

More Help About the War

a newsletter for people who care about self-esteem

Issue 62 - Volume 11, Number 2 - March, April, 1991

Dear Readers,

As I write, the Gulf War is still on. I hope that by the time you read this, peace will have broken out!

Either way, children will need help and support in dealing with their feelings and in getting accurate information about the war.

This issue of WE offers:

- Handouts that you can use for yourself and in support groups and workshops.
- Suggestions for using the last WE, **Help for Kids, Understanding Your Feelings About the War**, For Children Ages Six and Older.
- Help for Children ages 3, 4, and 5.
- A poster that you can place in your home or school or enlarge for use in other places.

The poster reminds us to remind children that the war is the job of the adults. While children may be concerned and may need lots of information, their job is to ask their questions, express their feelings and get on with their regular daily activities and their ordinary tasks of growing.

When the fighting stops, the effects of the war will not stop. Children will still have many questions and will still need help with their feelings. They will need new kinds of information.

I hope that this issue of WE will help us all think about these tasks.

WE gives thanks to Carole Gesme for writing the **Help for Kids** book and to Minneapolis Children's Medical Center for the helpful way they put together much of the information in this issue and for letting WE share it. Also, special thanks to Mary Paananen for helping design the workshop activities and for coediting this issue of WE.

Courage and tenacity,

Jean Alday Clarke

★ Helping Children Deal With The War ★

Here are eight special ways for adults to help children deal with war.

1. **Provide Accurate Information.**
Give honest information. "We don't know . . ." "We hope . . ." Do not offer false reassurances.
2. **Provide Context.**
Help the child put the war in a context that fits his age. To a three-year-old, "I will take care of you." To a teenager, "There have been wars before and civilization has survived."
3. **Provide a Forum for Ongoing Exchange.**
Accept and validate feelings, fears and uncertainties.
4. **Provide Emotional Support.**
Elicit fears, deal with anticipated loss. Be reassuring and provide hope but be honest.
5. **Watch for Children with Special Vulnerability.**
Give extra support to children who have experienced illness, loss or other trauma, children with family or friends in the Gulf or the military, children with ethnic vulnerability (Ex: Jewish, Arab descent, Southeast Asian, Central American).
6. **Monitor TV and Radio.**
TV presents emotionally gripping material. We need to:
 1. Be aware of what our children see on TV and talk about it with them.
 2. Be especially sensitive to pictures and reports involving children with which our children might identify.
 3. Remind children of where, when, and why things are happening.
 4. Consider if there are pictures or reports that children should not hear; this can be difficult to do but may be worthwhile in some instances.
 5. Do not leave children alone with TV reports of the war or stories about prisoners of war. This is especially true in the hospital or when a child is ill or for some reason feeling vulnerable at home.
 6. Remember to ask children what they have seen on TV and what they think and feel about it.
7. **Be Aware of the Changing Reality of What is Happening.**
When an air war changes to a ground war children need different information and may have different fears and worries.
8. **Be Aware of the Changing Needs of Children.**
As children grow their needs and capacity to understand change. The child who "understood" a month ago may need more and different information now.

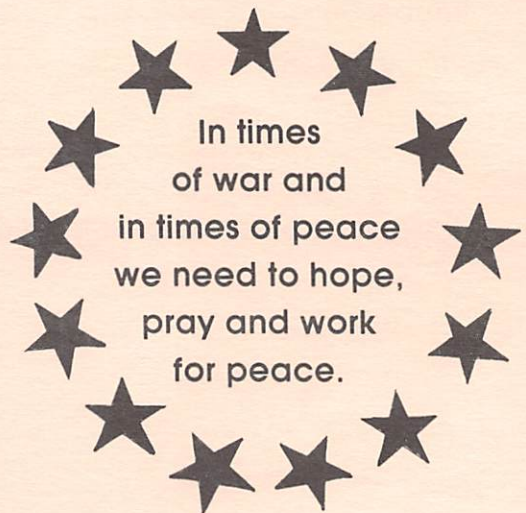


Children's Worries

Children may express their worries in many ways including words, clinginess, limit testing, increased activity level, nightmares, repeated questions, and many more. They may

start war play or engage in more of it or suddenly stop such play. We need to respond first with understanding, second with listening, and third with discussion and explanation. If a child's fears or behavior becomes out of control, consider consulting a mental health professional or a helpline such as The Parent Warmline.

—Thanks to Dr. Don Brunquell of Minneapolis Children's Medical Center for this framework.



