

What to Tell Kids When Bad Things Happen

A psychotherapist affiliated with Beaumont Hospital says what children don't know won't hurt them.

By [Judy Davids](#)

November 22, 2011



On Monday morning as Royal Oak children were heading off to school, some saw the morning news and learned of the unthinkable — a homicide had occurred in the city the previous evening.

“I was talking to my neighbors and we all were thinking the same thing, ‘What do we tell our kids?’” said Paula Messner, a mother of two. Messner lives only blocks away from [80-year-old Nancy Dailey](#) who was slain on Sunday evening.

What you do or don't tell your children depends a lot on their age and what they are able to comprehend, said Howard Belkin, a Birmingham psychotherapist affiliated with [Beaumont Hospital](#).

“If a child is very young and doesn't know about a particular incident — don't bring it up,” said Belkin.

For elementary-school age children, it is possible, even likely, they will hear about a tragic event in a community at school. If a child asks you about it you need to provide assurance.

"It's OK to tell your child, 'Bad things happen, but we will always be here to help you and we would never let anyone hurt you,' " said Belkin.

"Basically when a child asks, they worried about their own safety, and secondly, they want to know if their family is safe. They want to know if something is going to happen to them."

Belkin says you do not need to go into a lot of details. You just need to assure you will keep them safe. They do not need to worry.

For teenage children, Belkin says you can be more realistic and offer more details about what happened.

"You can use it as a learning moment," he said. "Teens often put themselves in dangerous situations, so use events like this to remind them to take precautions and always be aware of their surroundings."

<http://royaloak.patch.com/articles/what-to-tell-kids-when-bad-things-happen>