

# The 4 R's of Processing Violent Social Media Content with Kids

Social media feeds are fertile breeding grounds for very disturbing content. Inevitably, the most shocking and unignorable words, images, and videos rise to the top of people's feeds. As a child and adolescent psychiatrist, I treat young people who are routinely exposed to these horrific stimuli, and I'm often asked by patients, families, and community members how to navigate all this. To make my recommendations easy to remember, I've organized them into **4 R's: React, Research, Reflect, and Reset.**

## Step 1: React

- Allow your child plenty of space for emotions/reactions such as anger, confusion, fear, sadness, and cynicism.
- Watch for unpredictable mood/behavioral changes, which may be related to traumatic exposure, even if the child does not overtly draw this connection.
- *Listen* to your child -- find out what they already know, and ask them what they still want to know.

## Step 2: Research

- Embark upon a proactive learning journey with your child. Teach them to challenge their assumptions and the content they see, to seek credible sources, and to come to you if they're not sure about the accuracy of things they read, see, watch, and hear.
- Explain to the child that different people have different perspectives, and that there are many disputes about what is and is not factual. Acknowledge that you yourself don't have all of the answers.
- Research AACAP and AAP recommendations regarding screen use and access by social-emotional and developmental age. Learn about available settings to control and limit the child's exposure in social media and elsewhere, and discuss with the child the importance of these measures.

## Step 3: Reflect

- Invite--but never force--open communication. Be prepared to discuss challenging or unexpected topics.
- Always be honest to the best of your ability, and acknowledge that even you don't have all the answers.
- Model for your child how to name feelings, process those feelings, and think through the situation, what it means to them, and how it may impact their life.

## Step 4: Reset

- Help the child reset algorithms in their social media feeds
- Optimize settings to protect your children, based on their age and developmental level.
- Take time to recenter yourself and ground yourself before resuming regular activities.

Of course, there are so many more considerations; this is meant as a starting point. Everybody responds differently to traumatic exposures, and such situations provide an opportunity for improved communication and increased compassion between loved ones, friends, acquaintances, strangers, and even adversaries.

--Jeremy Chapman, MD; Medical Director of Child Psychiatry, SSM Health Treffert Studios; Director, PsychChild.com

More psychiatrist-created video, resources and links available at: [www.PsychChild.com/Violence](http://www.PsychChild.com/Violence)

