



Community-Police Engagement: How Law Enforcement Parents Can Talk to Their Children about Current Events

Children with parents in law enforcement may experience stress, fear, and a variety of other emotions in the wake of global demonstrations, protests, and other civil unrest. Parents are encouraged to have an open dialogue with their children about the different views of policing in the media and how history may shape community opinions today. Consider the following when talking with children of different ages:

How to Start the Conversation

- Whether you or your child prompts the discussion, use the opportunity to have a valuable and important conversation with them.
- Understand your child's access to social media will likely shape the discussion and their knowledge on the subject.
- Tailor the discussion to your child's age, maturity level, and attention span.
- Identify what is occurring in a digestible format for the child.
- Acknowledge that the discussion may be emotional or uncomfortable.
- Be present in the discussion, turn off any distractions, and give your child your full attention.

Conversations will look different based on each individual child, their age, and their ability to process the information given to them.

Young Children

Younger children might have limited knowledge on what is occurring, instead relying on word of mouth from friends and information on the internet or television.

- Ask them what they may have seen or heard about the topic.
- Address questions they have and be honest when you do not know how to answer.
- Recognize that your normal routine may change.
- Be aware of stress manifesting differently in young children such as stomach aches or behavior changes.

Preteens

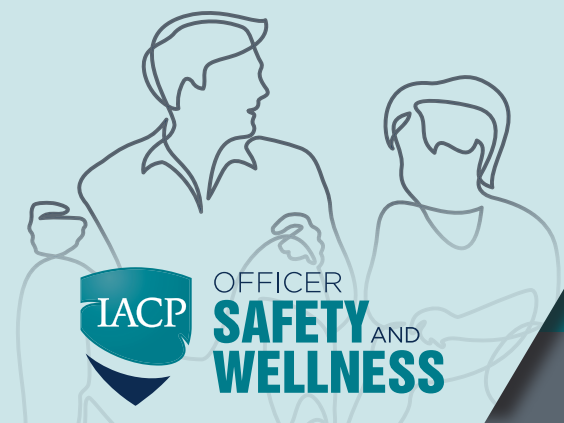
Preteens and middle-school aged children are likely witnessing social demonstrations around the world through the lens of their peers and social media. They might lack the ability to distinguish between facts and false information.

- Find out what they know and fill in the gaps with factual information.
- Acknowledge that people have very different opinions and perspectives about the issue.
- Explain your role in keeping community members safe.
- Share strategies to evaluate content and understand the motives of the content publisher.

Teens and Young Adult Children

Older children are likely to have formed their own values and thoughts on the topic. Respect their views and encourage a healthy discussion, even if their opinions may contradict your own.

- Share your own emotions about the issue and the protests.
- Listen to their concerns about policing and the law enforcement profession.
- Discuss your role in protecting people's constitutional rights of free speech and peaceful assembly.
- Explain that there are policies and safety measures your department has in place to maintain officer and community safety during demonstrations.



Community-Police Engagement: How Law Enforcement Parents Can Talk to Their Children about Current Events

Key Topics to Discuss

- Help your child develop critical thinking skills to gather all the facts before forming an opinion.
- Recognize that it is acceptable for opinions to change as new information is gathered.
- Explain to your teen how you engage with the community in two-way communication, take the time to provide pertinent information, listen to their concerns, and build crucial respectful relationships.
- Share steps that you are taking as an officer to ensure your safety and well-being.
- Address changes in your schedule and times your child can expect to hear from you while away.

Supporting Your Child in Peer Discussions

- If your child is faced with a difficult conversation with a peer, discuss healthy conflict-resolution and communication skills your child can use.
- Remind your child that it is not his or her job to defend the law enforcement profession or completely disclose your profession unless he or she wants to.
- If your child is experiencing bullying or harassment because they come from a law enforcement family, make other parents aware and encourage your child to walk away from the situation.
- If harassment or threats occur on social media platforms, encourage your child to let you know.

Continuing the Dialogue

- Acknowledge that this is a constantly evolving dialogue and conversations should continue in the future.
- Encourage children to speak with you in the future if they have questions about the profession or common practices in policing.
- Recognize that these conversations should occur beyond times of protest or civil unrest.
- Prompt discussions about race and diversity in your home.
- Read books with your child that show diversity, acceptance, and people from different cultures. Make these books available for teens to read on their own and discuss themes with them.
- Encourage appropriate forms of activism.
- Identify ways to express gratitude to those around you to help combat stress and negativity.

While current events mark a turning point in community police relations, it is important to acknowledge the stress and emotions children of all ages may be experiencing at home. This is an opportunity to discuss the longstanding relationship between the police and minority communities. Assure your child that you are taking steps to keep yourself safe and you have your own feelings about what is happening. Through this valuable dialogue, children of law enforcement families can remain healthy and positive supporters of change.