



Talking to Kids about Events in Ferguson, MO

- Begin by asking your child open ended questions about what he thinks about the events. You might start with “Wow, there’s been a lot of stuff about the unrest in Ferguson, MO in the news. What do you think about all this?” By giving your child the opportunity to express his thoughts first, you make it clear that you value what he thinks and that his experience is important to you.
- Give your child space to talk. If you jump in immediately to correct her or to provide a different point of view, she is more likely to shut down, disengage, and feel invalidated. It also makes her less likely to listen to you when it’s your turn. By allowing your child to talk freely, you give your child the chance to learn how to organize her thoughts and express them to others.
- Ask your child about his fears and concerns. Kids will sometimes surprise you with the details and fears they end up focusing on. Even if they seem irrational, try to acknowledge your child’s feelings and correct any misconceptions gently and without ridicule. Remember that his feelings are very real to him even if they are not based in reality. If he is concerned about his own safety, explain to him the steps that you are taking to keep him safe.
- If your child is not ready to talk about it, don’t push her. Validate that it can be confusing and scary to talk about it, but let her know that you’re there to help her figure it out when she is ready
- Focus on the facts. As adults, it is hard enough to filter through all the information and figure out what is accurate and what we think and believe. To add to that confusion, kids also have a tendency to think in concrete ways like, “you’re either on this side or on the other side.”
- For younger children and preschoolers, it is important to stick to the basic facts and explain them in a clear straightforward manner, without vivid or unnecessary details.
- Older children and teenagers may be able to talk about more controversial aspects, but it can still be helpful to be clear about what we know and what we do not know. This may be an opportunity to talk about how to decide if you can trust a particular source of information. You can also demonstrate and discuss how to deal with the uncertainty of not knowing all of the facts and how frustrating that can be.
- For age-by-age tips on talking to your kids about the news, check out this article at PBS Parents: <http://www.pbs.org/parents/talkingwithkids/news/agebyage.html>