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## Helping Children Feel Secure During Uncertain Times

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What can parents do to help their children feel safe in these uncertain times we live in? I have outlined four principles that underlie the more specific efforts parents can make.

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1. **Spend time together as a family.** Children's sense of security is mostly founded on their relationships with their parents and family. It stems from being with people a child trusts in an intimate relationship. But a child needs to have enough time with you to feel that the everyday world you live in is a reliable and safe one in which he feels protected. This can only come from warm, nurturing relationships.
2. **Express feelings.** Help your children express their feelings and concerns. This means giving them the time, empathy, and support to do so. Quick, hurried reassurance does not allow children to get all their feelings out. Listen, empathize, and help children share what's on their minds in play as well as in verbal exchanges. As children are getting their feelings out, you can help by summarizing or paraphrasing what they are saying, asking them if this is what they are feeling and trying to help them articulate what they feel. For all of us, it's reassuring to know you are being listened to and that someone can hear you.
3. **Provide reassurance.** To help your child feel secure, begin offering some reassurance. But the reassurance needs to be couched in realistic terms. Children will want to know what you are doing for them as a parent to make them feel protected, so it's important to go through the steps you are taking at home first. Then explain to them what the government is doing in terms they can understand. For example, children need to know that they will be seeing more people at airports or train stations who are checking tickets and bags; that there will be more guards or police to make sure the wrong people don't get into buildings or schools or onto planes. This will help children from being shocked, surprised, or confused by what changes they see.
4. **Contribute and help others.** We all benefit from the ability to contribute something to others in need. From recycling to bake sales to writing letters, both tiny efforts and grander ones can make children feel more secure and not helpless. When children (and adults) have a sense of being directly involved and doing something positive and constructive, everyone gains energy and confidence.

Adapted from the book, *The Secure Child: Helping Our Children Feel Safe and Confident in an Insecure World* (Perseus Publishing, May 2002).