

Talking to Children about War

All adults are responsible for helping children understand and make sense of traumatic world events. The recent attack on Ukraine is evoking a range of reactions including sadness, shock, fear, and confusion. During times of crisis, it is essential that adults listen to children's concerns, provide realistic reassurance, and model healthy coping.

Below are key strategies, followed by additional resources.



Strategies:

- Allow time for children to ask questions. It is also okay to ask what they know about the war and what they have heard.
- Explain what is going on with words and concepts children can understand. Don't overload children with too much information. Correct misperceptions.
- Encourage children to find ways to express themselves. Some children are unable to talk about their thoughts, feelings, or fears. Drawing pictures, playing with toys, or writing stories or poems may be helpful.
- Children often know more about events than adults think. It is essential to provide honest answers and information. If adults are less than honest, children know.
- Limit TV and social media exposure. Repetitive frightening images can be very disturbing.
- Identify ways children can help. Writing letters, making cards or raising money for those impacted gives children a sense of control and allows them to participate in a meaningful activity.
- Monitor children's behaviors and reactions. Those who have experienced prior trauma or losses may have more intense reactions. Other signs that a child may need professional help include: trouble sleeping, persistent upsetting thoughts, fearful images, intense fears about death, and trouble leaving their parents or going to school. The school counselor or pediatrician physician can provide referrals.



Resources:

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network - www.nctsn.org (NEW)

Offers information for caregivers on how to talk to children about war. This fact sheet includes the potential impact and considerations when talking to children about war, how to start the conversation, understanding media coverage, and how to foster resilience.



The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry - www.aacap.org

In today's world, parents are faced with the challenge of explaining violence, terrorism, and war to children. Although difficult, these conversations are extremely important. They give parents an opportunity to help their children feel more secure and understand the world in which they live. The following information can be helpful to parents when discussing these issues.

Common Sense Media - www.commonsensemedia.org

Dramatic, disturbing news events can leave parents speechless. These age-based tips on how to talk to kids about the news -- and listen, too -- can help.

Archdiocese of NY Drug Abuse Prevention Program - www.adapp.org

LISTEN, PROTECT, CONNECT— MODEL & TEACH the steps of PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID for your students after a disaster, school crisis, or emergency. These steps can help them bounce back more quickly.

American Psychological Association - www.apa.org

Resilience in a time of war: Tips for parents and teachers of elementary school children. Events are uncertain for children. Their friends' parents, or perhaps their own parents, may be called away to serve in the military. They look to teachers as well as to parents to make them feel safe in a time of war.