Community Unitarian Universalist Congregation at White Plains
established 1909

Personal and Family Support Materials

updated October 26, 2023

Dear Ones, it seems horror comes again and again with mass shootings, a war overseas with the potential to expand, and more. Young people likely know about them even if you are not having conversations at home, or they may just sense that their adults are concerned.

When you are ready, the resources below may help navigate answering questions and sharing information in age appropriate ways. There are also resources for healing around separation and grief.

I wrap my heart around yours as we find our way through, and remind you that support is available in our CUUC community. The **Sharing and Caring Team** can help with short-term needs (contact Julie Gans, (julieagans@gmail.com), **Pastoral Care Associates** offer spiritual and emotional support (contact Rev. Deb Morra, getreal714@gmail.com), and the **Reconciliation Support Team** can help when there is discord between two or more people or groups (contact Al Rocchi, alrocchi@verizon.net). We also have a **Minister's Discretionary Fund** for short-term financial needs (contact Rev. Deb Morra, getreal714@gmail.com)

You don't have to go it alone...

with love, Tracy

Tracy Breneman, Religious Educator, cuucwptracy@gmail.com

Table of Contents (click links below to jump to topics)

Supporting Emotional & Mental Health

- If you are struggling, please reach out:
  - Westchester's St. Vincent's Crisis Team, 914-925-5959
  - NAMI HelpLine, 914-592-5458
  - National Suicide Hotline, 800-273-8255
  - The Trans Lifeline, 877-565-8860
- Resources for Separation, Grief, and Healing **(curated list with music, stories, activities, and more)**
- The Child Mind Institute's California Healthy Minds, Thriving Kids Project is a wonderful series we used during the pandemic. Parents and children attended together to watch the short videos and discussed them, affirming that feelings are normal and encouraging children to talk with parents about them. This series is designed to promote young people's emotional health and there are also resources for youth. The five topics are: understanding feelings, relaxation skills, understanding thoughts, managing intense emotions, and mindfulness. You can use the videos at home. If a group of parents and children would like to participate in a five-session group, I would be happy to lead that.

A Starting Place… Support Resources for Grief, Violence, Trauma

- NPR, What to Say to Kids When the News is Scary - As part of their Parenting: Difficult Conversations series, NPR journalists spoke with child development experts about what parents, teachers and other caregivers can do to help prepare and protect kids from scary news, whether it's fighting overseas, a school shooting, devastating wildfire or a global pandemic.
- Child Mind Institute, Guide for supporting children through trauma and grief, and discussing frightening news.
- Child Mind Institute, Multilingual Trauma Resources & Guide: Helping Children Cope After a Traumatic Event
- (Past) Live Event: Helping Children Cope with Anxiety and Trauma, Fort Health & Child Mind Institute, Mon Oct 23, 5:30pm (check here for future dates).
  Join mental health and trauma experts in a special live event designed to help parents support children during these trying times. Topics include initiating conversations about traumatic events, helping children handle their emotions, and creating a supportive environment for your kids while also looking out for your own mental health.

Talking with Young People about Events in Israel and Gaza (Oct 2023)

- Stanford Medicine, How to Talk to Your Children About the Conflict in Israel and Gaza
- PBS NewsHour (video), How to talk to kids about the Israel-Hamas war
- NPR, How to talk to children about the violence in Israel and Gaza
- Stanford Medicine, How to Talk to Your Children About the Conflict in Israel and Gaza
- PBS NewsHour (video), How to talk to kids about the Israel-Hamas war
- NPR, How to talk to children about the violence in Israel and Gaza

Talking with Young People about Shootings (May 2022)

- Unitarian Universalist Association, Hate, Violence, and Trauma: Talking with Children (curated tips, facts, readings, music, and more)
- Tara Brach, Nourishing Our Spirit in Times of Collective Fear
- PBS, Helping Children with Tragic Events in the News
- NPR offers an amazing list of podcasts for talking with young people about a range of difficult issues, click here.
- Child Mind Institute, Trauma & Grief resources, including, Helping Children Cop with Frightening News
- New York Times, An Age-by-Age Guide to Talking to Children About Mass Shootings (read full text below)
- The Atlantic, Children Deserve the Honest Truth About Mass Shootings (read full text below)

Pandemic Support Resources (last updated Oct 2020)

