

Talking with Children about War:
***How Children of Different Ages
Show Anxiety and Stress.***

Dr. Julie Poehlmann & Dr. Dave Riley
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Sometimes children can talk about their worries, but this is not typical for most young children, or even for some adolescents. Children often show their concerns and stress level through changes in their normal behaviors.

Infants may pick up on the feelings of worry of their parents and siblings, without understanding the reason for the worries. Infants can show stress through changes in sleeping or eating patterns, decreased attention span, or increased fussiness or clinginess.

Parents can help by addressing their own feelings of worry and by maintaining the baby's normal routines. Extra play time and comforting also help.

Young children are sensitive to parental stress levels. They might cling more to adults and fear being left alone. They can have eating or sleeping problems, nightmares, increased sensitivity to stimulation (like loud noises), or feelings of upset if their routine changes. Preschoolers might regress back to thumb sucking, daytime accidents or bed wetting, or complain about aches and pains. They may communicate their worries by acting out or showing an irritable mood.

These levels of stress can be addressed by parents who can talk with and reassure the child. Spend extra time playing with your child, and maintain the child's normal routines. Seek professional assistance if the child shows excessive withdrawal, acting out, or does not respond to special attention.

School aged children who are stressed might also cling more to parents, although this may show as increased competition with siblings for the parents' attention. They may have nightmares, appetite disturbance, irritable or sad mood, increased bodily complaints, and can become either more withdrawn or more aggressive. They may show poor concentration on tasks like schoolwork. They are sensitive to parental stress levels but also to the feelings and information they are exposed to in other settings, such as school. They may have many questions but not know how to begin a conversation with adults about issues related to war.

These levels of stress can be addressed by parents who can talk with and reassure the child. Giving children the opportunity to ask questions in a safe and

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supportive manner is helpful. Parents can maintain routines and spend extra time in activities with the child. Seek professional assistance if the child shows excessive withdrawal, acting out, preoccupation with death or violence, or does not respond to special attention.

Adolescents, like younger children, can have sleep or appetite disturbances and can show poor concentration. In response to stress, they also sometimes show physical problems like head and stomach aches, or even bowel problems or rashes.

These levels of stress can be addressed by parents who can talk with and reassure the teenager. Seek professional assistance if the child becomes disoriented, has memory gaps, is severely depressed or withdrawn, cannot make simple decisions, or is preoccupied with one thought.

(Some of this material comes from a web site on “Helping Children Cope with Stress” by Dr. Karen DeBord of the University of North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service:
<http://www.nccc.org/Guidance/cope.stress.html> .