

First Church

SANDWICH, UCC

Caring people, sharing God's love.

Talking to Your Children About War & Peace in Light of the Russian Invasion of Ukraine

Keep lines of communication open. Listen and honor the child's expressions. Encourage compassion: for self and feelings, for the people directly impacted, and for the world

1.) **Set the tone:** You are more credible to your children than any other source – limit the “breaking news” anxiety. Children take cues from their parents. Offer them a sense of confidence and comfort.

Children evaluate from a self-center (how does this affect me?) With a still-developing concept of geography, an 8-year-old might ask, “Will a rocket hit our home?” They’re really asking, “Should I be afraid?”

Our faith can help us: *we don't need to fear, because we are where God has called us to be.* Our confidence is not in an ideal of safety, but in God – Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit. We follow the Prince of Peace.

⁶This is why we can confidently say,
*The Lord is my helper,
and I won't be afraid.
What can people do to me?*
(Hebrews 13:6)

The LORD protects everyone who loves him,
(Ps. 145:20a)

Don't fear, because I am with you;
don't be afraid, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you,
I will surely help you;
I will hold you
with my righteous strong hand.
(Isaiah 41:10)

2.) **Offer information:** Use a map to show children how far away the fighting is from their home. Talk about all the people God has provided to take care of them: parents/families/adults they know, civil servants, and neighbors.

Decrease fear and increase a sense of safety with age-appropriate discussion. Don't minimize the seriousness of war, but keep in mind that your child doesn't need to know all the gory details of what's going on. Stick to the facts.

For example, you could tell your kindergartener, "Some people in another country disagree on what's important to them, and sometimes war occurs when that happens. The war is not happening near us, and we're not in any danger."

If they want to see the news or watch a movie set during wartime, and you think they can handle it, watch it together. Encourage them to ask questions and, if you don't know the answer, tell them that you'll find out and follow up later that day or the next day.

If asked, be honest about war's ramifications. Soldiers die and their families grieve. There are civilian victims of war. Help children know that when they cry, God sees them and understands their fears. Throughout the Bible God told leaders such as Moses, David, Deborah and Joshua to have courage during war. Look up these stories/books in your Bible and read them together. If you need a child-friendly version, Rev. Jennie has options.

3.) **Acknowledge War:** God didn't cause the war. God wants people to live in peace. But when they fight it can lead to war.

Do you know where [people's] fights and arguments come from? They come from the selfish desires that make war inside [them]. ²[They] want things, but [they] don't get them. So [they] kill and are jealous of others. But [they] still cannot get what [they] want. So [they] argue and fight.

(James 4:1-3)

Just-war theory and principles of war are unnecessary.

War is horrible. It is not exciting or to be celebrated. It is not rooted in love; it is a product of disconnection from God, from each other, and our planet home.

Peace comes from connection. Connection begins in the individual and familial center, and spreads locally and globally. When children recognize their agency, that they can do something, they build their confidence, reduce fear, and are able to respond to the world in a positive manner.

4.) **Pray:** write/speak your own prayer, color or draw a prayer, listen to peaceful music, or use/adapt this one from the Archbishop of Canterbury:

God of peace and justice,
We pray for the people of Ukraine today.
We pray for the peace and the laying down of weapons.
We pray for all those who rear for tomorrow
That your Spirit of comfort would draw near to them.
We pray for those with power over war and peace,
For wisdom, discernment and compassion
To guide their decisions.
Above all, we pray for all your precious children, at risk and in fear,

That you would hold and protect them.
We pray in the of Jesus, the Prince of Peace.
Amen.

Here are some ways to teach kids peace

- Natural light – This idea seems simple but packs a huge punch in energy levels.
- Plant life – Caring and understanding plants is a big step toward compassion and kindness.
- Practice gratitude – Ask questions to get children thinking about their ideas around gratitude.
- Reduce waste – A healthy environment is a powerful message to keeping the peace with Mother Earth. Understanding how to care for the environment and its needs depending on the habitat carves the way for peace making.
- Silence game – Sit calmly together, challenge each other to see how long you can sit completely silent; notice the sounds around you, sounds from movement, sounds from breathing. You can ring a bell to signal the start of the silent time, or set a timer for desired silent time
- Teach kids courage – Cultivating peace or pursuing peace is a big job that requires loads of courage.
- Read books about peace – There are many available at the library and bookstores
- Yoga cards –teach children to self-regulate in a way that honors their emotions as strong as they may be? Yoga and meditation are great tools. Yoga card decks are available at retailers. Rev. Jennie has resources.
- Quiet corner – Creating a go to quiet corner is key in a child's environment All it takes is a few pillows or a comfy chair, a window or natural light, maybe a book, maybe a plant, maybe a blanket, maybe headphones with easy listening music...the possibilities for a quiet corner are seemingly endless.
- Outdoor quiet space – Just as important as the indoor space for calm is an outdoor space. Identify a sitting spot where a child can go to simply be.

This information was adapted from:

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/explain-war-children/>
<https://www.cefonline.com/articles/tough-topics/talking-to-children-about-war/>
<https://www.verywellfamily.com/how-to-talk-to-kids-about-war-4147597>
<https://carrotsareorange.com/teach-kids-peace/>

Rev, Jennie Valentine
Minister of Faith Formation & Service
First Church Sandwich, UCC
www.FirstChurchSandwich.org