As the 10th anniversary of September 11, 2001, approaches, kids will be exposed to information and images regarding the tragedy. We hope the combination of Nick News with Linda Ellerbee: What Happened? The Story of September 11, 2001, and this discussion guide will be a useful resource that will help get you and your child talking—together!

The content in this document was created in collaboration with the American Psychological Association.
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OVERVIEW

The events of September 11, 2001, had a major impact on our world at the time and continue to have a presence in the media. The 10th anniversary of the attacks has contributed to an increase in the level of recent coverage.

Kids are talking about September 11 with their classmates, at places of worship, and they’re seeing repeated images from 2001 on TV, online, and in magazines. In conjunction with Nick News with Linda Ellerbee: What Happened? The Story of September 11, 2001, this discussion guide is meant to serve as a resource to help parents, caregivers, and educators talk to kids about the difficult emotions that may arise as attention to the anniversary grows. If you missed the episode on September 1, you can still view it at www.nicknews.com.

Be sure to let them know that the footage on the news and the Internet is being replayed, and the events are not actually happening over and over again. Listen for any misinformation and misperceptions, then provide the facts.

...the media coverage of events like the 10th anniversary of September 11, 2001, is extensive and elaborate. With that in mind, it’s important to monitor children’s media exposure.
TEACHing about September 11, 2001, is a way for us, as parents, caregivers, and educators, to talk about this important event with children. It offers ideas and activities to help children understand a significant time in our country’s history. It can also help you discuss with your children how, together, on this anniversary, we remember, reflect, and continue to grow stronger. Finally, it can provide you with some ideas to help build your child’s resilience during or following any difficult time.
TALK!

ENCOURAGING DISCUSSION

Talk about September 11, 2001. Talking and listening to your child is a cornerstone to healthy family relationships. It seems so easy, especially when they are very young. Keep in mind that really talking and listening is tough and takes commitment. As children enter the preteen and teen years, it can be a challenge, but it’s equally important. Start now! Find a time each day to check in with your children about the day’s events. Remember, you are their biggest source of support, and talking can make even the most difficult subjects easier for kids to understand. When we talk to our children about events like the anniversary of September 11, 2001, we need to let them know that we are open to listening and hearing what they have to say. When we don’t, our children may believe that the subject is too upsetting or scary for parents to discuss or that we don’t want to hear what they have to say. Once these talks become a regular part of your routine, children will come to expect them and they’ll be ready to open up each day. TALK! Here are some ways to get it going:

• **Take the first step. Start the conversation.** Children will follow your lead! After telling your child about September 11 or watching the Nick News special with him or her, ask your child about it. You can simply say something like, “The events of September 11, 2001, can sometimes be very confusing and a little bit upsetting. There was a lot happening on that day and afterward. Tell me what you think about what you learned.” (Be careful—if you ask, “Do you have any questions about September 11?” most young children are likely to say, “No,” even when they do.)

• **Ask about any worries and concerns your child may have.** Remember, there are no rights or wrongs. Even if their worries don’t seem logical, they are very, very real for children. For example, if your child is concerned that terrorists may come to his or her school, you might say, “I know you’re worried. Your school has plans in place to help make sure that no one who is not supposed to be inside the school is there. That’s why, even though I am your mother, I still have to check in at the office before I can go anywhere in the school.”

We need to let them know that we are open to listening and hearing what they have to say.
**Listen to what your child tells you.**

Pay special attention to any inaccurate or wrong information. Even though they may have just watched the *Nick News* special, young children may not fully understand and they “fill in the gaps.” By listening, we can determine if they misunderstood anything they saw or heard. Simply correct this in a gentle manner, using words they can understand. Be sure to double check that they now have the story straight. When you listen, the best way to gather more information is to reflect what your child is saying. In other words, simply restate what he or she has told you without asking too many questions. Here’s an example:

**Parent:** Tell me what you think about what we just watched on *Nick News*.

**Child:** I had heard a lot about it, but didn’t really know. It looks scary.

**Parent:** You had heard people talk about it since it happened, but this gave you more information. It looked scary to you and it was to us, too.

**Child:** Are you still scared that it will happen again?

**Parent:** You wonder if I’m scared about it happening again. That’s a really good question. I was at first, but now I know that our leaders are taking actions to try to be sure it doesn’t. Also, I decided that being scared was what terrorists wanted. So, I decided to keep living my life. I had fun with you as you were growing up. I kept working and spending time with people I love. I went to funny movies and did lots of other things that make me happy.

**Offer patience.** Extra attention, regardless of a child’s age, is critical after an upsetting event. This includes learning about September 11 and other world disasters.

