

# TEACH ONE REACH ONE



## Helping Children of War

*Second Edition*

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## **Dedication**

The children of Ukraine were the inspiration for this book. The information contained within, however, is dedicated to all of the children around the world who have experienced war, armed conflicts, terrorism and/or high rates of community violence. My prayer is that it will help them process and heal from their experiences so they can grow up to reach their full God given potential.

## Chapter 1 - War, Children and Trauma

Nearly ten percent of children around the world are impacted by armed conflict.<sup>1</sup> Estimates vary, but the total number of children touched by war and other types of similar violence is thought to be as high as 246 million worldwide.<sup>2</sup> Historically, armed conflict has been thought of as war - usually between two nations or empires. Armed conflict, for our purposes, can also include a government against a segment or the entirety of its own people, two armed groups (neither of which is government sponsored) in conflict within a nation or in two or more different nations, prolonged and pervasive terrorism attacks and in some cases, urban areas with a high incidence of violent crimes.

In an armed conflict (which for brevity will be referred to as war henceforth), children often have different experiences than adults and can also have different reactions to the things that they see, hear or experience during a war. Young people do not have the skills, knowledge or life experience to process any trauma they experience in the same way as adults. They may not fully understand what has happened, have no idea how to begin processing their experiences and may not even fully be aware that they have experienced trauma.<sup>3</sup> Since children are still growing, their experiences during a war can impact normal development and must be addressed quickly to avoid potentially serious developmental delays.

Unlike adults, where any healing from war experiences is likely permanent, young people move through various developmental stages and they will need to process their war experiences again in each stage. Children will need the help of adults navigating not only their initial traumatic responses to what they experienced during the course of a war and its aftermath, but also reprocessing the traumatic incidents experienced earlier in their lives with the new mental tools available in each of their subsequent developmental stages. As a result, ministering to children of war is a long term commitment lasting many years.

You may have known someone who experienced a war as a child, or you may have experienced one yourself. Some children appear to be almost unfazed by what they experienced, while others are emotionally broken by it. Resiliency is a factor in healing as are the various interventions which may have been used with the young person both during and after the war.

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<sup>1</sup> Kadir, "The Effects of Armed Conflict on Children"

<sup>2</sup> Kadir, "Effects of Armed Conflict on Child Health and Development"

<sup>3</sup> Anderson, "Puppet Creation: A Lost Art in Treating Child Trauma"

While helping children of war heal from their experiences is still a relatively new field with many questions, there is enough research to help develop a ministry that can make a positive difference in the lives of these children. This book will examine what a lay ministry can safely do to help children - particularly in geographic areas underserved by professional therapists, psychologists and psychiatrists - as well as in cultures where those fields are not trusted by the parents or caregivers of the children impacted.

**Lay Person** - A person without professional or specialized knowledge in a particular subject.

### **Defining War Traumas**

Intuitively, we understand that war is a traumatic experience for a child. It is important when ministering to a child who has experienced war to understand the number and type of traumatic events the child witnessed or experienced during it. Although children can react differently to the same traumatic event, it can be helpful to know whether a child merely heard about a conflict nearby or was actually a child soldier in that war, for example. Understanding as much as possible about what happened to the child, can help those ministering to him or her better understand the potential interventions the child may need to be able to process what happened and heal from the trauma it caused.

It is important to remember that even two children living in the same apartment building or who are members of the same family can have vastly different experiences in a war. If one child was away much of the time, his or her experiences will be different from the child who was there when more traumatic incidents happened. It is important to avoid assuming you know what trauma a child has experienced merely because you have vetted another child in the same family, building, neighborhood or town.

The list of possible negative experiences children might have during a war is extensive. It is important to remember that war experiences also include what happens if they become refugees or are internally displaced (refugees from conflict who move to a different area within their own country), as well as any other experiences immediately after a war until the child's life returns to "normal". While this list is not exhaustive, it does contain the most common experiences a child might have during a war.

Please note: If you are the parent or caregiver for the child(ren) in question, please do not feel guilty that your children had these experiences. One must assume you did not wish



them for your children and made the best decisions you knew how to make in the moment. The list is to help you understand the depth of the trauma your child(ren) experienced. It is not meant to trigger your own trauma from the incidents (although it may in some cases) or to make you feel guilty in any way.

- Preoccupation of parent(s)
- Absence of one or more parents (usually due to fighting in the war)
- Separation from one or more parents (may be temporary or permanent)
- Injury of one or more parent(s)
- Death of one or more parent(s)
- Cared for by someone other than parents
- Mental health issues of parent(s)
- Drug and alcohol use/abuse by parent(s)
- Physical injury
- Disability from war injury
- Illness due to war conditions
- Sexual assault/rape
- Physical or emotional abuse by parent(s), caregiver(s) or other adults
- Malnutrition/food insecurity/starvation
- Lack of clean water
- Interrupted education
- Lack of play
- Loss of home/forced to leave home
- Loss of family pet (usually from being left behind or given to others)
- Saw someone being killed/dying
- Saw one or more dead bodies
- Saw someone injured in the war
- Saw physical destruction of their home and/or town
- Thought he or she might die at some point
- Experienced shelling nearby
- Experienced being shot at
- Sudden onset of family poverty
- Loss of clothes/toys/material possessions
- Loss of friends by separation
- Dangerous experiences while attempting to escape
- Spending time in bomb shelters (The conditions in the bomb shelter and the amount of time spent there can impact the level of trauma.)

- Spending time in refugee centers (It is important to note that some refugee centers are more stressful than others. Those with overcrowded conditions, lacking adequate facilities, food, etc. are going to impact children more negatively than refugee centers where perhaps a handful of families were housed in a church or other building with plenty of resources available to support them. The amount of time spent living in the refugee center or camp is also a factor in trauma. In some locations, families have lived in a refugee camp for more than one generation.)
- Expectation to take on adult responsibilities
- Social marginalization (often as a refugee or internally displaced person)
- Child soldiers (Please note that children who are child soldiers have needs too exhaustive to be adequately addressed in this book.)

