

# Helping Your Youth Respond to Difficult Situations

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Now that my kids are ages 10 and 12, they are becoming more aware of politics in the news (like gun violence and gun control) and are even eye-witnesses to social issues (like homelessness). Youth today may even hear of news from other classmates while in the school quad or they may get their news from videos on the internet. With such immediate access to news (fake or not), youth and pre-adolescents may notice they are getting affected by it. As parents, how can we help our children process this new input and respond to it in healthy ways? Here are some tips you may consider:

## Acknowledge Their Feelings

Have an open discussion about how the news or issue makes your child feel. Help your child describe and articulate their feelings by offering words like *anxious, enraged, fearful, hesitant, elated, and*

*hopeful*. Accept the full range of their feelings. This is how you encourage kids to be honest and vulnerable, assuring them that they can trust you.

## Offer an Unbiased Background

By nature, youth are impulsive and can jump to conclusions. It's hard for them to discern if their source of news is true. Help your child be in the habit of considering both sides of the news or issue so they can gain perspective. Stephen Covey, author of The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People says "Seek first to understand, then to be understood." Guide your youth to be empathetic and compassionate leaders.

## Encourage Kids to Expand Their Horizons

While the news is of a temporal nature (in no way taking away from the significance of the event), one way to help youth deepen their appreciation of current events is to read books, especially historical non-fiction and biographies. While reading, discuss these questions with your youth: What happened in the past that contributed to today's conflict? Who was pivotal in that movement and what was their legacy?

## Find Positive, Age-Appropriate Ways Youth Can Get Involved

After being made aware of the news or social issues, some kids just want to do something about it. There are

many ways to encourage youth to take meaningful action and make an impact in their community. Here are some suggested activities:

Fill a backpack with school supplies for a migrant child

Volunteer at the local animal shelter

In lieu of presents, collect socks or canned food for a food bank

Participate in a beach or creek clean-up day

Organize a recycling program at school

Read with someone who is learning English

Here's to raising socially aware and responsible young adults! We can make a difference.

Jaime

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