Parenting Expat Kids During Uncertain Times

When children hear about events that feel big, changing, or are unclear, they often absorb more than adults realize. One of the most helpful first steps in supporting them is defining language clearly. The word **"uncertain"** is frequently used in news media and adult conversations; but children may interpret it as *'dangerous'* or *'something bad is DEFINITELY going to happen'*.

The included resources have been developed to help support children processing their experience and feelings during times of geo-political uncertainty. This activity booklet begins by defining uncertainty in age-appropriate language. When children understand that uncertainty means **'not fully known yet'** rather than *'unsafe,'* their nervous system can settle. From there, you can guide them through facts and routines with reassurance.

Suggested responses if your child asks, "Are we safe?"

When a child asks this question, they are usually not asking for a detailed explanation of world events. They are asking for reassurance and regulation.

Here is a simple structure you can follow:

1. **Pause and Regulate Yourself First**

Take one slow breath before responding.

Children read our tone and body language more than our words.

2. **Lead with Clear Reassurance**

You might say:

- "Yes, we are safe right now."
- "You are safe, and I am here with you."
- "If I was worried about our safety, I would tell you."

Keep your language simple and steady.

3. **Give a Concrete Anchor**

Children feel safer when they can see stability.

You might add:

- "We are in our home, and our routines are the same."
- "Your school is open, and we are going about our normal week."
- "The adults around you are paying attention."

Concrete details help their brains settle.

4. **Avoid Over-Explaining**

Too much information can increase anxiety.

Answer the question that was asked, not the one you think is coming next.

If they want more, they will ask.

5. **Close the Loop**

End the connection with:

- "Thanks for telling me you were worried."
- "It's okay to have questions."
- "Let's take a breath together."

Children borrow calm from the adults around them. Your steadiness is more powerful than perfect words.

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What Does "Uncertain" Mean?

Sometimes, adults use the word **"uncertain."**

When we hear that word, our brains might imagine something scary or dangerous. But that's not actually what it means.

Let's learn what uncertain really means, and what it doesn't mean.

Ages 6-9
What does 'uncertain' mean?

Uncertain means we don't have all the information yet.
It means something feels unclear or still changing.

It does NOT mean something bad is definitely going to happen.
It just means we are waiting to understand more.

Ages 8-12
What does "uncertain" mean?

Uncertain means things feel unclear, unpredictable, or still develpping.
It means we don't know every detail yet.

Uncertain does not mean unsafe.
It means we are gathering information and paying attention.

Ages 13+
What does "uncertain" mean?

Uncertainty happens when we don't have complete information or when situations are still unfolding.

It can feel uncomfortable because our brains like predictability.
But, uncertainty is a normal part of like, especially in a world that is so interconnected.

Not knowing everything is different from being in danger.

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Understanding “Uncertain”

Ages 6-9

Activity: What do I know? What don’t I know?
Goal: Help children separate imagination from reality.

Step 1: Define together.
Remind them:
Uncertain means we don’t know everything yet. It does not mean something bad is happening to us.

Step 2: What do I know? What don’t I know?

Help your child fill in the boxes below.

Here are some example prompts to help your child get started:

For Things I Know:

- What do we know about today?
- What do we know about our home?
- What do we know about who takes care of you?

For the Things I Don’t Know Yet:

- What might change?
- What are we still waiting to find out?

Things I Know	Things I Don’t Know Yet

Let’s choose 2-3 things from our Things I Know box and circle them. When we feel nervous, let’s remind ourselves of these things to help calm our bodies down.

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Understanding “Uncertain”

Ages 8-12

Activity: Brain Story vs Real Story
Goal: Help children identify anxious thinking.

When something feels uncertain, our brain tries to fill in the blanks. Sometimes it fills them in with scary guesses.

