive aspects of the fight against racism in the U.S. (e.g., [Come with Me, by Holly M. McGhee](#); ages 4+). Children need to feel safe, so make sure to reassure them that they are safe and that adults are working together for everyone's safety.



Answer Their Questions

Children will ask questions, so it is important that adults are well informed. Providing children with the opportunity to ask questions will help children facilitate their expression of fear and confusion. Answering questions like [“why do these things happen?”](#) is important for a child's social and emotional growth. Frame answers to questions in a way that does not have children fear a group of people. Help children understand that authority figures work together to combat violent crimes and situations. Teach them to “find the helpers” in any situation.

Provide a Safe Place

Creating a safe place for children to express themselves is important in helping children cope with their own responses to what is happening around them. Parents and teachers can [understand a child's feelings by talking to them and also by structuring their child's play so that it is constructive and allows them to express fear and anger.](#) It is also important that exposure to the media is limited; balance news time with discussions with younger children. Parents and teachers should remind their children to always report to an adult if they spot mistreatment of another person or if they themselves are mistreated.

Resources and References:

- Dube, R. (2013). 8 tips for talking to kids about the Boston marathon bombing. TODAY available at <https://www.today.com/parents/8-tips-talking-kids-about-boston-marathon-bombing-1C9361539>
- Mental Health America (2013) Helping children cope with tragedy related anxiety. Available at <http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/children-cope-with-tragedy>
- Kohli, S. (2017, August 12,). How to talk to your kids about the violence in Charlottesville. *Los Angeles Times* available at <http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-charlottesville-talking-to-kids-20170812-htm1story.html>
- Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress (2013). Restoring a sense of safety in the aftermath of a mass shooting: Tips for parents and professionals. Available at https://www.cstsonline.org/assets/media/documents/CSTS_restoring_sense_of_safety_aftermath_shooting.pdf
- Russo, M. (2017, August 14). How to talk to your kids about Charlottesville. *The New York Times*. Available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/14/books/review/children-violence-racism-charlottesville.html?mcubz=1>