

WAR OVERVIEW

What do kids think about war? How do their feelings affect their development? Where do they get their information? What is the role of adults in helping kids process these feelings? Perhaps at no other time for this generation of youth had war been so real and expected as in the weeks following 9/11 and the events that ensued in Iraq. During this time, a lot of kids found out they did not know what they thought about war until they were forced to feel something. Many had never answered questions as those above and were just glad to have a place where they could untangle their feelings and thoughts on the inescapable topic of war.

Whether in peace time or not, open dialog is necessary for adolescents to process fears and anxieties about war. These feelings will undoubtedly play a major role in how the adolescent views the future. Jane Annunziata, a psychologist, notes that the experiences during these formative years "will affect how (teenagers) view the world, their own sense of safety and peace of mind, their comfortableness in society." This crucial issue cannot be overlooked. In order to communicate effectively to kids, one must first sort one's own feelings about war.

In the absence of adult mediation and example, teenagers formulate their ideas and feelings primarily based on information given to them by the media. This forfeits the opportunity for questions and interaction to clear up misconceptions. The media also project unintegrated paradigms through the widely differing portrayals of war in movies and TV. This seems to create a generation of teenagers with patchwork views of war. They are confused as they struggle to coordinate their conflicting views of the media, their society, and themselves.

Twenty-five percent of the current U.S. population was born after the Vietnam War. (USA Today, p. 1. [1991, January 11].) It seems that America has since stopped talking about war. This was evident in one suburban junior high school during the escalating Iraqi conflict: the administration had no idea how to handle the stirring of questions and emotions from their students. (The Morning Call, p. B1. [1991, January 18].) Students just wanted to talk about their feelings on the world-changing events occurring around them. When given the chance to be heard, they took advantage of it. At one high school in Fairfax, Virginia, a teacher created and distributed a survey to glean insight into student views on the Persian Gulf conflict. Kids lined up outside the teacher's door to offer their input. It seems that they just wanted a place to share their views.

IMPLICATIONS

1. Kids need help integrating their feelings about war. Not addressing feelings risks negative future consequences.
2. Young people need to understand the ramifications behind their beliefs and align them with the rest of their value systems.
3. Youth need a safe haven in which to share their feelings. They need to be able to struggle with their own feelings and eventually own them for themselves. It needs to be a place where there is no right or wrong, only love and acceptance.

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