

How do you talk to your kids about the Israel-Hamas war?



by **Cyrus Moulton**

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Talking with children about war is difficult – for adults and for children. Getty Images Photo

This report is part of ongoing coverage of the Israel-Hamas war. Visit [our dedicated page](#) for more on this topic.

The stories, images and news coming out of the [Israel-Hamas war](#) are terrifying and — in today's 24-hour news cycle — difficult to ignore.

But adults aren't the only ones exposed to them. And they aren't the only ones with questions.

"Kids are hearing about violence, and to not be able to talk about that with someone that they trust — a parent, a teacher, a neighbor — they'll invent things, they'll come to their own conclusions," says [Jaci Urbani](#), a professor of education at Northeastern University in Oakland and a childhood education expert. "So, I think it's better to be honest with kids about what's happening — in a developmentally appropriate way."

But how best to do this?

[Northeastern Global News](#) spoke with Urbani to discuss talking with youth about difficult topics such as the Israel-Hamas war in this age of 24-hour news coverage and first-hand social media.

Comments have been lightly edited for brevity and clarity.

What do you need to understand in order to talk to kids about difficult subjects such as war and hate, particularly with what's happening right now in Israel? Are there some general rules?

The first thing is to realize it's going to be very difficult — it's difficult as an adult to talk to kids about how people hurt each other in violent ways. Understand that you yourself are going to have emotions around this topic and that it's OK to have emotions, and that your child, probably regardless of age, will also have emotions and questions.

For kids — regardless of age but especially the little ones — reassure them that they are safe. There's a fantastic Mr. Rogers quote: "When bad things happen in the world, look to the caregivers." There's an outpouring for the people — for the Israelis, for the

Palestinians. That's what we want to show because it's so hard to talk about people being kidnapped, murdered and killed.

But let kids decide their emotional state and if they want to engage or not. There are different needs and so it's hard, but I also think it's also necessary with these emotionally charged issues to let kids decide how much they need to know. So, ask your child if they want to talk about it.

How do you handle the ubiquity of information, images, videos, news, opinions, etc. on social media?



Jaci Urbani

There's been some horrible things on social media. I would say to parents and teachers to have conversations about it, so kids don't think that they have to go to social media to find out what's going on. It's better that the information comes from people that they trust — it comes from their teachers, it comes from their parents.

Talk about that there are rules of law — we protect people who aren't involved; we protect the elderly, we protect children, we protect people who are hurt. This small group of people who are part of Hamas violated those human rights laws around violence. Now Israel is targeting the Hamas in Gaza, but in doing so are also hurting innocent Palestinians, which is upsetting many people.

But also this is very complicated, as both sides make valid points; and you say that to kids — “this is very complicated.” While teachers can present the multiple perspectives in the classroom, families can further those conversations with their personal feelings and reasons for them.

How do you emphasize the uniqueness of this event while also indicating its historical context, and what are some things that you need to do to frame this situation?

What you want to make clear here is that, regardless of age, the Hamas who perpetrated these acts were a very small group of people compared to the Palestinians in Gaza; and we still want to protect the Palestinian people because they are children, they are adults who are not involved directly in this conflict.

Bring up that we as America have been trying to help with this situation for a long time. With the older kids, bring in the Holocaust and that six million Jews were murdered for their religion and ethnicity. So Jewish people having land — the world felt like they deserved that; but not the whole world.

But in Jews returning to their ancestral land, Palestinians were displaced. Here is where and why it is complicated: the Palestinians believe their land was taken from them too. How can we balance and respect these competing perspectives? Ask kids how they would feel if they were Jewish? Palestinian? Why would they feel that way? You should be asking kids those questions. So you're not just talking at kids; you're asking them to engage in conversation.

What are other questions you would like to ask children?

Why do we have to go to war? How does religion play a part in it? I would want to talk to kids about how Jews have been persecuted across thousands of years and the rise in

antisemitism right now, and the rise of Islamophobia. How do we make sure we don't fall into the very easy generalization that they're all bad? How do I not stick with the generalizations that lead us to racism, Islamophobia, antisemitism?

Are TikTok, X and other social media platforms good or bad sources for news on the Israel and Hamas war?

For older kids, talk about the ethics of this conflict. How do we protect the people in Gaza who aren't part of the problem and how do we get them out, why can't they get out, why can't aid get in, ... there's so much that's complicated with that. I would also want them to explore the different perspectives: What are the people of Israel saying, What are the people of Gaza saying, What has Hamas said, and Why is Hamas not representative of all Palestinians? How do we protect those people who haven't had a voice in saying who's going to have power?

What should you do at the end of the conversation to ensure that kids feel supported?

You end the conversation on a positive note: how do we move on from here.

Do we want to raise money for the Red Cross and Red Crescent so they can go in and help? What can we do in our community? Are there people who are in our community who are suffering? Could you visit a Jewish nursing home and try to make residents feel better? How could we support the local Muslim community?

Also say that if you have more questions — when you see something, hear something — come to me and we can talk about it. This is not a one-time conversation.

I also want to figure out what else I can do. I think helping kids see the bigger picture of saying we can prevent this, how do we prevent it, how do we engage in conversations that are hard with people we disagree with, and how can we still respect each other's humanity as we try to find a compromise.

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