**Share your own thoughts and feelings, too.** Kids want to know what you think! Whenever possible, chat with your child about the day you’ve both had. It’s okay to share with children that you were very upset when the attacks occurred. But also share what you did to feel better and to cope with your thoughts and feelings. This may happen over dinner, on a walk, or at bedtime. The conversation doesn’t need to be long—it just needs to happen, regardless of your child’s age.

**Action steps you took may have included the following:**

- Talking to friends and relatives
- Asking questions
- Gathering information
- Taking a break from the coverage to get some exercise and eat healthy
TRY THESE ACTIVITIES
TO HELP OPEN THE LINES OF COMMUNICATION

ACTIVITY: KID REPORTER ON THE SCENE
While children may have questions about what they are seeing or hearing, they may be unsure of how to articulate them. Encourage your child to be a news reporter and interview you! A good reporter wants to get the story straight and asks questions (who, what, where, when, why) about anything they are not sure about concerning the event in question. Use this interactive activity to listen for, and correct, any misinformation or misattributions your child may have. You can even switch roles and interview your child to learn about his or her perceptions and concerns. Before discussing September 11, 2001, or another difficult topic, you and your child may want to warm up by interviewing each other about a recent family outing or event, a birthday celebration, or vacation.

REPORTING, LIVE!
Does your child’s school have a newspaper or newsletter? If so, talk to your child about getting involved so he or she can find out and report on the five Ws of school events (who, what, where, when, why).

ACTIVITY: TALKING ABOUT RESPECT AND DIVERSITY
September 11 happened, in part, because those involved did not accept people with different viewpoints, ideas, or religious beliefs. Discuss situations where intolerance or disrespect toward others (such as bullying) can lead to problems. This activity will help you reinforce the importance of respecting diversity.

- Work together to make a list of at least three things members of your family all have in common. Then make a similar list, this time focusing on your differences. Do these differences make you less of a family?
- Think about your friends. What do you have in common? What are your differences? Wouldn’t it be boring if everyone were exactly the same?
- Does your child ever witness or experience bullying at school? How does that make him or her feel?
EXPRESS!

EMOTIONS, THOUGHTS, BEHAVIORS, PHYSICAL CONDITIONS, AND SPIRITUALITY

Kids (and adults) react to stressful situations and tragedies like September 11, 2001, in individual ways. Those with a direct experience (having been physically present when it happened or having lost a loved one) are at greatest risk for these reactions. However, researchers are beginning to learn how watching crisis events on television can be associated with reactions. Even if children don’t remember the events of September 11, 2001 (maybe they were not even born!), they may still have some reactions. Any traumatic event such as a natural disaster, car accident, house fire, or the unexpected death of a friend or loved one, can result in reactions. Reactions can affect how someone feels, thinks, and behaves. Knowing about common reactions can help parents determine how their children may be coping. Also, sharing information about how people react can help children feel less “different” and may increase the likelihood that they’ll open up about what they are experiencing. If you have any worries about your child, talk to someone who can help: your pediatrician, your clergy, your child’s teacher, or a mental health specialist such as a psychologist. The more you know, the more you can help support your child. For more information on addressing kids’ reactions to coverage of tragic events, go to www.apa.org.

Sharing information about how people react can help children feel less “different” and may increase the likelihood that they’ll open up about what they are experiencing.
COMMON REACTIONS

EMOTIONS
Anger or rage
Changing moods
Fear or terror
Guilt
Helplessness
Irritability
Loss of interest
Sadness
Shame

THOUGHTS
Having difficulty in the following areas:
- Concentrating and thinking
- Finishing schoolwork, homework, or chores
- Learning new information
- Making decisions

Having intrusive thoughts (thinking about the event when not wanting to)
Feeling responsible for what happened
Having a preoccupation with death or suicide (primarily teenagers)

SPIRITUALITY
Demonstrating changes in beliefs about God/higher power
Questioning beliefs
Struggling with a sense of fairness
Withdrawing from or rejecting spiritual outreach and activities

BEHAVIORS (CHANGES IN BEHAVIOR OR INCREASES IN CERTAIN BEHAVIORS)
Engaging in aggressive or disruptive behaviors
Asking many questions or repeatedly telling stories related to the event
Avoiding people, places, or situations
Being argumentative or defiant
Clinging to parents or caregivers, or refusing to be away from parents or caregivers
Crying and whining (very young children)
Having difficulty getting along with others
Refusing to attend school
Showing regressive behavior (acting younger than their age)
Reliving the event through play (younger children)
Withdrawing
Using drugs or alcohol or engaging in other high-risk behavior like reckless driving or sexual behaviors (teenagers)

PHYSICAL CONDITIONS
Agitation
Change in appetite
Difficulty staying or falling asleep (including nightmares)
Being easily startled
Fatigue
Increased activity level (hyperactive)
Physical issues like headaches, stomachaches, nausea
TRY THESE ACTIVITIES
TO HELP YOUR CHILD EXPRESS HIS OR HER FEELINGS

ACTIVITY: FACE TIME
Younger children may have a hard time identifying the different emotions they’re experiencing, making it very difficult for them to communicate. Try this activity to help your child identify how he or she feels.

