

# What do you **say** when there are no **words?**

Age-appropriate explanations for  
conversations with children about the war



This resource is designed for parents of children from preschool age through elementary school.

This is not meant for children who have experienced severe, complex trauma because of the war.

The content was written by a professional team from Goshen, a non-profit organization, and professionally validated by Professor Tirtza Joels.



**GOSHEN**

Community Child Health & Well Being  
בריאות ורווחת הילד בקהילה  
صحة ورفاهية الطفل في المجتمع المحلي



**Dear parents,** there are no “right” words to describe a reality that is so wrong. At times, it can be extremely difficult to find any words at all... At the same time, providing space to have a conversation with children is very important.

We have prepared a ‘dictionary’ to talk to children about the ‘Swords of Iron’ war: words that have, unfortunately, entered our lexicon and are often difficult to explain to children.

There is no “right” age to begin speaking about this, but there are different levels of explanation that are appropriate for different ages of children. This dictionary suggests different phrasing to help you find the words that fit your ability to tell what happened and to fit your child’s ability to hear what happened.

# Before we get to the phrases – how do you have a conversation with a child? - 6 principles -

- 1.** Tell children the truth (even if it is just the partial truth), but find the way to say it in a way that will reassure your child that they are safe. It is important not to overwhelm children with frightening information.
- 2.** When speaking with your child, use words that they are capable of understanding. Maintain eye contact and use comforting touch, such as a hug, in order to strengthen feelings of security as well as reassuring them that you will always be there to protect them.
- 3.** Take a deep breath or do something else that helps you maintain your composure – the conversation needs to be as calm as possible.

# Before we get to the phrases – how do you have a conversation with a child?

## - 6 principles -

- 4.** Start by asking your child “what do you know? What have you heard?” and invite them to ask any questions they have. Show them that you are their source of information to know what is happening. You can also say “you have really good and important questions. I also have questions, but we do not always have all the answers. As soon as I know more, I will let you know too.”
- 5.** Even if children are not asking questions, you may notice from their behavior that they are feeling troubled about something. In that case, it is important to help them find the words they need and to help them explain their emotions, so that they can better understand what they are feeling. This will help them regulate their emotions and calm them down.
- 6.** At the end of the conversation: you can ask “how did you feel speaking about this?” If the child does not answer, that is okay. You can also say “This is really hard. We all are feeling many emotions (anger, fear, sadness) and we are together.”

Now  
**Let's talk**



# What is **An Invasion**



Bad people entered a place where people live. This is something that almost never happens because we have fences and security guards. When this happens, we stay in the room with the family until the soldiers capture the Bad people and we can leave the room again.



Israeli towns have a big fence and security guards that protect them. But this time, the terrorists were able to enter some towns and all the residents needed to stay in their safe rooms until the soldiers were able to catch the terrorists. Then it was safe for them to go out again.



Basic explanation



Intermediate explanation



Choose the explanation that is appropriate for your family and for your child's level of understanding.

# What is A Fence



Fences surround a house, a preschool, a town or the country. The fence protects us, so that people who should not be there do not come in.



Around every house, nursery or school, every town and the country, there is a fence that is there to protect the people inside it, so that people who should not be there do not come in. This time, terrorists were able to pass through the fence and enter parts of Israel. Now our soldiers are working on catching them and make the fence even stronger than before, so that this will not happen again.



Between Israel and Gaza, there is a fence on our border that prevents travel between Gaza and our territory. There are security guards, cameras and soldiers watching the fence. What happened on Shabbat morning was very unusual. The terrorists were able to bypass all our security efforts and cross through the fence. Now, they are fixing the fence and the IDF is protecting us.



Basic explanation



Intermediate explanation



Advanced explanation



Choose the explanation that is appropriate for your family and for your child's level of understanding.

# What is **A Missing Persons**



People who we have not been able to find since the start of the war. we do not know where they are and they are not able to call anyone, there are many people trying to find them now.



We do not know where some people are. They might be okay or something may have happened to them, and they are not able to call us. We are all worried about them and there are many people trying to find them now.



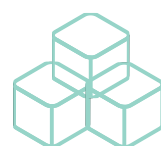
We do not know where some people are and what happened to them. Maybe they are okay and maybe they are dead, injured or taken hostage. They cannot call us and it is very difficult to not know what happened to them. We are all worried about them and there are many people trying to find them.



Basic explanation



Intermediate explanation



Advanced explanation



Choose the explanation that is appropriate for your family and for your child's level of understanding.



# What is **A captive, hostage**



People that the terrorists caught and are holding by them right now. We are trying to bring them home.



People that our enemies took and they are not able to come back. We worry about them and do not know if or when we will see them again We, are doing everything we can to bring them home.



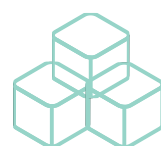
People that the terrorists kidnapped to Gaza. We are very worried about them and doing everything we can to bring them home. Sometimes, there are negotiations with the terrorists about what we can do to release the hostages.



Basic explanation



Intermediate explanation





Advanced explanation




Choose the explanation that is appropriate for your family and for your child's level of understanding.