- Left Brain Buddha, Mindfulness Practices, Especially for Kids. Mindfulness is a powerful practice that helps ALL of us improve our **focus and concentration, and manage stress.** Below are five simple mindfulness concepts you can introduce to **kids as young as four or five**. Click HERE to read the full Left Brain Buddha blog, and HERE for a handy poster you can print and post.
    1. **I can find my anchor and breathe.** An anchor keeps our mind from drifting too far by offering a specific place to put one's attention, often the breath.
    2. **I can notice my puppy mind.** Minds are like puppies that are curious and want to wander off! We don't get angry at our puppy mind, but notice it has wandered and gently call it back.
    3. **I can send kind thoughts and be grateful.** We can wish for ourselves and others happiness, safety, health, and send kind thoughts. We can also pause and notice what we are grateful for.
    4. **I can notice my feelings.** Mindfulness can help children become more aware of their emotions. Adults can help build awareness by asking where in their body they feel a feeling. They can pause and name the emotion. These help children learn to recognize and handle emotions.
    5. **I can be still as I look, listen, and learn.** You can simply sit and let your mind, body, and nervous system take a break. It can help us to remain still and focused by having something to pay attention to, e.g., the sounds of nature, the breeze of a fan, the smell of something baking. Be present in the moment.
- Sunday, September 27th, Rev. Meredith's introduced the RAIN technique for managing stress: **Recognize, Allow, Investigate, Nurture**. Recognize what is happening. Allow the experience to be there, just as it is. Investigate with interest and care. Nurture with self-compassion. **It's a wonderful mindfulness technique for our children and youth to learn.** You can read Rev. Meredith's sermon HERE. Or, listen to his sermon HERE - part 1 begins at 18:36 and part 2 begins at 51:35. Tara Brach offers several related resources HERE.

- Get some CUUC Caring & Sharing TLC by contacting
  Paula Meighan, paula.meighan74@gmail.com, 914-924-0204 or
  Liz Laite, em.laite@verizon.net, 914-366-4211.
- NAMI Westchester Family Support Group
- Headspace, a Mindfulness and Guided Meditation App
- Psychology Today, A Therapist's Self-Care Tips to Cope with Stress and Anxiety
- Today, 2-Minute Grounding Exercise

School Resources

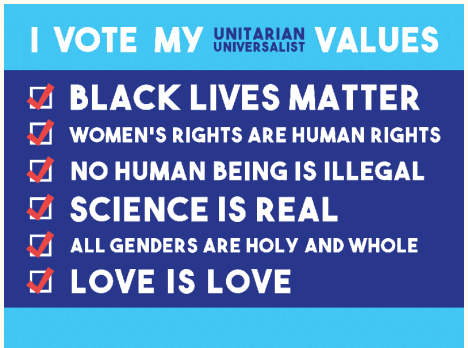
- Child Mind Institute Back to School Resources - Manage Anxiety, Modify an IEP or 504, Manage Remote or Hybrid Learning & Signs of Depression During the Coronavirus Crisis & Additional Resources
- NY Schools COVID Report Card
- Khan Academy is a great free resource for instructional videos on many topics.
- Open Culture has free textbooks, movies and audiobooks and links to free online courses from professors.
- Amazing Educational Resources, a Community of Educators Sharing Resources and support for most subject areas
- Editable Visual Schedule Resource for Children

Get Active Indoors and Outdoors

- Cosmic Kids Yoga YouTube Channel
- KIDZ BOP Dance Along Videos
- Fall: A Guide to Westchester Apple Picking

Be Inspired

- Ellery Churchmouse learns about Unitarian Universalism and deals with the Covid-19 pandemic, click HERE (Instagram). Each picture has a wonderful explanation.
- Center for Healthy Minds Series: Our Actions can Plant Seeds for a Better Tomorrow, Well-Being Tips & a Discussion with His Holiness the Dalai Lama.
- **VOTE!** Encourage others to vote, like our 5th-7th grade RE class will be doing with Karen Leahy & UU the Vote! You can also Rock the Vote. All registered NY voters can request an absentee ballot **TODAY** under the "temporary illness" designation; request your absentee ballot HERE.
- The UU Soul Matters group offers this family resource about RENEWAL with activities and discussion prompts. When we embrace renewal, we accept that what worked in the past may not work in the future, and we trade the confidence of experience and mastery for the release, excitement, and opportunity of beginner's mind. That kind of renewal is a gift to our kids and ourselves.
- Soul Matters also shares their Spotify playlists related to their monthly themes.



