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**National Mental Health Information Center***Center for Mental Health Services*[Home](#)[Programs](#)[Mental Health Topics](#)[Newsroom](#)[Publications](#)[Resources](#)[SEARCH](#)[IN THIS SECTION](#)

- Hurricane Katrina and Disaster Relief Information
- Tips for Talking About Traumatic Events
- Managing Anxiety
- SAMHSA DTAC
- Related Links
- Resources
- Mental Health Services Locator
- Featured Publications
- In the News
- Emergency Mental Health
- Coping With Traumatic Events Homepage

CMHS Programs:

CMHS Activities:

[PAGE OPTIONS](#)

- printer friendly page
- e-mail this page
- bookmark this page
- shopping cart
- current or new account

## Coping With Traumatic Events

### Tips for Supporting children during Times of War: A Guide for Teachers

#### About Talking to your Children

**Suggestions:** [Be a Role Model](#); [Connect with Children](#); [Foster Open Communication](#); [Enforce the Same Rules](#); [Help Children Understand](#); [Reinforce Ideas of Safety and Security](#); [Foster Resilience](#); [Be Alert to Special Needs](#); [Open Lines of Communication with Parents and Caregivers](#)

#### For Additional Help

#### About Helping Children

Once again, teachers are faced with the challenge of explaining war to children. Regardless of personal circumstances, all children are likely to be affected in some way during this difficult time. The guidance you provide, as a teacher, can make the difference between whether a child is completely overwhelmed or is able to develop emotional and psychological coping skills.

[Back to top](#)

#### Suggestions

For most children, teachers can provide adequate support with the following suggestions:

##### Be a Role Model

- Set an example of calm and in-control behavior. The more in control adults appear to be, the more confident children will be that things will ultimately turn out all right.
- Keep in mind that children learn from watching the adults in their lives, and that includes teachers. They will take their lead from watching your behavior and mood.
- Monitor the tone and content of your conversations with other adults when children are present.
- Take time for yourself, too, and try to deal with your own reactions to the situation as fully as possible.

[Back to top](#)

#### Connect with Children

- Pay attention to children's fears. Children can feel embarrassed or criticized when their fears are minimized.
- Respect a child's wish not to talk until ready.
- Help children to put the events of war in perspective. Explain that war is intended to prevent bad things from happening in the future.
- Look for ways to inject humor into classroom discussions and activities.

[Back to top](#)

### **Foster Open Communication**

- Reassure children that there is no "right" or "wrong" reaction to war. Give children an opportunity to express their thoughts and concerns in many ways.
- Help children separate real from imagined fears.
- Any time that a child is motivated enough to ask a question, use it as an opportunity for a teachable moment.
- Speak to children in terms they can easily understand.
- Be prepared to answer your students' questions factually, and take time to think about how you want to frame events and your reactions to them.
- Talk with children about their art or written images and how they feel.
- As war efforts continue, have ongoing discussions to address children's changing worries and concerns.

[Back to top](#)

### **Enforce the Same Rules**

- Expect and respond to changes in behavior. All children are likely to display some signs of stress. Immature, aggressive, oppositional behaviors are normal reactions to uncertain situations like war.
- Maintain consistent academic and behavioral expectations. Be sure children understand that the same rules apply, but be realistic about an individual child's coping skills.

[Back to top](#)

### **Help Children Understand**

- Help children interpret what has happened and make sense of what they see and hear.
- Dispel rumors and correct misinformation.
- Explain that this is a war against the current Iraqi government and the dangers it represents. Acknowledge and validate children's compassion for the Iraqi people.
- Use war as an opportunity to discuss issues of prejudice, stereotyping, and aggression. Stop children from stereotyping people from specific religions, cultures, or ethnic backgrounds.
- Use discussions of war to teach about non-violent ways to handle situations. For instance, teach children how to share and take turns.
- Help children understand that individuals can disagree with a particular war effort but still believe it is important to defend a country.

[Back to top](#)

### **Reinforce Ideas of Safety and Security**

- Reassure children that school is a safe place and that responsible grownups are there to protect them.
- Teach a sense of optimism. Remind children that our Nation has survived other difficult times, and help them to stay optimistic about the future.

[Back to top](#)

### **Foster Resilience**

- Help children explore positive ways of coping with their fears and anxieties. For example, help children maintain a sense of control by organizing activities that support military families and their communities, like writing letters of support or sending care packages.
- Involve children in creating a school disaster plan to follow in the event of an

emergency.

[Back to top](#)

### **Be Alert to Special Needs**

- Spend extra time with certain children, if necessary. Pay special attention to children who may feel isolated.
- Pay special attention to children who have parents involved in the military to help them cope with their feelings of separation and fear of loss.
- Watch children for signs of stress or anxiety.
- Be alert to signals of stress, and be prepared to alert the student's parents or caregivers to your concerns.

[Back to top](#)

### **Open Lines of Communication with Parents and Caregivers**

- Coordinate information between school and home. Inform parents about school activities being planned.
- Share information with parents about social studies and history lessons and other relevant classroom discussions.
- Invite parents with relevant professional experience to come to school to talk about their jobs and how their skills contribute to the war effort or safety at home.
- If a child is showing signs of stress in school, provide parents with helpful suggestions or information about community resources.

[Back to top](#)

### **For Additional Help**

If any of your students seems to need help beyond what is normally available at your school, alert the child's parents or caregivers about your concerns. By creating an environment of open communication in which children feel free to come to you for help, you can help them cope and reduce the risk of lasting emotional difficulties.

[Back to top](#)