



OU ISRAEL PARENTING COLUMN

Michal Silverstein, MS

Dealing With Uncertainty

Dear OU Parenting,

My 10 year old daughter tends to worry a lot. When we go out together, she worries about every possible scenario that can go wrong like what if her brother will get lost or kidnapped. Or any other bad thing that can happen to us. I keep trying to reassure her but she's still anxious. What can I do to help her calm down?

M.R.

Dear M.R.,

Dealing with an anxious child can be very draining. Parents tend to respond to their kids by saying things like "it's not going to happen" or "just relax, we're all ok". These words of reassurance don't usually lower the child's anxiety. Why? Because when a child is asking these questions and catastrophizing she's not

just looking for an answer, she's looking for connection.

The anxiety is coming from a place of fear and uncertainty. In addition, a parent can't guarantee that everything is or will be OK. A child especially living in Israel has heard and seen things happen that seem highly improbable, but still happen. So what can a parent do to calm their child? First, know that there's no quick fix. It's not about giving one answer of reassurance. It's a process of accepting the fear and uncertainty and learning coping skills to deal with it. Part of teaching those skills is modeling healthy ways that you, as a parent, cope with uncertainty and fear.

The first step is to validate your child's fear and anxiety. Feelings can get pretty intense and you want to show your kids that you aren't afraid of their big, sometimes scary feelings. This means being curious, validating their feelings and empathizing with them. Go with them on their imaginary journey of what ifs. It's ok to enter their world of chaos with them and just listen. Showing them again and again that they aren't alone in their fear is calming.

The next thing you can do to a degree, is to



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share your feelings of fear and uncertainty and what helps you manage when those feelings come up for you. Sharing makes the child feel less isolated and alone and makes the parent more relatable. Explore with the child what things have made them feel safe or calm in the past. Playing with a specific toy, resting on the couch, reading a book or holding an object they like such as a soft blanket, can help a child cope in times of uncertainty. Keep in mind that children need something immediate, so physical contact with a parent such as holding your child's hand, giving them a hug or letting them sit on your lap is a quick anxiety reducer.

Kids also enjoy connections, such as talking to a friend, or engaging in activities like drawing a picture, listening to their favorite music or dancing around. Plan ahead to have safe objects available when needed, and go through ways to access them. Lastly, explain that your job as a parent is to keep your child safe and protected and you take practical measures to ensure that as best as you can.

There are no guarantees and the Israeli lifestyle requires one to sit with uncertainty. As Jews we can also use emuna and tefilla, prayer, to keep ourselves calm, balanced and connected to others. ■

Michal Silverstein has a MS in educational psychology and counseling. She facilitates parenting workshops in and around Jerusalem and maintains a private practice.

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