

LIFEBOOKS & Adoption

Tips for Dealing with Scary Times

In times of trauma, children crave predictability. What better way to provide a comforting routine than by putting together a 'special' book? Making *and* reading your child's life storybook becomes a ritual. Any child would love to hear their story again and again and again.

#1 Announce the Lifebook Project

Tell your child that you have decided to make book, which is all about them!

#2. Make a 'date' with your child. Start by taking a trip to the local crafts store or office supplies store. Get a 3-ring binder and page protectors or traditional picture album, with pages that can be inserted. This is all about quality, child focused time.

#3 Basics

- a. A lifebook focuses on the child's experience. Start with the "Title Page" Ask them to select a favorite photo and have them decorate that page.
- b. Continue the book in the present moment. Call it " All About Me" Ask them to have a page of 'favorites', a school page, best friends, pet page, or who's in my family page. Things I like to do or My Favorite Foods.
- c. Move on to 'current events'. Ask them directly about what they know regarding the tragedy in New York and Washington D.C. See if they want to draw a picture for their book. Notice what they share, but don't push. Correct any misinformation. (I heard one 6-year-old girl talk about the 'twin brothers crashing into each other) See page 2 for additional suggestions. Give them a choice as to whether or not they include this page into their lifebook.
- d. Next, add a page to talk about safety. If a younger child (4-7) list all the people who are working hard to keep them safe. If school age or pre-teen have a safety plan written down. Reassure them they are safe.
- e. Then go back in time to when they were born. Have them select baby pictures. Ask other family members to share some funny stories. Add on with favorite family times. Fun distractions.
- f. Continue the book chronologically. You can use grades in school or places lived as focus points. Include important events as defined by the child..
- g. Finish with a page about the future. What do they want to be when they grow up? Or a to-do list for family activities this fall.

#4 Write up some of the stories on your computer

Take notes on some of the funny stories family members share and create some typed pages. Or type out some of the 'favorites' list. Make pretend that your child is on a TV show and they are being interviewed.

#5 Make Copies of the Lifebook

If properly used, your child's 'special book' will become worn with use and attention. Make color copies and put a second copy in a safe place.

Written by Beth O'Malley M Ed. copyright 2001, 2002, author of LifeBooks: Creating a Treasure for the Adopted Child. To learn more about lifebooks visit www.adoptionlifebooks.com To learn about children, trauma, and disaster visit preparerespondrecover.org or www.nasponline.org

Fighting Terrorism Starts at Home: Tips for Talking to Children

1. Children have radar. Even a 2 or 3 year-old can soak up a parent's unspoken anxiety. Think of how you react to stress. Children learn through imitation.
2. Silence does not 'protect' your child. Instead it gives the message that the subject is taboo and you are unable to talk about it.
3. Imagine for a moment, no TV, radio or disaster discussion in front of your child. If he/she is school age, there is always 'playground talk'. Children pick up bits and pieces of information and fill in the gaps with their own answers. Often more dramatic than real life. Adults need to set the record straight.
4. Ask your child directly "What do you think happened in New York and Washington D.C.?" *Correct any misinformation* they may have. (One 6-year-old was overheard talking about the "twin brothers crashing into each other")
5. Now ask "Why?" Young children are prone to 'magical thinking' and may be harboring some secret thoughts that they somehow caused this.
6. *How do you explain terrorism?*
Pre-school: Keep it simple and limit details. "These people were so angry that they crashed the plane and killed the people." Ask the child for alternative actions "What other things could the angry people have done?" (talk to a teacher, mother, principal) Make sure they understand this wasn't an accidental plane crash.

School Age: Preoccupation is on 'escaping death'. Their solutions are "smarter or stronger" ways people could have dealt with the 'bad guys.' Remind them why they don't fight back with a bully at school—because they are afraid of getting hurt. Many 'what if' questions. Try to stay in the day in discussions.

Pre Teen: This group will detach from their emotions as a way to cope. They will complain that the news is boring or ask "How does this affect us?"

Teenagers: Many are able to have more empathetic responses and move towards different rituals to express their sadness and grief.
7. Safety issues. Explain to young children that, "Just like they go to school, there are people who went to school to learn how to protect them." Name these people. (firemen, policemen, army, navy, President, marines). Parents will need to reassure children that everyone is working extra hard to make sure they are safe.
8. Explain that the chance of this happening again are very small. Kids understand the concept of 'chances.' Reassure them with the fact that you them.
9. Always give truthful and realistic answers. Children can cope better when they know

they can trust you to tell the truth. One truth being you will always love them.

10. Behavior is the language of children. Listen carefully to what each child is saying.

Written by Beth O'Malley MEd. author of *LifeBooks: Creating a Treasure for the Adopted Child*. Special thanks to child violence expert Lauren Gaspar for her assistance. To learn more about lifebooks visit

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