

DIGITAL SAFEGUARDING DAILY

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Talking to your Child about War and Conflict

Helping Children and Young People Make Sense of Distressing News

We live in a time of constant news streams and updates. It's hard not to be filled with uncertainty and heartache every time you switch on the television or look at your phone. It can be difficult to process news about wars or conflict in the world. However, it is especially concerning for children and young people.

To help you guide those in your care through this uncertain time, our online safety experts have created this support for parents, carers, teachers, and safeguarding professionals.



How children react to distressing world events

While news can be upsetting and worrying for everyone, it is not the first disruptive event to affect the children and young people in your care. In their lifetime, they have already spent over two years adapting to a pandemic, endured lockdowns and being isolated from their friends and family. They may even have lost loved ones during this time. If someone in your care is struggling, they might be:

- **Fixated**, spending more time on phones or tablets to stay 'up to date'.
- **Anxious**, especially about future plans or dreams.
- **Irritable**, over-reacting to minor inconveniences or issues.
- **Withdrawn**, not engaging with their friends, school, or extracurriculars.
- **Distracted**, with disruptions to regular eating, sleeping, or personal hygiene habits.
- **Obsessive**, thinking over every circumstance and talking about possible outcomes.

Why is it important to talk about what's happening?

Children and young people are naturally curious. They want to know about what is going on in the world as much as they want to know the latest TikTok trend. Even if you try to limit the content they consume, they will inevitably hear about big world events from various outlets, such as television, social media, friends, family,

and school environments. They might even overhear something from one of your conversations! If it's what everyone is talking about, their interest in the topic increases.

It's difficult to know what content the young person in your care is viewing. If you don't acknowledge

questions or concerns they may have, they could 'fill in the gaps' with the wrong information. This might cause further anxiety, ignorance, or worrisome behaviour. Educating those in your care *yourself* assures they know how to process news reports on their own with critical thinking and media literacy skills.

Top Tips for how to talk to children and young people about war and conflict

Acknowledgement - Don't deny what is happening or negate their worries by telling them it will 'all blow over soon'. Instead, tell them their concern is completely understandable and that you want to discuss it with them.

Honesty - It's important that you refrain from lying in your responses or ignoring any questions or thoughts your child has. It's okay if you don't know the answer. This allows you to open up a discussion with your child. You could even suggest seeking the answer together!

Sources - Discuss trustworthy news sources and how difficult it is to confirm things during times of conflict.

Validation - It is likely these emotions are complex and confusing for them. Remind them that, in this situation, feelings like this are normal.

Listen - No matter how worried or anxious you are, they will look to you for reassurance.

Set your feelings aside and give the young person in your care the attention and space they need to feel heard.

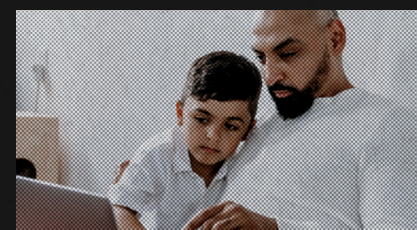
Limits - If they feel they are unable to look away from the news, suggest they switch it off.

If this isn't realistic, advise them to only check news sources 1-2 times per day.

Gratitude - Discuss gratitude around the dinner table or during morning drives to school. If a young person in your care seems to struggle with guilt, remind them that they have nothing to feel guilty about - just things to be thankful for! Suggest researching places that are taking in donations to bring to refugees or other ways to help the crisis in a local capacity.

Support - Your reactions to their reactions are key to helping those in your care feel protected and loved.

Tell your child you love them. Give them hugs or hold their hand. Allow them space when they need it, but remind them that you are here for them.



Every child is different.

Their ability to process information will depend on their age, character, and resilience. As their guardian, you will know them best, but assessing their abilities can help you choose the level of information you share with them.

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