As news comes in of the ongoing conflict in Israel, many Jews are challenged to reconcile conflicting thoughts and emotions. Strong and heartfelt as our commitment is to the security of Israel, we experience a sense of grief at the ongoing violence and over the loss of life. With reports of anti-Semitism, we may experience additional anxiety.

We want to offer some explanation to our children that will be both truthful and in some way reassuring. We want our children to be trusting and hopeful and to feel secure. We want them to believe that things can get better, and that their efforts and those of people around them can make a positive difference. We want them to be resilient - to be able to experience sadness and fear when appropriate but to be able to recover their joy and confidence. We want them to believe that people can and should resolve problems without violence. When we ourselves are feeling shaken and uncertain, we naturally find it difficult to choose our words.

There are no simple answers, but Jewish tradition teaches us to face difficult questions and difficult times by gathering together to develop responses that best reflect our values. It is in this spirit that we offer some suggestions, knowing that every parent, grandparent, teacher and friend will adapt these to create responses that are right for the children in their lives.

SPEND EXTRA TIME WITH CHILDREN & LIMIT ACCESS TO MEDIA

Speaking with a trusted adult who can listen and provide age-appropriate responses is far better than hearing from peers or news reporters. It's also vital that adults take care of themselves by avoiding repeatedly listening to and viewing the details of upsetting, terrifying events. Such continuous exposure to media, which may cause feelings of overwhelmedness and trauma, is not good for adults for their own sake, and also because anxiety is conveyed to children. Those living in the midst of the situation *(i.e. in Israel)* may not be able avoid awareness but can still seek to distract themselves and their children by engaging in ordinary life to the degree possible.

ALLOW CHILDREN TO TELL YOU WHAT THEY HAVE HEARD, TO ASK QUESTIONS, & TO EXPRESS THEIR FEELINGS

Don't provide more information than requested, and avoid gory details unless they bring them up. Even when children do mention such things, the conversation can be gently steered to a less frightening place by acknowledging that these things are true, frightening, and disturbing, and - if it is the case - taking place far away from home. If you hear distortions, provide corrected information. If you sense a child has heard something but is not speaking about it, gently ask whether something is worrying him, or provide her the opportunity to draw or show concerns in other ways.

TEACH CALMING METHODS

Deep breathing, singing, and movement can be adapted for people of all ages and are highly effective at helping to manage stress and fear. Seek online or community resources to find approaches that are right for your child.

BE AWARE OF HOW CHILDREN OF DIFFERENT AGES MAY RESPOND TO THE SITUATION, & FIND CONSTRUCTIVE WAYS TO HELP THEM

The youngest children simply need to have the conflict acknowledged, if they already heard of it.

- Reassure them that they will be kept safe & that the adults in their life are working to keep them safe.
- Protect them from hearing too much of what they will not understand.
- Young children especially need the structure that adds to security, but adults also benefit from reliable routine, so continue routines such as regular meals, baths, bedtime stories, & visits to relatives.
- If children have witnessed violence directly or in the media, or have loved ones whom they know to be in danger, be alert to increased separation anxiety, tearfulness or defiance, sleep or toileting problems.
- Provide toys & art materials to allow children non-verbal expression.

School-aged children often will have heard more about what is going on in the news. Because they grasp more facts, adults may forget they are still children and need to be made to feel as secure as possible.

- Answer questions and be honest, but try to be optimistic about the possibility of the situation improving and the ultimate resolution of problems.
- Stress that it is not the fault of children that wars happen or hateful words are spoken.
- Do not be alarmed if they speak of ways they would prevent terrorism or anti-Semitism by using super powers or violence to keep themselves or others safe; imagining these solutions may help them feel powerful and less helpless. Avoid telling them, "That would never work, children can't solve such problems," which may increase their anxiety and belligerence.
- Offer them realistic ways help, if they seem so inclined, such as sending gifts, drawings, or letters to soldiers and helping to raise money for relief efforts. Most of all, children want most to forget about adult concerns and get on with the business of school and play, so help them to return their focus to the day-to-day life of school, family, hobbies, and activities.