### **Negative Impact of War on Children**

As one might assume from the list of traumatic experiences children may have during war, the resulting physical, psychological/emotional, behavioral, academic and spiritual issues that can result from them are extensive. However, clearly defining the impact of war on children is somewhat elusive. Some dramatic symptoms may appear immediately and disappear within a few weeks if no other traumatic events are experienced. Other children will appear unfazed by what they experienced, only to have symptoms appear weeks, months or even years later. Parents and other adults may also believe children have fully healed from their trauma, only to realize that symptoms have reappeared at a later date or that new symptoms have arisen.

While there are definitely trends and patterns in the negative impact of war experiences on children, even identical twins could have different clusters of symptoms based on even slight variations in experiences. One must also factor in a child's resilience and his or her strengths and weaknesses before the war began. Some children may also be predisposed to certain issues, making them more vulnerable to experiencing additional symptoms.

Physical injuries sustained as a result of war are often visible and easily identified and treated. Academic and behavioral issues may be noticed by adults, but the connection to the trauma the child experienced may be missed. Emotional, psychological and spiritual issues often must be self-reported by the child or deduced from clues the child may give with words, attitudes or behaviors. Because they are not as easily seen, these issues are often missed and can go unaddressed. Children may suffer for decades because of their experiences in a war without realizing the issues they are facing are connected in any way to their childhood trauma.

To children or teens, the trauma of war continues until they believe they are settled in a permanent location and their lives return to a sense of normalcy. Since their definition of what that means may be very different from that of a parent or caregiver, or even other young people, it is important to understand from the young person whether or not he or she feels the war has ended for him or her.

If it has been some time since the traumatic events occurred, it can be tempting to think children no longer need to understand and process those events. Regardless of any symptoms the child may or may not be experiencing, any traumatic events should be explored by using the interventions suggested in this book. This can help mitigate or prevent any possible future symptoms from the trauma of a young person's war experiences.

It is also important to remember that any trauma a child experienced before the war, can add to or deepen any symptoms he or she experiences from the war. These traumas, sometimes referred to as Adverse Childhood Experiences can include events such as abuse or neglect, family suicide or suicide attempt, exposure in the home to substance abuse or serious mental health problems, instability in the family due to separation, divorce or an absent parent, food or housing insecurity, etc.<sup>4</sup> While not rising to the level of trauma in most cases, normal childhood stressors like school work and issues with friends can also impact any negative symptoms children or teens may be experiencing.

Because each category of potential negative effects is somewhat unique, symptoms will be separated and grouped by category, not only in this list, but in subsequent chapters covering suggested interventions.

### **Possible Physical Impact**

- Injuries from weapons, collapsing structures, land mines and physical or sexual abuse
- Mild to severe malnutrition, including deficiencies in key dietary vitamins and minerals
- Anemia<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> CDC, "Adverse Childhood Experiences"

<sup>5</sup> Kadir, "The Effects of Armed Conflict on Children"

- Diarrhea or constipation<sup>6</sup>
- Sleep deprivation
- Dehydration
- Stomach aches, headaches, chest pains and abdominal pain (may be physical in origin or caused by stress)<sup>7</sup>
- Illness and diseases from weakened immunity, lack of sufficient hygiene in the environment, exposure to elements, chemicals, fumes, smoke, etc.
- Underweight or obesity
- Stunted growth<sup>8</sup>
- Long term health issues like fertility problems, heart disease, cancer, chronic lung disease<sup>9</sup>
- Sexually transmitted diseases
- Worsened epilepsy control even with similar medication compliance<sup>10</sup>
- Endometriosis (linked to food deprivation during war)<sup>11</sup>
- Illnesses from missed immunizations
- Complications from missing prescribed medications

### **Possible Psychological/Emotional Impact**

- Anxiety
- Panic attacks
- Fear (with or without obvious cause)
- Hypervigilance
- Easily startled<sup>12</sup>
- Intrusive thoughts<sup>13</sup> (Sometimes referred to as “flashbacks”, these are less common in children than adults. Children can, however, find themselves intentionally replaying traumatic events in their minds in an attempt to better understand what happened.)

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Kadir, “Effects of Armed Conflict on Child Health and Development”

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> Kletter, “Helping Children Exposed to War and Violence: Perspectives from an International Work Group on Intervention for Youth and Families”

<sup>10</sup> Kadir, “Effects of Armed Conflict on Child Health and Development”

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> Kadir, “The Effects of Armed Conflict on Children”

<sup>13</sup> Leclerc and McCarty, “War, Toys, Play to Heal: Priming Designers to Create Playthings Promoting Resilience in Children in War Zones”

- Sleep disturbances including delayed or interrupted sleep<sup>14</sup>
- Bed wetting<sup>15</sup>
- Nightmares/night terrors
- Anorexia<sup>16</sup>
- PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, which can be mild to severe)
- Depression
- Pessimistic outlook/lack of hope<sup>17</sup>
- Suicidal thoughts and/or attempts
- Increase in risk taking behaviors<sup>18</sup>
- Lowered self esteem
- Anger/rage/bitterness
- Guilt
- Shame
- Emotional numbing/repression
- Difficulty experiencing positive emotions<sup>19</sup>

### **Possible Behavioral Impact**

- Aggressive/violent behaviors
- Antisocial behaviors
- Increased alcohol consumption<sup>20</sup>
- Binge drinking<sup>21</sup>
- Illegal drug use/substance abuse<sup>22</sup>
- Early sexual debut<sup>23</sup>
- Teen pregnancy<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Kadir, "Effects of Armed Conflict on Child Health and Development"

<sup>15</sup> Raymond and Raymond, *Children in War*

<sup>16</sup> Kadir, "Effects of Armed Conflict on Child Health and Development"

<sup>17</sup> Smith "Children in the Heat of War"

<sup>18</sup> Kletter, "Helping Children Exposed to War and Violence: Perspectives from an International Work Group on Intervention for Youth and Families"

<sup>19</sup> Leclerc and McCarty, "War, Toys, Play to Heal: Priming Designers to Create Playthings Promoting Resilience in Children in War Zones"

<sup>20</sup> Kadir, "Effects of Armed Conflict on Child Health and Development"

