

Using the P.E.A.C.E. Approach When Helping Children Who Are Affected by a Crisis

Purpose:

With the increase of civil unrest and crises within our nation and throughout the world, children and their families are trying to cope with the proliferation of information they are receiving as well as manage a variety of emotional reactions. For children, observing adults experiencing and expressing a range of emotions can make them feel uneasy or unsafe. The ultimate goals of adult-child interactions during a crisis are to model constructive stress management behaviors and reinforce the adults' role in protecting and keeping children safe so that they can be kids. To achieve these goals effectively, adults can use the therapeutic approach, **P.E.A.C.E.**, which may help children cope with what they are seeing, hearing, and feeling during a crisis.



▶ Adults may use the P.E.A.C.E approach to:

- P** Provide reassurance and promote resiliency for a child.
- E** Explore children's emotions and listen/respond to any questions they may have.
- A** Acknowledge feelings and thoughts that they may be struggling with.
- C** Clarify in concrete language and in a developmentally appropriate way the feelings they are expressing, explain how they can cope when they are feeling these emotions, and answer any questions to the best of your ability.
- E** Emphasize that adults always keep children as safe and secure as possible and are there to help and support them.

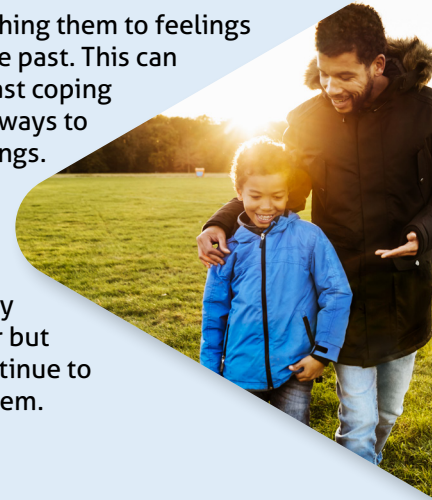
▶ For Parents, P.E.A.C.E. can look like:

- Providing reassurance by giving hugs, holding hands, or allowing children to use stuffed animals or personal items that bring comfort to them.
- Reinforcing calming behaviors and other coping skills that children may have already developed.
- Reinforcing routines to provide and promote consistency and predictability in a child's life.
- Preventing children from viewing or listening to news items that are graphic or complex, and avoiding adult conversations about complicated issues or crisis when children are present. Be mindful that children observe adults when they are communicating via phones, computers and in person.
- Asking children what they are thinking about or how they are feeling. Simple open-ended statements like: 'How are you feeling right now?' or 'What are you thinking about?' are examples of appropriate questions.
- Defining or placing a name to the feeling(s) they may be experiencing in simple terms if they demonstrate challenges in doing so.
- Restating what a child has said with simple speech, so they understand that they have been heard. Use statements like, 'I hear you telling me you are feeling this way because of what is happening,' or 'Wow, thank you for telling me this!'
- Answering any questions with simple, easily understandable statements that match their age and developmental skill levels. When questions cannot be answered, it is OK to say, 'let me think about that and I will get back to you' or 'let's find out more about the answer to the question you have.' If it is a complex question that is difficult to answer, try to refocus the answer or explanation on a small piece of the larger issue that you can talk about or address.
- Reinforcing with children the role adults have in their lives and that they are there to make sure they are safe, cared for, and supported. Talk about the adults in their family and in their community who provide safety and support everyday: police, fire fighters, military personnel, teachers, principals, and religious leaders.



► For adults working with children, P.E.A.C.E. can look like:

- Providing a designated space that children can go to independently to center themselves or calm down. Use feeling pictures and words that correlate to the possible emotions they may be feeling. Use stories, books, and other themed examples, such as resiliency, comfort, and safety.
- Allowing children to share their feelings or thoughts one-on-one or in small group settings. Physically remain at the children's level either by sitting on the floor with them or on a chair at a table where the children are sitting.
- Responding to a child(ren)'s communication of feelings or questions by recognizing what they have shared and repeating it back in your own words. Allow them to take the lead in conversation when possible. For children who are more introverted, using an artistic activity that can promote expressing of feelings over time as the activity progresses.
- Reinforcing routines to provide and promote consistency and predictability in a child's life.
- Exploring feelings and matching them to feelings they have experienced in the past. This can help build on or reinforce past coping skills used or highlight new ways to cope and manage their feelings.
- Allowing children to ask questions and answering them to the best of your ability. Sometimes there may not be an immediate answer but it can be something you continue to explore and work on with them.



Adults have the opportunity to provide emotional support to children, which will help promote and reinforce their overall health and wellbeing. Adults can always provide a space for children to feel more empowered when they may be feeling that things are not within their control..

The P.E.A.C.E. approach provides adults with an outline to start the conversation about how children are understanding, experiencing, and coping with crisis and uncertainty. Adults can help children develop resiliency and coping skills that they can use now and in the future by implementing guidelines of the P.E.A.C.E process.

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▶ Additional Resources:

- [National Education Association \(NEA\) School Crisis Guide:](https://www.nea.org/resource-library/neas-school-crisis-guide)
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Knowing what to do in a crisis can be the difference between stability and upheaval. This step-by-step resource created by educators can make it easier for school staff to keep schools safe before, during, and after a crisis.
- [National Child Traumatic Stress Network \(NCTSN\):](https://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/trauma-types/terrorism-and-violence)
<https://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/trauma-types/terrorism-and-violence>
NCTSN resources can help parents and children deal with catastrophic mass violence events and natural disasters, including examples of children's reactions and how parents can respond.
- [Talking to Children About Tragedies and Other News Events:](https://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/Media/Pages/Talking-To-Children-About-Tragedies-and-Other-News-Events.aspx)
<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/Media/Pages/Talking-To-Children-About-Tragedies-and-Other-News-Events.aspx>
The American Academy of Pediatrics encourages parents, teachers, childcare providers, and others who work closely with children to filter information about events and present it in a way that their child can accommodate.
- [Helping Children with Tragic Events in the News:](https://www.pbs.org/parents/thrive/helping-children-with-tragic-events-in-the-news)
<https://www.pbs.org/parents/thrive/helping-children-with-tragic-events-in-the-news>
It is normal for both adults and kids to feel anxious after these events. Learn what you can do to minimize the stress.
- [Incidents of Mass Violence:](https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/disaster-distress-helpline/disaster-types/incidents-mass-violence)
<https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/disaster-distress-helpline/disaster-types/incidents-mass-violence>
Find disaster-related resources from SAMHSA.

▶ For Questions Contact:

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