Ask your child to read the feelings listed with each face.

Together, think of examples of what might produce each emotion.

Ask your child what feelings he or she thinks other children may have with regard to September 11. This may also include how he or she may be feeling.

Used with permission from New Directions, OUHSC, 2010.
**ACTIVITY: FEELINGS CALENDAR**

A Feelings Calendar or diary can help kids articulate their emotions. After discussing a difficult topic like the anniversary of September 11, 2001, create one as a way of checking in with your child. Make it a daily habit to know how your child is feeling, and use this activity whenever you think it will come in handy.

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TEACHing ABOUT 9/11
As parents, caregivers, and educators, it’s important that we walk the line between ensuring that our children feel safe and being careful not to alarm them unnecessarily. The following actions and activities should help you strike that balance.

- **Establish an Emergency Safety Plan.** It’s important to have first-aid kits and safety plans on hand at home and in schools. Take some time with your family to develop a safety plan for emergencies and include a set location, such as a neighbor’s home or local landmark, as a meeting place in the event your family cannot meet at your own home. Visit [www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov) for more information and see the RESOURCES box on this page for access to additional ideas.

- **Encourage routine.** After being exposed to images of September 11 or other tragic events that have taken place around the world, day-to-day routine can bring kids immeasurable comfort.

- **Set realistic goals.** When children learn about tragedies that have happened close to home or even on the other side of the world, they may have worries about the future. Realistic goals make us more hopeful about our place in the future.

- **Keep health and wellness in mind.** Healthy eating and exercise are excellent ways to spend time together. Plus, when we are physically healthy, we can build our emotional strength. Is there a way to move together every day? Keeping track of physical activity and cooking healthy meals together can make a real difference.

**RESOURCES: SAFETY PREPAREDNESS**

Check out these websites for more information about safety and emergency preparedness.

- [fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov)
- [ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov)
- [ready.gov/kids](http://www.ready.gov/kids)
- [redcross.org/preparedness/cdc_english/evac-plan.html](http://www.redcross.org/preparedness/cdc_english/evac-plan.html)
TRY THESE ACTIVITIES

TO HELP YOUR CHILD UNDERSTAND THE VALUE OF DAILY ROUTINE AND SETTING SMALL, DOABLE GOALS

ACTIVITY: THE IMPORTANCE OF ROUTINE

Use the chart below to demonstrate how routine can really help.

- Think about your child’s daily routine and, together, list each element. Home routine may be packing a backpack, feeding a pet, or emptying the trash.
- Put a check mark (or star sticker or smiley face) to note each completed activity.
- Consider including a special addition to your family’s routine. This may be volunteering with a local nonprofit organization, exercising or playing a game as a family on the weekend, or preparing healthy meals together.

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ACTIVITY: SMALL, DOABLE GOALS

Follow these steps for setting realistic goals with your child.

- Together, set a small, doable goal.

- Write down the action steps needed to achieve this goal, and add a check box next to each step. (If the goal involves completing a task on a regular basis, it might help to dedicate a calendar to the activity.)

- Check off each action step that is completed.

- Consider setting your own goal. It can be the same as your child’s goal or completely separate.

- Support each other and congratulate each other on your progress. Decide on a way to celebrate your achievement!
CONNECT!

REACHING OUT TO OTHERS

After the events of September 11, 2001, it felt like people really went out of their way to be a bit nicer to others. One of the best ways we can help children understand a tragedy such as September 11 is if we help them connect with others. So many different people can help in an emergency, and lots of them are willing to talk to children about their jobs.

One of the best ways we can help children understand a tragedy such as September 11 is if we help them connect with others.

TRY THIS ACTIVITY

TO REMIND YOUR CHILD ABOUT THE WIDE RANGE OF PEOPLE WHO ARE OFTEN READY AND WILLING TO HELP

ACTIVITY: FIND THE HELPERS! WORD SEARCH

Work together to complete the word search on the next page. In addition to circling the hidden words, ask your child to name the people he or she could talk to about any relevant concerns. A few possibilities include teachers, faith-based youth leaders, coaches, extracurricular instructors, Scout leaders, and relatives.
Used with permission from Healing After Trauma Skills, 2010.
HELP!

GETTING INVOLVED IS EASY

Engaging in service helps build communities. A simple way to raise your child’s awareness about the importance of service is with his or her school and through extracurricular activities. (It’s important for parents and caregivers to stay as involved as possible throughout a child’s education, not just when kids are very young.) Check out these suggestions for how to make that happen.

