



# Guidance for Parents and Caregivers

**How to Talk with Children About the Current Situation  
in the UAE- A Guide for Parents**

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# Table of Contents



**Introduction**

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**Key Principles**

---

**How will they  
respond**

---

**How to start the  
conversation**

---

**Parent guidance  
checklist**

---

**Scripts**

---

**Common Questions**

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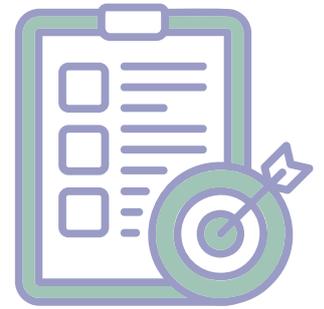
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**Your calm  
presence is the  
greatest safety  
you can give a  
child**

”



# Introduction



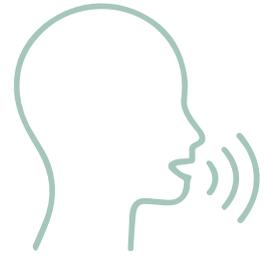
To help children manage a crisis situation, clear, calm, honest communication that is developmentally appropriate and restores safety and routine is the most helpful response. The guidance below is trauma-informed, culturally sensitive for international and expat families, and aligns with best practice for working with children and young people. Use the age-range table for developmentally specific scripts and strategies.

# Key Principles



- Prioritise safety and predictability, reassure children about what is being done to keep them safe.
- Keep language simple and factual, avoid speculation and graphic detail.
- Limit media exposure, be the filter for news and social media, especially for younger children.
- Validate feelings, name and accept emotions without trying to fix them immediately.
- Offer choice and control, small decisions (where to sit, when to talk) help restore agency.
- Maintain routine, predictable schedules reduce anxiety.

# How will they respond?

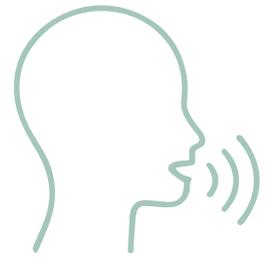


Some children may be withdrawn; others will experience intense sadness or anger, or act as if nothing has occurred. Children are often confused about the facts and will need your help to make sense of what has happened and what may happen in the future. You can help children to overcome these problems by

- listening to them,
- speaking kindly,
- reassuring them,
- playing with them,

Try to re-establish your children's routines (sleeping, playing, etc). Ask them to help with family tasks, as this will give the child a feeling of security, predictability, and control. Try to find opportunities for your child to play or socialise with other children and with you.

# How to start the conversation



- Find a quiet, familiar space and ask an open question: “Do you have questions about what’s happening?”
- Listen first; follow the child’s lead about how much they want to know.
- Answer simply. For example: “There have been some dangerous events nearby. The adults in charge are working to keep everyone safe. Right now, we are safe at home.”
- Repeat and reframe as needed. Expect and be ready to answer the same questions multiple times.

“ What feels  
small to you  
matters greatly  
to a child: your  
attention, your  
patience, your  
listening. ”



# Early Years Scripts

AGE	DEVELOPMENTAL STAGE / TASK	UNDERSTANDING OF THE EVENT	COMMON GRIEF / TRAUMA RESPONSES	PARENT ACTIONS (TRAUMA-INFORMED + EMOTION COACHING)
2–4 years	Egocentric; regulating via caregivers and routines	Very concrete; limited sense of scale or permanence; may see events as temporary or self-caused	Crying, clinginess, regression, sleep/eating disruption, startle, repetitive questions, play reenactment	Keep routines; give brief, concrete reassurance (“We are safe right now”); limit media/adult talk; provide physical comfort and play. Emotion coaching: Label (“You look scared”), Validate (“Loud noises are scary”), Soothe (hold, breathe together), Set brief limits, <u>Redirect</u> to calming activity.

## One-page parent script

Prep: Find a quiet space and sit at child level; remove distractions.

Opening line: “Some loud things happened, but we are safe here with each other.”