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> Ibid

<sup>24</sup> Ibid

- Choosing to live on the street rather than with parents or caregivers<sup>25</sup>
- Attention seeking behaviors
- Tantrums
- Crying
- Angry outbursts
- Social withdrawal
- Feelings of loss of control/or an excessive need to control
- Lack of trust/overly suspicious
- Reactions to triggers<sup>26</sup>
- Problems making and/or keeping friends<sup>27</sup>

### **Possible Academic Impact**

- Lack of or slowed educational progress
- Difficulty concentrating
- Drop in grades
- Increased absenteeism<sup>28</sup>
- Impaired memory<sup>29</sup>
- Lower IQ scores in boys separated temporarily from both parents<sup>30</sup>
- Lower verbal ability in boys separated from their parents before school age<sup>31</sup>
- Increased rate of leaving school permanently before completion (age 17/18)<sup>32</sup>
- Decline in math reasoning, general knowledge and certain vocabulary test scores (due to exposure to violence in early childhood)<sup>33</sup>

### **Possible Spiritual Impact**

- Loss of hope

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid

<sup>26</sup> Leclerc and McCarty, "War, Toys, Play to Heal: Priming Designers to Create Playthings Promoting Resilience in Children in War Zones:

<sup>27</sup> Kletter, "Helping Children Exposed to War and Violence: Perspectives from an International Work Group on Intervention for Youth and Families"

<sup>28</sup> Kletter, "Helping Children Exposed to War and Violence: Perspectives from an International Work Group on Intervention for Youth and Families"

<sup>29</sup> Kadir, "Effects of Armed Conflict on Child Health and Development"

<sup>30</sup> Ibid

<sup>31</sup> Ibid

<sup>32</sup> Ibid

<sup>33</sup> Ibid

- Loss of meaning for their lives and the world<sup>34</sup>
- Change in ideas of right and wrong<sup>35</sup>
- Forced change in moral beliefs or acting on those beliefs by those in power<sup>36</sup>

If the children you are helping do not appear to have any of these symptoms, it does not necessarily mean they are symptom free. Young people will often attempt to hide or downplay symptoms to avoid embarrassment or adding to the stress of those caring for them. As many of the activities in this book are helpful for coping with stress in general, encouraging young people to participate in the various interventions can prove helpful even if they are symptom free.

It is important to note, that while these are the most commonly reported issues, an individual child may have unique reactions not included on this list. Change is rapid in childhood, however, and not all of the changes any particular child experiences will necessarily have a direct connection to any traumatic experiences during a war. The interventions discussed in subsequent chapters should help if the change is somehow connected to the young person's experiences during a war and any concerns not addressed in this book should be discussed with the child's doctor.

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<sup>34</sup> International Institute for Peace through Tourism, "The Impact of War on Children"

<sup>35</sup> Ibid

<sup>36</sup> Ibid





## **Chapter 2 - Laying the Groundwork for Healing**

This book is written for lay people, whether they are in ministry, volunteers working with children in various capacities, teachers, caregivers or parents. The strategies or interventions shared in this book are those it is generally believed will help (without harming) the child. The effectiveness of the strategies and interventions shared in this book may vary from child to child. In general, young people who have had fewer traumatic experiences will benefit more than children who are exposed to ongoing challenges related to the war and any social challenges arising from it (like violence and poverty).<sup>37</sup> Some strategies are used in a slightly different manner by professionals, but have applications that can be used by those without degrees in counseling or psychology. These differences will be explained in detail when applicable.

It is important to understand that some children will need professional help that lay people cannot provide. Unfortunately in areas impacted by war and in refugee centers, these professionals are not always readily available. When ministering to a child who appears to need more help than you are able to safely give, it is important for you to do whatever you can to have the child seen by a professional. If a counselor or psychologist is not available, doctors often have enough training to determine what the child needs to heal. They often are also aware of resources that will help the young person that may not be known to you or your ministry.

If you are ministering to a significant number of children who have experienced a war, it can be helpful for your ministry to create a list of the various medical and social services resources available in the area. Often parents and other caregivers are overwhelmed and having a list of helpful contacts can make it more likely they will seek needed professional help for their child.

### **Signs a Young Person Needs Professional Help**

Helping young people heal from traumatic experiences during a war is somewhat unique in that large numbers of children are impacted beyond what the medical - and particularly the mental health system - are designed to accommodate. This creates a need for lay interventions that can address as many issues as possible and be used by those volunteers and caretakers working with the children. The assumption is that this will allow

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<sup>37</sup> Betancourt, "Interventions for Children Impacted by War"

professionals to focus on the young people with the most urgent needs for immediate professional care.

It is important to note that as some children begin to heal and the load on the system decreases, finding professional help for less urgent issues can be easier. Families relocating to areas with few refugees should be encouraged to have their child examined by a local pediatrician to discuss any concerns and develop a plan for any necessary treatment beyond the interventions the family is providing.

Knowing when a young person has an urgent need that should be attended to by a professional during a war situation is difficult. This is due in part to the fact that most lists of warning signs are created with the assumption that the local health care system can handle patients with mild and moderate issues. There are some signs, however, that should spur anyone reading this book to quickly seek whatever professional medical care is available to the child.

- Talk of suicide or suicide attempts (This is an emergency and should receive immediate medical intervention.)
- Constant talk of death and/or dying
- Becoming obsessed with a specific incident or scenario that is then used repeatedly in art, play, conversations, etc. with no apparent lessening of obsession over time
- Symptoms that worsen when there has been no additional trauma and intervention strategies have been used
- Symptoms that don't improve after a few weeks of lay intervention
- Symptoms that are making the child unable to function in his or her daily life
- Extreme withdrawal
- Extremely aggressive or violent behaviors
- Destructive behaviors
- Extreme sadness or depression lasting more than two weeks
- Illegal drug use
- Alcohol abuse
- Signs of anorexia or other eating disorders
- Dangerous risk taking behaviors

### **Understanding Short Term and Long Term Intervention Plans**

Often, the most dramatic symptoms of trauma begin immediately after the child experiences a traumatic event during a war. With a few simple strategies (and sometimes

without) and no additional traumatic experiences, these symptoms may disappear totally in six to eight weeks.<sup>38</sup> The interventions used during these early experiences can be considered psychological first aid and often reflect common trauma informed interventions. These interventions do not need to be provided by professionals because they do not involve diagnosis or treatment of any potential conditions.

