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Resilience in a time of war: Tips for parents and teachers of elementary school children

Talking to children about war can help them feel safer and more secure. Here's what psychologists recommend.

Last updated: October 16, 2023 Date created: July 1, 2011 6 min read



Current events are often uncertain for children. They look to parents as well as teachers to make them feel safe in a time of war.

As children start to study subjects that teach them about the world outside of their home, they will need your help to sort it all out. You may wonder how you can teach your child to move beyond the fears that a time of war brings. The good news is that, just as your children learn reading and writing, they can learn the skills of resilience—the ability to adapt well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or even significant sources of stress.

What are some tips that can help you teach your children resilience? As you use these tips, keep in mind that each child's journey along the road to resilience will be different and that your own knowledge of your child will guide you.

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10 tips for parents and teachers of elementary school children in a time of war

1. **Talk with your child.** When children have questions, answer them honestly but simply and with reassurance. Ask them what they think is happening, and listen to their answers. Don't discount their feelings—they may say they're afraid, and you should be ready to tell them that fear is all right, but that they must go on with life anyway. Use black-and-white language that leaves no room for doubt, such as, "I will always take care of you."
2. **Make your home a safe place emotionally for your child.** Spend lots of family time with your child, especially during a time of war. Spend more time with your child playing games, reading, or just holding your child close.
3. **Limit the amount of news your child watches during a time of war.** Turn off the TV or radio when war coverage is on. You don't need to hide what's happening in the world from your children, but neither do you have to expose them to constant stories about war. Put away magazines and newspapers that have extensive photo coverage of war or frightening

covers. Monitor your child's internet usage to ensure that they aren't going to sites that will give gory or sensationalized accounts of war.

4. **Realize that the stresses of war may heighten daily stresses.** Your children might normally be able to handle a failed test or teasing, but be understanding that they may respond with anger or bad behavior to stress that normally wouldn't rattle them. Reassure them that you just expect them to do their best.
5. **During a time of war, map out a routine and stick to it.** Children are reassured by regular schedules. If homework is completed at a certain time, make sure you keep that time for homework. Your child may be less able to handle change at home when the world situation is unstable.
6. **Make sure you take care of yourself.** If you don't, you may have less patience and less creativity at a time when your children need both to reassure them about their own safety. Take care of yourself so that you can take care of your child. Many people find that turning to a higher power, whether through organized religion or privately, can help.
7. **Tell children that they will be all right.** Reassure them that they will be protected. Have an emergency plan for the family and share whatever parts of it you think your child can understand. Share with children the emergency plans their schools have and prepare them—some schools shut down in an emergency with the children inside, and children need to know they will be protected at school even if they are not with their parents.
8. **Watch your children for signs of fear and anxiety they may not be able to put into words.** Have your children become extra clingy, needing more hugs and kisses than usual? Have their grades suddenly dropped? They may be feeling the pressure of what is going on in the world around them. Encourage them to write stories or draw pictures that show how they feel if they can't put their feelings into words. A licensed mental health professional such as a psychologist can help. To find a licensed psychologist in your area, [use our Psychologist Locator \(https://locator.apa.org/\)](https://locator.apa.org/).

9. **Enlist your child's help.** Just because your children are young does not mean they cannot do age-appropriate chores, such as setting the table or cleaning their room. Make sure your child knows how their actions contribute to the entire family's well-being. If children know that they have a role to play, and that they can help, they will feel more in control and more confident.
10. **Put things into a positive perspective for your child.** Neither you nor your child may have been through a war before, but you should tell your child that wars end. Point out times when your child has faced up to and conquered something that may have frightened them, whether it was fear of the dark or of entering a new classroom for the first time. When you talk about bad times, make sure you talk about the good times in the future as well.

Resilience is a journey

You can teach your children resilience. But just because your children learn resilience doesn't mean they won't have bad times. Bad times hurt, and your children will have times when they aren't happy.

Resilience is a journey, and each child will take their own time along the way, just as each child learns to read and write in their own time. Your child may benefit from some of these resilience strategies, while other children may benefit from other strategies. The skills of resilience you teach your children in a time of war will be useful to them even after war, and they are good skills to have in daily life.

You may feel that you need some help in teaching your child resilience. If you are feeling stuck or overwhelmed and unable to use the tips listed above, you may want to consider talking to someone who can help, such as a psychologist or other mental health professional. Turning to someone for guidance may help you help your children strengthen their resilience and persevere in a time of war.

To find a licensed psychologist in your area, [use our Psychologist Locator \(https://locator.apa.org/\)](https://locator.apa.org/).

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Resilience in a time of war: Tips for parents and teachers of teens (/topics/resilience/teen-war)

Although your teens may tower over you, they are still young and can keenly feel the fear and uncertainty of a time of war.

Acknowledgments

APA gratefully acknowledges the following contributors to this publication:

- Mary K. Alvord, PhD, director, Group Therapy Center at Alvord, Baker, and Associates, LLC, Silver Spring, Maryland
- Rosalind Dorlen, PsyD, ABPP, CAPP board member, Allied Professional Staff, Overlook Hospital, Summit, New Jersey
- Robin H. Gurwitch, PhD, associate professor, University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center's Department of Pediatrics
- Ronald S. Palomares, PhD, assistant executive director, APA Practice Directorate

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