



## **Talking With Children About War (Including Iran)** A Parent Handout

When children hear about war—whether through media, school, or adults—they often feel fear, confusion, or worry. Your role is not to explain everything, but to help them feel safe, heard, and supported. Children take emotional cues from adults, so your calm presence matters more than having perfect answers.

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### Start Here (For All Ages)

- Ask first: “What have you heard?”
- Listen for feelings: fear, confusion, curiosity
- Keep it simple and honest
- Reassure safety: especially if the conflict is far away
- Limit exposure to graphic news

Children don’t need all the details—just enough to feel oriented and safe.

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### What to Say by Developmental Stage

#### Ages 3–6 (Preschool / Early Childhood)

##### What they understand:

- Very concrete thinking
- Limited sense of geography or distance
- Easily frightened by images and tone

##### What they need most:

- Safety, reassurance, simple explanations

##### What to say:

- “There is fighting happening in another part of the world.”
- “You are safe. The grown-ups here are taking care of you.”
- “Sometimes people have big disagreements, but many people are working to help and keep others safe.”

##### Helpful strategies:

- Keep explanations very brief
  - Use play, drawing, or stories to help them express feelings
  - Turn off or limit news exposure
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#### Ages 7–10 (Elementary School)

##### What they understand:

- Beginning to grasp cause/effect
- May hear things from peers or school
- Can worry silently

##### What they need most:

- Clear facts + emotional reassurance

##### What to say:

- “There is a conflict between countries, including Iran, where leaders are making decisions that have led to fighting.”

- “It’s far from here, and you are safe.”
- “It’s okay to feel worried or confused.”

Helpful strategies:

- Ask: “What have you heard at school?”
- Correct misinformation gently
- Emphasize helpers:
  - o “There are doctors, aid workers, and leaders trying to stop the fighting.”

Focusing on helpers builds a sense of hope and control.

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Ages 11–13 (Preteens / Middle School)

What they understand:

- More complex thinking
- Interest in fairness, justice, and “who is right”
- Increased media exposure

What they need most:

- Context + emotional processing

What to say:

- “This is a complicated situation involving history, politics, and different perspectives.”
- “People may strongly disagree, but war has real human costs.”
- “Let’s look at reliable information together.”

Helpful strategies:

- Discuss media literacy:
    - o “Not everything online is accurate.”
  - Validate emotions:
    - o “It makes sense this feels upsetting.”
  - Avoid labeling groups as “bad” or “evil”—promote compassion
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Ages 14–18 (Teens)

What they understand:

- Abstract reasoning
- Exposure to social media, opinions, and graphic content
- Forming their own beliefs

What they need most:

- Open dialogue + critical thinking support

What to say:

- “What are your thoughts about what’s happening?”
- “Different sources may present this differently—how do you evaluate what’s reliable?”
- “It’s okay to feel angry, overwhelmed, or unsure.”

Helpful strategies:

- Encourage discussion, not lectures
- Talk about bias, misinformation, and emotional media
- Help them set boundaries with news or “doom-scrolling”

Short, ongoing conversations are more effective than one long talk.

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Signs a Child May Be Struggling

- Trouble sleeping
- Increased clinginess or irritability
- Avoiding school or activities
- Repetitive worries or questions

If you notice these, increase reassurance, reduce media exposure, and consider additional support.

### What Helps Most

- Reassurance: “You are safe.” “We are safe.”
- Routine: Keep normal schedules
- Connection: Extra time together
- Action:
  - o Drawing, writing, or helping others
  - o Small acts reduce helplessness

### What to Avoid

- Graphic details or images
  - Overexplaining beyond their developmental level
  - Dismissing feelings (“Don’t worry about it”)
  - Sharing your own overwhelming fears
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### Closing Message to Children

A simple, grounding statement for any age:

“There are hard things happening in the world, but you are safe, our family is safe, and we will get through things together”