- The graphic on the right was made by Claire Pullen, a UU young adult graphic designer. It is free to use, with credit.

Full Text Materials

An Age-by-Age Guide to Talking to Children About Mass Shootings

May 25, 2022, Catherine Pearson

Leer en español

A devastating reality of raising children in America today is that parents must be prepared to talk to their kids about mass shootings.

It's a wrenching task, and experts say there are some universal best practices — like avoiding graphic details. Or doing your best to actively listen, rather than trying to take away children's pain.

But the particulars of what families discuss — and how parents respond to questions and concerns — depend a lot on children's age and development. A 5-year-old will have a very different understanding of an act of mass violence than a 15-year-old will.

The New York Times spoke with several mental health experts about some basic principles for parents and caregivers to have in mind when talking with children of all ages in the immediate aftermath of a mass shooting.

Preschoolers and early elementary schoolers

With children this young, arguably the biggest question is whether to talk about the tragedy at all. Much of the answer comes down to whether you think they are likely to learn about it elsewhere, say from a classmate, an older sibling or on the news.

Your personal parental values also come into play.

"Some parents believe that even young children should know what is happening in the world — which has merit," Steven Meyers, a professor of psychology at Roosevelt University in Illinois, said. "Other parents will want to shield their children as long as they can. There is merit to that approach as well."

If you decide to discuss the shooting with your preschooler or kindergartner, your primary goals are twofold: Offer very simple information, and give ample reassurance that close adults are there for support and protection.

Dr. David Schonfeld, director of the National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement and a clinician who has spent years working directly with communities in the wake of mass shootings, suggests parents say something like: I want to let you know that in a school that is hours away from us, there was a person who shot some children and adults, and a lot of people are sad. Noting where the school is can help provide some basic context about how the shooting affects them.

Help children name their emotions. For example, Dr. Meyers said, a 4-year-old might say something like, "I feel bad." Help children unpack that feeling. Does "bad" mean sad? Angry? Frightened? Learning how to label big feelings is a bedrock emotional skill that develops with age and practice.

Older elementary school children

For children in this age group, start by asking what, if anything, they know about the event. Depending on when you speak with them, they may have already learned about the shooting from a classmate or some other source.

"You're listening to how much they know," Dr. Harold Koplewicz, president of the Child Mind Institute, said. "And then you're telling them the facts of the case in a very calm, informational way. You are not sharing unnecessary details."

Make sure to ask what questions they have, if any. If they have none, that is OK. In fact, Dr. Schonfeld said, "the most common reaction is no reaction." Simply reassure your child that you are available if and when there are questions down the road.

But if children have questions, be careful not to provide too much detail at once.

"If they ask rapid questions, you slow it down. Because oftentimes kids don't want as much information as they're asking for, so you give them small pieces," Dr. Koplewicz said, adding that if you don't know an answer or simply want more time to think about it, say that.

Keep in mind that children of all ages, but perhaps particularly elementary-school age, tend to focus inward. So they may immediately jump to how the news applies to themselves.

"Be reassuring and say: 'Let's think about what's going on in your school. What are the safety measures and precautions?'" Dr. Koplewicz said. "And the other piece of information that's reassuring is how rare these events are. They're horrific, but they're still rare."

Tweens

If you have an adolescent, it is safe to assume your child has already heard the news or will soon, regardless of whether you bring it up. So again, start with questions about what your child knows and how they feel. Your primary goal is to be open to what your child says, not to try to fix anything.

"The key is to listen to their account of the situation, to be very judicious as to when you interrupt them, to focus on feelings and then to move into correcting misperceptions and providing reassurance," Dr. Meyers said. "But the goal for all parents is to essentially drain the well of emotions by virtue of their sensitive listening."

Keep in mind that all of the emotional confusion of adolescence could rear its head, and your tween may need some reassurance that feelings are meant to be felt.

"They're testing the waters in a lot of ways. Like, 'Does crying make you a baby?' Or, 'Is crying a normal reaction when the world is scary and hard?'" said Dr. Jessi Gold, an

assistant professor in the department of psychiatry at the Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis.

