

Nine Actions We Can Take to Help Children Deal with War in Iraq

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These ideas are intended for parents, caregivers and teachers; they span a broad developmental range, so use them wisely!

1. Pay attention and spend quality time. Hug your children; hold them in your hearts. Listen for concerns, fear or anger directed at people who look like “The Enemy.” Give yourself time to connect with the children closest to you.

2. Practice and model tolerance. Children watch what we do. Model tolerance of people with views different from your own. This is especially important around issues of color, ethnicity, culture and language.

3. Manage our own fear and anger. Children often feel what we feel. War is frightening. Some of us have military families or friends; some have family or friends in endangered areas in the Middle East. Many of us worry about terrorist attacks at home. Some of us will be angry at those responsible for the war – in Iraq and/or in the U.S. It’s important to be aware of our own feelings, because they trigger our behavior.

4. Communicate carefully. Take a moment before we respond – to questions, fears challenging behavior; to the news or to the views of others around us.

5. Take action to help or heal. It helps children (and many of us) if we can DO something to help: cards to soldiers and to civilian victims in Iraq; donations to aid organizations; letters to elected officials; art or poems; prayers. Encourage action that helps or heals.

6. Monitor media. Gulf War I and September 11 filled the airwaves with stories and images that frightened as much as they informed; it’s important to monitor the amount and kind of media our children see, and to watch it with them to help interpret or support.

7. Read and play together. Books help and they can heal. Ask the local librarian for books about peace and tolerance; play family board games instead of video games.

8. Stay in contact with others who work with our children. Communicate, dispel rumors, and help each other support our children.

9. Ask for help. Parent hotlines are often a good source of support; so are friends, family, teachers, counselors and clergy. It’s hard to do this alone; ask for help.