Exploring Ways To Use The Help For Kids Book With Children 6 and Older

Activities to do with your family, in a group or by yourself.

- Give each person a copy of the **Help for Kids** book and ask people to be seated in circles of six.
- Introduce yourself and state that the purpose of the workshop is to help each person identify a variety of ways in which he can use the workbook.
- Post and state:

GROUND RULES

1. Everyone Participates
2. Right to Pass
3. All Beliefs Are Honored
4. Mutual Respect



- Use the Opening Activity (page 8 of WE)
- Ask each person to tell the others in his circle what he hopes to get out of this workshop. Ask one person from each circle to share a goal with the whole group. (Adjust your leadership plans if needed. Select from the following activities to do other activities from the **Help for Kids** book.)

Job of the Adults

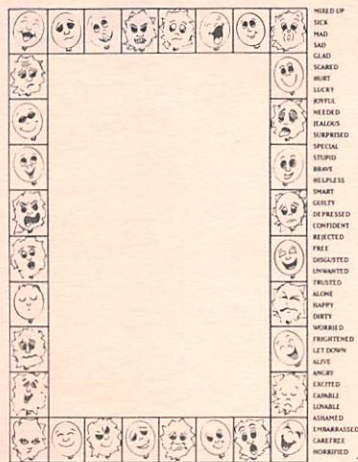
- Read the eight point list, "Helping Children Deal With War" (page 2).
- Ask people to notice which ones will be easy for them to do and which they will need to practice.

Hear the Word War

- Hand out copies of page 3 from the **Help for Kids** book.

HEAR THE WORD WAR

HOW DO YOU FEEL WHEN YOU HEAR THE WORD WAR?
Find faces or words on this paper to help you. Circle the faces. Circle the words, or draw your own pictures. Do as many of these as you want to.



- Ask people to do one of the three directions, (circle faces, circle words, or draw a picture) and then to share what they learned in their small group.
- Ask for one "I learned . . ." from each small group. Feedback will probably show a variety of awareness and you can emphasize the need to respect each other's differences.
- Ask people to share things children have said about the war, or behavior changes the adults have noticed since the war started. List them.
- You may also share the examples from the last WE.

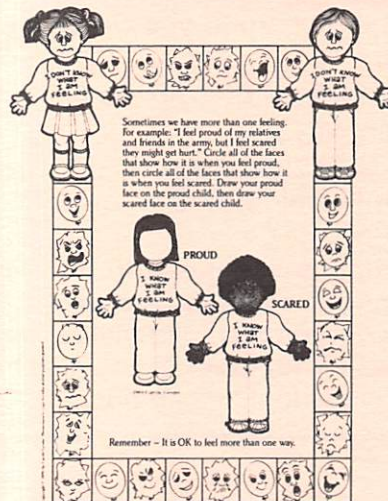
A Five Minute Walk Through the Book

- Ask each person to explore the **Help for Kids** book in whatever way she wants to for exactly five minutes and then to share what she learned with her small group. (Signal clearly when the five minutes starts and ends and then allow five minutes for people to share.)
- Ask for one awareness from each group.

Mixed Up Feelings

- Hand out copies of page 7.

MIXED UP FEELINGS



- Ask people to follow the directions on the sheet and then share in their small groups.
- Tell people that they could change this sheet to use for many other purposes by changing the directions and the words. For example, about divorce: "I feel glad the fighting has stopped but sad cause my Dad is leaving and scared about where I will live." (NOTE: you can add more words and blank faces in the margins.)

Feeling Permission Activity

- Ask people to read the Pink Permission Ovals. Ask them to think of three ways to offer these ovals and these messages to a particular child.
- Ask each person to choose three ovals he would like to hear for himself and ask the person next to him to read them to him.
- Do the Closing Activity on Page 8 of WE.

Helping 3, 4 & 5 Year Old Children Deal With the War

Suggested Activity

1. Read page 33 of **Help for Kids** aloud or ask people to read it aloud in their circles — each person reads one paragraph. Have each person indicate if she agrees or disagrees with each item.
2. Ask each small group to read the list of Developmental Factors Affecting Preschoolers Reactions to Reports of War on page 5 of WE. Ask each group to choose one factor and think of ways they could support children in reference to that factor. Ask each group to share with the large group.
3. Post the following guidelines:

Guidelines for Helping 3, 4, & 5 Year Olds

1. Control the media.
2. Tell the children you are responsible.
3. Don't tell children how to feel.
4. Keep play safe.
5. Expect children to work out their feelings in their play. Stop any dangerous play.
6. Remember that children this age engage in fantasy as a way of "trying on" ideas and identities. Do not limit their fantasies but do help them separate fact from fantasy.

