



# Coping With the Crisis

My original column focused on ways that parents can help their children at home in managing with the wartime stress, especially as it seems that this war may go on for some time. These strategies include four related and sometimes overlapping categories, which, of course, depend on the age of the children and family-specific considerations.

1. Limit exposure to information or content.
2. Encourage children to engage in activities that are some combination of distracting, social, active, and meaningful.
3. Use strategies to help manage your levels of stress, and help your child implement age-appropriate stress-management strategies as well.
4. Offer your child an open ear, so that if or when s/he wants to talk or ask questions, you are a safe and trusted address.

Each of these points deserve their own elaboration, and I encourage any reader to find resources from trusted sources that provide more details.

However, in recent days, I have heard different parenting conversations, and I believe there is value in raising some of the challenges even if solutions to these challenges are more difficult to identify. Over the past several weeks, many families have seen a child, parent, or both leave the home to serve in the war efforts,

and conversations seem to relate to three types of concerns. One prominent issue is how parents can be most supportive to their child who is called up to serve. This question is relevant both before the child departs, such as whether there are specific messages that a parent should offer the child; when the child is granted leave to return home for a few days, such as whether the parent should try to encourage the child to discuss their experiences, or instead be a place where the child can relax and be distracted; and, ultimately, when the child returns home after fulfilling his duties.

In other instances, it is the parent or an older sibling who has been called up, which raises a number of challenges. First, how do the parents speak to their child about the reality that a parent will be out of the house and potentially in harm's way? Second, how does the parent who remains home with the children manage her own stress and be an effective parent for the children whose home life experienced such disruption so abruptly? And third, how should the parent at home answer the children's questions about the safety of their father or sibling who is serving?

A third issue relates to parents who are struggling with their own experience in the war, and they are not able to be there for their children in the way that they want

to be. In some instances, this challenge may be related to the general stress that everyone is under right now. In others, parents may have very unique sources of pressure, such as direct connection to one of the fallen or missing, economic strain due to loss of income, or involvement in ZAKA or other services that are emotionally charged. In such cases, it can be difficult to be present in the home with their children in the way that they would like.

From my perspective, addressing these vast and varied issues requires support on many different levels, for which a full elaboration is well beyond what can be articulated in this column. In this ongoing war, these evolving challenges touch on individual issues—how the parent manages her/his own anxiety; relationship issues—how the parent communicates with the spouse and child; community issues—how do those who are able to support others best provide this support; spiritual issues—how to our Rabbanim, rebbetzins, and other spiritual leaders best create social infrastructures to support these families, and how can they offer direct support to individuals who are struggling?

I recognize that there are likely some issues that are not mentioned here, and that this column does not offer solutions. I would like to ask readers, if they are willing, to share their experiences with us here at [parenting@ouisrael.org](mailto:parenting@ouisrael.org)—both in terms of the challenges, as well as what has worked for you in managing during these times. Your experiences can help others who may be going through something similar.

May Hashem protect all of us, and bring home to safety all of our soldiers and captives. ■