

## Talking to Your Kids About Islamophobia

Last October, Waheeda Saif, Program Coordinator of Riverside Trauma Center, began offering a workshop entitled “Talking to Your Child about the Current Climate and Islamophobia,” which is designed to support Muslim families who have been assailed by Islamophobia. In the aftermath of the San Bernardino attack, a crying and shaking Muslim mother told workshop attendees she was afraid to leave her home:

“I haven’t left the house since this happened. I get the kids to school and make sure to pick them up right away. While they are at school, I just watch the news over and over again. Someone said something to my kid at school about being a terrorist. I don’t know what to do. I just think we need to hide for a while.”

Pervasive fears of the United States being attacked by radical groups such as ISIS and Al Qaeda have resulted in members of the Muslim community being exposed to threats, bullying, harassment, and demands for increased surveillance of all Muslim communities. Also, in this highly charged election season, American Muslims have found themselves and their children increasingly exposed to political portrayals and comments of being a threat to the security of the United States. According to the FBI Hate Crime Statistics, there was a 14% increase in anti-Muslim hate crimes in 2014. The number of reported crimes is expected to increase further during this year.

The goal of the workshop is to provide Muslim parents the tools they need to have an honest and productive conversation with their children. Muslim parents have such a difficult time managing their own reactions to these terrifying experiences, and the idea of how to talk to their children about these events feels like an impossible conversation.

The workshop includes practical tips on how to have difficult discussions about the current political climate, the rise of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim backlash, and the very real threat of recruitment by ISIS. The workshop includes age-appropriate suggestions, developmentally suitable language, and recommendations for the age to begin the conversation. There have been seven workshops to date with more scheduled in the coming months.

Waheeda has also spent time consulting with school systems on how to best address this backlash within their schools and support their Muslim students.

The reception for this workshop has been overwhelmingly positive, from both Muslim parents trying to navigate this difficult atmosphere with their children, and from sympathetic community allies who wish to stand up to intolerance:

One preschool teacher and mother to young children said, “These were really helpful tips. It helped me to figure out how to talk to my young children. I’ve been so nervous about what to do and not to do, and what I may have been doing wrong.”

If you are interested in learning more about this workshop, scheduling this workshop for your organization or workplace, or a consultation, please contact Waheeda Saif at [wsaif@riversidecc.org](mailto:wsaif@riversidecc.org) or 781-433-0672, ext. 5617.