



Counseling Corner

Talking With Your Kids About War

The United States is in a very long period of conflict as it attempts to fight the war on terrorism. Students in middle school in the US today have only recently experienced war as a reality. Unique to the experience of our students is the impact of media on their thinking and feeling. They have been exposed to violence— both real and fictional— in unprecedented amounts.

Children probably do not understand the politics of this situation. For many, especially the youngest children, war is a distant event, and they do not pay attention to it. But many others are likely to be confused. They see parents being deployed and leaving their children behind. Seeing children in the news attracts other children's attention. They may wonder if their own parents will be called to go away. As they hear about deaths of soldiers they may become especially worried. Older children may be confused when they hear differing opinions and recommendations. Many words are being used that are not familiar to children.

All students need the support of caring adults to help them deal with this crisis. If you need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact Molly Kridel, counselor at AMS (x 2215).

What Can I Expect?

Students' reactions are determined by their previous experiences, their temperament and personality, and the immediacy of the crisis in their own lives. The following may become evident during the course of the conflict in the Middle East:

- **Fear:** This may be the predominant reaction of many students— fear for their own safety or fear for a friend or loved one who is serving in the military. Students' picture of war may include a bomb being dropped on their home or school. While this may seem unreasonable, these fears are real to them.
- **Loss of control:** Military actions are something over which children and most adults have no control. Feelings of loss of control can be overwhelming, and students may grasp at what control they do have.
- **Anger:** Anger is not an unusual reaction. Unfortunately, anger is most often expressed to those with whom the students are most secure.
- **Loss of stability:** War interrupts the natural order of things. Stability is gone, and this can be a very threatening thought to students. After all, if this war can happen, than almost anything else might happen, also.



Be sure to spend time with the children in your lives and reassure them that they are SAFE!

Mitten Tree Starting November 29

The Aspen Middle School will be collecting gifts for less fortunate families in our valley beginning November. 29.

Mittens hanging on trees in the AMS office will each represent one child in our valley whose family cannot afford extras this holiday season. Each mitten will have a description of an individual child who is in need this winter. Please stop by and sign out a mitten, purchase and wrap a gift for this child, and return to the office by December 9 with the mitten attached. Please note, there is a \$20 limit on each gift. Contact Molly at x 2215 with any questions.

ACTS OF HOPE FOOD DRIVE : THANK YOU!!

Special Thank You to Acts of Hope, a group of seventh graders who saw a need and saw that need met: Emily Olson, Niki Vetromile, Lucy Shore, Megan Karus, Alex Maple, Kerry Braisted, and Hannah Pike. Aspen Middle School helped the Lift Up organization prepare over 200 Thanksgiving baskets for families in need this fall.

What can I do to help my student?

Help Children To Feel Personally Safe

- Help children understand that precautions are being taken to prevent terrorism and attacks on the US.
- Deal with fears such as the end of the world. Discuss what is realistic modern technology of war versus science fiction. If kids are imagining Star Wars-type battles, help them to understand what is real and not real.
- Try to maintain normal routines and schedules to maintain a sense of stability and security.
- Stop children from stereotyping people from specific cultures or countries. Children can easily generalize negative statements.

Acknowledge Children's Feelings

- Knowing what to say is often difficult. When no other words come to mind, a hug and saying "This is really hard for you/us," will work. Acknowledge that you don't like war either, but we hope that our military can stop terrorists or help bring peace to other countries.
- Try to recognize the feelings underlying kids' actions and put them into words. Say something like "I can see you are feeling really scared about this" or "It is hard to think that your dad has to go so far away to help our country."



- At times when your children or students are most upset, don't deny the seriousness of the situation. Saying to kids "Don't cry, everything will be OK" does not reflect how the child feels and may not make them feel better. Nevertheless, don't forget to express hope and faith that things will be OK.
 - Older students may need help clarifying what they believe about the war and the role of the US.
- Always be honest with kids. Share your fears and concerns while reassuring them that adults in charge are working to make responsible decisions.

Keep adult issues from overwhelming children

- Don't let your children focus too much of their time and energy on this crisis. If they are choosing to watch the news for hours every night, you may need to find different activities for them. You may also need to watch the news less intensely and spend more time in alternative family activities.
- Don't speculate. Be prepared to answer your children's questions factually and take time to think about how you want to frame events and your reactions to them.

- Take time for yourself and try to deal with your own reactions to the situation as fully as possible.
- Coordinate between school and home: Let the school know if a family member is being called to active duty. Tell your child's teacher if he or she is

having difficulties and share what strategies make your child feel better. Contact the school if you would like help brainstorming new strategies to help kids feel better.

"Take time to think about how you want to frame events and your reactions to them."

Expect and respond to behavior changes

- Make it a priority to watch the children in your lives, and understand their behavior. Children may manifest some behavioral and emotional changes, including misbehavior, sleeplessness, nightmares and anxiety.
- It is important to maintain consistent expectations for behavior. Be sure children understand the same rules apply.



- Some children may have difficulty at bedtime. Maintain a regular bedtime routine. Be flexible about nightlights, sleeping with special toys, siblings sharing a room, and sitting with your child as they fall asleep.

For more information...

Resources to assist staff, parents, and students during uncertain times.

www.naesp.org/safety/resources.htm

How to talk to your kids about the news.
www.kidshealth.org/parents/positive/talk/new.html

When war is in the news.
www.ces.purdue.edu/terrorism//index.html