

Talking to students about rioting at the US Capitol

Before talking with your students:

- Reflect on how YOU feel first. Students will sense your unease and stress
- Approach students with a calm and receptive state of mind
- Be careful not to include your own biases. Try to remain neutral

Engage your students:

- Ask students what they think is happening and why
- Ask students where they are getting their information from
- Ask students how are you feeling/how does this make you feel
- Validate your students' feelings to help them feel heard and understood (ex: This is scary for me too/This makes me angry)

Elementary Grades:

- Use developmentally appropriate language
- Use brief and simple explanations
- Repeat the explanation often
- Help students find the right words to express their feelings
- Reassure their feelings are normal
- Keep an eye on their emotional state

Secondary Grades:

- Use developmentally appropriate language
- Give detailed explanations
- Allow extensive discussions
- Ask them what they saw
- Ask them how it makes them feel
- Reassure students about their feelings

Discussion Points

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Q: Why was Congress in session January 6?

A: Congress was in session to confirm electoral votes for the incoming President. This is a good time to explain the voting process at an age-appropriate level.

Q: Did these people have the right to protest?

A: Explain the 1st amendment right to peacefully protest. Explain that it is unacceptable and illegal when it turns violent and threatening.

Q: Why do you think these people were protesting?

A: People can have different viewpoints & beliefs.

- For younger students: “These people were angry over the election results. The protest got out of hand and some of the protesters did bad things, like use violence.”
- For older students: Explain the voting process and electoral college. This is also a good time to talk about fairness and good sportsmanship.

Q: (For older students) Do you think that what you heard or read was accurate?

A: This is a good opportunity to discuss biases among news broadcasts, and remind your students that information shared on the internet and social media is not always accurate. You can build on this with a discussion separating fact from opinion.

Q: How can you, as students, get involved?

A: You can get involved by: participating in community organizations, volunteering for a cause, voting when you turn 18, researching current issues, writing your local politicians, attending school board meetings.

Tips:

- Help students to understand that only a small minority of people are engaged in these riots and protests
- Ensure that students know they have a safe environment to discuss and display their feelings
- Remind students that people can have different viewpoints and beliefs. It is ok to discuss these as long as we respect one another
- Discuss that people can protest for many reasons (unfair treatment, election, war)

After the Discussion:

- Ensure students know they have a safe environment to have further discussions
- Keep an eye on their emotional state