Ask people to adjust or rewrite this list to make guidelines that would fit in their settings (e.g. home, child care facility, Sunday School, etc.)

Reference Books

Kathleen and James McGinnis.

Parenting for Peace and Justice: Ten Years Later.
Orbis Books, 1990.

New!

Who's Calling the Shots? How to Respond Effectively to Children's Fascination with War Play and War Toys

Nancy Carlsson-Paige and Diane E. Levin

Carefully examines developmental needs served by dramatic play, and contrasts them with unimaginative, merchandise-oriented play. Offers a wealth of suggestions, practical ideas and resources for broadening and enriching children's play. Ideas are easily implemented, fun and reduce conflicts. Encourage rather than stunt creativity. Also discusses gender and racial stereotypes. Softbound, 30 photos and illustrations, 204 pages. \$12.95.


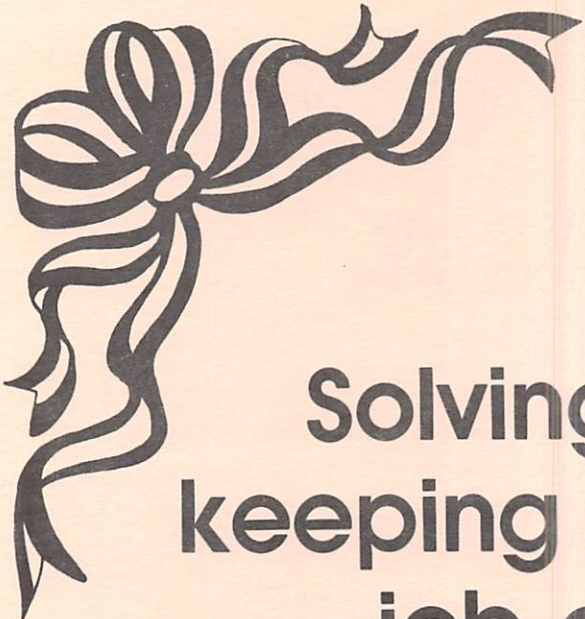


Minneapolis Children's Medical Center

Human Ecology

Developmental Factors Affecting Children's Reactions to Reports of War

- I. Infants**
 - Can be affected by distraction and upset of their caregivers.
- II. Toddlers (12 months - 36 months)**
 - Will be affected by distraction and upset of caregivers.
 - Are extremely sensitive to emotions of the adults around them.
 - Will hear and be affected by reports of war, verbal and pictorial.
 - Have relatively little language skill to use in understanding, coping or communicating concerns.
 - Are likely to show distress in behavior changes such as increased activity, limit testing and separation anxiety.
- III. Preschoolers (3 years - 5 years)**
 - Will be affected by distraction and upset of caregivers.
 - Are extremely sensitive to emotions of the adults around them.
 - Will attend specifically to reports of the war.
 - Will attempt to understand what is happening and why; they need help with both factual understanding and confusion about motivations. This needs to be done with specific explanations, pictures, maps, play, etc.
 - May incorporate war and violence themes into play as a means of understanding and coping.
 - May have unrealistic fears based on misconceptions.
 - Are "egocentric," and may feel responsible for or affected by events with no logical connection to them.
 - Are likely to show distress by increased fears or anxieties, nightmares of vulnerability, increased conflict in peer and adult relationships and limit-testing.
 - May express and work through some of their concerns through superheroes or other fantasy play such as Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, GI Joe, etc.
- IV. School-age (6 years - 12 years)**
 - Will be affected by distraction and upset of caregivers but less than younger children.
 - Will attend specifically to reports of the war, and often will seek considerable detail in numbers, lists, etc.
 - Need help with geography and facts but especially with motivations.
 - May tend to understand the conflict in polarized, black and white terms.
 - May especially be affected by experiences of other children.
 - May incorporate war and violence themes into play as a means of understanding coping.
 - Will be concerned with how peers react.
 - Are more likely to show distress if already vulnerable, either in specific anxiety behavior or increased conflict in a relationship.
 - Some children adapt to a crisis by avoiding information about it or talking about it. If this happens we need to respect their need to do this while leaving the door open to further discussion.
- V. Adolescents (12 - 18 years)**
 - Will attend specifically to reports of the war.
 - Will be very concerned about how peers react.
 - Will begin to think about how they might be affected by or involved in this or other war situations.
 - May wish to be involved in activities to support or protest the military action.
 - May have a better grasp of factual information such as geography but have an exaggerated sense of how they may be affected.
 - Will identify with and be concerned about age peers in the war area.
 - May show distress with swings of emotion, withdrawal and depression, or acting out.



