

Discussing Terrorism

A parent recently asked me if I felt it was okay to discuss events like the attacks in Paris with their teen, or try to switch it off and block it out. In reality, you cannot block it out. The teens are exposed to cell phones and media from 100 directions – they will hear it no matter what you do. You need to be engaged in the conversation. They may not raise it, but that does not mean they are not thinking about it. Many people in the US are concerned about terror attacks here in the US. Your teen is no different, and ignoring that won't change the situation.

So, what can you say? Start by being honest – these things are scary. It is frightening – that is why terrorists do it! Because they appear random and strike innocent people, it creates the impression that it WILL happen anywhere, when in reality, it cannot happen everywhere. Always recognize that your teen may be concerned and be honest about that feeling. Fear is an essential human emotion – it is what has kept man alive since dinosaurs looked at man as an appetizer. It is irrational fear that is harmful, and that is what you are trying to address. They have always looked to you for protection. Don't abandon that role now when they really need you.

Help your teen realize that the number of terrorists is small compared with the number of people in the world. Help them see that these things are done to make you ignore facts and focus on the fear. It is the facts that beat the fear. FACT: There are not many terrorists. FACT: it is not that easy to get to the US with current screening in place. FACT: The odds of you and an armed terrorist being in the same place at the same time are astronomically small.

But what if...? Well, yes, it is always possible. That is the time to say what I tell my son. "If you are not comfortable where you are, but you don't know why, TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS AND LEAVE." Your gut is a great detector of danger. Call it spidey sense or gut wisdom, the fact is never ignore your instincts. Nature has been honing them for 4000 years. This is a good lesson not only for handling terrorism (and the Zombie Apocalypse) but for handling situations where the people (or friends) you are with are doing stupid things – like bullying; drinking and driving; drugs, etc.

Finally, I always turn to the advice of Mr. Fred Rogers (of Mr. Roger's Neighborhood), who said when terrible things happen, his mother always said "but look at all the people helping – you want to be one of them."

The reality is our Lord calls us all to love one another. If we were more caring for one another, there would be less fear; less cause for offense; and less violence. Making sure your teen is on the side of light is the most effective way to combat the darkness.