

FOR PARENTS: IN THE FACE OF THE CURRENT SITUATION IN ISRAEL

Developed by the Jewish Education Center of Cleveland

This guide from the JECC has two sections to help parents. The first contains expert advice on helping your child deal with crisis and tragedy. The second are action steps you and your family may take to help answer questions or deal with high emotions that may find their way home.

HELPING YOUR CHILD

Every child will be touched in some way, whether it is through the emotions felt by their parents and teachers or through the coverage on television, newspapers, the internet, and even talk on the street.

Social workers and other mental health experts offer these thoughts and suggestions:

- When tragedy strikes, younger children will sense the emotional responses of the adults around them, understanding that something bad has happened. This is not to suggest that adults must hide their emotions, but that they should at least be alert to effects on children.
- Children might find themselves reacting to a specific situation because of a number of factors:
 - They probably have seen a picture or heard a graphic description of the event.
 - They may know of a relative or friend hurt or killed.
 - They may have a relative in the military.
 - They may be reminded of a past loss.
 - They might be personally familiar with the location.

Without treading into therapeutic-territory, parents might need to help their children identify why they are reacting in a particular way to a news event.

- It is important to be honest with children. While parents may choose to omit information (such as graphic details), acknowledging a tragedy, its issues and tumultuous emotions is crucial. Adults need to reassure children that their feelings are appropriate and normal. Most importantly, the adult's role in a situation of this nature is to give full attention to a child's concerns, anger, frustration or sadness, by listening carefully and acknowledging feelings.
- Children need to be reassured that adults will always do their best to keep children safe and healthy.
- Older children will understand the broader intellectual implications of the political situation and may have feelings or fears that should be discussed and explored.



FOR PARENTS: IN THE FACE OF THE CURRENT CRISIS

- Sadness and anger can be exacerbated by feelings of helplessness. Finding ways to empower children begins to ameliorate overwhelming emotional responses.

Rabbi David Wolpe offers some excellent insight about this issue in his classic book, *Teaching Your Children About God*. (NY: Henry Holt and Co., Inc., 1994)

Adults must remember that younger children view such violence as unfair, and since children want to view the world as a fair place, this may be the first challenge of their worldview.

There is often not an answer to “why?” Educators must recognize that the question is an indication of the children’s fears. They need to be reassured not just of their safety, but of their worth. Children often feel that if they are “bad” they will get hurt as well.

A way to bring God into the picture is to remind the children that God gave us the gift of being able to make choices. Some people make choices that hurt or sadden others. The consequences of freewill granted by God may seem unfair to children (and adults).

Our personal task is to exercise our gift of free will to make good choices, guided by our own value systems and our Jewish heritage.

Related Web Links:

- Fred Rogers: Tragic Events
<http://www.fredrogers.org/parents/special-challenges/tragic-events.php>
- Familyeducation.com: Helping Kids Cope in a Time of Crisis and Fear
<http://bit.ly/HMO6DI>



ACTION STEPS FOR PARENTS

Stay Informed.

- Read and listen to different perspectives. Seek multiple sources of information. Attend lectures and special events. Be wary of unsubstantiated information and propaganda. The more you know, the better you will be able to help your child.
 - Key news sources from Israel (along with some notes about their leanings):
 - Ha'aretz www.haaretz.com
 - The Jerusalem Post www.jpost.com
 - Ynetnews www.ynetnews.com
 - The Times of Israel <http://www.timesofisrael.com>
 - Arutz Sheva www.israelnationalnews.com
 - For short news articles, videos, and personal accounts go to: <http://www.jewishfederations.org>
 - For relatively easy-to-understand information about the Middle East read Mitchell Bard's *The Complete Idiot's Guide to the Middle East Conflict, 4th Ed.* (Alpha, 2008).
- If you hear or read news that seems inaccurate (or if your child brings home a faulty statement made by another adult), check the facts or the conclusions drawn and then correct the misinformation. Older children can do this research with you (check especially <http://HonestReporting.com>). If you're not sure what is accurate, contact your rabbi, school director, librarian or the Community Relations Council of the Jewish Federation.

Help your child respond.

