

## How to Help Kids Live Fear-Free Lives

By Richard and Jennifer Jarman

We live in fearful, confusing times. The media gives us new reason to be afraid every day: terrorism, war, bad economy, mortgage crisis, climate change, political upheaval. It's enough to rattle the nerves of even the most stable adults.

If today's news is tough on adults, it's even harder on children. Why? Children don't have the ability to process information the way most adults do. They don't have the benefit of experience to judge current circumstances. Also, kids have very vivid imaginations. Their imagination amplifies the fear and danger they already feel.

What does that mean for your children? When they hear about a crime, they assume that it happened next door, and the bad guys are coming for them. News of a mortgage crisis means that they are going to lose their home. News that we adults might brush aside becomes personal and threatening to our children.

What can parents do?

One of our jobs as parents is to help our children gain the skills they need to deal with the uncertainty of life. Here are 6 things you can do to make your child less fearful in these troubled times:

1. Turn off the TV news. Or, at least watch it with your children. The worst way for a kid to learn about the world is through television newscasts. They show the most shocking, disturbing images possible to hook people into watching. (Remember, the real purpose of the TV news is to sell products, not provide information.) Kids see those images, and believe the whole world is like that.
2. You become your kids' source for news. Take time to discuss current events with your children. As an adult, you should be able to give them the perspective they need. When a major event happens, explain what's going on, and what (if anything) it means to you and your family.
3. Give your children a chance to talk. Your children may need help expressing the fears they have. Give them a chance to express themselves. Reassure them that it's natural to be afraid sometimes.
4. Introduce them to firemen and police officers. It is comforting for children to know that there are people who can help them in an emergency. Plan visits to the local police station and firehouse. Your children will see, meet, and get to know the people who protect them. That is sure to make your kids more secure about the world around them.

5. Be prepared. It's a good idea to have emergency supplies on hand in case something happens. Basic first aid supplies, along with adequate food and water, serve 2 purposes: you are ready if the worst happens, and your kids know the family is ready to face whatever might happen.
6. Model courageous living. Like it or not, kids draw most of their ideas about how to live by watching their parents. We need to show them how to live a full, normal life, even in uncertain times. Show them that living in today's world means being wise, being safe, and yet being engaged in all the normal activities of life.

### Final thoughts

It's not easy being a kid. But it's impossible for a kid to live normally when he or she is overcome with fear. Parents play a critical role in making sure children learn how to manage fear and uncertainty. One of the great gifts we can give our children is the knowledge that they can face life's challenges, no matter what happens.