So your tween might want to lean on you emotionally but also feel conflicted about it. Reassure your child that it is OK to draw support from others in times of tragedy and that doing so doesn't mean in any way sacrificing budding independence, Dr. Gold said.

Teens

Again, the same basic advice holds: Lead with questions and focus on active listening. But with older children, you can be more forthright about your own emotions and response to the news, Dr. Koplewicz said.

"We can be angry, we can be super disgusted, we can be upset. We can even be tearful," he said. "There's nothing wrong with showing emotions to your kid." But you want to model positive ways of coping with those emotions, he added.

While some teenagers might welcome an opportunity to discuss their feelings and yours, others might not want to talk about them at all. Your goal is to be respectful while not "meeting avoidance with avoidance," Dr. Gold said.

If they shy away from the conversation, let them know you're around whenever they want to talk, Dr. Gold said. She recommended asking outright how your teenager would prefer for you to check in. Would tomorrow be OK? What's a way you could ask that would not be intrusive or annoying?

"Give them ownership of their own feelings and their own processing," Dr. Gold said.

For teenagers in particular, taking action can be a helpful antidote to feelings of helplessness. Talk to yours about volunteering, writing letters, donating money or just learning more about a particular topic or problem, which can be its own form of action. Even elementary school children and tweens can participate.

"Advocacy is a mature coping mechanism," Dr. Gold said.

Know your child

Every expert interviewed for this story emphasized that it is important for parents to tap into what they know about their own children: How do they typically process difficult emotions? How much access do they have to screens and social media? What is your sense of their baseline emotional well-being?

Children with underlying anxiety or a history of trauma may have more difficulty coping, so "monitor your child," Dr. Meyers said. Look for signs like sleep problems, changes in behavior (such as withdrawing or becoming clingy) or physical complaints. Dr. Schonfeld also noted that children are sometimes ready to talk about a seemingly unrelated loss after an event like a mass shooting, such as the death of a loved one.

There are many resources available to parents and families. The American Academy of Pediatrics and National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement offer guidance for helping children in the aftermath of a shooting. The Child Mind Institute has a

nondiagnostic symptom checker that can be useful for parents who have concerns that their child is struggling.

And make sure you are giving yourself time and space to process your own emotions. "You don't want your anxiety to become your kid's anxiety," Dr. Koplewicz said.

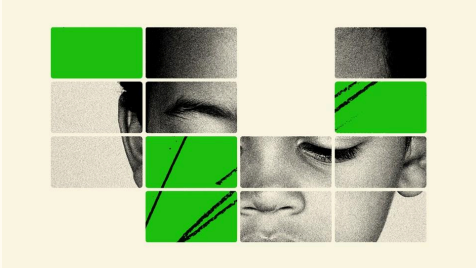
A version of this article appears in print on May 27, 2022, Section A, Page 15 of the New York edition with the headline: A Guide to Talking to Your Children About Mass Shootings. Order Reprints | Today's Paper | Subscribe

Children Deserve the Honest Truth About Mass Shootings (full text)

A conversation with Michelle Palmer, a social worker who specializes in grief and trauma

By Caroline Mimbs Nyce

Online at
https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/05/how-to-talk-to-kids-about-the-texas-massacre/638434/



Getty; The Atlantic
MAY 26, 2022, 7 AM ET

About the author: *Caroline Mimbs Nyce is a staff writer at* The Atlantic.

America is in mourning. The country is processing the deaths of 19 children and two teachers, murdered on Tuesday in their elementary-school classroom by an 18-year-old gunman. The massacre marks the second-deadliest school shooting on record in the United States, and the grief that has followed can feel overwhelming even to adults who have grown used to America's regular, brutal gun violence. For children, who continue to be the targets of such violence, the emotions can be more challenging yet.

Parents thus face the task of processing the news themselves while also navigating difficult conversations with their kids about the shooting.

I called Michelle Palmer, a licensed independent clinical social worker and the executive director of the Wendt Center for Loss and Healing, a Washington, D.C., nonprofit that specializes in the intersection of grief and trauma, to discuss how parents can address the Uvalde shooting with their children right now and in the weeks that follow. *Our conversation has been edited and condensed for clarity.*

Caroline Mimbs Nyce: Let's start with the youngest children. Is there an appropriate age to start talking with your child about tragedies like the one that happened in Texas?