- Pay attention to what your child knows and asks, then build your conversation from there. If you are stumped, consider using reflective questions ("what do you think?" "why do you ask that?" etc.); these will help you better understand your child's thinking so you can offer a targeted response. The following starters may help you open the conversation:
 - Have you heard about Israel in the news recently? I'd like to talk about what has been happening there this week.
 - Sometimes scary things happen in our world. These events are not happening in America, but I want you to hear about this because it is something I am thinking about right now...
 - I know you are hearing us worry about Israel and I want to talk about some of what the children in Israel are experiencing...
 - You know Israel is so important to our family and right now there are some special things we can do to help Israel. Let's talk about what is going on and how we can help.
[From: <http://www.lookstein.org/articles/israelsecuritysituation.pdf>]
- Ask your child what counselors, teachers, fellow students, club leaders, etc. may be saying about the current situation in Israel. If your child brings home a social studies textbook, photocopies of websites or other teacher-provided resources, read through the material for anti-Israel bias. [For more on the latter, read "Lies in the Library," by Andrea Rapp (*Reform Judaism Magazine*, Summer 2005), located at: <http://tinyurl.com/p8kyluw>]

Help your child learn to

- Listen carefully
- Bring to you, to a rabbi, cantor or Jewish educator, any information that is confusing or possibly incorrect.
- Learn to respectfully correct any misinformation.

Your child does not have to feel like "THE" spokesperson for the Jewish People, and may actually choose to not respond during the situation. But s/he should learn to bring any issues to someone for further clarification and understanding.



Advocate.

- Learn how to help your family become an effective advocate for Israel.
 - Practice short, simple responses. Think in terms of “sound bytes” or metaphorical “elevator conversations” (to-the-point-statements that could be delivered between the time of stepping on and then off an elevator).
 - Write letters, faxes, e-mails and make phone calls to elected officials.

Spread the word.

- Speak about Israel regularly at the dinner table or in the car.

Connect your family to Israel.

- Bring books, music, photos/pictures, apps and DVDs about Israel into your home or car. For a great selection, check a library, book, video or app store (even your PJ Library book collection!). Have family night & enjoy!
- Make a special effort to attend Israeli cultural events.
- If you have relatives or friends in Israel, include your children when you call or write to say “hello.”
- Connect to other extended “family” in Israel. Write a letter, send a holiday greeting, or put together a small package to send to Israel through one of the Jewish Federation's partnership programs. For instance, Clevelanders can consider these to be “family.”
 - *Cleveland/Beit Shean Partnerships* - Connects individuals and organizations in our two communities.
 - *PACT (Parents and Children Together)* - Provides pre-school and supplemental programs for Ethiopian-Israeli children between the ages of 0 and 6.
 - *IDF (Israel Defense Force) Education Corps/Havat HaShomer* - Works to raise the level of achievement for young men and women in the IDF.
 - *ISHA (Israel Health Advancement for Women)* - Helps improve health care for women all over Israel, whether Jewish, Arab or Bedouin.
- Consider sending Israeli and American friends and family (yourself included!) holiday flower arrangements, fruit baskets, music, food, books, calendars, wine, etc. [Check out www.shopinisrael.com to ship to either the US or Israel.]
- When you consider it to be safe, plan a family (or even adults-only) trip to Israel.
- For Clevelanders: On behalf of your children, join *A Gift of Israel*, a savings program for Israel educational trips with the participation of the family, the synagogue or school and the Jewish Federation of Cleveland. For more information, contact Helen Wolf at the JECC (216-371-0449)
- Send your favorite teenager or college student to Israel! For Clevelanders, Helen Wolf at the JECC (216-371-0449) has information on a number of programs, as do local synagogues and youth groups. For college students (and beyond!) check out <http://www.birthrightisrael.org> and <http://www.masaisrael.org>.

Give.

- Consider using family *tz'dakah* funds to help support Israel at her time of need.

Parents are welcome to check out the Jewish Education Center of Cleveland's "Responding to Crisis" educators' website, with a more detailed special section on Israel:
<http://jeccrespondingtocrisis.weebly.com/israel.html>