Teens are likely to have the most details and the most difficulty in seeking the help they need to process something as disturbing as war. They want to seem independent, yet such events may stir strong feelings of helplessness and fear; they do not want their independence challenged and yet need protection and reassurance.

- Teens need patience and tolerance from adults for their often sharply changing reactions. In one moment, teens may seem idealistic and deeply concerned over tragedy and loss of life, but at other times, they may seem indifferent and much more involved with their music, clothes, and social life. Some may speak heatedly about retaliating or blame adults for not showing more strength of response; others may accuse adults of over-reacting. Some may simply withdraw and not express how hurt or threatened they feel, while others may seem defiant and indifferent, covering their concerns with a veneer of self-sufficiency and rebelliousness. They may fear becoming victims of violence themselves or feel loss of control of their own aggression. Desperately wishing for the world to make sense, they are also old enough to recognize when it seems unstable. In short, teens may seem very mature at one moment, more childish at the next.
- While it is best to resist the temptation of turning kids into confidantes and activists for the causes their parents champion, adults also need not shelter them from the opportunity to understand situations that affect them, their families, and their communities. It may be helpful to offer teens' avenues for constructive action to further causes that they personally value, whether it is involvement in efforts to responsibly express their opinions through letter writing, peaceful demonstrations, raising money, or volunteering to help those affected by war. You may want to set limits if teens are yelling or promoting irresponsible action but it's important to allow them reasonable expression of what they feel about what is occurring.

- Because teens can be prone to black and white thinking and be overcome by particular events, it is important to help them to see all of the good in the world. Help them to notice the medical care, relief efforts, and concern being shown to those who have been affected. Point out the efforts of diplomats and leaders to seek an end to violence and a plan for security. Supporting trust and idealism while acknowledging the reasons for doubt and fear really help.
- Don't press teens to speak about the situation more than they choose, and try to respect each teen's way of coping, while leaving extra opportunities for talking to parents and other caring adults about ordinary events and concerns.
- Do provide them with access to youth organizations and trusted adults with whom they can be involved in well-thought out and safe efforts to make a difference.

HELP CHILDREN & TEENS TO USE OUR JEWISH TRADITION OF TAKING CONSTRUCTIVE ACTION IN THE FACE OF TRAGEDY

Help them to assist those who have been affected and to honor the memories of those whose lives are lost through acts of kindness and repair of our world. Everyone feels better when they can do something effective and positive in the face of a situation that has made them feel grief and helplessness. You can help them to make condolence cards, write letters to families who have experienced loss, send friendly and supportive letters to others affected by war, collect tzedakah for organizations that work to help people who have been injured or displaced, participate in religious rituals like prayers for peace and security, light candles in memory of those who have died, and create ways of honoring and supporting military, rescue and medical teams.

PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR SPIRITUAL & COMMUNAL SUPPORT

Even when we don't have the answers, most of us are helped by coming together with community members to affirm our belief in goodness, restraint, compassion and justice. We and our children may have questions about how to have faith in God in the face of warfare and terrorism. Some find solace in the idea of God as a consoler, a guider toward right action and a maker of peace. Others find solace in the hope that the people who die are now with God. Jewish tradition teaches us to comfort, support and inspire one another at times of tragedy and conflict. Through our actions and spiritual practices, we remind one another and teach our children that love and life are very precious and worth sustaining, and though wars are sometimes unavoidable, we must continue to seek peace.

KNOW WHEN & WHERE TO SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP

When, over the course of many weeks, a child continues to show a great deal of fear & anxiety, is more withdrawn, provocative, and defiant, or continues to be involved in repetitive play with themes related to violent events, it is useful to seek consultation with a mental health professional. Of course, if a child shows serious distress and cannot be consoled, exhibits or threatens violence towards himself or others or is paralyzed by fear and anxiety, seek help immediately. When parents find themselves struggling to re-establish trust or are overcome by anxiety about their own or their family's wellbeing, they too can benefit from help in overcoming anxiety and trauma. Social service agencies, mental health clinics, school guidance counselors, private mental health practitioners and pediatricians may all be helpful. Specific programs for children and families who have been affected by traumatic violence, even indirectly, can be particularly helpful.