

# DIGITAL SAFEGUARDING DAILY

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# Talking To Your Child About War, Conflict and Civil Unrest

## Helping Children and Young People Make Sense of Distressing News

With access to 24-hour news cycles and social media, it is easy for children and young people to feel overwhelmed by the constant flow of information.

Whether it is news of global conflict, civil unrest, or wars, the updates on their screens or the conversations at school can lead to feelings of uncertainty and heartache. It's important to know how to support those in your care through these complex and confusing times.



### How children react to distressing world events

Every child will react differently to distressing news, based on their age, character and resilience. A child struggling to process the news and in need of support, may become:

- **Fixated**, spending more time on their device to stay informed.
- **Anxious**, especially over "what-if" scenarios.
- **Irritable**, over-reacting to minor inconveniences or issues.
- **Withdrawn**, not engaging with their friends, school work, or hobbies.
- **Distracted**, with disruptions to regular eating, sleeping, or personal hygiene habits.
- **Obsessive**, thinking over every circumstance and talking about possible outcomes.
- **Pessimistic**, sharing a more negative or hopeless outlook on life.

## Why is it important to talk about what's happening?

Children and young people are naturally curious. They are likely to hear about major global events through social media algorithms, groupchats, friends, family, and school environments. If it's what everyone is talking about, their interest in the topic increases.

They may want to find out more, so it's important that the information they receive is true and they don't 'fill in the gaps' with misinformation or alarming rumours which can cause unnecessary panic. By talking about what is happening, you can better protect them and ensure they are receiving factual, age-appropriate information.

## Top Tips for How to Talk to Children and Young People About War and Conflict

### Acknowledgement

Don't deny the reality of what is happening or dismiss it by saying it will "all blow over soon" so they know they can talk to you.

### Honesty

Be truthful without providing overwhelming detail. If you don't know the answer to a question, admit it and offer to research reliable, age-appropriate sources together.

### Sources

Discuss the difference between verified news and unverified social media content, explaining how information is often shared quickly online to provoke strong emotions or push specific narratives.

### Validation

Remind them that feelings of fear, anxiety, or confusion are normal, healthy responses to distressing events.

### Listen

Set your worries aside and give the young person in your care the space, attention and reassurance they need.

### Limits

If they can't resist looking at the news, suggest they switch it off or log out of social media, or advise them to only check news sources 1-2 times per day.

### Gratitude

Discuss gratitude to replace feelings of guilt or sadness around the dinner table or during morning drives/walks to school, or organise a class activity.

### Support

Suggest researching ways to help those affected by the crisis in a local capacity, such as supporting aid groups or humanitarian charities.

### Comfort

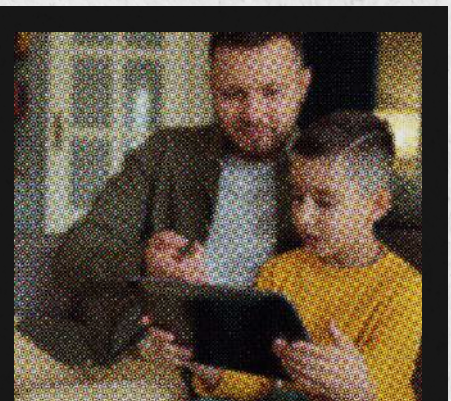
For those in your care to feel secure and protected, parents and carers can offer verbal reassurance of their love and support. For professionals, provide a safe environment and reassure them that you are there for them.

### Balance

Help them to remember the world is full of benevolence too. Subscribing to a child-friendly newsletter or reading uplifting news stories together can help them have a more positive outlook on the world.

### Self-care

It is okay to pause before responding to difficult questions if you feel overwhelmed. Being honest helps you model healthy boundaries and ensures you remain the calm, stable presence they need.



### Every child is different.

*Some children may not be interested in the news, and that is okay. You can start by sharing cheerful or interesting news stories with them, so they know you are informed and approachable if they want to talk about more complex stories in the future.*