

Helping Youth Cope with News Media

As we adjust to life in changing times, where every day presents new ideas and new challenges, I wanted to share a piece written by a fellow Nebraska 4-H colleague: Kimberly Cook. Kimberly is the 4-H Educator in Dundy, Hayes & Hitchcock Counties.

Everyone has spent time listening to news coverage about events happening locally and around the world. Whether it is wall-to-wall coverage of a global pandemic, the latest natural disaster or rioting, it is nearly impossible to keep the news at bay for young people. With technology doing the heavy lifting -- sending updates, tweets, posts, and breaking news alerts directly to our kids' phones and electronics -- parents are often playing catch-up. The bottom line is that elementary school-aged kids and even middle school youth have trouble fully understanding news events. And though older teens are better able to understand current events, even they face challenges when it comes to sifting fact from opinion -- or misinformation.

No matter how kids are, threatening or upsetting news can affect them emotionally. Many can feel worried, frightened, angry, or even guilty. And these anxious feelings can last long after the news event is over. Here are a few guidelines for minimizing the negative effects of watching the news:

- Take children's concerns seriously.
- Monitor the amount of time children watch news shows or have access to social media.
- Join along watching the news.
- Ask children what they have heard and what questions they may have.
- Provide reassurance regarding their own safety in simple words, emphasizing that you are going to be there to keep him/her safe.
- Look for signs that the news may have triggered fears or anxieties such as trouble sleeping, persistent fears, crying, or talking about being afraid.
- Remind children that there are plenty of good things happening in the world too.
- Try to keep up with regular routines.
- Spend time with them in meaningful activities, reading together, exercising, playing board games.

Parents should remember that it is important to talk to the child or adolescent about what has seen or heard. This allows parents to lessen the potential negative effects of the news and to discuss their own ideas and values. While children cannot be completely protected from outside events, parents can help them feel safe and help them better understand the world around them.

More information and resources about youth social-emotional development in difficult times can be found at <http://disaster.unl.edu/families> or by contacting your local county Nebraska Extension office.

Continuing the conversation on encouraging our youth to identify creative and safe ways to stay connected, Buffalo County 4-H encourages you to check out the Buffalo County 4-H social media channels. In an effort to connect with local families with self-paced educational activities, Buffalo County 4-H has developed some resources to make social-distancing life a bit more fun!

Check out our Facebook to stay updated on local and statewide 4-H activities:

<https://www.facebook.com/BufaloCountyNebraska4H/>

In addition, check out some other statewide virtual learning opportunities. These include live experiences, self-paced experiences, and activity guides. Most of these experiences are free!

<https://4h.unl.edu/virtual-home-learning>

As always, please reach out to your local Nebraska Extension office in Buffalo County with any youth development questions, comments or concerns.

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