

BEYOND FEAR:

Talking to Children about Scary Situations

BY WINNIE SANDLER GRINSPOON

PRESIDENT, HAROLD GRINSPOON FOUNDATION

I was 9 years old when 11 terrorists murdered Israeli athletes at the Munich Summer Olympics. I can't remember how I heard the news, but it didn't take long. I may have seen something on TV when it was first reported, or maybe heard it on the radio before my parents realized I was listening. It was terrifying to hear that athletes were murdered at the Olympics, of all places. If athletes at the Olympics weren't safe in the Olympic Village, how could anyone be safe anywhere? The news was shocking and scary for everyone, for sure, but for us Jewish kids it created extra cause for nightmares. I had never been to Israel and I didn't know anyone who lived there, but I knew that we had a connection to those Israeli athletes and that the world was less safe for people like me.

All parents anguish over how to protect their children and allay their fears. At some point, shielding them from bad news is not possible. News will get to them. I remember how, on the morning of September 11th, I rushed to my children's school; I wanted to take them home, hold them close, and somehow shield them from

the horrors that were unfolding. But by the time I got to their school, my 6-year-old daughter and 8-year-old son already knew that the towers had been hit.

A year ago, as JCC preschools were subjected to bomb threats, parents faced the issue yet again. No matter how calm and reassuring the teachers were during each evacuation, the children were experiencing a disruption to their daily routine that shook their sense of security. Before long, some children were showing signs of stress. On social media and at PJ Library gatherings, parents were seeking advice about the right words to say or approaches to take. Many of the people on the PJ Library team are parents of young children themselves, and they were asking the very same questions.

Soon after the bomb threats began, PJ Library published a blog post entitled "How to Talk to Your Kids About Scary Situations" that shared advice from respected child psychology experts. The post gained traction right away — reaching nearly four times as many people as other popular PJ Library blog posts. The bomb scares

FROM THE BLOG

continued, and we decided it was time to address the question that was on many Jewish parents' minds. Our next blog post was entitled "How to Talk to Children about Anti-Semitism." Again, the post was read widely, reaching more people than any other post in the month it was posted.

We know from our recent survey of subscribers that parents view PJ Library as a trusted parenting tool, and we saw from the response to those blog posts that we have an important role to play. PJ Library will be there to curate content and share the best resources we can find to help PJ Library parents navigate the topics that are on parents' minds.

I read recently that a memorial and museum opened in Munich this past September to remember those 11 Israeli athletes. The memorial is carved into a grassy hill in the Olympic Park. As described by one of its designers, the concept was to take something away from the landscape, just as the massacre took something away from the victims and their families. That massacre also took something away from those of us who were children at the time, as do all scary world events.

We hope in the year ahead, the PJ Library team can blog less about helping our children feel safe in scary situations and more about the joyous moments of parenting. But should difficult issues arise, PJ Library will be there to help.

Many sources recommend being direct with kids about difficult topics. The American Psychological Association (APA) stresses that for children in groups that are likely to be targets of discrimination, it's vital for parents to have ongoing, honest, discussions with their children rather than shying away from the subject.

The APA also recommends:

- Let the discussion be ongoing.
- Keep talking. Yes, even — and especially — when it gets hard.
- It's also ok to say "I don't know."
- Encourage your children to ask questions.

BOOKS ABOUT STANDING UP FOR WHAT IS RIGHT



Brave Girl by Michelle Markel

***I Dissent: Ruth Bader Ginsburg
Makes Her Mark*** by Debbie Levy

Like a Maccabee by Barbara Bietz



*To read the blog post
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