

When news creates anxiety

The California Partners Project is engaged in a statewide listening tour with California mothers, parents and caregivers to understand how they are navigating the integration of technology and devices into most aspects of their children's lives. A mother told us about her daughter's anxiety and insomnia due to constantly watching the news. Her daughter hasn't been able to stop herself from watching even though it makes her feel worse. Here is some background information to help you if this is also a problem in your family.

Uncertainty breeds anxiety. According to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America (ADAA), the pandemic has created a moment of incredible uncertainty. When individuals experience uncertainty, they want to gather as much information as possible to feel more in control. (ADAA) Watching the news, hoping for information that will assure certainty, can increase anxiety when not all the facts are available.

Don't overestimate the likelihood of negative outcomes and underestimate your ability to cope. Worry about the latest headlines can spiral out of control, leading teens to overestimate the dangers mentioned in the news or underestimate their ability to cope and/or protect themselves.

Tips if your child is feeling anxious about the news

TIP 1: Practice Acceptance.

The ADAA recommends that instead of watching the news and doom scrolling (the tendency to continue scrolling through bad news without the ability to step back or stop), we need to "practice acceptance of what is beyond our control and to refocus our attention on things we can control."

TIP 2: Be mindful of how watching the news makes you feel.

Ask your teen how watching the news makes them feel and suggest time limits to their consumption of news. Is the news actually helpful or making your teen feel worse; suggest that they respond accordingly.

TIP 3: Set a plan to watch the news with your child and/or discuss the content of the news of the day.

The APA recommends that parents set guidelines about what time of the day the family checks the news. (APA) If your child is young, try to make sure the news is not on unless you or a trusted adult is monitoring what they are hearing and seeing. Ask your children what they think about the news and take time to listen to their response. Remind your children and teens to stick to trusted news sites to gather information.

TIP 4: Shift attention to supporting others.

Psychologist and author Lisa Damour writes in her column for The New York Times that research indicates "teens feel better when they turn their attention to support others" during difficult moments in life. (NY Times, 3/11/20)