

PARENTING TEENS IN WARTIME

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"I THOUGHT I KNEW MY TEENAGER, BUT NOW, AFTER THIS TRAUMA, IT FEELS LIKE WE'RE WORLDS APART."
- SARAH, BEIT SHEMESH

Understanding Your Teen in Times of Crisis

The teenage years are inherently challenging, marked by a quest for independence, identity formation, and emotional highs and lows. When these natural adolescent complexities intersect with the trauma of war, teens can feel overwhelmingly vulnerable, despite often projecting an image of resilience. Such traumatic experiences can disrupt their budding sense of invincibility, making them feel even more uncertain in an already tumultuous phase. For parents, recognizing these signs of trauma and providing steadfast support is crucial. As they navigate these challenges, it's essential for parents to strike a balance: setting boundaries while also approaching their teens with empathy and understanding.

Creating a Safe and Supportive Environment:



1. Create Safety

In a world that might feel chaotic, ensure that your home remains a safe haven. Spend quality time with your teen, engage in activities they love, and maintain familiar routines to provide a sense of normalcy.

2. Limit Exposure to Traumatic News

Ensure your teen takes breaks from distressing news and social media. Discuss what they see and help them navigate the distressing and overwhelming content they encounter.



3. Encourage Peer Interaction

Teens often find comfort in their peer groups. Encourage them to spend time with friends and participate in group activities, either in-person or virtually.





Communication and Emotional Support

4. Open & Honest Communication:

Encourage your teen to express their feelings. Let them know you're there to listen whenever they're ready. Share that you too are preoccupied by the ongoing situation and that they can approach you with any questions or thoughts.

5. Acknowledge Their Feelings:

If your teen shares their concerns, validate their feelings. Avoid dismissing or minimizing their emotions. It's important to hold space for how they are feeling, and it's okay not to have all the answers. Expressing and validating emotions is healing.



Healthy Coping



6. Model Coping Strategies

Demonstrate healthy ways to cope with stress and anxiety, such as deep breathing exercises, meditation, or seeking support when needed. Allow distractions and engage in activities that are meaningful and restorative.

7. Encourage Actionable Responses:

Motivate teens to actively participate in community outreach, taking on extra mitzvos, or volunteerism. These actions provide a sense of purpose and reinforce their connection to their community.

8. Spirituality as a Source of Resilience:

Encourage your teen to engage in spiritual practices that they find meaningful, including reciting tehillim and learning torah. Understand that trauma might lead some to question or feel distant from their faith.

9. Seek Professional Help:

If your teen shows signs of severe trauma, such as constant anxiety, withdrawal, or risky behaviors, consider seeking help from a mental health professional.



Remember, as a parent, *your support, understanding, and love* can make all the difference during these challenging times.



Preparedness and Planning

10. Addressing Teen Invulnerability:

Many teens feel invincible, leading them to take unnecessary risks, such as dismissing the seriousness of sirens or avoiding safe rooms. Emphasize the importance of safety and address this behavior.

11. Stay Informed:

Gather as much information as possible about loved ones who might be in conflict zones. This not only helps in planning, but also provides a sense of control in uncertain times.

11. Emergency Preparedness:

Plan and rehearse emergency scenarios with your teen. Make sure they know what to do when there's a siren, military, or police announcement. Encourage them to regularly check their cell phones for updates and alerts.



12. Communication Plan

Establish a clear communication plan, determining how often they'll check in, what channels they'll use, and what to do if communication is disrupted. Stress the importance of keeping certain information private to avoid security risks.



Navigating Digital Challenges:

14. Digital Era's Impact on Teens:

The digital age exposes teens to real-time, often graphic war coverage. While they might feel obligated to witness these events driven by empathy, it can strain their emotional well-being.

15. Balancing Awareness and Mental Health:

- **Moderate Media Consumption:** Encourage daily limits for news and recommend breaks from distressing online content.
- **Promote Text Over Visuals:** Reading news might provide a less emotionally intense experience than graphic visuals and watching videos.
- **Open Dialogue:** Foster conversations about what they encounter online. Clarify any misinformation and discuss its potential impact.
- **Teach Critical Consumption:** Guide teens in discerning between reliable and misleading sources. Encourage a holistic view from multiple trustworthy outlets.
- **Tech Safeguards:** Use parental controls to filter inappropriate content and manage triggering notifications.



16. Encourage Positive Engagement

Urge them to transform passive viewing into actionable support for affected communities, fostering a sense of purpose.

