

# General explanations and information for the public



## Advice for parents:

### How can we help our children cope with continued pressure and the security threat!

#### **Important to know:**

- \* A significant adult available - the more children see the adults around them as figures that can be relied on, the more they will be able to feel protected.
- \*Public reaction to security events, as serious as they may be, are normal reactions to an abnormal situation.
- \*Studies in Israel and around the world point to an immediate symptomatic response by many children and youths exposed to traumatic events. These symptoms will disappear in most of them within a relatively short time. Among a small number, symptoms will continue to appear, may worsen and lead to a decline in function.

#### **What are normal feelings and responses to the situation?**

**Fear and anxiety:** Life suddenly seems a lot more difficult to predict, threatening - "What will happen to me? What will happen to the people dear to me?"

**Feelings of helplessness:**What can I do in this situation? Shame following feelings of helplessness.

**Frustration and anger at the situation:**Sometime expressed as slowing down of activities, lack of energy, emotional numbness.

#### **Normal physiological feelings:**

Fatigue, difficulty falling asleep, difficulty concentrating, shortness of breath, crying, suffocation, chest pain, diarrhea, muscular tension, dizziness.

#### **Behavioral/social reactions:**

Children and youths exposed to stress react in a polar manner. On the one hand, amplification of behavioral patterns such as over-activity, non-stop speech, a strong need for physical contact. And on the other, diminishing of behavioral patterns such as apathetic behavior, silences, withdrawing from hobbies, estrangement from friends and the environment.

Regressive patterns may also appear, especially among younger children, such as clinging to parents, bedwetting, thumbsucking and childish speech.

Children and teens look for control over their lives. Tension is characterized by a feeling of lack of control.

Many times, children are not aware that they are in a situation of stress (I'm bored, it hurts... or behavioral expressions such as disquiet and tantrums) and therefore it is important to teach them methods to balance themselves.

## What can we do as parents?

1. **Get them to talk** The role of adults is to display sensitivity and listen to their children's needs. To understand, contain and support. It is important for the child to have the opportunity to talk about what they are feeling and experiencing. To express their fears and unhappiness with the situation. It is important to let a child express themselves in various ways, conversation, drawing, games and more. When a child reacts to events it has been exposed to, you can initiate open questions such as what do you feel about the siren/rockets? (if not - are you afraid of the sirens?) It is important to help the child observe points of strength in himself that help him cope with the situation. Do not force children to talk about the subject.
2. **Set a personal example and share** - Adults who feel anxiety and try to hide their feelings in order to "protect" children. Do not deny or lie to children when they are talking about adult reactions. It is recommended that you share your feelings, depending on the age of the child, and without bringing up the full intensity of the parent's feelings. The message should be "the situation is concerning... but together we can overcome the difficulties". It is desirable to share past experiences where we have managed to cope. Sharing emotions brings you closer and gives a child legitimacy to talk about their feelings.
3. **Listen** - listen fully to our children. Look at them when they are talking, pick up how they are feeling from what they are saying and provide them with legitimacy to express feelings of fear without contempt.
4. **Explain** - children and youth require information on their surroundings in order to strengthen their feelings of self control. Therefore, it is important to provide accurate and reliable information depending on the developmental stage of the child.  
Preschool children (3-6) require minimal, simple and concrete information, with soothing messages. "The noise we are hearing is a siren", "In order to protect ourselves we need to go into the protected space" etc.  
Elementary school children (6-11) require more detailed information with more examples. Provide information about ways to cope ("What can you do if you are scared?") and make encouraging and calming statements ("This is a temporary situation that will change" "We have been through difficult times and we got over the difficulties").  
Teenagers (12-18) require a wide range of information integrating historical, political and ethical aspects. Adults can create a dialogue about the situation. But avoid dramatic statements. "The State of Israel is in danger of elimination."
5. **Maintain routine** - Adults and children need daily routine to cope with stress. Routine provides us with a feeling of permanence and security. It is important to maintain a daily routine of getting up, meals, bedtime, going to extracurricular activities. If you can not maintain regular routine, create an alternative routine.  
Even in a situation of tension as a result of the security situation, make sure to maintain rule and boundaries within the family.
6. **Encourage initiative and independence** - Situations of uncertainty and ongoing threat intensify feelings of confusion and helplessness, this situation makes it difficult for the child to solve problems and make decisions and harms feelings of control and independence. Adults should help children break down problems into short-term tasks, review priorities and options, make decisions while examining the outcomes and consequences of decisions. Success increases feelings of control and self confidence.

As part of an effort to encourage independence, a redistribution of roles connected to emergency routines can be conducted. What is each member of the family's role on the way to the protected space.

7. **Encourage emotional expression** Emotional expression in stressful situations is one of the important coping resources available to adults and children. It helps break down stress and enables the environment to support the child. Emotional expression can be encouraged with questions like "What are you worried about?", "What helps you feel better?"

Enable the child to see the positive in the situation, such as being together at home. Encourage the child to see their own coping resources.

You can encourage children to express themselves with non-verbal means such as drawing.

8. **Activate** - a continued stress situation causes feelings of helplessness and loss of control. Activity gives the child back a sense of control and releases stress

You can make a child active by functional activities such as helping out at home, looking after younger siblings. These activities create a sense of control, distract the child and heighten their sense of value.

You can aim for common activities that cause enjoyment and release stress like playing games, telling stories, doing works, drawing, working with dough and other materials depending on the age of the child. Singing, sport and dancing are also recommended.

It is also recommended to encourage children to engage in fun and relaxing activities such as listening to music, watching movies, socializing outdoors while maintaining safety rules, encouraging use of humor, watching comic films, telling jokes... Humor is considered one of the most important elements in increasing personal resilience.

It is important to do the things that you love together, it is liberating, relaxing and creates a good feeling.

9. **Enable family and social solidarity and support** - Studies in Israel and around the world indicate that family support and social solidarity are important resilience resources for children and adults.

Physical contact (hug, pat on the back ..), joining in a game, doing joint projects at home such as arranging family photos, baking, making dinner .. contribute to coping with the situation.

Incorporating the child into community projects such as looking after children in the building, volunteering for the civil guard and more creates a sense of mutual guarantee.

10. **Minimalize exposure to stressful events** It is advisable to limit exposure to media reports on tough and threatening events. (Especially for young children)

Excessive exposure can exacerbate stress reactions and make it difficult to return to routine.

In addition, the child should not be forced to engage in activities that he or she experiences as stressful.