

ICS Safeguarding Newsletter 23

Talking to children and teens about conflict and worry

When conflict escalates in our region, it can feel as though the world becomes louder overnight - news alerts, social media clips, adult conversations, and the emotions of people around us. Even when children aren't watching the news directly, they often *sense* the tension. Some will ask direct questions. Others will become quieter, more irritable, more clingy, or unusually focused on 'what if' scenarios.

Safeguarding is about helping children feel safe, heard, and supported, especially when things feel uncertain. This newsletter offers practical ways to speak with children and teenagers about conflict and war, and it highlights a key protective factor for every child: **knowing their trusted adults - at home and at school - who they can turn to when they feel worried or unsafe.**

1) Start with the most important message: 'You are safe, and we are here.'



Children's brains are designed to scan for danger. In uncertain times, they seek reassurance from the adults they trust. Your calm, steady presence is more powerful than the 'perfect' words.

Try:

- "You're safe right now. I'm here with you.
- It's okay to feel worried. We can talk about it.
- We will keep you informed in a way that helps you feel safe.

Avoid:

- Don't worry about it. (This can shut down sharing.)
- You're fine. (If they *don't* feel fine, they may stop coming to you.)

2) Ask what they already know, then correct gently

Children and teens often piece together information from friends, overheard adult discussions, and social media. What they think is happening may be more frightening than reality, especially if they've seen alarming clips without context.

Useful questions:

- What have you heard about what's happening?
- What are your friends saying?
- Is there anything you've seen online that's stuck in your mind?



ICS Safeguarding Newsletter 23

Then respond with short, truthful, age-appropriate information and correct misinformation gently:

- That video is real, but it's from a different place/ time.
- Sometimes people share things online that are not verified.

Tip: For younger children, less detail is usually better. For teens, more context and opportunities for discussion are often helpful.

3) Keep it age-appropriate: Primary vs. Secondary support

Primary-aged children

Primary children often focus on concrete questions:

- "Will it happen here?"
- "Will you be safe?"
- "What if something happens to our family?"

What helps most:

- Simple explanations and reassurance
- Routine, predictability, and connection
- Permission to ask the same question repeatedly (this is how children process stress)

Example:

- "If you feel worried at school, you can tell your teacher straight away."

Secondary-aged children



Teenagers can understand complexity. They may ask big questions about justice, politics, identity, or the future - and may also feel pressure to appear fine while feeling overwhelmed inside.

What helps most:

- Respectful, non-judgmental conversation
- Curiosity rather than debate
- Support with boundaries around social media and graphic content

Examples:

- "It makes sense that you're thinking about this deeply."

ICS Safeguarding Newsletter 23

- “Would it help to talk about what you’ve seen and how it’s affecting you?”
- “Let’s agree on a plan for news /social media so it doesn’t take over your day.”

4) Expect stress responses (and remember: behaviour is communication)

When children feel unsafe, their bodies may respond with ‘fight, flight, freeze’. This can show up as:

- Headaches, stomach aches, trouble sleeping
- Increased clinginess or separation anxiety
- Anger, mood swings, irritability
- Over-focus on news, safety plans, or ‘checking’
- Withdrawal, low motivation, or tearfulness



What to do:

- Name what you notice without criticism:
“I’ve noticed you’ve been quieter lately. I wonder if something is worrying you.”
- Offer regulating activities: movement, time outdoors, music, drawing, prayer/ faith practices, journaling, cooking together.
- Keep routines steady: bedtime, meals, school attendance, sports/clubs.

If symptoms persist or intensify, reach out to the school for support.

5) Manage media wisely: reduce the ‘fear fuel’

During conflict, social media often amplifies distress. Graphic images can be traumatic, especially for children and teens.

Family media ideas:

- Create ‘news windows’ (e.g., 15 minutes once or twice daily for adults; limited exposure for students).
- Avoid watching distressing content in front of children.
- For teens: agree boundaries together.
“What’s a limit that still helps you feel informed without feeling overwhelmed?”
- Turn off push alerts, mute keywords, and encourage breaks.



6) Teach practical coping: “What can I do when I feel worried?”

Children often feel better when they have a plan. Try building a small ‘calm and cope toolkit’ together:

ICS Safeguarding Newsletter 23

At home:

- "When I feel worried, I can..."
 - talk to Mum/ Dad/ Carer
 - write it down
 - pray/ reflect
 - do a breathing exercise (e.g., breathe in 4, hold 2, out 6)
 - go for a short walk
 - cuddle a pet or comfort item
 - listen to a playlist



At school:

- "If I feel worried at school, I can..."
 - tell my class teacher / form tutor
 - speak to a trusted adult (see below)
 - go to the appropriate pastoral point of contact

Reassure them that seeking help is a strength, not a weakness.

7) The protective power of a trusted adult (at home and at school)

A trusted adult is someone a child believes will:

- listen without overreacting,
- take them seriously,
- help them get support,
- and keep them safe.

Children who can name their trusted adults are safer. They are more likely to seek help early, before worries become crises.

Your family check-in (do this this week)

Ask each child:

1. **"If you were worried, who are your 3 trusted adults?"**
(Aim for at least one at home and one at school.)
2. **"How would you contact them at school?"**
(Where would you go? What would you say?)
3. **"What if the first person wasn't available - who's your back-up?"**
4. **"What kinds of things should you always tell a trusted adult about?"**

Examples:

- Feeling scared or unsafe

ICS Safeguarding Newsletter 23

- Bullying, harassment, threats, or discriminatory behaviour
- Someone asking them to keep secrets that feel uncomfortable
- Inappropriate online messages or content
- Any talk of self-harm, harm to others, or feeling hopeless



For teens: reassure confidentiality has limits for safety:

"If something suggests you're not safe, adults may need to get help. That's to protect you, not to get you into trouble."

8) Speaking about conflict in an international community: keep it respectful and safe

In international schools, families may hold different perspectives and have lived experiences of trauma or displacement. Some students may have relatives directly affected.

At home, encourage:

- **Respectful language** about groups, nationalities, religions, and identities
- **Curiosity over certainty**
- **Kindness and inclusion** in peer interactions

If your child is discussing conflict with friends, you might say:

- "It's okay to have feelings and opinions. It's not okay to target others."
- "If conversations become heated or unsafe, step away and speak to an adult."



9) When to contact school

Please reach out if you notice:

- persistent anxiety, tearfulness, sleep disruption
- fixation on conflict or safety checks
- increased aggression or withdrawal
- concerning online behaviour
- any disclosure of harm, threats, or fear for safety

ICS Safeguarding Newsletter 23

Also contact us if you, as a parent, are unsure. Safeguarding is a partnership - early conversations are always welcome.

A final message to families

In uncertain times, children don't need adults who have every answer. They need adults who are **available, calm, and willing to listen.**

This week, choose one small action:

- a five-minute check-in at bedtime,
- a family agreement about social media,
- or the 'trusted adult' conversation.

These simple steps build a powerful safety net.

Please keep checking that your child knows who to speak to - at home and at school - if they have a worry or problem. That knowledge, and the confidence to use it, is one of the most important protective factors we can give them.

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