Michelle Palmer: I wouldn't say there's an appropriate age, just because kids develop at such different rates, both intellectually and emotionally. I know that that's a little bit of a cop-out answer, but parents really do know their kids best.
What's important, especially for the littles, is being aware that somebody is going to say something to them because they live out in the world—be it another kid, be it an older sibling.

For little kids, really what it will be for them is around: *What does this mean for me? Am I safe? Can that happen to me?* For those 5 and up, I would say—although again, that's not a hard-and-fast rule—it's really about reassuring them.

It's about: "Something happened, and a grown-up went somewhere that he wasn't allowed to go, and he hurt some people that he didn't even know. And everyone's really sad about it, because people shouldn't get hurt."

Nyce: Are there particular words or vocabulary you would use?

Palmer: It depends on the situation. For this, because kids don't know the kids and families impacted, I'm not sure I would even say *died* at first. I think I would just say *got hurt* and leave it at that.

Now, kids may follow up with "Are they gonna be okay?" So you don't want to lie. You give accurate information, but just enough. If they follow up, answer it honestly. If you don't know what the answer to the question is, you can say that.
So, for instance, if they follow up with "Oh, are they gonna be okay?," you can reply with "You know what? Sadly, no. Some of them actually died." Little kids don't know what *dead* means, so then you're in that conversation.

Nyce: How do you describe *dead* to a kid?

Palmer: For little kids, they may have had an experience with a fish dying or a dog dying or a cat dying, so you can draw that parallel. If not, it's "when your body stops working."

Nyce: It's very literal.

Palmer: Very, very literal. I usually do it in a way that I tie it to stuff that kids can relate to. So if the kids are little, like 3 or 4, that means that "Daddy's not going to come home anymore for dinner" or "Daddy's not going to pick you up from day care anymore"—stuff that is very concrete and stuff that they can understand because it's in their language. It's in a way that's *Oh, that's how that impacts my life.* Because little kids are very concrete thinkers.

And then it's not at all abnormal for little kids to go to those questions and those feelings like a moth to a flame—just for a minute, before it gets too hot. And then they're going to flitter away, and they're going to go play. And that's really normal. *Oh my God, is my kid a sociopath?* Nope.

Why aren't they sad? They are sad—they are sad for as long as they can be.
Nyce: What are some of the ways parents can expect that younger kids might process the news?

Palmer: It really will be around *How does this impact me? Am I okay?* They will likely see a little bit more worry, a little elevated feelings of anxiety.

It's probably more that because they're not immediately impacted. For little kids for whom the death is of a significant person in their life, it's not at all abnormal to see disruptions in sleep and eating and an increase in irritability. All of those things are ways that kids let us know that, emotionally, they're struggling. But we see that really much more frequently when the death has an immediate impact on a kid, like with a close family member or friend.

This is terrible—I hope in no way does it sound like I'm minimizing the massiveness of this. But for kids who are not directly impacted, it really is about *Am I okay? Are you okay? Are my people okay?*

Nyce: How do you talk about it in a way that they can understand, while balancing the risk of scaring them?

Palmer: It's important within that conversation to talk about all of the ways that people keep them safe.

> Kid: *What if a grown-up came in my school?*
> Parent: *Well, here are all the things that your school and your teachers do to keep you safe. Here are all the things that Mommy and Daddy or Grandma, Auntie, whoever do to keep you safe.*
> And then just do a couple:
> Parent: *Are you allowed to cross the street without looking both ways?*
> Kid: *No.*
> Parent: *How come?*
> Kid: *'Cause that's not safe.*
> Parent: *Exactly. That's a way that we keep you safe.*

So just giving concrete examples. One of my colleagues has an 8-year-old that she had to talk to this morning about it. And he's a pretty anxious 8-year-old anyway. He was going to occupational therapy. And she said, "Look, Ben, the door is locked. This is a way that everybody keeps each other safe."

Nyce: In general, is it better to wait for your child to come to you with questions or to initiate that conversation yourself?

Palmer: I think most parents would like the information to come from them first. Now, remember, your kids are going to pick up on the tone and the mood. So certainly you are not going to deliver this with jubilation, but you also don't want it to sound like it's the end of the world—because you're going to scare your kids if you deliver it that way. It's around *What is the information that we want our kids to hear from us?*

If you think they're going to find out that it was a school shooting, you can say, "A grown-up went into a school that they weren't allowed to be in and hurt some kids and some grown-ups."

