



HOW TO TALK TO CHILDREN ABOUT WAR



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YOUTH PROGRAMME
March 2022

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Source:

Talking to Your Kids About War by
verywellfamily.com

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Scouts of Czechia have prepared the following tips for Scout Leaders, but they can also be useful for educators, parents or volunteers working with children in other organizations. [The original guide](#) was created to address the situation in Ukraine, however this English translation has been adapted, with permission, to help adults address this challenging topic with young people in various contexts anywhere in the world.

Young people in your Scout Group may have questions about conflicts or wars that they hear about on social media, TV, radio or from other people. The subject of war will inevitably have an impact on most people who are exposed to the topic. Whether seeing or hearing about parts of it on Instagram or a comprehensive news report on a reputable channel, they may be seeing something that brings uncertainty back into their lives. This can be especially challenging immediately after a difficult pandemic.

How should we react when children bring up the subject of war at a Scout meeting or event?

- Let's not overlook their need to talk about the topic.** Let's take the time to talk together, even if it's at the expense of another scheduled program. Children may not enjoy scheduled activities if they're feeling anxious or distracted anyway.
- Let's provide a space for dialogue. Creating a safe space to enable young people to share their concerns,** perceptions and perspectives is necessary to help them understand the situation and their emotions. This can also help them have more open dialogue with other family and friends.
- Let's be good listeners** and show children that we are interested in what they think and feel.
- Let's ask what they know about the topic,** to understand what they have already understood. It can be a good springboard for another conversation.
- Let's supplement their information with a factual description of what is happening.** If they have questions, let's answer them truthfully and factually. Let's choose the language and depth of information in proportion to their age. We don't want children to leave the conversation with even greater fear of war. Let us not reduce the seriousness of the war, but let us keep in mind that there is no need for the younger ones in particular to know violent or gory details of what is happening.
- Let's stick to the facts, without speculation.** Let's not anticipate what may happen next, nor talk about how terrible things can happen in the future.
- Let's make it clear that violence is not a good way to resolve a conflict,** just as it is not right to violate the rights of others or international rights. If we want to share our views, let's talk generally about how we perceive war.
- Let's encourage children to empathize with those directly affected by the war.** Often they don't have to be far - maybe they know people in their class who have been affected by war, or whose families have. Remember that even if they have not been in a war themselves, they may also be worried about their loved ones in conflict zones.
- Let's talk to them about what we can do for people affected by the war, what our options are as a unit, but also as individuals.** It can be a financial contribution to a reliable public collection, material assistance, or just a simple understanding, compassion and readiness to help in the future as needed.
- Let's talk to children and young people about where to find information, how to recognise bias & distinguish fake news.** Let children know they can speak with trusted adults when they feel anxious or have questions. For Scouts and Rovers especially, you can search together on where to find reliable information, and talk about how to verify sources and distinguish fake news. The war of disinformation is also part of any conflict, and we must equip young people not to succumb to it.
- Let's recognise the helpers. Let's point out the service of good people and volunteers so that children know that,** even though there are some bad people in the world, there are many more kind and supportive ones.
- Let's talk to children about the many people who care about collective safety -** like Scout Leaders, police officers, community leaders, doctors, nurses and many others.
- Let's set a good example. It is important for young people to see how we approach things ourselves.** How do we work with our own fears so that we can support those who suffer? How can we help? Observing how adults manage and help themselves and others in these situations will help them cope with their own fears.





More resources to cultivate peace in Scouting:



[Dialogue for Peace Toolbox for Facilitators](#)



Messengers of Peace

[Messengers of Peace](#)

Should I bring up the topic of war if it's in the news?

Undoubtedly a difficult question. As we wrote above, it is unlikely that children would not know about the war or that they are not feeling affected by such news.

If you are unsure whether to open the topic, leave it to the group. Ask at the beginning of the meeting how they are, what they experienced during the day, or how they are doing. If any of them have anxieties about the topic, they will probably mention it, and others may agree. Then, you can follow the points above. If the topic doesn't come up, you may not need to open it with them yet.



What else is good to know?

Scouts in the United Kingdom put together [some activities](#) that you can use with groups of young people to help learn and feel better together.

It is possible that children who are feeling anxious will not want to participate in activities or outings and will want to be with their families. Let's respect that.

If you notice a group member who seems especially anxious, or has a significant change in behaviour, etc., be sure to notify their parents. You can share this resource with parents to help them have these discussions with their young ones at home.

At times, our Scout service presents us with a new and difficult challenges - to be a support to young people at a time when the word "war" is heard often. At the same time, we have dealt recently with the challenges of COVID-19. Perhaps in this time, we proved that we can face big challenges together and that we will leave a better world to the children and young people we work with. We will continue to try to offer you support in how to respond to the events that necessarily affect our activities in all sections.

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