
Holy Hacks: January 17, 2020

by the Rev. Julia Mitchener

It was a single tiny shoe—a bright, red, glittery one, though, so it caught her eye. My six-year-old had popped up behind me while I was reading about last week's horrific plane crash in Iran. *Why is there a picture of only one shoe?* she wondered. *Whose is it? And where's the other one?*

I closed my laptop in what I hoped was a casual way. *I don't know whose shoe it is, Sweetie,* I replied honestly. *And I don't know about the other one. Maybe it got lost.*

Hmm, my daughter replied, pausing for a second as if wanting to ask more. Then, just like that, she scampered to the back door. *It's a pretty shoe; I like it. Can I go outside now?*

One of the many hard jobs we parents have is helping our children in times of widespread loss, confusion, and anxiety (Yes, this includes political upheaval). Times when, though they may not know exactly what is happening, little ones tend to pick up on adults' increased stress. They may notice, for example, that we've started turning off the TV whenever they come into the room. They may hear us get angry about something we've read online. Older children may learn bits of news at school. They may have a classmate with a family member in the military or in state or federal government.

How can we help our children when the news of the world is especially bad? How can we provide a loving, reassuring presence? Here are a few ideas:

First of all, we can attend to our own needs. None of us can—or should try to—hide all our concerns from our children, but the better we care for ourselves, the calmer and more soothing we can be. Talk with a spouse, partner, friend, clergy person, or counselor. Attend a prayer vigil, check out a Bible study, take a long walk, do some yoga or meditation. Give yourself a break from the 24 hour news cycle and watch a funny movie or read a book. Try to limit your media consumption to certain times of the day.

Carve out some time simply to “be” with your child. If your little one likes art work, sitting down together with some paper and crayons can be a wonderful, low key way to invite a conversation. You don't need to have an agenda. Just draw together and see if anything comes up. If it doesn't, that's fine. You have made yourself present to your child and demonstrated that you are there for them.

If your child is aware of a specific situation, talk in age appropriate terms about what has happened and do your best to answer any questions she/he might have. Keep in mind the old adage about not volunteering more information than your child requests—this is often sage advice.

In times of national or global crisis, identify some way that you as a family can pray about what is happening. This could be as simple as lighting a candle at dinner as a sign of your hope and concern. It could mean adding an extra petition to your table blessing (e.g., “Thank you, God, for this food and for our family. We pray for all those in need tonight, especially for those living in places where there is war/for the people in the path of the storms/for the animals in Australia/for our leaders who have big decisions to make,” etc.). I know one family that uses a small chalkboard in their kitchen as a kind of “prayer wall.” Parents and kids write or draw what is on their mind and in their heart.

If your child does not already have a reliable method of self-soothing, help her/him find one. Something I have done with my own children is to remind them of the cross that was marked on their forehead at baptism. Though the oil of chrismation dried up a long time ago, an invisible, but indelible, cross is still there as a sign

that Jesus is always with them. When they feel nervous, lonely, or afraid, they know that they can touch their forehead and remember that God is near.

Finally, let us know how the community of St. Philip's can support you and your family on your journey. This applies in both good times and bad! We are here for you, we can be here for each other, and we will make it through, with God's help.

© *The Cathedral of St. Philip. All rights reserved.*