

Time to talk... PREVENT



Explaining Overseas Conflicts to Children & Young People

Guidance for Parents and Carers

Children and young people access information constantly whether that's on TikTok, YouTube, TV, and through friends at school. When global conflicts or overseas crises are reported, young people can feel particularly unsettled. The suggestions highlighted below, help support children of different ages through difficult news about wars or conflicts abroad.

Start with Yourself

Children and young people take emotional cues from adults. Staying calm and gathering accurate information first helps you guide them confidently.

Example:

Before answering your child's questions about a breaking-news alert on a conflict overseas, take a moment to check a reliable fact-checking website so you feel prepared.

- <https://fullfact.org>
- https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/reality_check
- <https://www.reuters.com/fact-check>
- <https://factcheck.afp.com>

For Children Aged 7 and Under:

Young children often confuse fears with reality and may be frightened by images of danger, especially photos or videos from conflict zones.

Reassure them that they are safe, loved, and protected. Children this age are most concerned with their immediate environment and with staying close to parents/carers.

Examples:

- Your 6-year-old glimpses a photo of destroyed buildings from a conflict abroad on your phone and asks, "Is that going to happen here?" You might say:
"That happened far away, and you are safe here at home. Grown-ups are working hard to help people who live there."
- If they overhear the word "war," gently clarify:
"War is something happening in another country, not here. You are safe, and we are right here with you."

For Children Aged 8–12:

Children in this age range think more deeply but may struggle with complexity. They also may be exposed to distressing images online or through friends.

Help them understand what's happening without graphic detail. Try to give simple and honest explanations. Avoid repeated viewing of dramatic footage from conflict zones, as repeated images can make danger feel closer than it is.

Examples:

- Your 10-year-old sees classmates sharing videos of bombings from a conflict zone on TikTok. You might say:
"Some videos online are very dramatic and don't tell the full story. Let's talk about what's actually happening and why some videos are made to get attention."
- If they ask why countries fight, you could explain:
"Sometimes leaders disagree over land, power, or politics. It's complicated, and not everyone involved wants to fight. Many people and organisations are working hard to help people stay safe and end the conflict."

For Teenagers:

Teens often see updates about overseas conflicts before adults do and may feel strong emotions such as anger, sadness, injustice - especially when they see graphic content shared by peers.

Talk with them about what they've seen, how it makes them feel, and how reliable the information is. Help them understand the difference between fact, opinion, and misinformation.

Examples:

- Your teen shares a viral social media post claiming that "an entire region has been destroyed." You might say:
"Let's compare this with a verified UK news report. Sometimes social media exaggerates or leaves out important context."
- If they feel distressed about images of injured civilians, acknowledge their emotions:
"It's really hard seeing people hurt. Feeling upset means you care. Let's talk about what is happening and what people are doing to help those affected."

Reassure, Listen, and Stay Connected

All children, including teens, may feel frightened, sad, or overwhelmed after hearing about global conflicts. Listening, validating their feelings, and offering comfort helps them feel secure. Remind them that widespread news coverage doesn't mean the event is happening everywhere; it is usually focused on specific areas far from home.

Examples:

- Your child asks whether a conflict abroad might "spread to the UK." You could calmly say:
"Conflicts like this are happening in a specific country far away. The UK is safe, and governments work very hard to prevent wars spreading."
- If they feel hopeless about people suffering overseas, you might say:
"It's normal to feel sad when we see others going through hard times. There are many people including charities, doctors and peacekeepers who are helping every day."

Consider Positive Action

Taking meaningful, age-appropriate action can reduce anxiety and build a sense of agency.

Examples:

- Your child wants to help families affected by a conflict. You could research a UK charity together and donate supplies or raise money.
- Teens may want to learn more through trusted sources, write to their MP about humanitarian issues, or join school-based awareness or fundraising projects.

Helpful UK-Based Resources

- <https://www.bbc.com/ownit>
- <https://www.childnet.com>
- <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/>
- <https://www.youngminds.org.uk>