



STARTING THE CONVERSATION. . .

Suggestions for teachers, parents and adults when talking to children about September 11th

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How do we begin the conversation with students who are so young that they only have knowledge of 2001 from parents and older siblings or friends? The following suggestions may help in beginning the conversation.

Language: Be consistent in how you refer to September 11, 2001

- September 11th or September 11, 2001
- 9/11, (pronounced nine-eleven) the numeric shorthand that has forever labeled this day in our history.
- If possible show younger students a calendar
- 9-1-1: Do not use this way of referring to September 11
 - And correct those who may be using this term
 - Saying 9-1-1 is confusing, 911 is the emergency telephone number for the North American Numbering Plan

Geographic Considerations

- Remember this is not just a New York, or Washington, or Pennsylvania event
- Students in the metropolitan areas surrounding these cities may be much more savvy about using certain words (9/11, terrorism, etc) but they still may not have full comprehension of their meanings.

Maturity

Remember that as a student matures he or she may have a different understanding and new questions about September 11, 2001

- Ten years is a long time in a student's life. A child who was barely five years old will be at a completely different developmental stage at 15.
- As children cognitively mature they are able to comprehend much more information.
- Adolescents are able to perform abstract reasoning
- A child or teen may experience feelings of their younger selves on that day, i.e. a 15 year old remembers the feelings of that day as a 5 year old.
- Be prepared to talk about the events of that day again.

Allow *time* in the classroom to talk to students

- Be sure to tell parents that it was discussed in class and they can continue the conversation at home
 - Tell students to talk to their families.
- Don't leave it for the end of the day when everyone is anxious to leave.

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Suggestions for teachers, parents and adults when talking to children about September 11th (continued)

- If there is a great deal of media coverage it is important to start the conversation before the media blitz.
- Ask parents to watch the news with their children.

Starting the conversation:

- Who has heard these words (9/11, September 11th)?
- What have you heard about (9/11, September 11th)??
 - Prompt: Maybe you have heard your parents, families, older brothers and sisters use those words
 - Maybe you have heard about it on the radio or the television. . .
 - For a long time, a lot of people have talked about this day.
- Ask students “What do you know about September 11th?”
 - Prompt: Has anyone told you the story of what happened on September 11?
- Tell the story in age-appropriate, non-graphic ways.
 - Use words that are not inflammatory and not alarming in the way they sound.

Using the Term Terrorist

Most children will have heard the word **terrorist** but may not have a real understanding of it.

- People who want do things to frighten others.
 - Not enough to say “bad” people as that is a label
 - Websites discussing terrorism: <http://www.ready.gov/kids/step3/index.html>
 - http://www.ncccv.org/violence/children_terrorism.htm
- Terrorism a complex term with no agreed-upon definition in governmental or academic literature.
 - If you use the term in the classroom, or ask if students have heard the term, you can begin with what they know and focus on safety and security. How people are trying to make sure their communities are safe.
 - Airport security, bag searches at baseball parks, museums, etc
 - Do not equate terrorism with bullying.
 - These are not the same concepts, and there is danger in equating the two.

Additional Reading and Resources

- For the youngest children, a book may be a useful way to introduce the story. 14 Cows for America very gently brings up the story of September 11, in a multi-cultural way that ends with giving and comforting those who are victims.
 - <http://14cowsforamerica.com/story.html>

Final Thoughts

- For older students, look for signs that this ten year marker may have triggered fears or anxieties such as sleeplessness, fears, anxiety, crying.
 - If you see something that may be upsetting to a student, don't be afraid to begin a conversation on the subject.
- Share your own experience in positive ways.
 - For educators, these are “Teacher Stories”
- Keep the doors of communication open.