Psychological first aid according to WHO (World Health Organization) also includes<sup>39</sup>:

- Providing support for concrete needs like food, shelter and clothing
- Assessing needs
- Listening to people
- Comforting and calming people
- Connecting people to needed information and services
- Protecting people from further harm

As mentioned earlier, however, children differ from adults in their response both to war and trauma in general. Research has found that children experiencing war trauma will often find the traumatic experiences must be confronted again at every developmental stage with the new resources the stage provides.<sup>40</sup> For example, a child who is five years old is in a stage where thinking is concrete. Any trauma a child experiences during a war at that age will be processed purely in concrete ways. When the same child begins adolescence, more abstract thinking abilities are available to the child. The entire experience during the war or various aspects of it may be reprocessed by the child in more abstract ways.

It is also important to remember that even after children have processed and healed from a war, certain situations may revive emotions and negative thoughts that were dealt with previously. For example, anniversaries of the beginning or ending of the war - with intense media reminders of death and destruction- may revive old memories and emotions for a time. If these do not fade quickly after the anniversary, revisiting activities that helped previously should ease or eliminate any symptoms of trauma that may have returned.

(OMITThis) Reprocessing experiences at the various developmental stages and when faced with reminders of traumatic events means that many young people will need a long term plan for regular interventions provided by adults. These interventions should include an

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<sup>38</sup> Raymond and Raymond, *Children in War*

<sup>39</sup> Snider, "Psychological First Aid:Guide for Field Workers"

<sup>40</sup> International Institute for Peace through Tourism, "The Impact of War on Children"

attempt to assess any new issues the young person may be having, encouraging the young person to ask new questions and share their current thinking about what happened during the war and providing any new support needed by the young person in his or her efforts to continue to process and heal from traumatic war experiences.

### **Impact of Parental Traumatic Responses on Children**

It is important to address the family dynamic when developing a plan to minister to children who have had traumatic experiences during a war. Many studies on the topic point out the importance of a stable family environment in both creating resilience in a child before a war and in helping the child process and heal after traumatic war experiences. Children do not experience war in a vacuum. Their parents or caretakers are having many of the same experiences. Parents can have symptoms resulting from the trauma they experienced during the war while with their children. In some cases, one or both of the parents may have actively participated in the fighting or had additional experiences not involving their children that can mean their personal trauma is greater than that of their children.

If you are a parent or a caregiver who has personally experienced trauma from the war experience, it is critical for you to do what you need to do to heal from the war. Many parents find that doing the activities in this book with their children also helps them in their own processing and healing. If your symptoms are more serious or are impacting how you care for your children in a negative way, it is extremely important for you to seek help from a medical professional as quickly as possible.

Those in a professional or ministerial position who work with children impacted by a war and their families believe that the reunification of families is critical in promoting mental health for the various family members.<sup>41</sup> Some of this reunification happens naturally as those fighting return from battle or families return to their homes. In other cases, the chaos of war may mean children have been separated from their parents. Ministries can help families find agencies who can assist in reunification efforts or provide assistance making phone calls, completing forms or interpreting for families seeking to find lost loved ones.

Any ministry to children impacted by war should also be aware of how the trauma is impacting the child's parents or caregivers in the ways they interact with the children in

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<sup>41</sup> Betancourt, "Interventions for Children Affected by War"

their care. Although your ministry may not be equipped to give adequate assistance to both adults and children, it is important to be aware of any additional trauma the child may be experiencing because a parent or caretaker is unable to provide a safe, nurturing environment due to his or her own responses to any trauma experienced.

As cultural norms may vary as to what constitutes a nurturing environment, it is important to examine academic studies that have determined the elements of nurturing that are essential for a child's healthy growth and development in any culture. There appears to be a consensus that nurturing environments for children include positive interactions consisting of verbal and physical affection, reinforcing interactions - including verbal support and praise, a fair and consistent setting and monitoring of limits with firm, but loving reinforcement, family participation in positive activities, positive role modeling by parents, parental involvement in learning activities and an effort to maintain the health of children and avoid unnecessary risk to the family.<sup>42</sup> If parents are unable to provide a nurturing environment for their children, they may need additional assistance with their attempts to parent well.

Studies have found that parents involved in a war - particularly those fighting in it - are more likely to physically abuse their children upon their return from deployment.<sup>43</sup> Women who have experienced traumatic events in a war were found to be more likely to develop Intermittent Explosive Disorder, making them more likely to excessively and/or harmfully punish their children.<sup>44</sup> Looking for signs of neglect or abuse in children served by your ministry can be critical in providing early intervention if a problem occurs.<sup>45</sup>

Studies have shown a strong family dynamic is critical in helping children heal from trauma.<sup>46</sup> In addition to personal symptoms resulting from the trauma of war, parents may find their marriage is weakened or broken from the additional stresses the war placed on it. Ministries may want to consider programs to help strengthen marriages as an indirect way of also helping the children in those families. The goal should be to help parents create the healthiest possible family environment to make it easier for their children to heal from their experiences during a war.

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<sup>42</sup> Komro et al, "Creating Nurturing Environments: A Science Based Framework for Promoting Child Health and Development Within High Poverty Neighborhoods"

<sup>43</sup> Kadir, "Effects of Armed Conflict on Child Health and Development"

<sup>44</sup> Ibid

<sup>45</sup> See Appendix 1 Signs of Possible Child Abuse

<sup>46</sup> Betancourt, "Interventions for Children Affected by War"



## Chapter 3 - Creating a Trauma Sensitive Environment

Hypervigilance, anxiety and other stress related responses to trauma are very common in children who have experienced war. Creating a calming, soothing environment for them can help minimize their symptoms - at least temporarily. Known as trauma sensitive, including these elements in your ministry environment and encouraging parents to incorporate them in the various environments in which their family may find themselves during the course of a day can aid in their children's ability to process and heal from any trauma they experience(d).

