

A War in Iraq: Tackling Tough Issues with Kids

by Robin F. Goodman, Ph.D., A.T.R.-BC, and Anita Gurian, Ph.D.

Kids ask a lot of tough questions but questions about war are some of the hardest to answer. When kids ask questions keep in mind the child's age, personality, how they deal with fear and worry, and how interested they are. Discussions do not happen all at once, parents should look for opportunities as they come up. Above all, be careful of your own reactions. Maintain a calm attitude so your child feels safe.

How do I explain that the US might go to war in Iraq?

First, find out what the children saw, read, or heard, and then encourage them to ask questions. It's best to be honest. Tell the truth and answer the questions directly. Provide an answer that includes something like "What we know so far is that the leader in Iraq is able to harm people in our country and in other countries. Our president is trying to take steps that will prevent us from being hurt. The goal is prevent anyone from being hurt."

How do kids react to news about war?

A child's age partly determines his/her reaction. Preschool children confuse facts with their fantasies and fear of danger. They do not yet have the ability to block out troubling thoughts. They may see something on TV over and over again and think that the act is actually happening over and over.

School age children can understand the difference between fantasy

and reality but may have trouble keeping them separate during times of stress. They may also believe rumors.

Middle school and high school age children may be interested and intrigued by the politics of a situation. They are concerned about concepts of ethics and justice and may show a desire to be involved in related activities.

What are kids most worried about?

Children relate the news to events or issues in their own lives. It



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is important not to minimize or ignore a child's worries.

Young children are usually concerned about separation from parents, about good and bad, and about fears of punishment. They may bring up issues related to their own good and bad behavior, believing it to be related to events

Middle school children are concerned with peer relationships and are developing a more mature outlook. It is likely that they will be concerned about issues of fairness and punishment.

Teens consider larger issues related to ethics, politics, and even the possibility that they may be called into service. Teenagers, like adults, may become reflective about life and re-examine their own priorities and interests.

What do I say when children ask if they can fight to solve problems?

Explain that fighting is never the first thing to do when there are disagreements and problems. The US will go to war if the leaders of the country believe that people's lives are at stake and want to do everything possible to prevent people in the US from being killed.

How can I reassure my child?

Not being able to provide children with a guarantee that things will be fine is difficult. But parents can reassure children with facts about how people are protected. Parents can teach safety procedures and read related "help" books.

How can I help my children deal with their worry and concern?

Reinforce their feelings of safety and protection by talking about active things they can do. They can write letters to leaders. Objections to war can be voiced without being unpatriotic. Help them feel in control by maintaining routines. Children can also feel useful by contributing to community organizations and volunteering. Adolescents can be
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High school seniors wait in anticipation of April 15, when final college admission announcements are made. Here are tips to help you and your teen get through this rite of passage.

For teens it seems like the most important event of their lives. Remember that acceptance or rejection is not a measure of the child's worth nor does it guarantee success or failure in life.

Be prepared

Keep realistic expectations in mind. All schools have something to offer.

Don't confuse your ambitions or past disappointments with those of your child. Although teens can profit from parental advice teens must experience things for themselves.

There is no such thing as a perfect college. There is such a thing as a good enough match to make the college experience an enriching and enjoyable one.

Have a plan for what will happen based on the outcome of the decisions. Know ahead of time what college is first choice, which is second, and list the pros and cons of each different place.

Decision Day

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Once you get the news

To open or not to open. Talk to your child about how the mail delivery issue is to be handled: letters read over the phone vs. saving the mail for the teen to open.

Recognize that the move to college represents a new phase in life for both parent and child. College signifies a move towards independence and adulthood.

Monitor your own attitudes. Realize that you and your child's reactions may be related to a host of other feelings and issues: fears and desires about moving on. Even if the teen remains living at home during the college years, the roles of parent and child no doubt will shift as teens take on new responsibilities.

For the child with multiple choices this is a time to consider advantages and disadvantages of each college.

Take time. Regardless of the decisions, plans become clearer over the course of the next weeks and feelings of either joy or sadness become less intense. It takes time to adjust to whatever decision you make as a family.

Breathe a sigh of relief. No matter what, at least the decision is made! Now everyone can move forward. □



Edible Peanut Butter Playdough

1/2 cup peanut butter
1/2 cup honey
1 cup powdered milk

Knead until smooth.

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encouraged to join school, religious and community groups where issues are discussed in a safe environment.

Should I let my child watch television?

We know that watching media coverage can create stress in children. Young children may think the event is happening over and over again. Older children may become more fearful. Parents should not let very young children watch; for older children viewing should be limited.

Summer is right around the corner.

Find a comprehensive list of NC summer camps and wilderness programs at:

<http://camppage.com/ncarolin.htm>



Parents themselves should be careful of their own increased stress with viewing.

How do I know if my child is having trouble?

It is not always possible to judge if/when children are scared about the news. They may be reluctant to talk about their fears. Parents can look for clues as to how their child is reacting. Playing games related to war is normal, and it may increase in response to current events. Some children are naturally more fearful, and news of a dangerous situation may make them feel scared. At the other extreme, some children ignore the violence and suffering they see in the news. They can get overloaded and become numb due to the repetitive nature of the reports. Parents should get further help if they see such things as:

- a significant change in normal behavior
- sad, withdrawn, or depressed behavior

- excessive or uncontrollable worry
- a regression to earlier behavior such as bedwetting or baby talk
- acting-out behavior such as aggression in younger, and inappropriate behavior in older, children
- avoidance of school and social contacts
- avoidance of anything that reminds them of the war
- frequent unusual, or unexplained physical complaints

The bottom line is kids, especially elementary-school kids, look at the adults around them to see how they're coping. Parents need to be calm as much as possible. If you need to talk about your fears, do so with other adults, not your children.

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