

Children and Fear of War and Terrorism

Terrorist attacks in our country and threats of war are frightening experiences for all Americans. Children may be especially fearful that threatened or actual military action overseas will result in more personal loss and violence here at home. Adults need to help children feel safe at a time when the world seems to be a more dangerous place. Here are some ways to provide support:

- ▶ **Acknowledge children’s feelings**—Try to recognize the feelings and put them into words. Some children will be afraid the United States will be attacked. Tell them this is a real concern and life offers no absolute promises. Nonetheless, reassure them that our government has taken many steps to prevent attacks from terrorists and that the military conflict is very far away.
- ▶ **Help children to feel personally safe**—Differentiate between terrorism and war. Emphasize that our homes and schools are not at risk...only a very few people in the world are terrorists...the war itself will be carried out far away. Help children understand that precautions are being taken to prevent terrorism or attacks on the United States (e.g., passport checks, heightened airport security). Try to maintain normal routines.
- ▶ **Expect and respond to changes in behavior**—While some degree of immature, aggressive behaviors are normal reactions in these times, it is important to maintain consistent expectations for behavior. Children may play “war,” or include images of violence in artwork and writing. This is a normal way for children to express their awareness of the events. Gently redirect children away from violent play, but don’t be overly disapproving unless the play is genuinely aggressive.
- ▶ **Keep adult issues from overwhelming children**—Don’t let your children focus too much of their time and energy on the war. You may also need to watch the news less intensely and spend more time in alternative family activities. Know the facts about developments in the war and protections against terrorism at home. Don’t speculate. Be prepared to answer your children’s questions factually. Take time for yourself and try to deal with your own reactions to the situation as fully as possible.

For more information on this topic, visit www.nasponline.org/NEAT/children_war_general.html and www.naeyc.org/Supporting_Children.htm.