



# WAYS TO TALK TO CHILDREN

## Addressing and Discussing War

Tips to Promote Child Well-Being and Resilience

### Overwhelmed by News

Within the world at the moment, we are bombarded by news and media coverage of conflict and war. This is anxiety provoking for most adults – and it's raising questions and concerns for children too. The concept of war is overwhelming to wrap ones' head around, and can therefore feel impossible to explain to younger children. We've put together some information to assist in navigating that conversation.

### Common Signs of Distress in Children

Separation anxiety; regressed behaviors; changes in sleeping/eating habits; irritability; angry outbursts/tantrums; defiant behaviors; increased risk-taking; increased hyperactivity/restlessness; aggressive behaviors; expressed worries/fears; feelings of hopelessness/helplessness; overly emotional (more than usual); poor memory/concentration; withdrawn behaviors; physical symptoms; talking about the events; repetitive play; guilt/shame/blame; grief

### Try to Avoid these Responses:

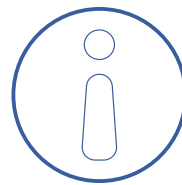
- **Becoming distressed** in response to the child's questions or confusion.
- **Blaming or shaming** the child for natural curiosity.
- **Minimizing** the child's feelings, for example, by telling him/her that she is over-reacting or imagining things.
- Being **punitive** and pointing out behaviors/responses as punishment, for example "that will happen if you don't listen".

### Ways to Support the Child

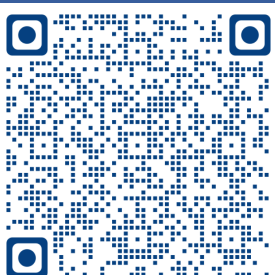
- **Emotional check-ins**
  - Identify and name feelings
  - Validate and reflect emotions
- **Express feelings** – verbally or through tactile means such as art mediums
- **Connect** – being present and connected to your child through conversation, physical touch, or collaboratively engaging in an activity aids in more effective regulation.
  - Regulation activities
  - Belly breathing
  - Safe space - create these through play and art
- **Mindfulness** activities
- Integrate **grounding techniques** into daily routine
- Share in **self-care** activities
- Strengthen and collaborate with **support systems** in different environments
- **Model** ways to express emotions and overcome challenges
- **Collaborate** on problem-solving
- Seek **professional support**



# Helpful Responses



- Don't **avoid or shut down** attempts to talk or ask questions
  - It feels safer to do so, but if they're asking questions, they're going to continue to seek that information until they find an answer. Rather provide that information in a way that helps them understand within the age-appropriate framework, and eases their concerns and anxieties.
- **Be secure in your stance** and the facts that you're able to share
  - Reinforce that people sometimes think differently about certain topics. But that in your family, this is your understanding of it and that if other people bring up new information, your child is able to bring it to you and talk about it.
- Be aware of your **facial expressions and body language**
- Notice your **tone**
- Start the conversation when in a **safe/calm space**. Important information such as this should be discussed when both parent/caregiver and child are feeling safe and regulated. Discussing it otherwise may become triggering, and the information could be lost entirely if the child's brain is not in a state to learn and remember.
- **Ask questions** to establish what the child already knows. This is a great way to determine what the child may have been hearing that has caused worry or concern.
- **Avoid discussing** anxiety-provoking topics before bedtime
- **Listen** to concerns without exacerbating them
- Allow child to share his/her **own opinions**. Openly discuss them as this helps show the child ways to speak about different topics and respect different opinions.
- **Check in** and monitor child's distress.
- Continue to **provide reassurance** – verbal and nonverbal.
- **Validate and normalize feelings**
  - "It can be confusing/complicated/scary to hear about these sorts of things". Attempting to contradict a child's feeling may create a situation where they don't feel safe, understand their emotional response or trust the information you are providing them.
- **Avoid harmful stereotypes** and labels
- Find **hope** and encourage compassion
- Find the **helpers** to focus attention on.
  - In crisis situations, there are always people offering support and finding ways to help. Looking at helpers in those moments, can assist the child in understanding that not all hope is lost. For example, understanding the role of emergency services or the Red Cross can help children understand that there are people available to assist in times of need.
- Find **lessons** and imagine solutions
- Identify practical **ways to help**
  - Helping a child find a small and practical way to help, may ease some worries and provide a solution that is manageable for them. Write or draw letters of love and support to victims, send encouragement to those who are helping, or find small ways for the child to raise money that can be donated to relief efforts, such as lemonade stands or bake sales.
- **Limit exposure** of conflict – keep news watching and discussion to a minimum in front of the child if not age-appropriate.
- **Maintain routine** and consistency – this helps to ease anxiety or worries as it provides "normality" and is predictable and reliable.
- **Monitor your own emotional state** and maintain wellbeing – children **FEEL** our emotions, whether we're aware of it or not, so ensure you are engaging in your own stress management and self-care



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