

Helping Children Cope with the War in Iraq

It is important to know children, regardless of age, can encounter a range of feelings when viewing, or hearing about the war in Iraq. When given a safe environment in which to express what they are feeling, the child's feelings can become a process of growth and healing. The following guidelines are meant to provide such an environment.

1. While it is important to be honest with your child about what has happened and what is happening, do not give more information than is necessary (especially with younger children).
2. In the next few days **do not allow your child to watch too much television** and if possible, sit with him/her so you can answer any questions they may have, or discuss what is being shown.
3. Listen carefully and answer **the question** asked. Do not go further than the question asked. A good way to explain why we are in Iraq is to explain Saddam Hussein as a bully who has hurt people in his own country. He has been asked by the United Nations to get rid of his weapons and he has not done this. The U.S. and the countries helping us want to make sure he cannot hurt anyone else.
4. Do not deny the seriousness of the situation, nor deny children their feelings. Give them permission to express what they are experiencing without shame. Saying to the child, "Don't worry, everything will be okay," does not reflect how the child feels.
5. Try to recognize the feelings underlying your child's reactions and put them into words. For example, saying something like, "I can see you are feeling really worried about this," can help.
6. Prepare for possible difficulty at night. Keep the bedtime and all routines the same; it gives your child a sense of security. Try to stick with your daily routines as much as is possible.
7. Expect your child's feelings may take a while to resolve.
8. Children's reactions will vary.
9. Assure them you will take care of them. The people in charge are doing everything they can to make sure we are all safe. Assure them they are **safe** in school.
10. Touching and holding a child can do more than any words to relay the message you are there to take care of him/her.