



**Annie Chappell presentation to DSL's 11/10/23
How to support children facing fears around the War in Israel**

- **Permission to pause**

Right now, it's ok to lower expectations and make space for reflective conversations, play, expression and space to just be and feel.

Access to the thinking part of a child's brain will be more limited right now as will the adults. When in a state of fear or panic we lose access to some of our executive functioning, making it harder to learn and pay attention. This is perfectly natural and will not last forever. It is ok to acknowledge this and adjust expectations accordingly.

Stick to routine

It is also important to stick to routine as this provides a sense of containment. Routine helps us feel the world is 'knowable' which is important in providing a sense of psychological safety when right now the world is so 'unknowable'.

Reflective spaces

Reflective spaces for children and adults are important. Space to talk and receive an empathic response helps to lower the stress response system.

Questions

Student's questions about 'facts' can often not be answered. Instead focus on the feelings. "That's such a big question and I wonder if it's left you feeling really confused? And maybe scared about what's going on?"

Social Media

Stay off social media as much as possible. Limit the amount of time watching the news and talking about the atrocities.

How to react and respond

It is ok for adults and children to be moved and devastated by what is going on right now. Internal messages we may have such as: "I don't live

there”, “other people are in worse pain than me”, only help to push our feelings down which can lead to symptoms of trauma, both mentally and physically.

We need to meet those in pain with empathy. The following phrases may help:

“It’s so painful to see these images.”

“I imagine it’s terrifying to see so much hate and violence “

“It’s incredibly brave to be able to show how you’re moved by this horror.”

“I too am devastated by we’re seeing and hearing. The atrocities that are happening to our community. It’s ok to be impacted by this.” (This last one helps to normalise and give permission to have difficult feelings.)

Be the role model

It is important to be in a steady state ourselves when having these discussions. Remember the oxygen mask analogy? We need to put ours on before the children’s.

How can you look after yourself during this difficult time? keep talking to others; get outdoors into nature; deep breathing exercises – Calm app or youtube have many. Ensure you’re getting enough sleep and eating well, surround yourself with like-minded people, engage in hobbies you love.

Find ways to help students to express themselves through art, music, talking, play, emotion cards.

Find ways to be of service. How can we as a school community help those in crisis? Fundraisers, prayer etc. And look for the helpers – who is helping?

It is ok to still find joy in the world. To laugh, have fun, play, celebrate and be silly. This does not mean we have forgotten the tragedy of reality. It is ok to turn from the onslaught of news and worry, to finding joy, whilst still holding the crisis in your mind. This will help to regulate the stress response system.