

Talking about War and Conflict Resources For Parents



Parents' Resources Contents

Page:

- 1.** What is war and conflict?
- 2.** War and the media
- 3.** Should I talk to my child about war?
- 4.** How to talk to my child about war
- 6.** Tips for managing war anxiety
- 7.** Things we can control
- 8.** What can I control? Blank worksheet
- 9.** Emotion coaching
- 10.** The five steps of emotion coaching
- 11.** The five steps continued
- 12.** The emotion coaching wheel
- 13.** Relaxed breathing for children
- 14.** Progressive muscle relaxation for children

15. Progressive muscle relaxation continued

16. Muting unhelpful words on 

17. Muting unhelpful words on 

18. Muting unhelpful words on 

19. Muting unhelpful words on 

20. Trustworthy websites and Helpful Organisations

What is war?

War is conflict or fighting between countries, or between groups fighting over a country. Experiences of war can differ greatly. There is much news about current conflict, and for many children this might be their first experience of hearing about war in modern times. For others, this might link with direct experiences shared from loved ones.

Children can be confused or worried after hearing about the current conflict. It is important to give your child space to ask any questions to support them.

This information is to help you cope if you or your child are:

- Feeling worried or anxious about war and conflict
- Unsure how to talk about war and conflict

Lots of people are feeling more anxious than usual during these uncertain times:

This is a perfectly normal response

War and the media

2

The media is reporting heavily on the conflict between Russia and the Ukraine. This can cause many people to feel anxious on top of ongoing worries from the pandemic.

While it is important we keep up-to-date on the latest developments, it is not always helpful to read every single news article.

Statistics can often sound scary- especially when they are updated multiple times a day. If you or your child are experiencing anxiety as result of the media coverage on the current conflict, it might not be helpful for you to keep watching live news, use social media, or to have news updates appearing on your devices.

You can instead limit your exposure to the new information by reading only one reliable update per day.

Most importantly, make sure your child only has access to age or developmental stage appropriate information.

Should I talk to my child about war?

3

When the news is scary, it is hard for us all to process, but it may be especially difficult for children.

How to talk to your child about war can be hard as our instinct can be to try and protect them from the scary or anxious reality of the world.

Information about war can be everywhere: On our TV screens, on social media, talked about at school or when we're at the supermarket. All this exposure makes it even easier for children to pick up on. Children do not always talk about what is worrying them but they may be trying to make sense of this information by themselves and, in the absence of factual information, imagining situations to be far worse than they are.

It's also important to remember that every child is different and while some might be scared, others may not be worried at all.

Below are some strategies for talking to children about war that will help to ease their concerns.

How to talk to my child about war?

Keep calm. Check in with yourself. How are you currently feeling? When you are feeling anxious children can notice this and begin to feel stressed too. If needed, take some time to calm.



Answer questions. Answer children's questions in language they will understand with a level of information appropriate to their age. Avoid sharing too much information as this can be overwhelming. It's ok if you don't have all the answers, just say "**I don't know but I am here to help you**".

Create a safe environment. Children need to feel safe and secure. Limit children's exposure to news reports and discuss your own worries outside of their earshot.

Reassure them. Young children often personalise situations and may perceive the danger to be closer to home. Let them know that although war is very serious, they do not need to worry about it happening in their neighbourhood (maybe show this on a map). Tell them you understand how they are feeling and reassure them that they are safe and that you are there to take care of them. It is important, however, to be realistic and not promise that no one will get hurt.



Help children find ways to express themselves. Some children may not be able to talk about their thoughts or feelings but can be supported to make sense of the world through play.

Do something positive. Encourage children to engage in activities where they can feel helpful such as drawing pictures to send to children who are living in affected areas.

