

Talking To Children About Safety in Dangerous Situations

For even our youngest children, part of their routine at school probably includes practicing lockdown and other safety procedures and drills. During these routines, children remain calm and unruffled, largely due to the fact that dealing with these types of emergency situations has simply become part of their lives. They regularly discuss these issues, in an age appropriate manner, with their teachers, and we want to support these conversations continuing at home about safety in other locations.

Keeping in mind the age of your children, we hope that you will have a discussion as a family about what to do in the event of an emergency. You can use the guidelines and suggestions below as a tool to help you. Just as your children feel safe and secure at home and at school, we want them to feel the same when they come to church.

Key ideas to remember:

- Reassure children that they are safe.
- Validate their feelings. All feelings are okay and children need to be allowed to talk about their feelings.
- Make time to talk. Allow their questions to guide you in how much information to share. Keep the dialogue going.
- Keep explanations developmentally appropriate.

Developmental Characteristics of Children

Pre-school: Children can feel tension and unexpressed emotion. Answer any questions they may have, but at this age, there is no need to talk much.

Early elementary school: Give brief, simple information balanced by reassurance. Just as their homes and schools are safe places with adults there to protect them, so is the church.. Ask them if there is anything you can do to make them feel safer.

Upper elementary and early middle school: Children are more vocal with questions about if they are truly safe and what is being done to protect them. Encourage them to ask any questions and use their questions as a guide to share information that you think is appropriate.

Upper middle and high school: Children will have strong opinions about the causes of violence. They may offer suggestions on how to make things safer. Emphasize their role to communicate any safety concerns they may see, but reassure them that it is not their responsibility nor will it be their fault if something happens.

Next Time You are at Mass:

1. Remind children that Church is a safe place. Just like in school, we need to know what to do if a stranger comes in that wants to do harm.
2. Point out the exits.
3. Remind them that there are exits behind the altar with doors to outside via the side of the building.
4. Establish a family meeting point should you get separated (i.e. meet at home, behind the fire house, etc.)

Sources: www.care.com, www.alicetraining.com, and The Washington Post