It is important to remember that families are often experiencing situational poverty (poverty brought on or exacerbated by the war) or are living in places where they cannot control things like the color of the walls. Thankfully, there are things that can be done in the environment that are inexpensive and portable. Helping parents or caregivers add any of these trauma sensitive elements to their living space - particularly in the areas where their children spend significant amounts of time - can help in calming and soothing. In some cases, your ministry may choose to purchase and provide one or more of these soothing items to the children to whom you minister.

Many of the things that serve to calm and soothe children who have experienced trauma, however, do not need to be purchased. Parents may not realize the importance of using certain techniques to soothe their children. Or depending upon their own background and experiences, they may not even be aware of the things they can do to calm their children or how to create a soothing environment in whatever living circumstances they may temporarily find their family inhabiting - including bomb shelters and refugee centers or camps. Providing a list of things parents can do to create a trauma sensitive environment may make it more likely that they are able to be effective in their efforts to consistently calm and soothe their children.

Here is a sample list you can give to parents or other caretakers of the things they can do to create a trauma sensitive environment:

- Look around any environment in which you and your child may find yourselves. What is available to you that might help calm or soothe your child? Your child may be able to suggest available items or things you can do that he or she finds comforting.

- Try to minimize what children see and hear during an event that could be potentially traumatic. This applies not only to actual experiences, but also news reports of traumatic events.
- Sing softly to your child. Lullabies and worship songs often work best.
- Cuddle your child.
- Read or quote comforting Bible verses. The book of Psalms, in particular, contains many comforting passages.
- Pray with your child and encourage your child to tell God the emotions, fears and hopes he or she has.
- Pray aloud for God's blessings on your child.
- Help your child find ways to exercise safely to help work off nervous energy.
- Share your own emotions with your child in age appropriate ways. Remember, it is good for children to see adults express their emotions in healthy ways. Your child, however, needs to believe you are emotionally stable enough to care for him or her. Extreme emotional reactions should be expressed privately when possible.
- If your child is in a situation either during or after the war where it is possible to attend school and other activities, be careful to avoid over-scheduling your child. Processing and healing from the trauma of war takes a lot of time and energy. Children who are over-scheduled will not have the time to process their experiences during the war and the emotions they caused. They may also be too tired from other activities to participate in activities designed to help them process and heal.

Items parents or other caretakers can use to create a trauma sensitive environment for children.

- Try to use soothing shades in rooms where children may spend a lot of time. Lighter shades of blue, green and purple have been found to be particularly soothing.<sup>47</sup> If walls cannot be painted, try to incorporate pillows, bedding, art work or other elements in those hues.
- Find something soft and/or fuzzy children can hold or stroke.
- Allow them to hold a favorite stuffed animal or if one is not available, encourage them to create an imaginary one from nearby items.
- Include items from nature in their environment or expose them to trees, flowers, and other natural elements outside if it is safe to do so.

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<sup>47</sup> Cots Online, "Trauma Informed Design"



- Animals can be soothing for children if the animals are calm and affectionate. Children who are afraid of an animal, however, will not be soothed by its presence.
- Try to expose them to as much sunlight as possible (using sunscreen if available). If it is unsafe for the child to be where sunlight can be seen, artificial light is preferable to darkness.
- Be willing to keep doors ajar, use night lights, place items under beds (so children know nothing can hide under the bed), remove closet doors or to use any other strategies that help the child feel safer.
- Weighted blankets can be soothing. When they are not available, try placing a heavy blanket, coat or even book on their laps to give them the same sensation as a weighted blanket. Make sure the child is not overheated or physically uncomfortable with the item on his or her lap.
- Use earplugs or noise canceling earphones to drown out unpleasant or frightening noises. If it is not too warm, ear muffs can also help.
- Limit exposure to news accounts of traumatic events. When young people are old enough to control their own devices, encourage them to limit the amount of time each day they expose themselves to content about the war, while still staying connected to any source of information needed to maintain physical safety.

## Triggers

Certain sounds and images may bring back memories of any traumatic events young people have experienced during a war. (It is important to note that young people with PTSD are less likely to have actual flashbacks than adults.<sup>48</sup> They can, and usually will, have memories of those experiences upon which they may choose to regularly reflect.) These triggers will often vary from child to child, although there will most likely be some triggers that many of the young people from the same war will have in common.

**Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)** is a mental health condition that is triggered by one or more terrifying events. It can occur if the event was experienced or witnessed.

When a child sees or hears a trigger, he or she will often have the same physical and psychological symptoms that occurred during and immediately after the traumatic event the trigger brings to mind. It is important to note that young people may or may not be fully aware of why they are suddenly shaking in fear, having a panic attack, crying or having some other response to the trigger. Even if they are somehow aware the response is

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<sup>48</sup> Betancourt, "Interventions for Children Impacted by War"

connected to the war, children may not be able to verbalize what is happening, recognize that the trigger is what brought back the memory or the emotional and physical response or be able to identify the trigger.

The first step in helping young people reduce or even eliminate the effect triggers have on them is to recognize what their particular triggers may be. Very young children will probably need the help of a parent or other caregiver who can monitor what triggers appear to cause these reactions in the child. Older children can be encouraged to make notes whenever they have unpleasant symptoms that arise unexpectedly. They should jot down anything that happened immediately before the symptoms began - sights, sounds, smells. Over time, they should begin noticing patterns. For example, if they have a panic attack every time they hear an unexpected loud noise, the unexpected loud noise is most likely a trigger. When possible, attempts should be made to minimize a child's exposure to triggers until some processing and healing have occurred.

It is important to note that some children, particularly those with certain special needs like autism, may have what appears to be a tantrum when exposed to triggers. It is important to note that this type of tantrum is not a way to convince an adult to let the child have his or her way, but rather is the child's way of expressing overwhelming emotions for which words do not seem adequate. These tantrums can be controlled and even eliminated with the help of the child.