**Solving the war and
keeping the peace is the
job of the adults.**

**Children are not
responsible
for war.**

**You are safe here.
If something changes and
I think you are not safe,
I will tell you.**



Minneapolis Children's Medical Center

Parent Warmline (612) 863-6336

Communicating with Children About the Gulf Crisis

Following is some basic information which should be helpful to parents as they interact with their children regarding the war in the Persian Gulf.

Keep communication open with your children. It is helpful to use open-ended questions such as, "What do you think about this war? What are you feeling? and Tell me what you know or have heard about this situation," to find out what meaning this war has for your child. Take time to listen to their concerns.

Accept any reactions. Some children seem very **concerned or fearful** and others show **indifference**. **Either is okay** and it is not important that they experience the same emotions felt by the parent.

Offer reassurance for stated fears.

Look for anxiety or stress signs. Sleep disruptions, unusual or sudden behavior changes or "war play" which seem to indicate that your child is feeling anxious are reasons to ask questions or lend a listening ear.

Limit the amount of media exposure. It is okay for children to be aware of the situation, but excessive exposure may cause overanxiousness. Children need attention during this time and if a radio or television is turned on all day, the parent might find very little time or emotional energy to deal with the children.

Keep routines as normal as possible!

Preschool children need to be reassured about their safety. They need to be told that the war is very far away. Use concrete explanations to make this point, i.e. "It would take *many* days to get to where the war is and we would have to take a long airplane, train and car trip to get there." They also need to know that their caretakers are safe and will protect them.

School-age children will want to master the situation. They will request more facts but also need to feel safe and in control.

Adolescents will need parents to listen and help them through all of their questions and concerns about morality and values. Accept this exploration but again, encourage the adolescent to continue with everyday routines.

Children may also feel less anxious if they can actively do something for the cause. Encourage them to write letters to legislators or servicepeople, make paper peace chains, draw pictures, etc.

Physical activity will also help diffuse the anxiety and stress.

Look for and take advantage of community organizations and local churches which provide resources for families during this crisis.

Parents can be honest and share their own feelings with their children. However, it may be helpful to find other "adult" supports to vent some emotion so that it is easier to remain calm around children.

Opening Activity

About the Start of the War

Hand out name tags.

- Choose a partner.

Make a name tag for her and ask her to tell you what she was doing when she found out the Jan. 16 bombing had started and how she felt about that.

- Introduce your partner and tell the group what she was doing if she is willing for you to share that information.

Closing Activity

About War and Peace

At the end of the meeting, briefly review the activities of the meeting.

- Ask several people to share what they think is the single most important way they can encourage children to express their feelings about war and about peace.
- Ask for resentments. Listen to resentments, do not defend or explain.
- Ask for appreciations.
- Ask the group to read the following affirmation to themselves and then to join you in reading it aloud if they want to.

As adults we create safe ways for children to explore their feelings and ideas about war and to practice peace making skills.

WAR

Subscription Order Form

Enclosed find \$_____ for a one year extension of my subscription:

Name _____

Address _____

Help for Kids Order Form

Name _____

Address _____

To order the book, **Help for Kids, Understanding Your Feelings about the War** send \$5.95 (+ 6% tax for Minnesota residents) plus \$2.50 shipping per copy to Daisy Press, 4036 Kerry Ct., Minnetonka, MN 55345. Phone (612) 938-9163.

Workshops

Facilitator Training

A week-long workshop for people who want to . . .

- Facilitate the Self-Esteem: A Family Affair parenting model.
- Improve group leadership skills for working with growth, education, or support groups.
- Receive advanced training in the use of Transactional Analysis in educational settings.
- Practice ways of inviting people to change.

June 17-21, 1991
Berrien Co., Michigan

July 15-19, 1991
Seattle, Washington

September 9-13, 1991
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Reminder:

Facilitators who have already taken the workshop anywhere may repeat it in Minneapolis for half price.

Transactional Analysis 101

March 22, 23, 1991

Minneapolis, Minnesota

A Friday evening and all day Saturday overview of TA theory and practice.

Write to WE for details on the workshops.

newsletter for people who care about self esteem

Edited by Jean Illsley Clarke

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WE

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