Tips for managing war anxiety



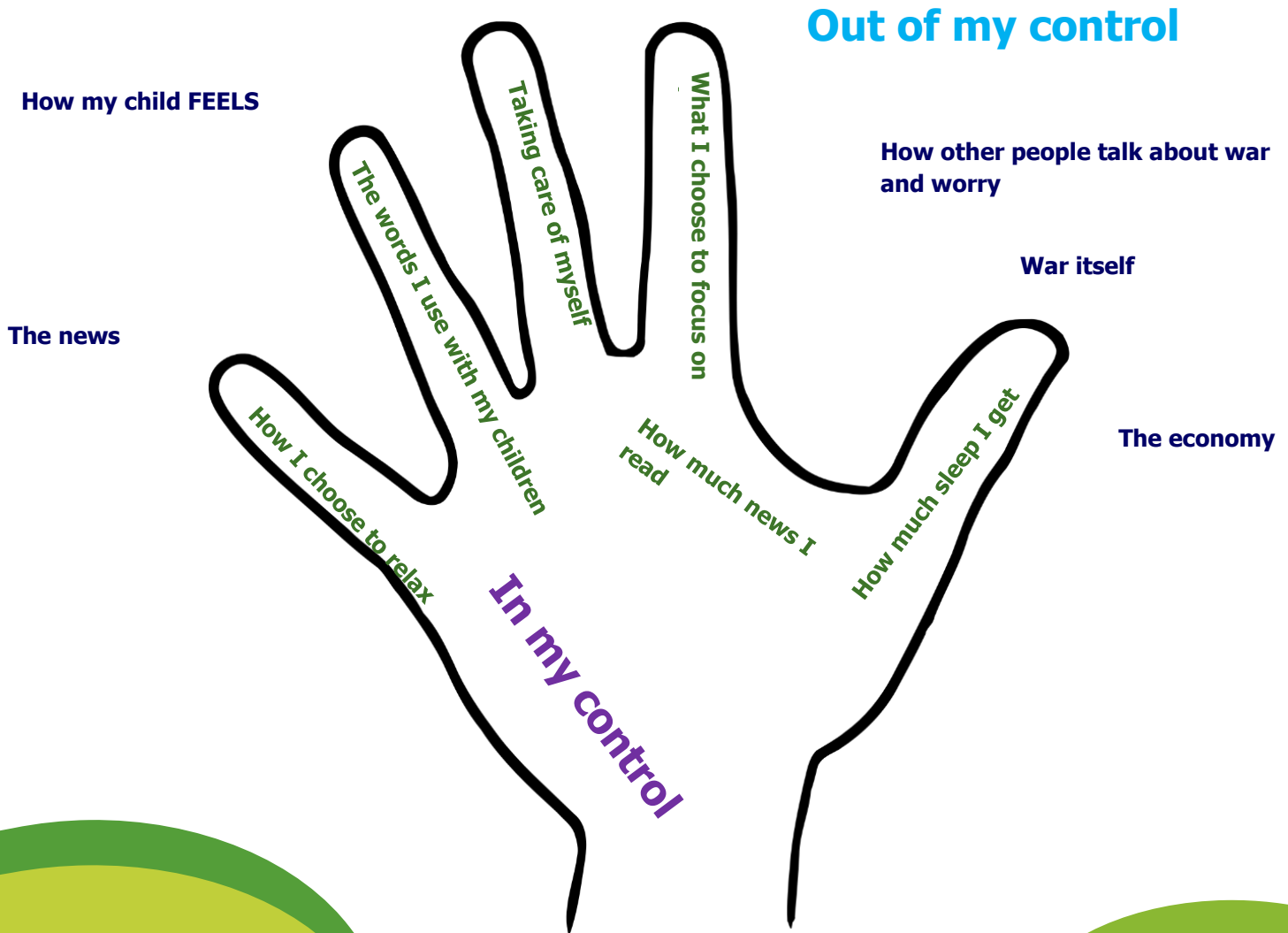
Things we can control

7

Understanding what we can and can't control is important. When we focus on things we cannot control we may feel worried and overwhelmed. If we focus on that we can control this can help us feel calmer and less anxious.

Here is a quick activity to help us think about the things we can and cannot control in regards to war.

A blank form is provided on the next page if you would like to do this exercise with your child.



What can I control?

