

This pamphlet, developed by the child development specialists at PARENTS AS TEACHERS NATIONAL CENTER, is intended for free distribution to all families. Please freely photocopy it and share with others.

**PARENTS AS TEACHERS** offers:

**PERSONAL VISITS** with a PAT-certified parent educator to share child development and parenting information, help parents learn to observe their child, and address parenting concerns

**PARENT GROUP MEETINGS** where parents share information about parenting issues and child development, learn from and support each other, and practice parenting skills

**PERIODIC CHILD SCREENINGS** for early identification of developmental delays or health, hearing and vision problems.

**RESOURCE AND REFERRAL NETWORK** to link families to other community services

PARENTS AS TEACHERS is a nonprofit parent education and family support program serving families throughout pregnancy until their child enters kindergarten. Parents as Teachers programs can be found in all 50 states as well as in other countries. For more information or to learn how to start a program, contact the Parents as Teachers National Center.

Parents as Teachers National Center, Inc.  
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St. Louis, Mo. 63146  
314-432-4330 or 1-866-PAT-4YOU  
[www.patnc.org](http://www.patnc.org)

# Helping Children and Families Cope with War and Trauma



“Above all, let your children know you love them,  
no matter what”

Angela Stewart

## Tips for Parents in Times of Trauma

Children's basic needs remain the same, especially during times of crisis. Remember the importance of routines — try to keep regular mealtimes and bedtime. Spend quiet time reading each night to create calm.

Turn off the TV and radio when children are around. *You* control the information they need to have and how it is presented. Young children need to know few details about traumatic events and do not need to hear details repeated over and over.

Answer questions in an age-appropriate way and reassure children. What they need to hear most is that the adults around them will take care of and protect them.

Try to stay as calm as possible around children. It is appropriate for children to see adults showing emotion, but it frightens them when their parents lose control. If you feel emotional, try to remove yourself briefly until you can calm down.

Children can be very resilient, if they feel listened to, supported, and taken care of by parents and caretakers. They are not little adults. They need to be in a caring environment that fits their developmental needs, even in times of crises.

Take care of yourself and address your own needs. This will allow you to take care of your child.

Do not be afraid to seek help for yourself or your child if reactions or coping become difficult to manage. These are unusual circumstances. It is normal *not* to have all the answers.

### Helpful websites

[www.psych.org](http://www.psych.org)— *American Psychiatric Association sections on coping with trauma/ violence*

[www.childtrauma.org](http://www.childtrauma.org) — *Tips for teachers and schools to help children cope with tragic events*

[www.naeyc.org](http://www.naeyc.org) — *Helping Children Cope with Disaster, from the National Association for the Education of Young Children*

[www.mfrc.calib.com](http://www.mfrc.calib.com) — *Military Family Resource Center*

[www.fema.gov/kids/](http://www.fema.gov/kids/) — *Federal Emergency Management Agency: FEMA for Kids*

<http://pbskids.org/rogers/parents/sept11.htm> — *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood: Helping Children Deal with Scary News*

<http://www.aap.org/terrorism/index.html> — *American Academy of Pediatrics, Children, Terrorism and Disaster*

[www.military.com](http://www.military.com) — *Deployment, Deployment and the Family*

[www.patnc.org](http://www.patnc.org) — Parents as Teachers National Center

### Books for children and their parents and educators

The following materials were compiled by the Association for Library Service to Children, a division of the American Library Association, to aid parents, teachers and caregivers who wish to discuss violence, trauma and loss with children and teens.

Bailey, R. (2000) *I Love You Rituals*. Quill Publishers

Cappello, Dominic (2000) *Ten Talks Parents Must Have with Their Children About Violence*. Hyperion

Carlsson-Paige, Nancy and Diane E. Levin (1989) *Helping Your Children Understand Peace, War, and the Nuclear Threat* NAEYC, 1834 Connecticut Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009

Cohn, Janice (1994) *Why Did It Happen?: Helping Children Cope in a Violent World*. Morrow Junior Books

Coloroso, Barbara. *Parenting Through Crisis: Helping Kids in Times of Loss, Grief, and Change*. Harper Collins

Greenspan, Stanley I. (2002) *The Secure Child: Helping Children Feel Safe and Confident in a Changing World*. Cambridge, MA: Persens Publishing

Loftis, Chris (1997) *The Boy Who Sat by the Window: Helping Children Cope with Violence*. Small Horizons Press

# CHILDREN and WARTIME

It can be confusing to know just what to say to young children and how much to discuss about war and violence. Children will have different needs based on their temperament, personality and developmental stage, but these are some tips that will apply to all children,

## UNDER 2 YEARS

Children 2 and under will not understand what is happening in the world around them, but will react to the tension and anxiety in their environment. Keeping routines constant, providing quiet downtime, and engaging in calming rituals the child enjoys all will increase the ability to cope effectively.

