

Breaking news

Every one of Collin's mornings begins the same. I gently press against his heart and nudge him from asleep to awake. (Sometimes he's muttering something. Today, it was that I should have taken the yellow door.) I sing his name like a door bell, dragging out the first syllable. "Col-lin."

What follows is a template, of sorts. In a high, soft pitch, I pipe, "Good morning! It's today! And do you know what you're going to do today?"

This is the exact moment at which his dreams dissipate and the reality of the day's details reveal themselves in synchronization with the movement of his covers to his feet.

It's Tuesday, so "Hot Lunch" is usually the hot topic of the day, and bowling club when it's in season. But today was going to be different.

"We're going to the Orioles game!" he shouted with the alertness and fervor of a 5-year-old boy at recess.

"Not today," I told him, as I helped him with the buttons on his uniform polo.

"Why not?"

"It's not my decision," I told him. "We can't go because the game is cancelled."

"Why?" he asked.

It hadn't been made official yet, but when Saturday night's peaceful protests over the death of Freddie Gray, who died in police custody on April 19, turned violent last night, the Orioles/White Sox game was postponed. Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake established a curfew for the city effective 10 p.m., so I assumed that those factors coupled with the declared State of Emergency and the installation of the National Guard would result in another cancelled ballgame. But how do you explain all of that to a kindergartener?

Collin was away all weekend, and I worked until he was asleep on Monday, so I hadn't had a chance to talk to him about the riots in Baltimore, or, as he calls it, "the City," the place where we visit museums, animals, restaurants, and family members.

"Something really sad and really bad happened. A man named Freddie died when he was with the police, and a lot of people are really mad and sad about it. Some of

them are breaking things, and stealing things, and lighting fires, and throwing things to try to hurt people.

The police and other people are doing the best they can to keep everyone safe, but it's really dangerous right now, so the Orioles are not going to play tonight. So, we're going to stay home.

But there are a lot of people who live and work and go to school in the city, like G (my mom) and Becky (his godmother), so we should pray for all of them and their families."

He didn't ask any more questions.

I don't know if I said the "right thing." I don't know if there's a "right thing" that can be said about all of this. Some stories are so complicated they're impossible to write.

I've made the decision to raise my children to see the truth in the world, but at their age, I find myself dissecting news stories for them, like a mother bird processing food for her chicks. I sift for facts and filter through grisly details to determine what they actually need to know in order to walk away from the story learning something important about life.

At the same time, I try to shield my children from graphic images. Our brains retain images, attach strong emotions to them, and readily retrieve them when cued. Exposure to excessive violent imagery is linked to anxiety, desensitization, and violent behavior. Even adults should avoid overdosing on disturbing visual media.

Some people choose to expose their children to more of the story when tragedies occur. Some less. Some not at all. For them, it's a choice and we hope that their decisions are made in the best interest of their children.

Some parents don't have a choice because they're living in the midst of civil unrest here or utter devastation in Nepal. Children throughout the world find themselves the witnesses to and victims of tragedies beyond our privileged imaginations. For them, we must pray.

So, too, we must pray for our own city and all of those affected by this ongoing situation. We must find those who seek peace and positive change and unite. And, we must find a developmentally appropriate way to discuss the issues at the core of world and local events with our children. They might be the ones who finally get it right.