- Join your school’s Parent-Teacher organization.
- Ask your child’s club leaders, coaches, or other supervisors how you can get involved.
- Model for your child what it means to be connected, to be a team member in any activity.

TRY THESE ACTIVITIES

TO TEACH YOUR CHILD THE VALUE OF HELPING OTHERS

ACTIVITY: SUPPORT SERVICE MEMBERS AND MILITARY FAMILIES

Many kids are part of military families. Kids may want to express their thanks to military service members in Iraq and Afghanistan. It’s easy to help them accomplish this. Thank you notes and drawings can be addressed to a specific individual or to a general group of people, such as “U.S. Army.” If you’re involved with your PTA, consider a classroom or school-wide project for writing letters or creating drawings of thanks. For more ways to help, visit www.ourmilitary.mil.
ACTIVITY: HELPING CHILDREN COMMEMORATE

Children often have ideas about how they can help others during a time of crisis. As they learn about the anniversary of September 11, they may also come up with ways to commemorate the event. These ideas might help get their juices flowing.

- Ask! Kids are incredibly creative. Find a way to help your child make his or her idea, in some way, a reality. For example, if your child wants to make a donation to a service agency or group, perhaps a portion of his or her allowance or proceeds from extra chores for your family or for neighbors can go toward a donation fund.

- If your child's ideas involve a donation on a larger scale, consider working with his or her class or school to organize ways to raise money.
**SUMMARY**

**TEACHing** about September 11 is immeasurably important, as this significant event changed the United States forever. On the anniversary, there will be news coverage, including replays and stories about survivors and rescue workers will be common. Consider how you can use the ideas and activities of **TEACH** to help your child now and in the future. September 11 can be difficult to address as it may also bring up memories and feelings that you had that day and in the days following the terrorist attacks. Be sure to take care of yourself as you take care of your child. Your willingness to talk about the event will show your child that you are able to talk about difficult topics. Because of this, he or she will be more likely to talk to you about other difficulties or concerns. You will also learn more about your child’s hopes, wishes, and dreams, and the positive experiences he or she may have. It’s all about communicating!

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Psychologist Robin H. Gurwitch, PhD, is a Professor and Program Coordinator of the National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center. An expert in children’s mental health, Dr. Gurwitch has worked with numerous national organizations including the American Psychological Association and the American Red Cross on information materials to assist parents and other caregivers help children deal with traumatic events.

**AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION**

The **American Psychological Association**, in Washington, D.C., is the largest scientific and professional organization representing psychology in the United States and is the world’s largest association of psychologists. APA’s membership includes more than 154,000 researchers, educators, clinicians, consultants and students. Through its divisions in 54 subfields of psychology and affiliations with 60 state, territorial and Canadian provincial associations, APA works to advance psychology as a science, as a profession and as a means of promoting health, education and human welfare. Visit [www.apa.org](http://www.apa.org) for more information on a wide variety of psychology topics including parenting, family relationships and the connections between mental and physical health.

**IF YOU MISSED THE EPISODE ON SEPTEMBER 1, YOU CAN STILL VIEW IT AT NICKNEWS.COM.**
Nick News, produced by Lucky Duck Productions, marks its 20th year on the air in 2011 and is the longest-running kids’ news show in television history. It has built its reputation on the respectful and direct way it speaks to kids about the important issues of the day. Over the years, Nick News has received more than 20 Emmy nominations and won its eighth Emmy Award in 2010 for The Face of Courage: Kids Living with Cancer for Outstanding Children’s Nonfiction Program.

In 2009, Nick News was honored with the Edward R. Murrow Award for best Network News Documentary for Coming Home: When Parents Return from War—the first-ever kids’ television program to receive this prestigious award. Nick News has also received three Peabody Awards, including a personal award given to Ellerbee for explaining the impeachment of President Clinton to kids, as well as a Columbia duPont Award and more than a dozen Parents’ Choice Awards. Visit www.NickNews.com for more information.

The Big Help is Nickelodeon’s ongoing commitment to engage kids to take action and make a difference in the world every day. The 25+ year-long campaign connects kids to issues and current events they are most passionate about with particular focus on four key themes: environment, service, education and health and wellness. Visit www.Nick.com/thebighelp for more information.

Nickelodeon, now in its 32nd year, is the number-one entertainment brand for kids. It has built a diverse, global business by putting kids first in everything it does. The company includes television programming and production in the United States and around the world, plus consumer products, online, recreation, books and feature films. Nickelodeon’s U.S. television network is seen in more than 100 million households and has been the number-one-rated basic cable network for 16 consecutive years. For more information or artwork, visit www.NickPress.com. Nickelodeon and all related titles, characters and logos are trademarks of Viacom Inc. (NYSE: VIA - News, VIA.B - News).