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HOW TO SUPPORT OUR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

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Recent violent events may raise fear, confusion, and difficult questions for children and young people. The way adults respond can strongly shape how safe and supported children feel.

This guide offers **practical, compassionate advice** for talking with children in age-appropriate and reassuring ways.

Drawing on decades of experience in trauma and emergency medicine, Hadassah Medical Organization in Jerusalem is sharing evidence-based mental health support to help our community navigate the days and weeks ahead.

Important Note on Emotional Wellbeing

This guide is intended to offer general support and guidance for families and educators. Every child and young person responds differently to distressing events, and some may need additional care beyond these suggestions.

If a child or young person shows ongoing signs of distress such as persistent anxiety, changes in behaviour, sleep difficulties, withdrawal, or intense fear it is important to seek support from a qualified mental health professional, such as a psychologist, counsellor, GP, or school wellbeing professional.

Seeking help is a sign of strength and care, and early support can make a meaningful difference.





First Principles

- Children take emotional cues from adults. **Stay calm, grounded, and present.**
- Not all children need the same information. **Follow their lead.**
- Honest, simple explanations build trust, **without frightening details.**
- Reassure children that **adults and authorities are working to keep people safe.**

If children ask questions, it means that they are willing to accept the answers. When talking to children, we should follow their lead. If they're asking questions, provide honest answers. Because if they ask, then they are capable of receiving the answers. If they don't ask, then we provide minimal information.

How to Start the Conversation

You don't need to have "the perfect words."

Start with curiosity and care:

- *"What have you heard?"*
- *"What made you think about that?"*
- *"How did that make you feel?"*

If a child hasn't asked questions, you don't need to force a conversation, but remain open and available.



PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

- Answer questions honestly without graphic detail
- Emphasise safety and care
- Example: "Sometimes people make very bad choices. That doesn't mean it's likely to happen to us. There are many people whose job it is to protect the community."



TEENAGERS

- Acknowledge complexity and emotions
- Encourage critical thinking about news and social media
- Reinforce values: violence and hate are never acceptable



What to Avoid

- Graphic or sensational details
- Constant exposure to news footage
- Over-explaining or overwhelming with information
- Dismissing feelings with “Don’t worry” or “It’s not a big deal”

Instead, validate emotions:

- “It makes sense to feel scared or upset”
- “I’m really glad you told me how you’re feeling”

If a Child Is Distressed

Signs may include trouble sleeping, anxiety, withdrawal, or changes in behaviour.

What helps:

- Maintain routines
- Offer extra reassurance and physical comfort (if welcomed)
- Encourage expression through talking, drawing, or play
- Limit news exposure
- Seek professional support if distress continues

A Message of Hope

Children need to hear not only that bad things happen — but that good people respond.

Share messages of:

- Community strength and solidarity
- Helpers, first responders, and acts of kindness
- Resilience and care in times of difficulty

Let children know:

“We face hard moments together — and we don’t face them alone.”



IF YOU NEED SUPPORT SERVICES AND HELPLINES:

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