# What is **A Terrorists, Hamas**


 Enemies of Israel that want to do bad things to us. We are fighting against them to protect ourselves.


 Enemies of Israel that belong to a terror organization and are fighting us in a cruel way. We are fighting them, with the support of the rest of the world, in order to protect ourselves.

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 Basic explanation

 Intermediate explanation

 Choose the explanation that is appropriate for your family and for your child's level of understanding.



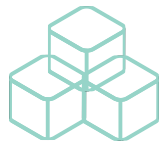
# What is Gaza



The place where Israel's enemies came from.



A city outside of Israel that has some terrorists living there (you can show a map or picture if it is appropriate).



Gaza shares a border with Israel. Hamas terrorists or Islamic Jihad terrorists come from there and shoot rockets. (If the child asks, you can tell them that they took hostages there and are currently hiding them there).



Basic explanation



Intermediate explanation




Advanced explanation





Choose the explanation that is appropriate for your family and for your child's level of understanding.


# What is **Besieged**

-  People who are unable to leave their homes, safe rooms or towns because there are terrorists and it is dangerous.

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 Basic explanation

 Choose the explanation that is appropriate for your family and for your child's level of understanding.

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# What is A Siren



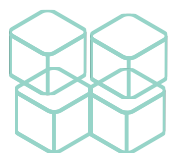
A special loud sound that tells us that right now we need to go together to our safe room or a shelter.



A special loud sound that tells us that right now there are rockets and we need to go together to a safe room or shelter to protect ourselves.



A noise that rises and falls and is activated when they are shooting rockets at us. When we hear that, we need to go to the safe room or to a shelter.



You can do a rocket drill, with a timer, to practice running with your children to the safe room in the amount of time that you have until the rocket lands.



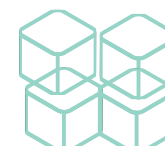
Basic explanation



Intermediate explanation



Advanced explanation





Expert explanation




Choose the explanation that is appropriate for your family and for your child's level of understanding.


# What are Missiles, Rockets


-  Israel's enemies sometimes fire missiles or rockets. We have the "iron dome" that destroys these missiles so that they do not fall on us.
-  The terrorists/Hamas shoot missiles/rockets at us. Our army has a system called the "iron dome" that destroys the rockets so that they cannot hurt us.

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 Basic explanation

 Intermediate explanation

 Choose the explanation that is appropriate for your family and for your child's level of understanding.

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# What is **A Safe room, Residential secure space**



A special room - inside or outside - the house that protect us from rockets. When we hear the siren, we need to enter the safe room quickly and carefully. We will be safe there.



A special room - inside or outside f the house - which has walls made from concrete, as well as special doors and windows, that protect us from the rockets. When we hear the siren, we need to enter the safe room quickly and carefully and wait there until the rocket attack is over.



Basic explanation



Intermediate explanation



Choose the explanation that is appropriate for your family and for your child's level of understanding.

# What is Reserve, Tzav 8



Mom or dad went with other soldiers to help people who need help to protect them.



Our mom or dad is a soldier and s/he went with other soldiers to help other people. Just like mom or dad goes to work each day, this time they did not go to work but to the army.



Right now, there are rockets in the North and the South of Israel and people in those places need the army to help them. Mom/Dad's unit went to help those people. They have what they need to protect them (you can add: big tanks, bullet-proof vests, weapons) and they practiced and trained for this. They won't always be available to speak with us. We are all thinking about them and waiting for them to come home quickly and safely.



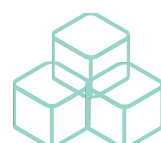
If children ask when their parent/s will come home, you can answer that mom or dad won't sleep at home and they will let us know when they are coming home or coming to visit. You can talk about the feeling of missing someone. You can suggest that the child draw a picture for their parent or record a message that they can send.



Basic explanation



Intermediate explanation



Advanced explanation



General comment




Choose the explanation that is appropriate for your family and for your child's level of understanding.




# What are Casualties


 People who die in war. They are in our hearts and memories.


 When someone dies in war, we call them a casualty. There is a special cemetery for soldiers. Now they are in our hearts and memories.

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 Basic explanation

 Intermediate explanation

 Choose the explanation that is appropriate for your family and for your child's level of understanding.

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# What is A Funeral



When someone dies we put them in the ground, in a special place called a cemetery.



At a funeral, the people who love the person who died all go to a place called a cemetery to say goodbye. The body of the person who died doesn't feel anything, so we put them in the ground and say goodbye. They stay forever in our hearts and our memories.



Basic explanation



Intermediate explanation



Choose the explanation that is appropriate for your family and for your child's level of understanding.

# What is A Shiva



After someone dies, their family stays in the house for one week in order to say goodbye together.



After someone dies, their family stays in the house for a week. Friends come to the house to visit them and tell stories together to remember them. Sometimes the stories are sad, but sometimes people will tell stories that may be happy or funny and you are allowed to laugh.



Basic explanation



Intermediate explanation



Choose the explanation that is appropriate for your family and for your child's level of understanding.

Remember, creating a time and space for  
conversations with children is vital.  
Be there for them, and make sure to find support  
for yourselves as well.

May we see better  
days ahead.



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ורפוא ירפא

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