



TALKING WITH CHILDREN ABOUT WAR AND CONFLICT

ARNG CYS

A Guide for Military-Connected Families

Children in military-connected homes often hear about conflict, terrorism, and war through news, school conversations, social media, or peers. Because someone in their household or family serves in the military, these events can feel very personal and may raise questions, worries, or fears.

Even when a service member is not deployed, children may still feel anxious about what they hear or see. They may wonder if their parent, sibling, or family member could be involved or in danger. Open and honest communication helps children process these feelings and strengthens their sense of safety and support.

Talking about difficult topics like war can feel challenging, but it is an important way to help children understand what is happening and feel supported within their family and community.

WHY THESE CONVERSATIONS MATTER

Military-connected children often have a heightened awareness of world events because of their family's connection to military service. They may hear discussions from classmates, teachers, media outlets, or online platforms before parents are aware of what they have encountered.

Without guidance, children may form misunderstandings or imagine worst-case scenarios. Supportive conversations can help:

- Reduce anxiety and uncertainty
- Correct misinformation
- Provide reassurance and stability
- Strengthen trust between parents and children
- Help children build resilience and healthy coping skills

These discussions also remind children that their feelings are valid and that they are not alone in navigating difficult emotions

PREPARING FOR THE CONVERSATION

Conversations about conflict should be thoughtful and intentional. Children benefit from discussions that occur in a calm and supportive environment.

Choose the Right Time and Place: Create a comfortable setting where children feel safe to ask questions. A quiet moment at home, during a walk, or while sharing a meal can provide a relaxed opportunity to talk.

Take the Initiative: Children may hesitate to bring up difficult topics because they do not want to worry their parents or because they are unsure how to ask questions. Opening questions may include:

- "What have you heard about what is happening in the world right now?"
- "How are you feeling about what you've seen or heard on the news?"
- "Do you have any questions about the military or what I do?"

These types of questions allow children to guide the conversation and share what is on their minds.

Focus on Feelings First: Children may express fear, confusion, pride, anger, or sadness. Allow them to share their thoughts without interruption or immediate correction. Listening first helps them feel heard and supported.

HELPFUL COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES

DO	AVOID
Be honest and clear	Avoid making promises you cannot guarantee
Keep information age appropriate	Avoid overwhelming children with details
Reassure children	Avoid dismissing emotions
Maintain routines	Avoid using stereotypes and labels
Keep communication open	Avoid letting your emotions lead the conversation

TALKING WITH CHILDREN AT DIFFERENT AGES

Children process information differently as they grow. Tailoring conversations to their developmental stage can help them better understand and cope.

Ages 2-4

Young children think in very literal terms and may not understand abstract ideas like war.

- Use simple, concrete explanations
- Focus on safety and reassurance
- Maintain familiar routines
- Answer questions briefly and calmly

Ages 9-12

Twins begin to understand more complex ideas and may hear about global events through school or media.

- Discuss what they have heard or seen
- Help them evaluate information from news or social media
- Validate emotions such as worry, confusion, or frustration
- Allow them space if they need time before talking

Ages 5-8

Children in early elementary years are curious and observant. They may ask many questions and revisit the topic repeatedly.

- Provide simple explanations
- Encourage questions
- Offer reassurance when concerns arise
- Be prepared to repeat information over time

Ages 13-18

Teenagers often seek independence but still benefit from emotional support. They may form their own opinions about global events.

- Invite their perspective and listen actively
- Respect their thoughts even if they differ from your own
- Encourage thoughtful discussion rather than debate
- Reinforce that support and guidance are always available

RESOURCES FOR MILITARY-CONNECTED FAMILIES

Families seeking additional guidance or support can explore the following resources:

Family Resources

- <https://arngcys.com/resources-for-families>
- <https://www.ourmilitarykids.org>
- <https://military.tutor.com/home>
- <https://unitedheroesleague.org/>
- <https://www.bloommilitaryteens.org/>
- <https://public.militarychildcare.csd.disa.mil/mcc-central/mcchome>

Resources for Educators

- <https://arngcys.com/resources-for-educators>
- <https://militarychild.org/>

Counseling and Emotional Support

- <https://www.militaryonesource.mil/health-wellness/mental-health/confidential-counseling-for-youth-teens>

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