

Questions & Answers about children's reactions to war

1. Is it a good idea for my children to watch news about the fighting that their parent is involved in?

Children can become stressed by seeing or hearing too much about military conflict in the news. Your most important job as a parent is to watch how your children feel about it and to help them deal with any fears or anxieties. Limit the amount of news your children see and hear and talk with them about it. This may be good for you as well. Although you want to have accurate information and to watch the news, remember that you may not get the whole story. Check with several sources before you come to conclusions about the news reports you see and hear.

2. Recently, I have been crying most of the day because I have been so upset. I am very worried

about my husband because I haven't heard anything from him for several days. This is making my children upset as well. What should I do?

During a military conflict, try to stay calm and offer comfort to your children. If you cannot do this, find some help. Contact friends or family. Let someone else look after your kids for a while. Contact the Family Center in your installation, a chaplain, or other professionals with whom you can discuss your worries. Don't just try to get by! Your children need you and you need to take care of yourself.

3. The other day, my children told me that they heard some kids at school saying that a lot of service personnel had been killed. They said the kids heard it on TV. There have been

rumors, but I am not sure what the facts are. What can I say to my kids?

Help your children sort out what they have heard and seen in news reports. These reports may not tell the whole story and may stress the worst part of a military situation. This is a good opportunity to teach your children that it is okay to ask questions and talk about what they have heard. It teaches them to check information out before believing everything they hear.

4. We were watching television and before I knew it, there were pictures of wounded personnel. My kids immediately asked if their dad was at that place. What should I do?

In these situations it is best to turn off the television and talk with your children. If you know the location of your husband and his circumstances, you should tell them if he is in danger. This may be difficult to talk about if he is in danger or if the wounded personnel were close to your husband's location. The best you may be able to do is to remind your children that he is careful and will take care

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of himself. If you are able to contact him, it is important for your children to know that he is okay. If your husband is not in a dangerous place, tell your children that and answer any questions they may have.

5. What are some signs of stress in children that I, as a parent, should be aware of?

Fear can cause children to regress (wet the bed, withdraw, throw tantrums) for short periods of time. If these signs continue, seek help from the Family Center in your installation, your pediatrician, or other professionals experienced in working with military families.

6. What are some things that I can say to help my children deal with their fears?

Your children need to know that their fears are real and that you know how they are feeling. You can say something like: *“Everyone is afraid sometimes and it is okay to be afraid.”* *“A lot of other people are afraid right now also, just like you.”*

Your children need to know that you understand the reasons for their fears and worries. Say something like: *“I can understand why you are fearful and upset about your dad being deployed.”*

Your children need time to think about their fears and to feel their emotions. You can say something like: *“It’s okay to cry.”* *“It is sad and scary.”* *“Maybe right now you need a few minutes to cry and then we*

can talk about your fears for your mom’s safety.” Or if the fears are unknown to say, *“Just go ahead and cry for now and let me know when you want to talk.”*

Your children need time to talk about what is worrying them or what is on their minds. Their fears may be both real and imagined. Give your children time to tell you what they are fearful about so that you can help them sort out the real fears from the imagined ones. You can say things like: *“Let’s talk about why you are afraid for your dad.”* *“Let’s talk about what is troubling you.”* *“Tell me what you are thinking.”*

Your children may need help knowing how to cope with real fears. Help them think of ways to deal with fears and worries by getting them to think of things they can do. You can ask: *“Can you think of something you can do when you get afraid?”* *“What can you do when you are thinking about your dad and you get worried?”*