## AGES 3 TO 5

Children this age need to have their questions answered at a developmentally appropriate level.

Reassure them that responsible adults are handling the war.

Use a map or globe to show where the conflict is occurring.

Children this age are naturally self-centered and worried about their bodies; they need reassurance that neither they nor their families are in danger.

It can be difficult for a child this age to distinguish between facts and fantasy. If they have seen pictures or movies of war, this is what they will think of when they hear the word.

Offer comfort by talking about the special people who protect and take care of children and families. Use illustrations of firefighters and police officers in the community and talk positively about the protection and care that is being offered for our country.

Ask children how they feel and encourage them to express their concerns. Very young children or children who have trouble expressing themselves verbally can be encouraged to draw, paint, or act out a story about their feelings.

Have family talks about why people go to war. Use examples from the child's world to help aid understanding of conflicts and how they can be resolved. Children ages 4 and 5 can begin to gain some understanding of family beliefs and values, violence, and intolerance of other people's views. The family talk can become a *teaching time* for children about sensitive topics. Remember to keep the length and content age-appropriate and stop the conversation if the child loses interest.

Avoid listening to or watching news coverage while your child is with you; the words, pictures, and presentation may be too graphic and frightening for the child to handle. It is important to control the stimulation young children receive and to calm them.

Children may need more holding and hugging than at other times. It may also take longer for them to calm down at bedtime or to fall asleep. While it is important to keep routines the same, it is all right to lie down with the child or hold them longer at nap or bedtime if the child seems frightened or upset.

Set aside special time each day to participate in activities that the child enjoys. Some normal activity each day is reassuring for the child. It is important not to focus on wartime and its consequences.

If children ask you, or if you feel overwhelmed with your own feelings at times, it is appropriate to talk with your child about your concerns. Young children do need to know that adults are in control, so reassure your child that responsible adults are available to protect and care for him.

If possible, participate and include children in an activity that supports the military personnel or the country.

Write letters, send drawings or care packages to people involved in the war.

Help support or sponsor an event that is patriotic. Children who have been given a role or who are allowed to feel useful during times of trauma, have less anxiety and more resiliency. Everyone wants to do something to help and children are no exception.

CHILDREN OF  
ALL AGES

# 6 strategies to help ease the separation

- 1** Mark the time apart in a concrete way by making an X on a calendar for every day the separation lasts or adding a link to a paper chain that represents each day the family will be apart (the chain will keep us connected).
- 2** Audiotape a favorite story. This allows the child to listen to a familiar voice and remember a special time together. Watching a videotape of a parent who is away may be too scary for younger children who are concrete thinkers and may think mommy or daddy is in the television.
- 3** Remember important events that will occur during the separation. If a parent will be gone on a child's birthday they may want to leave a card for the child to open on his/her special day.
- 4** Stay in touch as much as possible. Phone calls, letters, drawings and cards are ways to stay connected. E mails may be the quickest way to keep in touch with a child during the separation. Parents should remember to always tell the child, "I love you. I miss you and it is not your fault that I'm away."
- 5** Show the child where the parent will be. Use a map, even if it is in the same state, to show children where their parent is.
- 6** Leave a special object that the child can keep with them to remind them of the parent who is away. Using a "magic stone" or a special cloth will help the child have a concrete object to keep with them to remind them of their parent.

## Preparing Children for Separation during Stressful Events

**S**eparations are a fact of life. Each day children learn to cope with short separations such as mom or dad leaving for work, saying goodbye to a friend at the end of the day, or leaving their favorite pet in the morning. When a long separation from a parent is necessary, children need time to prepare for the change that is about to occur. When this separation occurs during a stressful time, such as the deployment of a parent, special concern must be given to preparing the children.

### YOUNGER CHILDREN

How children react to separation and stress will vary from child to child. A child's reaction will likely vary depending on his or her age. A 2-year old may show more non-specific responses such as becoming fussy, clingy, or develop feeding and sleeping problems.

### PRESCHOOLERS

Preschoolers may develop fears and exhibit regressive behaviors. Children under 6 have a difficult time understanding other points of view. They may think it is their fault the separation is occurring.

### THINGS TO REMEMBER

Help the child understand that he did nothing wrong. In the case of a military deployment, children need to know that this is their parent's job. Just as police officers protect our towns and cities, the military defends our country, which means parents sometimes have to be away.

Help children understand that their parent did not abandon them. Saying things like, "Daddy is doing his job right now," or "Mommy is on assignment." are ways to communicate to children that their parent did not desert them and will be coming back.