

## **SELF talk for reassuring your children**

Claire LaPoma, Faubion Elementary School counselor and Trillium Family Services therapist, tells parents it's essential to help children process their emotions when they're overwhelmed. She says the key elements are safety, emotions, loss and future (SELF).

### **Safety**

Physical safety is important, and psychological safety is just as essential for children and adults. "Help kiddos keep healthy boundaries," Claire encouraged. "Take a vacation from certain media, outlets because that plays a big role in the fears that come up. Kiddos are recognizing the divisiveness in our society and they're going to experience repercussions."

She also said messages of personal safety are what children need to hear. "Tell them, 'No matter where we are, we're a family and we'll be together. We are safe as a family and we'll protect you.'"

"Faubion Elementary school is diverse and we believe in equity. We allow each other to speak our opinions and feel safe, while holding space for our emotions."

### **Emotions**

Don't be like Mr. Spock.

"Children have to know they can and should work through and process their feelings," Claire pointed out. "Parents can help them understand and manage their feelings without thinking their feelings are controlling them."

"Open a discussion about the wide array of feelings they're experiencing – negative and positive," she added. "Kids develop their sense of safety based off relationships. If parents are dwelling only on fear, they may inadvertently send a message that the world is unsafe," she said. "Help children to accurately identify their feelings and develop coping skills for when they get big and tough."

"As human beings, we want to fix sadness rather than explore it, but kiddos need to know it's safe to express sadness to you," Claire said. "Acknowledging their emotional space is really important."

### **Loss**

It's also human nature to try to attach silver linings to loss. "Instead, tell the kiddo you know he or she is hurting, it makes sense they're hurting and that you're there to share it," Claire suggested.

"Understand that grief is a natural response to loss – there's nothing bad about it. It can include many emotions, from anger to numbness, or unsettling thoughts like, 'What will happen next?' There is no 'right way' to grieve."

“Parents can help by practicing self care and responding to their children's feelings with their own cups full, even just taking five minutes to breathe deeply.”

### **Future**

It's always time to make choices to create a better life because it fosters resilience in children. “Tough events are inevitable,” Claire said. “So ask your child – and yourself – ‘What about this event is helping me grow and learn, and to be a better person to myself and others?’”

That could include talking about demonstrating love, compassion and peacemaking with the people in your lives. “Talk about affecting change on a small scale and growing that to the entire community,” she recommended. Think about writing letters to politicians, making donations to worthy causes and/or volunteering.

“Rather than retreating into denial or thinking ‘There's nothing I can do because I'm just one person,’ integrating community-support activities into family time empowers kiddos.”