Out of my control

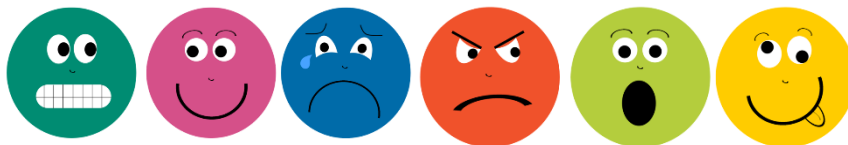
In my control

Emotion coaching

It may be that your child has some worries about war (or in general!) that you cannot reassure them about. At times like this, emotion coaching is a really useful way to support your child to handle and tolerate all the uncertainty.

This may feel uncomfortable to start with, but it is worth the effort. When children have their feelings acknowledged, they feel safer and this is especially important in these strange times.

Emotion coaching teaches children the important life skill of emotion regulation, not only will this help them in the present, it will also prepare them to handle challenges they will face later in their lives.



Research shows that children who learn about their feelings and emotions have these advantages:

- **Feel calmer and learn to self-regulate.**
- **Get sick less often.**
- **Stronger relationships with other people.**

The 5 steps of emotion coaching

1. Be Aware:

- a. To support your child with emotion coaching, you need to start observing, listening and learning how your child expresses different feelings and emotions.
- b. Watch for changes in their facial expression, body language, posture, and tone of voice.
- c. Set a good example by talking about feelings and emotions in order to help children build a vocabulary of different feelings.
- d. Encourage children to talk about their feelings and emotions.

2. Connect with your child:

- a. You can use emotional moments as opportunities to connect with your child.
- b. Allow your child to have their feelings without dismissing, disapproving or avoiding.
- c. All feelings are **okay**, but not all behaviour is okay.

3. Listen and tune-in to your child:

- a. Your child will feel more secure when they are allowed to express their feelings.
- b. Take time to stop, breathe and get curious.
- c. Tune-in to the feelings underneath your child's behaviour.
- d. Take 5 long slow breaths to help you feel calm.
- e. Check what's going on for you. Has your child's behaviour touched a nerve for you? Has it made you feel frustrated? Angry? Scared? Helpless?

4. Name your child's feelings out loud:

- a. Your child will feel more secure when their feelings are heard.
- b. Naming emotions helps to soothe and regulate your child's brain.
- c. Ask, rather than telling, them how they are feeling. If they're not sure, offer suggestions for them to consider.

5. Set limits and problem solve together:

- a. You can allow all of your child's feelings while still setting clear limits on behaviour.
- b. Corrections should only occur when feelings have been acknowledged and when everyone is calm.
- c. Where possible involve your child in problem solving, especially as they get older.
- d. Think ahead about tricky and potentially overwhelming situations and be prepared to help the child through them.

Emotion coaching wheel



Relaxed breathing for children

13

1. Find a quiet place free of distractions. Lie on the floor or sit in a chair. Rest your hands in your lap or on the arms of the chair.
2. We are going to practice breathing slowly in for three and out for three. Imagine your breath is like a wave, slowly rushing in to your body, then slowly running out of your body 1.....2.....3.....1.....2.....3.....
3. As you breathe in feel air fill your lungs and then when they are full of air slowly push the air back out until there is no air left.
4. Now focus on where you are breathing. Place one hand on your upper chest and the other hand on your stomach. I want you to breathe in through your nose and down into your stomach. You should feel the hand on your stomach move out whilst the hand on your chest stays still. Now practice breathing down in to your stomach, feeling your hand move out as your stomach fills with air, then as you breathe out feel your hand fall.
5. When you have practiced breathing like this you can take your hand away and continue to breathe down into your stomach.
6. Continue this pattern of rhythmic breathing for five to ten minutes.

Progressive muscle relaxation for children

Begin by finding a comfortable position sitting, standing, or lying down.
You can change positions any time during the progressive muscle relaxation exercises to make yourself more comfortable as needed.

Start with the muscles in your legs. Tighten all the muscles of your legs. Tense the muscles further. Hold onto this tension. Feel how tight and tense the muscles in your legs are right now. Squeeze the muscles harder, tighter... Continue to hold this tension. Feel the muscles wanting to give up this tension. Hold it for a few moments more.... and now relax. Let all the tension go. Feel the muscles in your legs going limp, loose, and relaxed. Notice how relaxed the muscles feel now. Feel the difference between tension and relaxation. Enjoy the pleasant feeling of relaxation in your legs.