Step 1: My Brain’s Story vs. What’s Actually True

Ask:

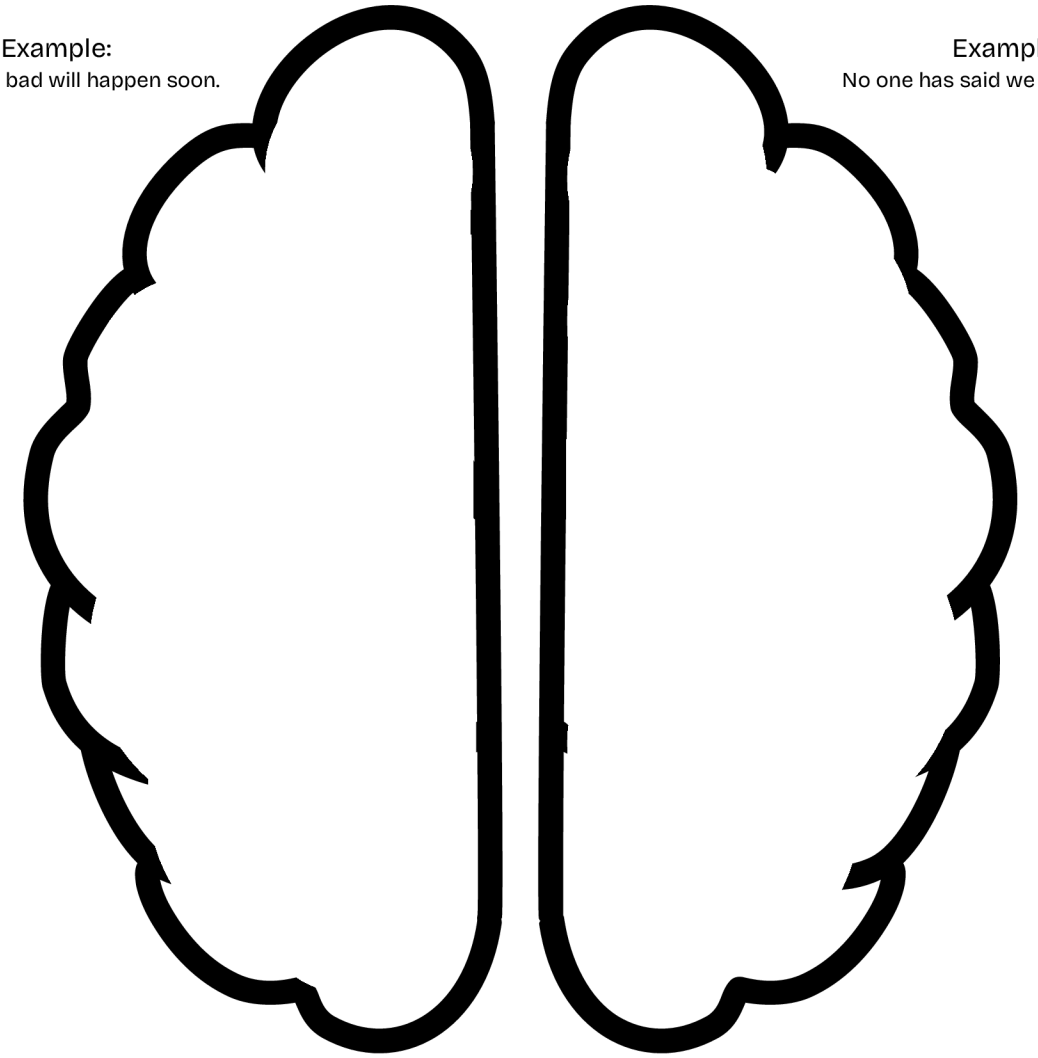
- What is your brain imaging might happen?
- What facts do we actually have?

My Brain’s Story

Example:
Something bad will happen soon.

What’s Actually True

Example:
No one has said we are in danger.



Which side helps your body feel calmer?

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Understanding “Uncertain”

Ages 13+

Activity: Control, Influence, Accept
Goal: Reduce helplessness and increase agency.

Uncertain means some things are not fully known. When that happens, it helps to sort what is in our control and what is not.

Step 1: Get Organized
Fill in the columns with examples of each:

Control	Influence	Accept
• *My effort at school*	• *How I treat my friends*	• *Global events*

Reflection Prompts:

- What feels hardest to accept right now?
- What is one thing you can control today?
- What helps you feel steady when things feel unclear?

Ways to feel more anchored:

- Daily exercise
- Time with friends
- Prayer/meditation
- Creative outlet
- Routines