



Talking with Children about War and Conflict

Be honest with children and keep explanations simple.
Encourage children to ask questions and follow their lead.

INITIAL DISCUSSIONS

- » ***It is always best for children to learn about things from their trusted adults when possible.*** Think about what a child might be observing or hearing in their environment.



For directly impacted children, it might be disruption to their daily routine, concerns from caregivers, increased security, or witnessed events. For children more distant from the location or impacted community, they may have heard or learned about things at school, from a friend, or in the news.

- » ***Ask open-ended questions*** to assess how much they already know and limit news and social media as much as possible.

- “Have you heard or seen anything about _____?”
- “Are you familiar with _____?”
- “Is anyone talking about _____?”

- » ***Build upon what they already know*** and understand by either clarifying information or starting conversations if it’s new to them. Focus less on the content and more on the connection by creating safe spaces to talk, process, and play at their own pace. Children are looking to you to know that it’s okay to discuss.



- “I have something important/serious to discuss with you.”
- “I want you to know that you can get information directly from me.”

ONGOING SUPPORT

- » ***Remember that this is not a one and done conversation.*** Children benefit from small amounts of information at a time and then may need breaks to process.



- “It’s okay if you’re ready to play now. I just want you to know that we can talk about any time you want to.”
- “There are some things we can’t control right now. Let’s discuss how we can help you feel safe and supported in this difficult time.”



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ONGOING SUPPORT CONTINUED



» **Children may come back with questions** and you can reassure them that you will keep them updated and informed if anything changes. It's also okay to not know all of the answers. Reassure the child that you are learning too, and you will figure it out together.

- “I want you to know you can ask me any questions you have, and I am here to listen and support you.”
- “I don't know the answer to that. Let's find out together.”

» **Model and practice feelings and coping.** Acknowledge that they may see you or other adults feeling sad. Reassure the child that it is not because of anything they did, then share with them a way that helps you cope when you feel sad.

- “You might notice that adults are concerned about what's happening. It's normal to have different feelings about it.”
- “Sometimes when I feel sad I take a deep breath or hug someone I love.”



Helping Kids Process their Associated Feelings

All feelings are okay. It's important for children of all ages to have hands-on tools to express their range of emotions.

PLAY IT OUT

The most natural form of giving control to a young child is by facilitating and engaging in play. Having a safe space to act out, express and recreate moments is how children learn to understand their world and process difficult experiences.



When hands on tools or toys are not accessible, children can benefit from movement and imaginative play.

Create intentional invitations for play that provide choices such as:

- **Puzzles**- making sense out of chaos, putting pieces back together
- **Blocks**- building, destroying, rebuilding
- **Blank Paper**- free expression through written word or art
- **Emergency / Construction Toys & Dress-Up**- reenactment & rescue
- **Dolls / Puppets**- reenactment & rescue
- **Books**- choice of normalizing, emotional expression, or learning
- **Cards, Play-Doh, Rice/Sand**- sensory & comfort in connection



These play items can be provided without the associated explanation. Trust the child will use the play opportunities in the ways that are most beneficial to them at that moment. Sometimes children will want to reenact scenes they have seen on TV or experienced over and over again. Other times, children will need a break to play something unrelated. Both are okay.



For teens, consider creative or physical outlets as well as connection to their peers. Some may benefit from movement such as sports, games, or exercise. Others may benefit from journaling, listening to music, theater, or dance.