Ask: “Are you okay?” (pause; accept nonverbal reply)

If upset:

Label: “You’re scared.”

Validate: “Loud noises can be scary. It’s okay to cry.”

Soothe: Hold, rock, and model 3 slow breaths (“Breathe in—1,2—out—1,2”).

Redirect: Offer a calming sensory activity (soft toy, play dough, drawing). If asking

questions: Repeat brief answer each time: “We are safe now. Grown-ups are helping.”

Routine: Return to snack/nap/play as soon as calm.

When to get help: If regression, sleep or eating problems persist >2 weeks or intensify contact school/GP/counsellor.

# Primary Age Scripts

AGE	DEVELOPMENTAL STAGE / TASK	UNDERSTANDING OF THE EVENT	COMMON GRIEF / TRAUMA RESPONSES	PARENT ACTIONS (TRAUMA-INFORMED + EMOTION COACHING)
4–7 years	Growing autonomy, vivid imagination, magical thinking	May think events are reversible or caused by wishes; may feel guilt/responsibility	Nightmares, tantrums, repetitive “why” questions, acting out, clinginess	Use simple honest answers; correct magical thinking; offer choices to restore control; use play/drawing to process. Emotion coaching: Label (“You seem worried”), Validate (“That makes sense”), Empathise, <u>Set</u> limits with empathy, Problem-solve (choice of calming activity).

## One-page parent script

Find a quiet, comfortable spot; have crayons/paper and their favourite toy ready.

Opening line: “You may have heard some loud, scary noises. Do you want to tell me what you heard?”

Listen & reflect: “So you heard loud booms and that made you feel scared.”

Emotion coaching:

- Label: “It sounds like you felt really worried.”
- Validate: “That makes sense, it’s okay to feel worried.”
- Empathise & reassure: “I’m here with you, and you are safe with me.”

Offer a small choice to restore control: “Would you like to draw how you feel, or read a story together?”

# Primary Age Scripts

AGE	DEVELOPMENTAL STAGE / TASK	UNDERSTANDING OF THE EVENT	COMMON GRIEF / TRAUMA RESPONSES	PARENT ACTIONS (TRAUMA-INFORMED + EMOTION COACHING)
7–11 years	Concrete to early abstract thinking; peer awareness increasing	Beginning to understand permanence and cause; worries about recurrence and bodily harm; detailed questions	Anxiety about safety, intrusive thoughts, somatic complaints, concentration problems, hypervigilance, reenactment in play, mood swings	Provide accurate age-appropriate facts; teach coping skills (breathing, grounding); offer expression options (art, talk, movement); maintain routine with flexibility. Emotion coaching: Label, Validate, <u>Explore</u> thoughts/worries, Co-regulate (breathing), Problem-solve.

## One-page parent script

Find a calm place.

Opening question: “Tell me what you know and what questions you have.”

Facts: Give short, accurate info: “Authorities are working to keep people safe. Right now, we are safe.”

Emotion coaching:

Label: “You seem worried about safety.”

Validate: “That makes sense this can feel scary.”

Explore: “What worries you most?”

Problem-solve: Make a short family plan (who to call, a calming corner, steps if alarm sounds). Expression options: Offer drawing, journaling. Media rule: Agree when/what news sources they may check; parent filters details.

When to seek help: If persistent panic, somatic complaints, school decline → contact teacher/counsellor/GP.

# Secondary Scripts

AGE	DEVELOPMENTAL STAGE / TASK	UNDERSTANDING OF THE EVENT	COMMON GRIEF / TRAUMA RESPONSES	PARENT ACTIONS (TRAUMA-INFORMED + EMOTION COACHING)
	formation, peer orientation, autonomy	ruminates, seeks meaning, feels powerless or angry	risk-taking, sleep/appetite change, activism or avoidance.	boundaries collaboratively; support peer connections and constructive action; monitor risk and seek help if needed. Emotion coaching: Label ("You sound overwhelmed"), Validate, Reflect & probe, Offer space and follow-up, Collaborate on coping plan and safety steps.

