

HOW TO TALK TO KIDS ABOUT THE PLANE CRASH IN DC (NEAR AND FAR)



For children who are distant from the plane crash but may have heard about it or know someone closer:

Ask questions first to assess how much they know and/or understand

"Have you heard about a plane crashing?"

"What do you know about what happened in DC with the airplane and helicopter?"

"Is anyone talking about what's happening in DC with the airplane and helicopter?"

Then start or continue the conversation yourself using age-appropriate honest information

"I'm feeling a little sad today. There was a serious accident at an airport. A plane collided with an army helicopter. No one on either aircraft was able to survive the crash. This is a big deal and is in the news so a lot of people are thinking and talking about it."

If kids have not heard about the tragedy, say something like:

"I wasn't sure if it had come up at school. But there was a serious plane accident in DC. If you want to talk about it or it comes up, I want you to know that we can."

HOW TO TALK TO KIDS ABOUT THE PLANE CRASH IN DC (NEAR AND FAR)



For children who are closer to the plane crash or know someone directly affected, say something like:

“I have some upsetting news to share. There was a serious accident near the DC airport. A plane collided with an army helicopter. _____ was on the plane and died. No one on either aircraft was able to survive the crash so a lot of people in our community were impacted by this tragedy.”

Prioritize and establish safety first

“Flying on a plane is something that many families do regularly and it can be really scary to hear about this tragic accident. Plane crashes are actually extremely rare and it’s very sad that this happened to these people. Next steps include cleaning up the accident, researching what happened, and making improvements to further prevent accidents such as this. The families of those who died will be supported.”

What questions do you have?

HOW TO TALK TO KIDS ABOUT THE PLANE CRASH IN DC (NEAR AND FAR)



Name and model your own feelings and coping

It's unrealistic to be calm during collective tragedy and grief. Try naming how you feel and explaining that to your children.

"I feel really sad that this is happening."
"I'm scared too, but I know we will get through this together and my priority is to keep you safe."

Validate and regulate their emotions

During or following scary and traumatic events, it's important to validate all feelings.

First ask how they're feeling about the news and then assure them that:

"It's okay to feel _____
(scared, relieved, tired, confused, grateful)."

HOW TO TALK TO KIDS ABOUT THE PLANE CRASH IN DC (NEAR AND FAR)



Practice coping together

Work with kids on finding a calm state amidst the big feelings and challenges.

Show them how you're working through your feelings. Take deep breaths. Play mindfulness games. Hold each other. Use your imagination. Move your body. Get outside. And for young kids, even play.

Promote a sense of normalcy and control

Maintain routines and limits. Give kids choices for a sense of control. Follow their lead in terms of their needs. Revisit communication as needed.

HOW TO TALK TO KIDS ABOUT THE PLANE CRASH IN DC (NEAR AND FAR)



Identify gratitude, community, and hope

Following a disaster, there is an influx in helpers. This can provide a sense of hope amidst the raw pain and grief. Communities come together. Families and friends are connected. For those directly impacted by the tragedy, this can be a roller coaster of emotions. For those further, it can be healing to find ways to help and support those impacted.

Additional Resources:

A Terrible Thing Happened
by Margaret M. Holmes

When Something Terrible Happens
by Marge Heegaard

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network
<https://www.nctsn.org/>

Child Life Disaster Relief
<https://cldisasterrelief.org/>