

TALKING TO KIDS ABOUT DIFFICULT TOPICS

CHILDREN SPEAKING WITH TRUSTED ADULTS

- Ask open-ended questions to children about what they've heard. By learning what a child knows or thinks they know, you can then continue the conversation at their level of understanding.
- Speaking with a trusted adult can ease the anxiety that children may get from hearing things on the news or from their peers.

AGE APPROPRIATE CONVERSATIONS

• VERY YOUNG CHILDREN

- Reassure them that they will be kept safe and that the adults in their life are working to keep them safe.
- Protect them from hearing too much of what they will not understand.
- Continue routines. Young children especially need the structure that adds to security, but adults also benefit from reliable routine, so continue routines such as regular meals, baths, bedtime stories, and visits to relatives.
- If children have witnessed violence directly or in the media, or have loved ones whom they know to be in danger, be alert to increased separation anxiety, tearfulness or defiance, sleep or toileting problems.
- Provide toys and art materials to allow children non-verbal expression.

• SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN – Children this age often will have heard more about what is going on in the news.

- Help them feel as secure as possible. Because they grasp more facts, adults may forget they are still children.

- Answer questions and be honest, but try to be optimistic about the possibility of the situation improving and the ultimate resolution of problems.
- Stress that it is not the fault of children that wars happen or hateful words are spoken.
- Do not be alarmed if they speak of ways they would prevent terrorism or antisemitism by using super powers or violence to keep themselves or others safe; imagining these solutions may help them feel powerful and less helpless. Avoid telling them, “That would never work, children can’t solve such problems,” which may increase their anxiety and belligerence.
- Offer them realistic ways to help, if they seem so inclined, such as sending gifts, drawings, or letters to soldiers and helping to raise money for relief efforts. Most of all, children want most to forget about adult concerns and get on with the business of school and play, so help them to return their focus to the day-to-day life of school, family, hobbies, and activities.

TEACH CALMING TECHNIQUES

- There are many techniques kids can learn to manage difficult emotions. Most importantly, adults can model how they manage their own emotions and describe their feelings for children to watch and learn from.
- Validation is a powerful tool for helping kids calm down; validation is showing acceptance, but not the same as agreement. Allow kids to feel what they are feeling without judgment or trying to ‘fix’ negative emotions. It’s okay to reflect with children and ask if you are ‘getting it right’ in regards to understanding how they’re feeling.
- Practice deep breathing with children and other mindfulness exercises.

LIMITING ACCESS TO MEDIA

- Even if children may seem too young to truly understand what they hear on the news, they may pick up more information than we think. Limit children’s exposure to news and social media, especially around the topic of Israel.

- Continuous exposure to media may also cause adults and caretakers to feel overwhelmed and anxious; children may pick up on the shift in adults' emotions and internalize them. Be aware of the media that you consume and offer yourself breaks.