The first step in reducing and eliminating trauma induced tantrums is to identify the triggers as you would for other trauma reactions. While tantrum triggers are being determined, begin working with the child to identify words and behaviors that can be used in place of a tantrum. These options should be acceptable choices for the adults in the life of the child, but also give the child ways to adequately express powerful emotions. Depending upon the age and personality of the child, possible options may be roaring like a lion to make the emotion more "visible" to adults, using modifying adjectives, adverbs and phrases like "extremely, to the moon and back angry" to indicate the strength of the emotion or substituting a physical activity like running to work off any strong emotions.

It can be helpful while young people are attempting to use replacement strategies for tantrums, if the adults in their lives watch for signs of a tantrum - before it begins. Many children have physical signs their body uses to signal a rapidly increasing stress level. Older children can even help you figure out what signs their body uses, like a clenched fist or a tightened jaw. A quick predetermined hand signal or verbal reminder to the young person

to use an agreed upon strategy can stop a tantrum before it begins. (Once a tantrum has started, it is almost impossible to stop until the child has exhausted his or her need to express the strong emotion.)

Taking the time and energy to create a trauma sensitive environment can soothe children who have experienced trauma and make it easier for them to benefit from other interventions designed to help them process and heal from their experiences. Identifying triggers in an environment can help both young people and the adults caring for them minimize triggers and better prepare the child to respond to them.



## Chapter 4 - Interventions for Addressing Physical Symptoms

Physical symptoms resulting from war are often the most easily noticed and addressed. Many ministries are focused on meeting these more obvious needs as they appear more urgent. Even when focused on physical needs, however, some more subtle ones may be missed. It is also important to remember that while providing solutions for the physical needs of children and their families is important, your ministry should also find ways to address their spiritual needs. Jesus almost always connected healing people by pointing them to God - even if it was only with a sentence or two. Ministries should strive to follow that example of pairing the meeting of physical needs with exposure to God's spiritual truths.

The most urgent physical needs most children in war have are for the basic necessities of life - safe drinking water, food, shelter and clothing. The circumstances in which they find themselves will help you determine which of these needs is most urgent. Children still living in areas where fighting occurs will have different needs from children in a refugee shelter/camp or children who have relocated into a more permanent housing situation in a safe area.

Children in an area where there is still daily conflict may have had their source of clean drinking water eliminated. The human body can only last about three days without water. In many places unclean water is still available, but this can bring exposure to bacteria and parasites. It is important to remember that children in an area of active conflict, as well as those arriving at refugee centers, may be dehydrated or suffering from illnesses due to drinking unclean water. Providing safe hydration and medical care should stabilize any issues quickly. (Cases of serious dehydration should be referred to a physician as it can result in an electrolyte imbalance that can lead to heart problems.)

Food is one of the commodities that often becomes scarce during a war. Not only is the volume of food consumed lower, but often the meals eaten are not as healthy as they might normally be. As a result, children may be slightly or severely malnourished. Be extremely careful when giving any food to a child who appears severely malnourished. A physician should be consulted first (if possible). It is estimated that as many as one half of the survivors of the Auschwitz Nazi concentration camp died upon liberation because their bodies could not process the foods they were given when freed.<sup>49</sup> A body denied food for a

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<sup>49</sup> Holocaust Encyclopedia, "Liberation"

long amount of time must be reintroduced to it slowly and preferably under the direction of a medical professional.

For cases of malnutrition that are mild to moderate, it is important to provide healthy foods - particularly fruits, vegetables and whole grains. If possible, parents should be given multivitamins in the appropriate doses for the child's age and encouraged to give their child one daily. This will more quickly replenish any missing vitamins and minerals that could lead to other health problems like scurvy or rickets.

After any needs for food and water are met, shelter is usually the next concern. Often the shelters provided are temporary since many refugees and internally displaced people hope to return to their homes when the fighting ceases. Or you may find children attempting to live in homes damaged by bombs or missiles. Often, you may be attempting to help families find some sort of new family dwelling on either a temporary or permanent basis.

The first consideration should always be finding the safest environment for the child. It is important to think carefully about the dangers a child might encounter in any environment. For example, a refugee shelter or camp may seem safe, but children will have a possibly increased exposure to child predators - especially if there are no safeguards in place to protect children. Unaccompanied child refugees are at greater risk for not only abuse of some sort, but also being taken into a trafficking situation.<sup>50</sup>

Other dangers to consider are those from structural damage or weakness or shoddy construction in general. Many times more permanent homes for refugees or internally displaced families are found based on the lowest costs or they are constructed quickly from inferior materials. This may mean families are placed in substandard housing, which can be dangerous for their children.

If the housing a family has secured seems substandard, try to find ways to make the environment as safe as possible. Think about projects like providing childproofing for outlets, safe pest control, mold control and simple repairs to remove any other hazards in the housing. In serious cases, your ministry may choose to attempt to find a better housing situation for the family.

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<sup>50</sup> Kadir, "Effects of Armed Conflict on Child Health and Development"

If a family is placed into an apartment for more permanent housing, do not forget that there will be needs for household items like cleaning equipment and supplies, paper products and other essentials. Many apartments are rented unfurnished and so the family will have needs for at least the most basic bedding. It is important to note that some major relief organizations will provide transportation and a month or two of rent to refugees and nothing else. Do not assume that all of a family's need for household goods have been met merely because a well known agency has helped place the family in their housing.

Another concern - particularly for refugees and internally displaced children - is clothing. During war, people often flee their homes in extremely dangerous situations. They get out by any means possible. Most do not have more with them than the clothes they are wearing and perhaps a backpack or shopping bag with whatever they can fit in it. Any clothes left behind may be destroyed and even if they can reclaim those clothes at some point, they need enough clothing to make their current situation livable.

When providing clothing, make sure it is new or in excellent condition if at all possible. It may be a long time before the family has an income and money to buy new clothes for themselves. They will attempt to make any clothing they have last as long as possible, so gifts of clothing in good condition are a blessing.

Do not forget the needs for any seasonal clothing they may have. Those fleeing from conflict most likely left with clothing for whatever season it was at the time. They will need clothing for other seasons and for the various possible weather conditions within each season. Providing raincoats, boots, hats, gloves, jackets, coats and other higher cost items not only protects the children from the weather conditions, but also allows the family to purchase food or other needed items with the funds they may have.