## One-page parent script

Private moment; invite gently: "Can we talk for five minutes?"

Opening: "You've probably heard a lot. I want to hear what you think and share what I know."

Listen & reflect: "You sound worried/tired tell me more."

Facts & limits: Offer concise facts and acknowledge uncertainty. "Here's what we know; here's what we don't."

Emotion coaching:

Label: "You seem overwhelmed."

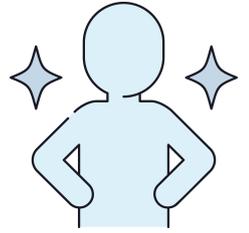
Validate: "Anyone would feel that way."

Probe: "What worries you most?"

Autonomy: Offer choice to talk now or later; agree a check-in time. Co-create plan: Media limits, peer supports, safe coping actions (exercise, creative work), and a list of trusted contacts.

When to seek help: If mood or functioning declines, increased risk behaviour, contact school counsellor/GP/mental health services.

# Parent Guidance Checklist



1. Approach the conversation when you are calm and regulated yourself.
2. Name the feeling (label).
3. Validate the feeling (this makes sense).
4. Give brief factual info (age-appropriate).
5. Offer one or two calming/co-regulating actions.
6. Provide a small, concrete choice to increase agency.
7. Revisit later; normalise repeat questions.

“

Hope grows  
in the gentle  
routines we  
keep and the  
small choices  
we offer.

”

From Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (2019)

# Common Questions



Common questions children ask in security/crisis situations and suggested parent responses

1. Child: **“Will we be okay?”**

Response: “Yes, right now we are safe. The people whose job it is to keep everyone safe are working on it. I’m here with you and we’ll follow our safety plan if we need to.”

2. Child: **“Is anyone hurt?”**

Response: “I don’t have all the details, but I will tell you what I know. It’s OK to feel upset.”

3. Child: **“Are we going to move/leave the country?”**

Response: “I don’t know about that right now. If plans change, I’ll tell you as soon as I can. For now, we’ll keep our usual routine and make a plan together if anything changes.”

4. Child: **“Could it happen to me?”**

Response: “Many people and authorities are working to keep places safe. If anything changes, we will follow our safety steps and I will tell you exactly what to do.”

5. Child: **“Why did this happen?”**

Response (young child): “Sometimes grown-ups disagree and do harmful things that’s not the child’s fault.”

Response (older child/adolescent): “There are complex political and historical reasons. If you want, I can explain what I know simply, or we can look at reliable sources together.”

# Further Support



You are your child's greatest source of safety. Simple, honest conversations, a steady routine, calm co-regulation and small choices will help children feel secure now. Trust your instincts: listen, validate feelings, limit exposure to distressing media, and offer one brief calming activity and one small choice when they are upset.

Watch for changes that persist (sleep or appetite problems, withdrawal, severe anxiety, school decline) and seek support early from your child's school counsellor, GP or local mental health services. If there is immediate danger or risk of harm, call emergency services now.

You do not have to do this alone reach out for further support and guidance. Small, consistent acts of care and presence make a meaningful difference.

## **For further information contact:**

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With warm regards,  
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**Educational and Child Psychologist**  
**Psychology Flows**



# Helpful Resources



Emergency (police / ambulance / fire): 999 / 998 / 997

- Dubai Health Authority (mental health):  
<https://www.dha.gov.ae>
- Ministry of Health & Prevention (UAE):  
<https://www.mohap.gov.ae>
- Urgent crisis & helplines
- Samaritans (international info): <https://www.samaritans.org>
- World Health Organization – Psychological First Aid:  
<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241548205>
- UNICEF – Helping children affected by conflict:  
<https://www.unicef.org/protection/children-and-armed-conflict>
- Child Mind Institute – talking to kids about the news:  
<https://childmind.org/article/how-to-talk-to-kids-about-the-news/>
- British Red Cross – activities for children after crises:  
<https://www.redcross.org.uk/get-help/prepare-for-emergencies/children>:

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