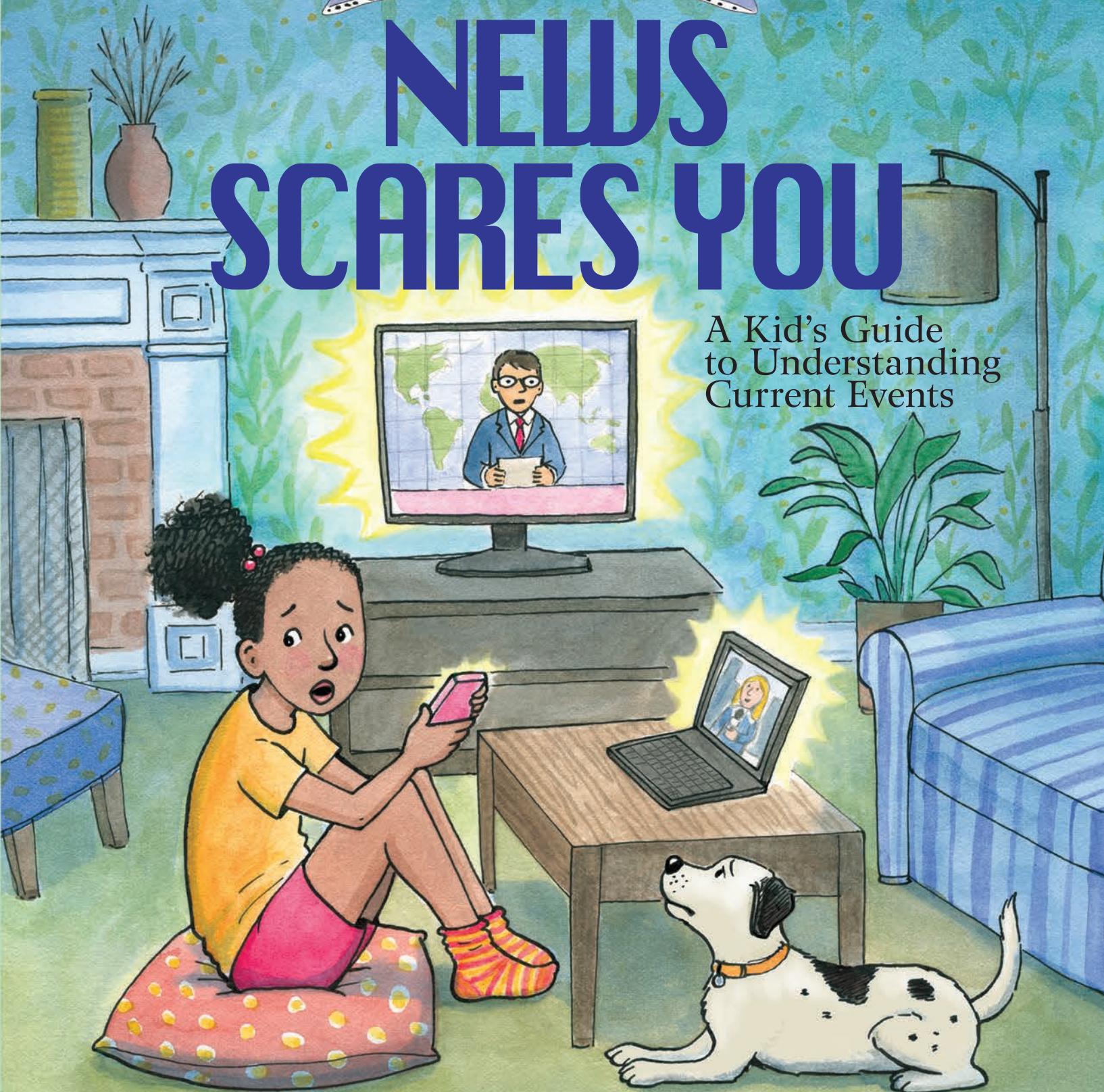


What to Do
When the

NEWS SCARES YOU

A Kid's Guide
to Understanding
Current Events



by Jacqueline B. Toner, PhD
illustrated by Janet McDonnell



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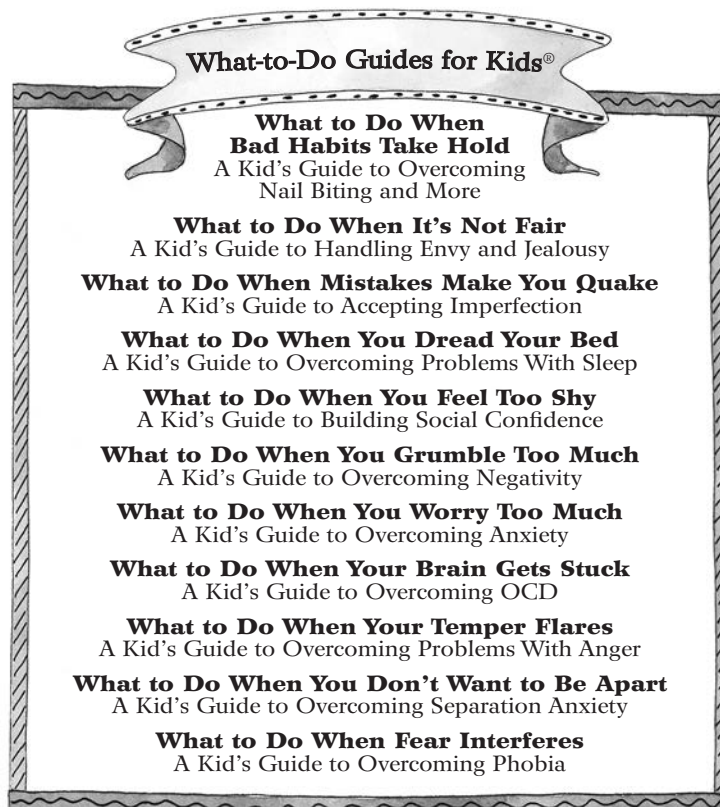
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Introduction to Parents and Caregivers

More than almost anything, we want the children we care for to feel safe. It's second nature to try to shield them from the harsher realities of life—but that doesn't always work. When tragic events happen, it's almost inevitable that children will learn about them. And sometimes life changes because of these events, and children need to know why.