Ministries often forget the need families may have for basic supplies used in personal hygiene and care. Items like diapers, sanitary products, soap, shampoo, toothbrushes, toothpaste, deodorant, razors and more may not be available in a war zone nor may they have been brought by refugees from the war. Over the counter medicines are often expensive, and children may need age appropriate medicines for pain relief, gastrointestinal issues, allergies and more. The family may also need items for ongoing wound care.

Any serious injuries children received in a war or while escaping a war zone may have been addressed quickly, but injuries needing additional rehabilitation services may go unmet in

the chaos of war and its aftermath. Volunteers should look for signs that a child might benefit from additional medical care, physical or occupational therapies as well as any needs for special equipment like braces, artificial limbs, wheelchairs, etc. If your ministry does not have the ability to provide licensed medical care or special equipment, having the ability to refer families to specific, reputable places that can provide the help they need can save families time and money. Families may also appreciate having a local volunteer assist them in navigating appointments, paperwork, etc.

Although not necessarily common, some children are on prescription medicines for chronic conditions. In most cases, parents will ask for help if they are running out of prescription medicines, but some may require a new or renewed prescription from a local physician. Finding someone to take care of routine prescriptions can be difficult in a war zone or for refugees who are new to an area. Helping them locate the necessary medical assistance and pharmacies with low cost medications can prove extremely helpful.

A common health issue missed by many humanitarian organizations and ministries is vaccinations. Young children have rather frequent well visits to pediatricians, during which they are given vaccinations. These pediatrician visits are often missed during a war and its aftermath. Depending upon the situation and available resources, it can be helpful to provide vaccine clinics where children can receive any missed vaccines. This will help prevent additional serious health issues that can occur when unvaccinated children catch diseases like measles, mumps, chicken pox, tetanus, etc.

Finally, there are two basic physical health issues often impacted by war that are often missed because of more pressing needs. Children through the age of eighteen need nine to twelve hours of sleep each night.<sup>51</sup> The noises from battles, shelling or even the noises from other people in a refugee shelter can disrupt sleep. Many children will be sleep deprived, which can weaken their immune systems and make it more difficult for them to concentrate on any academic lessons or have adequate self control to meet expectations for their behavior.

If children have been sleep deprived over a long period of time, they may seem to sleep the majority of the day and night for a few days when finally in an environment conducive to sleep. If their sleeping areas have a lot of noise and light, your ministry may consider

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<sup>51</sup> Sleep Foundation, "How Much Sleep Do Babies and Kids Need?"



offering older children and teens sleeping eye masks and earplugs to make it easier to sleep.

Exercise is also often denied to children in a war situation. They may be sitting for long periods of time or be unable to safely exercise in their preferred ways. Lack of exercise can weaken immune systems, cause digestive issues, increase stress levels and make it more difficult for children to have self control. If playgrounds or play areas are unavailable or unsafe, it can be helpful to design creative ways for children to move and get some needed exercise. Leading these activities or giving parents ideas and any needed equipment can make it more likely children get at least some of the exercise they need each day.

Children who continue to live in the area where the war was fought face a very real danger from landmines and unexploded ammunition. Efforts are usually made to remove such dangers as soon as fighting has ended. Unfortunately, there always seem to be some that are not found. Children can find and be wounded or killed by these weapons in the course of play or when chasing after pets. Ministries should encourage and support any efforts by local governments or other groups to find and remove landmines and other potential dangerous war remnants that could harm children.



## Chapter 5 - Interventions for Addressing Psychological Symptoms

It is important to remember that as a lay person without formal training in psychology or counseling, there are limitations to what you can do to help ease any psychological symptoms children may have as a result of war. Experts, however, are beginning to realize that because of a lack of available qualified care from mental health professionals in comparison to demand in many areas, some activities can be done safely by non-professionals. This can allow young people the opportunity to get the help they need more quickly than would otherwise be the case.

There are still some boundaries that must be respected when attempting to help young people address any psychological symptoms from the trauma they experienced during a war. As a lay person, you are not qualified to make a diagnosis of a psychological issue - no matter how accurate your assessment might actually be. There is danger in labeling someone as having a condition that he or she might not actually have. In young people especially, it can negatively impact their self perception and their self esteem. When ministering to children who have experienced war, labels are not particularly helpful to any lay people who are ministering to them and should not be attached to children by you or your ministry.

Lay people cannot prescribe medicines, but it is important to also avoid suggesting young people take herbal or other remedies that are available without a prescription. Many herbs have interactions of which you may not be aware and could negatively impact the person you are attempting to help. Often sleep, a healthy diet and regular exercise can provide the help young people need to be better prepared to heal psychologically. Young people in severe psychological distress should see a healthcare professional to ascertain whether or not medication could help.

In addressing psychological issues, there are some activities you can use to help young people process what they have experienced. You can also do things to help them identify and express the complex emotions they are feeling. There are even quite a few activities lay people can use that will help children begin to heal from trauma. (In some cases, these activities have aspects that can be safely done by lay people and other possible applications that should only be used by professionals. Usually, these restrictions are focused on diagnosis and medical treatment, but there may be others. In the following sections, any limitations to how the various types of activities can be used by lay people will be shared.)

There is quite a bit of overlap in how various psychological symptoms are addressed. To make it easier to find what you need for a particular child or group of children, the information in the remainder of this chapter is organized by the general types of activities you or your ministry can use. It is safe to assume that any of these types of activities can help address the symptoms resulting from one or more of these general areas of psychological needs:

- Calming
- Identifying and expressing complex emotions
- Understanding and processing various events and experiences
- Healing from trauma including:
  - Reduction in negative psychological symptoms like nightmares
  - Feeling appropriately safe in various common environments
  - An appropriate understanding of what one can and cannot control
  - The ability to choose and reside in a specific emotional state for a time
  - The ability to self soothe and redirect thinking when needed
  - A healthy self esteem - neither too high nor too low
  - Note: Hope and forgiveness will be addressed in the chapter on spiritual interventions.
- Developing healthy coping mechanisms to use when stressed or anxious

Although each category of interventions will give various examples of how it is used, specific activity ideas for all of the interventions will be in a separate chapter.