Now focus on the muscles in your arms. Tighten your shoulders, upper arms, lower arms, and hands. Squeeze your hands into tight fists. Tense the muscles in your arms and hands as tightly as you can. Squeeze harder.... harder..... hold the tension in your arms, shoulders, and hands. Feel the tension in these muscles. Hold it for a few moments more.... and now release. Let the muscles of your shoulders, arms, and hands relax and go limp. Feel the relaxation as your shoulders lower into a comfortable position and your hands relax at your sides. Allow the muscles in your arms to relax completely.



Progressive muscle relaxation continued....

Focus again on your breathing. Slow, even, regular breaths. Breathe in relaxation.... and breathe out tension..... in relaxation....and out tension.... Continue to breathe slowly and rhythmically.

Now focus on the muscles of your buttocks. Tighten these muscles as much as you can. Hold this tension..... and then release. Relax your muscles.

Tighten the muscles of your back now. Feel your back tightening, pulling your shoulders back and tensing the muscles along your spine. Arch your back slightly as you tighten these muscles. Hold.... and relax. Let all the tension go. Feel your back comfortably relaxing into an easy and natural posture.

Turn your attention now to the muscles of your chest and stomach. Tighten and tense these muscles. Tighten them further...hold this tension.... and release. Relax the muscles of your trunk.

Finally, tighten the muscles of your face. Scrunch your eyes shut tightly, wrinkle your nose, and tighten your cheeks and chin. Hold this tension in your face.... and relax. Release all the tension. Feel how relaxed your face is.

Notice all of the muscles in your body.... notice how relaxed your muscles feel. Allow any last bits of tension to drain away. Enjoy the relaxation you are experiencing. Notice your calm breathing.... your relaxed muscles.... Enjoy the relaxation for a few moments....

When you are ready to return to your usual level of alertness and awareness, slowly begin to re-awaken your body. Wiggle your toes and fingers. Swing your arms gently. Shrug your shoulders. Stretch if you like.

You may now end this progressive muscle relaxation exercise feeling calm and refreshed.

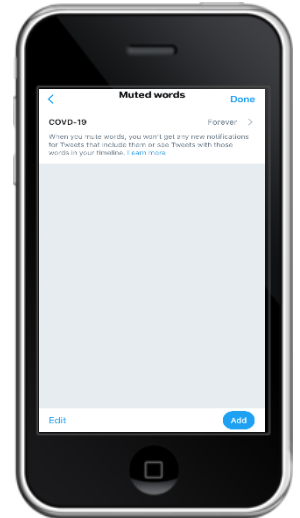
Muting unhelpful words on

Twitter has an option to mute certain words, phrases or hashtags to stop them from appearing on your news feed.

IPHONE (APP)

1. Go to your Notifications tab
2. Tap the gear icon
3. Tap "Muted" words
4. Tap "+Add muted or phrase"
5. Type in the word or hashtag you'd like to mute (for example: #Russia)

Alternatively, long press the word as it appears on a tweet and press "Mute"

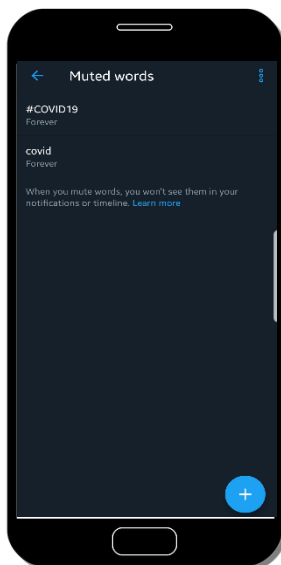


ANDROID (APP)

1. Go to your Notifications tab
2. Tap the gear icon
3. Tap "Muted" words
4. Tap "+Add muted or phrase"
5. Type in the word or hashtag you'd like to mute

ANDROID (APP)

6. Go to your Notifications tab
7. Tap the gear icon
8. Tap "Muted" words
9. Tap "+Add muted or phrase"
10. Type in the word or hashtag you'd like to mute



Muting unhelpful words on facebook

17

IPHONE AND ANDROID (APP)

Unfortunately you can't mute certain words, but you can mute pages or people if they are sharing/posting content you don't want to see. To do this:

1. Click on the three dots at the top right of the post you do not wish to see
2. Press "Snooze for 30 days"
3. Alternatively you can "Hide all" or "Unfollow"

You can also prioritise whose posts you see:

1. Go onto your menu – This is usually the three lines at the top right on the Facebook app
2. Scroll down to "Settings & Privacy"
3. Press "Settings"
4. Scroll down to the heading "News Feed settings" and choose "News Feed preferences"
5. Press "Prioritise Who to See First"
6. Choose who you want to see at the top of your News Feed
7. Press "Done" at the top right

Under your News Feed Settings you can also see who you have hidden posts from, or unfollowed.



Muting unhelpful words on

Instagram has an option to mute comments that other users leave on your posts that contain words and phrases that you do not wish to see. Follow the steps below and Instagram will automatically delete comments on your posts that contain them.

1. Go to your profile
2. Click on the hamburger (the three lines at the top right) of the screen
3. Click on 'Settings'
4. Click on 'Privacy'
5. Click on 'Comments'
6. Click on 'Manual filter'
7. The manual filter bar will turn from grey to blue, then in the space that says 'words separated by commas...' type in words and phrases that you do wish not to see, separating each word or phrase using a comma.



Unfortunately, Instagram does not allow you to block posts or comments left on other users' posts that contain words, phrases or hashtags that you wish to avoid. If you are experiencing distress as a result of content on Instagram it is advisable that you cut down on the time you spend on Instagram. Choose social media sites that do allow you to filter out content you do not wish to see (such as Twitter) and avoid the 'explore' feature that recommends content to you.

Muting unhelpful words on

19

TikTok has an option to mute comments that other users leave on your posts that contain words and phrases that you do not wish to see. Follow the steps below and TikTok will automatically delete comments on your posts that contain them.

1. From your 'For You' feed, click on your profile button in the lower right-hand corner of your screen
2. Go to profile settings by selecting the three dots on the top right-hand side of your screen
3. Click on 'Privacy and Safety'
4. Click 'Filter Comments'
5. Activate the option 'Filter by Keywords'
6. Now you can enter each keyword which you want to filter out as comments on your videos. These comments will be hidden
7. Exit the menu by selecting the arrow on the top left-hand corner of your screen
8. The feature is now active



Unfortunately, TikTok does not allow you to block posts or comments left on other users' posts that contain words, phrases or hashtags that you wish to avoid. If you are experiencing distress as a result of content on TikTok it is advisable that you cut down on the time you spend on TikTok. Choose social media sites that do allow you to filter out content you do not wish to see (such as Twitter) and avoid the 'explore' feature that recommends content to you.

Trustworthy websites



20

There is a lot of information that is accessible 24 hours a day, every day. People can share images at a click of a button as well as news articles and stories. Fact checking (finding out if something is true) is even more important in times of conflict. Make sure you're checking only reputable sources of information.

Some good questions to ask are:

- How do you know this information is reliable?
- Has the image/story been verified if on social media?
- What is the purpose of the article/story/photograph?
- Who has shared the information with you?
- When was it published?

Promote fact finding and prompt children to think about key ideas such as misinformation, propaganda, trusted sources or fact versus fiction. *"I don't know the answer to that question, shall we find out together?"*

Helpful Organisations

- Little Troopers (supporting children of British military personnel)
<https://www.littletroopers.net/>
- Service Children Personnel Alliance
<https://www.scipalliance.org>
- Childline
<https://www.childline.org.uk/getinvolved/articles/worrying-aboutrussia-ukraine/>
- Department for Education
<https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2022/02/25/help-for-teachers-andfamilies-to-talk-to-pupils-aboutrussias-invasion-of-ukraine-and-howto-help-them-avoid-misinformation/>

If you feel you or your child's worries are getting bigger, you can contact:

Samaritans: 116 123
www.samaritans.org

Breathing Space: 0800 83 85 87
<https://breathingspace.scot/>

NHS 24: 111
<https://www.nhs24.scot/>

Your local GP

Please note this booklet was written in March 2022 during the ongoing conflict between Ukraine and Russia, however, the information provided can be useful to explore feelings regarding any war or conflict.