Discussing
War & Conflict

1. **Create** a safe space for your child
2. **Educate** yourself to better understand
3. **Limit** exposure to traumatic content
4. **Focus** on positive humanitarian stories
5. **Encourage** expression through play
6. **Be present** to offer comfort
7. **Address** unanswerable questions
8. **Validate** your child's feelings
9. **Address** your child's safety concerns
10. **Navigate** uncertainty concerns
11. **Role model** practicing self-care
12. **Seek** professional help if required

In our globally connected world, children can often encounter distressing images and stories of war and conflict through the 24-hour news cycle and social media. These experiences can provoke anxiety and fear in young minds whose worldviews are still forming.

Overexposure to such distressing content can lead to symptoms similar to post-traumatic stress disorder. Parents and caregivers need to be mindful not to overexpose their children to these events as responses to such trauma can vary among children. Some will show strong emotional reactions, whilst others may seem indifferent or introverted.

Before initiating a conversation with your child, you should first assess your own emotions and comfort level discussing difficult topics. By staying calm and offering physical comfort, you can help your child regulate their own emotions. Children need to feel reassured of their safety as they navigate their way through uncertainty. Tailor conversations to be appropriate for their age and emotional maturity, to provide them with hope and understanding in an often complex world.

1

Create a safe space for your child

Allow your child to express their emotions, thoughts and specific concerns. Avoid pressuring them to talk about their feelings. Instead, reassure them that you are there when they need you.

Educate yourself to better understand

Understand who and what it is you need to talk about using age-appropriate language. When referring to those involved in the conflict, ensure to name the groups correctly to avoid confusion or misinformation.

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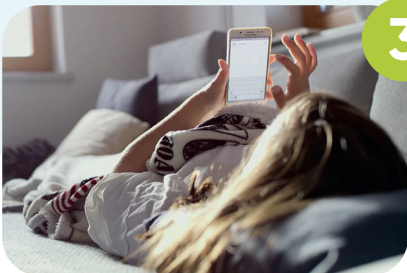
Limit exposure to traumatic content

Media coverage often underscores the fragility and unpredictability of life which can exacerbate emotions and foster anxiety in children. Be mindful of the content they may be exposed to via social media platforms either directly or inadvertently.

Focus on the positive stories

Discuss the humanitarian side and acts of kindness. Highlight stories of heroism, survival, kindness and compassion. This can help dilute the impact of what your child is seeing.

4

Encourage expression through play

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Play, drawing or writing often provides an outlet and valuable insight into a child's emotional state. It can assist parents to better understand their young person's worries, fears and underlying emotions.

Be present to offer comfort

6

Sometimes, children simply need someone to be there with them to provide comfort through touch, warmth and physical closeness. Your reassuring presence can be profoundly healing, offering a sense of safety and support.

Address unanswerable questions

7

Children may ask difficult, unanswerable questions like *"Why did this happen?"* Parents should acknowledge the complexity of such questions and admit when they don't have all the answers. It's essential to reassure children that most people are good and kind.

Validate your child's feelings

8

It's crucial for parents to let children know that whatever they're feeling is normal and natural. Acknowledging their sadness, anger, confusion, or even a lack of emotion can help them process what they are experiencing.

Address your child's safety concerns

Provide your child with reassurance that they are safe and supported. Acknowledge their fears and uncertainties to help them regain confidence in their safety.

Navigate uncertainty

Whilst we can't be absolutely certain about the future, we can be certain enough. Differentiating between global events and a child's daily life can help provide clarity. Emphasise the measures in place to protect them and keep them safe.

Role model practicing self-care

As adults, we can sometimes get drawn into the media coverage in an effort to understand what's happening. However, there's also a line that we need to draw for our own mental health, and show our children the importance of practicing self-care.

Seek professional help

Although most children recover well after traumatic events, some may require additional support. If a child's daily life is significantly disrupted, it may be beneficial to consult a medical professional.