

How to Speak to Children During Troubling Times

In difficult times like this, children have many questions. They are bombarded by news, social media, reactions from their peers, caregivers and other adults surrounding them.

When speaking to your child, please remember:

- **Age is just a number.** Please consider the sensitivity, vulnerability, developmental stage of the child, and their proximity to the events.
- **Consider your own reactions and disposition when conversing with children.** It is ok to show emotion or no emotion at all. We, as human beings, mourn and process things differently. Remember not to compare one child to another child. Validate, listen intently and without judgment. Your child should feel safe to come to you with things they hear at school and on social media.
- **Children of all ages may have questions, concerns, or uncertainty about the facts of the situation, and the things they are hearing or seeing.** Ask open-ended questions about what your child has heard. Provide information consistent with the developmental level of your child.
- **Social media is everywhere.** It is important to shield our children as much as we can from distressing news or graphic images. Encourage your child to tell you what they have been exposed to. Promise them that no matter what they've seen/heard, they can always come to you.
- **Children require routine and structure.** Predictability can offer a sense of stability and safety during uncertain times. Make sure that, as much as you can, you continue to create a sense of normalcy for your child.
- **Be available for your children when they ask for help.** Listen and validate their concerns without judgment. Offer hugs and reassurance. If a child experiences severe emotional distress, seek out professional help.
- **Make sure teachers and your child's school are aware of your child's needs.** This ensures school personnel may support and ensure your child's emotional and educational needs are being addressed.

School-Aged Children:

- **Children can feel and hear things going on around them.** We as parents may think they are not listening, but they are sponges absorbing information.
- **School-aged children require various forms of support to help them cope with challenged and traumas associated with conflict and war.** They may require more physical attention such as hugs and kisses. They may not have the verbalization or skill to ask for that "special time" with you, so make sure to carve out quality time with them where they can feel the affection and love that they so desperately need.
- **School-aged children may demonstrate regressive behaviors.** This is ok. There will be a time and a place to address the situation. Give them the support they need in the moment.
- **School-aged children may respond in various ways from being "a good child" to suddenly starting to act out.** They may have trouble in school or at home. Please remember that behavior is a form of communication. You can set a boundary while exploring with the child how you can support them.

- **School aged children may be curious about things that are seen and talked about on social media.** It may not be sufficient to say “this is not for kids your age”. If you do not make time to explain and validate their feelings and questions, they may seek it out on their own. This is not recommended as there is no filter to what they can see.
- **A sense of faith and community is a great way to approach the situation.** Giving them a mitzvah to accomplish will help them feel like they are contributing to the greater good. Saying the Shema, giving Tzedakah, packing items that will be sent to Israel, writing letters to soldiers are all examples of mitzvot they can do to feel like part of a mission.

Adolescents:

- **Children this age are bridging the gap between childhood and adulthood.** They are forming their own identity, their own opinions, values, beliefs and goals. They are now expected by family, peers and friends to formulate an opinion on the current situation. Reassure them that they have time to process and that they can ALWAYS come to you with questions. You may not have the answer, but you will help them find the best source of information.
- **Adolescents have access to all types of social media and they often do not have the capacity to set boundaries for themselves as to what is appropriate or what is not appropriate to watch.** Have a conversation with them about the type of media that is out there. Let them know that it is ok to unfriend or unfollow someone that does not align with them without necessarily getting into a confrontational argument with them. Let them know that taking breaks from social media is important and model appropriate behavior for them as it relates to social media.
- **Existentialism plays a huge role in adolescence.** They are now able to see themselves and their existence as their own free will. They may reject your beliefs and ideology simply because they are yours. They may reject your beliefs and ideology simply because their friends do. Do not push. Do not argue. You can have conversations in which you let them explain their beliefs while you explain yours.
- **Unfortunately, these times may bring heightened risk for hate and prejudice towards your adolescents, simply because they are Jewish.** Support your teen through this and take necessary actions to hold the school and staff accountable.
- **Safety concerns and questions may arise.** How could something like this happen? What if it happens here in America? Reassure them that you are doing everything in your power to prioritize their safety and the safety of the family. Allow them to explore with you the new protocols you have put in place to keep your family safe.

Adults:

- **Remember that you also were once a child, and that child within you has a unique response to trauma.** Give yourself time to process, mourn, grieve. The family we have all lost in Israel, our Jewish brothers and sisters, is an atrocity. Whether you have lost someone, know someone who has lost someone, know someone in Israel, or are fearful of the situation, etc., your experience is important. Give yourself space for that.

If you or anyone you know needs help or support, please do not hesitate to call 211 or ACCESS services at 305-576-6550. We will be providing support groups as well as individual sessions, free of charge.