Whether from television news reports, the car radio, or adult discussions, children are often bombarded with news. When the events being described include violence, extreme weather events, a disease outbreak, or discussions of more dispersed threats such as climate change, children may become frightened and overwhelmed. As a parent or caregiver, you may feel unprepared to help them understand and process the messages around them.

What to Do When the News Scares You provides a way to help children put scary events into perspective. If children start to worry or become anxious about things they've heard, there are ways to help them calm down and cope. Read through the book before you share it with your child to familiarize yourself with the ideas presented. This is not intended as a book for children who have themselves experienced trauma or loss; if you are looking for a book on that topic, I encourage you to explore Magination Press for other titles designed to help such youngsters.

Remember that children are impacted by the emotions of the important adults in their lives. Stay mindful of how your own reactions to frightening news events may

influence the small ones around you. If the news is worrisome or threatening, you may feel a need to stay up to date on what is happening and to communicate with others about it. At such times, it may not be feasible to completely protect children from incoming information. But news reports and overheard conversations can lead kids to make incorrect assumptions of the danger to them or their family. Stories of individuals who are traumatized by an event may lead children to identify with those who are experiencing the event and make them think that they are next. When adults around them seem concerned, children's fears are unlikely to be whisked away by simple reassurance. They need help understanding what is happening and assistance in putting it into a larger context.

Keep these tips in mind as you help your child through scary times:

- Children's ability to cope with scary events varies with age and with the child.
- Limit young children's exposure to news stories as much as you can. When you are unable to limit their exposure due to your own needs for information, be available to interpret messages for them.
- Consider how you access news and how that may impact children nearby. Reading news on your own is the least likely to accidentally transfer information to children; television news is more likely to include frightening visuals and sound effects.

- Listen to the child’s concerns before offering explanations. Ask what they have heard and what that information means to them. You may uncover misperceptions and unfounded fears which need correcting.
- Tell the truth but gently. Don’t brush off a child’s concerns but present hopeful information with the truth. Include information about how the event is being dealt with and people are being cared for. Be careful not to let your own fears result in sharing information based upon speculation about possible future developments.
- Help your child put the event in perspective. While you may have a sense that a threat is far away, limited in scope, being managed, or even in the past, don’t assume that your child understands this.
- Comment to your child about the ways in which news reports may be making things seem more dire than they are.
- Help older children become active consumers of the news by teaching them which news sources can be trusted and why. Be sure to point out sources of information that are likely to be misleading, especially online.
- Remind the child that you and other adults around them will keep them safe. Use concrete examples when you can.
- Maintain routines and don’t let news intrude on normal daily activities (no TV news during dinner).

Read *What to Do When the News Scares You* with your child to help them understand the news in context (“who, what, where, when, how”) as a means of introducing a sense of perspective. This

book helps children identify reporters’ efforts to add excitement to the story, which may make threats seem more imminent, universal, and extreme. As you talk about scary events with your child, point out all the people in their life who keep them safe and some of the ways that they are doing so right now. If children become worried and anxious about events, encourage them to employ the coping



strategies presented in the book which are designed to reduce overexcitement and anxiety. Encourage them to develop plans of actions to offer support to others, participate in small ways to address large problems, and devise a family safety plan.

Scary news is an inevitable part of life. This book can support and guide you in your efforts to help scary news seem a bit more manageable for the young people in your care.

JACQUELINE B. TONER, PhD, is a clinical psychologist with over 30 years in private practice working with children and parents. She lives in Baltimore, Maryland. Visit jacquelinetoner.net.

JANET McDONNELL is a writer and illustrator whose characters populate many books and magazines for children. She lives in Arlington Heights, Illinois. Visit janetmcdonnell.com, @McDonnellDoodle on Twitter, and @JanetMcDonnellIllo on Instagram.

CHAPTER ONE

Sometimes Scary Things Happen

Reporters let people know what is happening in the world. They tell news stories about things in your town, your state, your country, and also things that are very far away. There are a lot of ways that they let people know what they have found out. Some reporters write down what they have learned in a newspaper, magazine, or online. Others make reports on the radio or on TV.



**Where do your parents usually
find out what's happening?**

You may think that just knowing what happened is all that reporters do, but sometimes that's not enough information. Investigative reporters look further into things that happen to learn more about who the people involved are, what happened before, what might happen later, and whether anything like this ever happened before.

Sometimes the stories that reporters tell are scary. When bad things happen it's important that reporters let adults know about them. They might first hear about it from the news on TV, the radio, the internet, or a newspaper. Once some people hear about it, the news starts to spread. They start telling other people about it. They tell people near them and they call or text friends and family farther away to tell them what they've heard. Pretty soon lots of adults start watching the TV, listening to the radio, or looking for information on the internet and talking about what happened.