Nyce: Let's talk about slightly older kids now. What would an approach there look like? How might it differ from a conversation with younger kids?

Palmer: They're going to be able to sit in the emotion a little bit longer. They're going to have a more sophisticated understanding. And so they will follow up with questions. *How many people died?* Especially that sort of middle-school age. They may ask some of the questions like *How old were the kids? What grades were they in? What kind of gun was used?*

Nyce: And you want to be honest with them?

Palmer: You do want to be honest. But you don't want to be overly detailed unless asked. *What kind of gun was used?* A very reasonable answer to that is "I don't know. I was not there. The news is reporting *blah blah blah.*" And leave it at that. I actually have a really strict no-news rule in my house. There's very little in the world I can control, but what comes into my house is one of those things.

Nyce: Lastly, I wanted to talk about teens. How might an ideal conversation with them look?

Palmer: That is a much more sophisticated conversation: "This is what happened. I'm sure you've seen it on the news. I'm sure you've talked about it with your friends. What is it that you're thinking and feeling around that?"

Both with the middle-school kids and the high-school kids, do some reality and accuracy testing around what they know. Invite that conversation: "What do you know? What are you guys talking about?"

It is an opportunity to say "Are you talking to your friends about how they're feeling? Are you listening? Are you sharing how you're feeling? It doesn't have to be with me. But is there a trusted adult that you can talk with about this and about how you're feeling?"

Our kids are compromised anyway because of COVID. We've got kids who are struggling with anxiety at a rate that is pretty significant. So this is just another layer of something terrible. So really trying to validate, like, "You guys have had to manage so much, and so much has been asked of you. I would be surprised if you weren't worried, if you weren't anxious. I'm not asking you not to be. What I am asking is that you have ways to cope with that so that you are not hurting yourself or others."

Nyce: How do you comfort an older child that might be afraid to go to school after an event like this?

Palmer: Somewhat similar to the younger kids. "Let's talk about the things that your school does to keep you safe. Let's talk about the things that you do to keep yourself safe. Do you know where the exits are? How you'll get out a window?" Especially for those older kids, those teenagers, a feeling of self-agency is really important, both just developmentally, but also in the context of so many things feeling out of their control. Normalizing that: "Yep, it makes all the sense in the world that your antennae are up. What are the things you have found that work to help bring those antennae down again?"

Kids navigate feeling unsafe all the time, and they manage it. They can use the same exact strategies. And if those strategies don't work: "Let Mom or Dad or whoever know, and we'll come up with some different ones that you can try." It is about helping them figure out their own power, both in keeping themselves safe, but also in how they regulate when they are feeling overly anxious.

Nyce: If after this, your child comes home and says they had a lockdown drill, or maybe a real lockdown, would you be prepared to have another conversation with them, knowing that they now have the Texas shooting in the back of their minds?

Palmer: That question is a really important one because these conversations are very likely not going to be one-and-done. This will be in a news cycle for a while. Kids will continue to talk about it. You can say, "I'm going to check in with you periodically, and if you want to check in with me periodically, we can make that agreement"—so that they don't think, *Oh, well, we already talked about it.*

Nyce: I can only speak to my own experience as a kid, but I feel like it's easy to ruminate on this stuff.

Palmer: It really is. And teenagers don't want to sit there and have heavy, deep, and real conversations with their parents, as a general rule. So there may be some harrumphing and rolling of the eyes. And what I tell parents is, do it anyway and keep doing it. They're teenagers. That's what they're supposed to be doing.

Nyce: A lot of parents may be dealing with fears or grief of their own. How do you protect your children from feeling scared while still being honest with them and processing your own emotions about the shooting?

Palmer: I think honesty takes the day on this one. "I'm really sad too." "I'm really mad too." "I'm really scared too." Parents are like, "I don't want to cry in front of my kid"—especially dads. It's, like, *no, no, no.* If what you can do is destigmatize crying—for your boys particularly—and help them understand that this is just the way your body expresses emotions, you are modeling the exact right behavior.

There is a balance there. Completely falling apart and getting dysregulated is going to scare your little kids, and it's going to make your older kids feel like they have to take care of you. So you want to modulate and be able to manage yourself.