

Resilience in a Time of War

Middle School Children



A time of war can be scary for children, even older children, especially because terrorism has brought fear so close to home...

Events are uncertain for children. Their friends' parents, or perhaps their own parents, may be called away to serve in the military. They look to teachers and friends as well as to parents to make them feel safe in a time of war.

As children start to study subjects that teach them about the world outside of their home, they will need your help to sort it all out. You may wonder how you can teach children to move beyond the fears that a time of war brings. The good news is that, just as your child learns reading and writing, he or she can learn the skills of resilience -- the ability to adapt well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or even significant sources of stress.

What are some tips that can help you teach children resilience? As you use these tips, keep in mind that each child's journey along the road to resilience will be different and that your own knowledge of your child will guide you.

10 Tips for Parents and Teachers of Middle School Children in a Time of War

- 1.** Talk with your child whenever you can. Sometimes the best time to talk may be when you are driving your child somewhere. Sometimes, it may be when you are doing chores together that allow your child to focus on something else while he or she talks. When children have questions, answer them honestly, but simply, and with reassurance. Ask them their opinion about what is happening and listen to their answers. Don't discount their feelings-- they may say they're afraid or they may express hatred for people from a certain country or religion. Encourage them to avoid generalities, and be honest about your own feelings, but leave them with messages of hope and encouragement. You might say, "I get a little afraid too, but I know that we're prepared for whatever happens, and I know we'll get through it." Your child probably is old enough to appreciate some gray areas in your own feelings, but you should leave no room for doubt when you talk about how you will do whatever it takes to keep him or her safe.
- 2.** Make your home a safe place emotionally for your child. In middle school, cliques and bullies can make life difficult for your child--home should be a haven. Your child is at an age when he or she may start wanting solitude, but be ready to provide lots of family time for your child when he or she needs it, especially during a time of war. Spend more time with your child playing games, reading, or just doing side by side chores.
- 3.** Limit the amount of news your children watch during a time of war. You don't need to hide what's happening in the world from your children, but neither do you have to expose them to constant stories about war. Put away magazines and newspapers that have extensive photo coverage of war or frightening covers. Monitor your children's Internet usage to ensure that they aren't going to sites that will give gory or sensationalized accounts of war. When you do watch the news, use it as a teaching tool and discuss what you have just seen with your child.
- 4.** Realize that the stresses of war may heighten daily stresses. Your child might already be feeling extreme highs and lows because of hormonal levels in his body; the uncertainty during a time of war can make these shifts seem more extreme. Be understanding but firm when a child responds to stress with bad behavior. Reassure him that you just expect him to do his best.

5. During a time of war, map out a routine and stick to it. Middle school offers your child more choices about how he spends his time. It can be reassuring for home to be a constant, especially in uncertain times. If homework is completed at a certain time, make sure you keep that time for homework. Your child may be less able to handle change at home when the world situation is unstable.
6. Make sure you take care of yourself. If you don't, you may have less patience and less creativity at a time when your child needs both to reassure her about her own safety. Many people find that turning to a higher power, whether through organized religion or privately, can help. Take care of yourself so that you can take care of your child.
7. Tell your children that they will be all right. Reassure them that they will be protected. Have an emergency plan for the family and share it with your children. Give your children instructions for what to do in an emergency and give them a list of your phone numbers--work and home--that they can keep in their backpacks. Share with them the emergency plans their schools have and prepare them--some schools shut down in an emergency with the children inside, and your children need to know they will be protected at school even if they are not with their parents. If children have family in the military, obtain as much information as you can about where their family member will be, how long they'll be gone, and how often their family member will be able to contact them.
8. Watch your child for signs of fear and anxiety he may not be able to put into words. Have your child's grades suddenly dropped? Is your child asking about the welfare of a friend during the war when he may actually be afraid for himself? He may be feeling the pressure of what is going on in the world around him. If he has trouble putting his feelings into words, encourage him to use journaling or art to express his fears.
9. Enlist your child's help, whether it's doing a chore or giving an opinion about a family activity. Include your child in any volunteer activity you do. Make sure your child knows how her actions contribute to the entire family's well-being. If your child knows that she has a role to play, and that she can help, she will feel more in control and more confident.
10. Put things into a positive perspective for your child. Neither you nor your child may have been through a war before, but you should tell your child that wars end. Point out times when your child has faced up to and conquered something that may have frightened him, whether it was fear of the dark or of entering a new classroom for the first time. Point out the important things that have stayed the same, even while the outside world is changing. When you talk about bad times, make sure you talk about the good times in the future as well. Teach your child about how to think positive thoughts or about a particular song to relax himself in a time of stress.

Resilience is a Journey

You can teach children resilience. But just because children learn resilience doesn't mean they won't have bad times. Bad times hurt, and children will have times when they aren't happy. Resilience is a journey, and each child will take his or her own time along the way, just as each child learns to read and write in his or her own time. Children may benefit from some of these resilience strategies, while other children may benefit from other strategies. The skills of resilience you teach children in a time of war will be useful to him or her even after war, and they are good skills to have in daily life.

You may feel that you need some help in teaching children resilience. If you are feeling stuck or overwhelmed and unable to use the tips listed above, you may want to consider talking to someone who can help, such as a psychologist or other mental health professional. Turning to someone for guidance may help you help a child strengthen his or her resilience and persevere in a time of war.

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