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Ask Dr. Harold: When Scary Things Happen

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www.drharoldhoyle.com Harold can be contacted by phone or email: 510-219-8660 hjhoyle@mac.com Harold is licensed clinical psychologist and a lecturer and in the School of Counseling Psychology, Education, and Pastoral Ministries Santa Clara University. With his wife and two children he is a 14 year long resident of the Lamorinda area. He is a sought after speaker in the areas of parenting, education, behavior with adolescents and children. He has a local private practice. anxiety or negative emotions count it as a normal part of their development.

The second dynamic goes something like this; imagine that I am a kid in Moraga and I have anxiety about something--school, friends, family or just being a kid. I see a story on the news about a tragedy in what I think is peaceful Norway and a few days later I get Facebooked about a shooter in my area. It becomes much easier for me to focus my actions on this shooter than on my own life. It is a kind of emotional procrastination. So I buy into the hyping of this event and maybe even hype it up a little. This is a natural process as long as the worry doesn't intrude on the functioning of the kid.

So, what can you do?

You have more experience on the planet than your kids do. Use it! Listen to what they have to say and give them the language they need to process what is going on. Problem solve with them. Do not problem solve for them. We are worse than video games if we always run to their side with some lesson and do all of the interpretation for them. Use Socratic questioning. This is a time to separate your being with them from your doing for them. Be with them and listen and guide them with questions. Help them brainstorm the activities that would make them feel safe. Do those activities and then see if it works. Give them honest feedback about how you see them getting worked up by the media and suggest they have choices about getting worked up or not. Model for them how you are working through the possibility of a shooter loose in your city. What are you saying to yourself? This is a great time to get out a map of Moraga or Norway.

I personally argued to go get frozen yogurt and my daughter reminded me how bad I would feel if I got the warning and then got shot. We had a good time making cookies.

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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Dear Dr. Harold,

A parent wrote me this week asking about the recent shooting in the town of Moraga and the drama it produced in our kids. So here are some thoughts on our kids in a world full of worries and media to hype it up.

My Experience

I was planning on going to Yogurt Shack with my kids and I received a text from a friend telling me there was a shooter on the loose who had shot at a cop. The text also let me know that the parent who sent it was not letting their kid leave the house. Two minutes later we were reading the description of the event on the web and Facebook and Twitter were all a buzz. I heard or read about drug cartels and right wing extremist within minutes of getting my text. Note to self: get to yogurt shop before you read your texts.

So, what are the dynamics going on for a kid in this scenario?

First, there is the developmentally appropriate task of identity development or figuring out who you are. An important tool we use accomplish this task in psychology is called detached intimacy. My generation knew it as late night phone conversations that required a cord long enough to reach one's room. (Yes a phone with cord) Today's version is Facebook and texting. These social devices represent social connection. They are how kids get to know each other and more importantly themselves. These public domains are subject to the same drama and entertainment requirements that plague our news programs. When this behavior is not causing