

# TALKING WITH CHILDREN AND TEENS ABOUT EMERGENCIES IN ISRAEL

## Parenting Guide for Jewish Families

In times of crisis, children and teens look to the adults in their lives for stability, clarity, and reassurance. As events unfold in Israel and continue to affect Jewish communities around the world, parents face the difficult but essential task of speaking with their children about complex and often distressing realities. These conversations require sensitivity, honesty, and age-appropriate communication that fosters emotional safety while affirming a child's identity and sense of belonging.

With the expertise of the Israel Trauma Coalition, JReady—The Jewish Agency for Israel's platform for community resilience in partnership with the Ministry of Diaspora Affairs, has designed this guide to help parents compassionately navigate these discussions and offer practical approaches to support their children's well-being. We'll explore three circles of emotional impact and provide tools for navigating each one.

### Circle 1: Exposure to Images, News, and Social Media

#### What children & teens may be feeling:

- 1
- Fear, overwhelm, or confusion from graphic or emotional videos
  - Trouble sleeping, focusing, or settling down
  - A sense that “the world isn’t safe” or that they “should be doing something”
  - Guilt for being far away

Even young children notice our stress. Teens are often overwhelmed by disturbing or misleading content online.

#### what parents can do:

##### Young kids (3–9):

- 2
- Speak calmly: “There’s a war far away. Some are hurt, and others are helping keep us safe.”
  - Limit screens and upsetting images.
  - Keep routines. Make time for play and simple questions.
  - Use emojis or charts to name feelings.
  - If they ask about your feelings, keep it short and steady: “I do worry sometimes, but I know how to help myself feel better.”

##### Teens (10+):

- Validate their feelings: “You’re seeing a lot. Let’s sort through it together.”
- Talk about fact vs. opinion vs. propaganda.
- Model thoughtful engagement: “It’s okay to care — and also okay to step back sometimes.”

### Grounding tools for everyone:

3

- “Flower & Candle” breath: Inhale like smelling a flower, exhale like blowing out a candle.
- Create media-free moments (dinner, bedtime).
- Pick one trusted news source and check it together, just once a day.
- Engage in hands-on activities together: drawing, cooking, movement.

## Circle 2: Worry for Loved Ones in Israel

### What children & teens may be feeling:

1

- Fear for family or friends in harm’s way
- Guilt for being safe
- Helplessness or sadness
- Big questions like: “Why is this happening?”

### What you can do:

2

- Speak gently and honestly: “Yes, people we love are in danger — and they also have people looking out for them.”
- Let your child send a drawing, message, or voice note to loved ones.
- Do small acts of connection: light a candle, write a hope note, say a prayer support a cause together.

### Supporting teens:

3

- Talk openly about emotional complexity: “It’s okay to feel many things at once — fear, anger, care, hope.”
- Help them channel emotion into action: organizing, volunteering, learning.
- Reinforce emotional limits: “Caring doesn’t have to hurt constantly.”

## Circle 2: Facing or Hearing About Antisemitism

### What you can do:

#### With Children:

- 1
  - Keep it simple and safe: "Some people say hurtful things because they don't understand us. It's not your fault — and I'm here to keep you safe."
  - Reassure through presence, routine, and calm.
  - Talk about Jewish pride and kindness: "Being Jewish means caring, helping, and standing up for others."

### Grounding tools for everyone:

#### With Teens:

- 2
  - Acknowledge the fear: "What you're feeling is real. You're not imagining it."
  - Help them choose when to speak up and when to step back.
  - Discuss when to report, when to talk it out, and when to walk away.
  - Build identity strength: "Being Jewish isn't just how people treat us — it's how we live, celebrate, and stay human."

## Circle 3: Feeling Detached or Misunderstood by Others

### What children & teens may be feeling:

- 1
  - Isolation when classmates or teachers avoid the topic
  - Frustration or sadness that others "don't get it"
  - Feeling invisible, silenced, or expected to "stay neutral"
  - Doubt: "Am I overreacting? Why do I feel so alone in this?"

### What you can do:

- 2
  - Name it: "Sometimes people don't understand because it's not personal to them. That can feel lonely — and it's okay to talk about it."
  - Offer presence and pride: "You're not alone. We're part of something strong and beautiful, even when others don't see it."

### Supporting teens:

- 3
  - Normalize the disconnect: "You're not imagining it. Sometimes others really don't know how to respond."
  - Offer language: "You don't have to explain everything — but you can say, 'This matters to me. I'd appreciate your support.'"
  - Strengthen internal anchors: Talk about identity, values, and what it means to carry something sacred — even when the world is indifferent.

## A Note Just for Teens

### What children & teens may be feeling:

You're growing up in a complicated world. Things move fast, and your heart feels a lot.

You might be thinking:

- "I'm not doing enough."
- "I care, but I'm overwhelmed."
- "I don't know who to trust."
- "I want to speak out — but I'm scared."

You're not alone. And you don't have to figure it all out right now.

It's okay to pause, to ask, to care deeply and also rest.

Talk to people who see you — your family, your friends, your teachers, your rabbi.

You are part of something ancient and strong. And we're with you.

## When to Reach Out for Help

### What you can do:

You or your child may need extra support if:

- There's trouble sleeping, eating, or functioning for more than a few days
- You see ongoing sadness, fear, anger, or withdrawal
- Your teen is stuck in a constant loop of scrolling or shutdown
- A child becomes unusually clingy, angry, or emotionally flat
- Asking for help is not weakness — it's strength.
- Reach out to a therapist, school counselor, rabbi, or a trusted mental health provider.

## FINAL WORDS FOR PARENTS

You don't need to have all the answers.

What your kids need most is you —

- Listening with care
- Naming feelings without fear
- Being present, even in uncertainty
- Showing, again and again, that they're not alone

You're already doing something powerful — just by being there.