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BREAKING NEWS...

WHEN YOUR CHILD BECOMES CURIOUS ABOUT REPORTS, HOW SHOULD YOU RESPOND, ASKS RHIANE KIRKBY

Betrayed by the government”, “Terror murder suspect released”, “Got him – the world’s most wanted man.” These are just some of the headlines that have appeared over the past few weeks and they’re by no means the worst. Little surprise then, that many parents feel it’s best to shield their children from the news. But is that the right thing to do?

Anna Bassi, editor of the newly-launched *The Week Junior* magazine doesn’t think so. In fact she thinks, in an age of 24/7 news and online access, it’s an almost impossible task and a potentially detrimental one. Anna believes that while every parent has the right to decide what to tell their child, “you can’t wrap children up in blankets their whole lives.” In her experience, “children will hear things from their peers – often the distorted playground version – and so it’s far better they hear things from their trusted source – you.”

Nicky Cox, editor of *First News*, agrees. “News isn’t as easy to escape as when we were young and the family sat down together to watch *Newsround*. It’s around us constantly and if we don’t talk directly to kids, we’re doing them a disservice.”

So, when should you start introducing the concept of news to children? Both Anna and Nicky agree there’s no specific age as children are naturally curious. They say parents will know the right time to engage children and suggest adults arm themselves with the facts about specific stories and never refuse to answer questions, as that just fuels fear. They stress the importance of providing reassurance (“the people responsible have been caught”, “no one was hurt”) and of putting stories in context (“there’s such a small chance of anything like this happening here or to you”). Anna also advises parents not to forget the good stuff. A mix of light-hearted and serious stories will, she says, fuel their curiosity in the

world around them.

Surprisingly, in an age where many children are often seen to be glued to their phones or tablets, both *The Week Junior* and *First News* come in print format and are going from strength to strength. Both titles, along with *Time For Kids*, are also available in schools. Nicky says some of her newspaper’s popularity is fuelled by parents who want their children to have time away from their screens, equally, “kids have a real desire for printed matter and love to dip in and out of stories in a way they can’t do online,” says Anna. But neither is naive enough to ignore the digital world completely. *The Week Junior*’s digital strategy is in development and *First News* has plans to expand its online offering and will start to broadcast news bulletins presented by children this September.

But what about *Newsround*? Forty-four years on from its first broadcast, it remains a respected and trusted news source for young people and adults alike. Editor Lewis James credits its success with the fact it has always put its audience first, from telling stories in a way that is sensitive and age-appropriate to

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ensuring it’s available on the platforms the audience demands. Gone are the days when everything was thrown at one TV bulletin. Now the online offering is the focal point, and with its mix of the serious and the downright silly, it’s clear to see the country’s six to 12 year olds are at its heart. “For this generation, the concept of life without smartphones



doesn’t exist,” says Lewis. “The digital platform is growing, but TV is still key.” If statistics are to be believed, the average child scrolls the equivalent of a mile and a half online every day and so it’s interesting that, unlike America, there aren’t currently any specific news apps for children in the UK. Paul Bradshaw, a blogger on journalism technology says this is due in part to the start-up costs and also the fact that amongst news organisations generally, there’s a push towards mobile-ready websites and social media. Technology may have moved on since *Newsround* began, but its core values remain the same, winning high praise from parents. “Tactful, sensitive, pitched just right”, “clear, concise and unpatronising” – just some of the comments posted on Twitter after the recent

Brussels attacks. Similar praise was heaped on *First News* and *The Week Junior* for their reporting of the events. It’s reassuring to see that in an age when it’s increasingly difficult to shield our children from the harsh realities of the world there are trusted news sources which make it easy to feed their natural curiosity and hunger for information. ❶

A good mix of light-hearted and serious stories will fuel your child’s engagement with the world

THE RESOURCES



THE WEEK JUNIOR
Brought to you by *The Week*, this new current affairs magazine for children aged between eight and 14 gained 10,000 subscribers in just three months. theweekjunior.co.uk



FIRST NEWS
Ten years after its launch, this weekly paper for seven to 14 year olds has more than two million readers, covering everything from sport to politics. firstnews.co.uk



NEWSROUND
Since its first show in April 1972, *Newsround* has remained one of the most trusted news sources for children aged six to 12. Catch bulletins three times each day. bbc.co.uk/newsround