

Helping Children During Times of International Conflict

Dealing with Unsettling Times

Information condensed from National Association of School Psychologists releases.

The military conflict involving United States troops may be unsettling to both children and adults. Children may be confused or frightened by the news and will look to adults for information and guidance on how to react. Adults can help children cope first and foremost by establishing a sense of safety and security. Here are additional tips for parents and other adults that may be helpful.

1. **Model calm and control.** Children take their emotional cues from the significant adults in their lives. Avoid appearing anxious or frightened.
2. **Reassure children that they are safe** and so are the other important adults in their lives.
3. **Let children know that it is okay to be concerned.** Let children talk about their feelings and help put them into perspective. Be honest with them when they ask questions while not giving young children more information than necessary.
4. **Observe children's emotional state.** Depending on their age, children may not express their concerns verbally. Changes in behavior, appetite, and sleep patterns can also indicate a child's level of anxiety or discomfort. Children will express their emotions differently.
5. **Keep your explanations developmentally appropriate.** **Early elementary school children** need brief, simple information that should be balanced with reassurances that the daily structures of their lives will not change. **Upper elementary and early middle school** children will be more vocal in asking questions but will also need reassurance and structure. They may need assistance separating reality from fantasy. **Upper middle school and high school** students will have strong and varying opinions while at the same time looking to their parents for guidance and reassurance. **For all children, encourage them to verbalize their thoughts and feelings. Be a good listener!**

What Parents Can Do

1. **Make time to talk with your children.**
2. **Limit the amount of your child's television viewing of coverage of these events.** If they must watch, watch with them for a brief time; then turn the set off.
3. **Maintain a "normal" routine.** Stick to your family's normal routine for dinner, homework, chores, bedtime, etc.
4. **Spend extra time reading or playing quiet games with your children before bed.** These activities are calming, foster a sense of closeness and security, and reinforce a sense of normalcy. Spend more time tucking them in. Let them sleep with a light on if they ask for it.
5. **Safeguard your children's physical health.** Stress can take a physical toll on children as well as adults. Make sure your children get appropriate sleep, exercise and nutrition.
6. **Consider thinking hopeful thoughts or praying for the people directly involved in the conflict and their families.** It may be a good time to take your children to a place of worship, write a poem, or draw a picture to help your child express their feelings.
7. **Find out what resources your school has in place to help children cope.** Schools are a good place for children to regain a sense of normalcy and routine. Being with their friends and teachers can help. Schools also have a plan for making counseling available to children and adults who need it.