### **Identifying Support Systems**

Children who are the most resilient after experiencing a war are usually those with a strong network of support. Efforts should be made to identify the supportive relationships available to each young person. Older children and teens should participate in this process. This not only makes them more aware of the various people they can turn to for help, but also alerts the adults participating in the identification process to any weaknesses in the support network of a specific young person. Young people can also help by sharing their perceptions of the strength or weakness of various supportive relationships. While their assessments of the amount of support a particular person is willing to give may be inaccurate, their perceptions will impact how willing they are to turn to particular people for emotional support.

## **Managing Relationships**

Young people experiencing a war often struggle to maintain healthy relationships with their family and friends and this can impact their emotional and mental health. War often means people move - sometimes with little warning - or are called to participate in the war in some way. Children and teens may suddenly find themselves with no friends or an absent parent. Young people may feel isolated and struggle to find new friends or find themselves mourning the temporary or permanent loss of a parent or friend.

Those caring for young people in a war zone or as refugees need to find ways to help them create new friendships while maintaining connections to those who are now far away. Many young people may attempt to use social media or texting to maintain relationships with their friends. While this can help ease loneliness and give teens a sense of normalcy, depending merely upon long distance relationships can eventually make them feel even more alone. This can be especially true if the friends' separate lives take on very different appearances from their own experience.

Making new friends is not always easy - especially during the teen years. Since it is natural to hope life will return to normal quickly, young people may prefer to believe the separation from their friends is short term and they do not need to make new friends. They may also be reluctant to put in the effort to find new friends where they are currently living. This can be because it seems like too much work or from a fear of rejection or the loss they will feel when ultimately separated from these friends, too.

While adults cannot force children or teens to be friends, they can help facilitate relationship building. Hosting young people for activities or meals can give them a relaxed atmosphere in which they can begin to get to know each other. Encouraging teens to enroll in activities outside of their school can also provide access to potential new friends. While children should not be enrolled in too many activities, they can benefit from a weekly exposure to new children outside of school. Parents can also facilitate potential friendships by arranging playdates and activities with other parents and their children.

Some children will find it difficult to make new friends. They may be shy or socially awkward. Spending time teaching them skills that will improve their social interactions with others can help. Social scripts can be found online in many languages and are often used to assist those who are socially awkward. These scripts give children practice in the specific things they can say or do that would be considered appropriate in a variety of social interactions.

In other situations, friend groups that are already formed may be reluctant to include someone new. This is common in any setting, but can be particularly difficult in a refugee situation. In some areas, refugees may be viewed as unsuitable for friendship or local teens may be reluctant to make friends with someone who may move away soon. If attempts to make new friends are rejected, and especially if the rejection is mean or cruel, it can make the sense of loneliness even more profound.

Often adults can only offer comfort and support when a young person is excluded socially. It can ease the sense of isolation to encourage those children to engage socially with other refugees their age or with younger children and safe adults. Participating in fun activities with a parent or siblings can also help. While perhaps not a perfect substitute, these relationships can ease loneliness.

If young people are old enough to be in romantic relationships, separation or potential separation from the other person can feel devastating. While adults may realize the relationship probably would have ended eventually even without a war, teens often believe anyone they date is going to be in a relationship with them forever. Add the drama of war and they can feel like the hero or heroine in a romantic movie. For teens with certain personalities or when the relationship was long term, their mourning of the separation can appear as if the teen is mourning the death of a spouse. Do not attempt to minimize the situation. Their pain and mourning are real and they should be comforted with love and respect.

When separation looms, it can become especially tempting to push the physical boundaries of the romantic relationship. Movies and books make it sound important. Teens should be reminded of all of the possible negative repercussions - physical, emotional and spiritual - from doing anything that was meant to be done only in the context of a marriage. Do not lecture, but empathize with their pain and have loving, but firm conversations about the possible consequences of their potential options.

After the separation, allow them to continue to communicate as much as they would like, as long as it does not interfere with their schoolwork and other obligations and relationships. If there is an extra cost for this communication, it is fair to ask them to help cover the added expense if they are able to work. If not, boundaries can be set that are fair to everyone involved. In most cases, the communication between the couple will gradually lessen and then eventually end.

Parental relationships are crucial for the health and well being of children and teens. Often war means one or both parents are called to serve in some way. This can mean a long separation, often in both time and distance. Children will mourn this situation in a variety of ways. Some may weep as if the parent has died. Others may become angry, withdraw or act as if the absence does not bother them at all. It is important to empathize with the child. Do not make promises you cannot keep. If the parent could be killed, be honest in age appropriate ways. Offer hope and support without guaranteeing the safe return of the absent parent.

It can be helpful to facilitate communication between children and their absent parent(s). While some military situations require soldiers to cut off all contact with loved ones for a time, most will allow at least some communications to continue. This will sometimes require sacrificial effort on the part of the absent parent. After a horrific day of fighting in a war, writing or calling their children may be the last thing on most soldiers' minds. They need, however, to understand the critical importance of regular communication in maintaining a healthy parent/child relationship. Video calls are particularly helpful to children. If parents know they are leaving for a deployment, they may want to record themselves reading favorite bedtime stories or reminding their children of important things. These videos can bridge the gap during times when communication is difficult or impossible.

As strange as it may seem, a parent returning from a long deployment can be almost as disruptive as a parent leaving for one. Children have gotten used to a new routine and not having the parent around to support or discipline them. Very young children may barely remember the returning parent. Communication is key as the parent is reintegrated into daily family life. Discuss the mixed emotions everyone is having. Encourage patience as new routines and interactions are established. Remind children the returning parent may be exhausted, wounded or struggling with his or her memories from the war. Do not be afraid to seek outside help if the transition is particularly difficult. It will take time and effort, but eventually a new family dynamic can be established and your children will benefit from having both parents available to them.

### **Remembering Traumatic Events**

Many of the interventions and activities in the remainder of this book assume that those participating remember what happened to them during the war and its aftermath. Some young people will appear to have no memory of their experiences. This can at times be an

intentional choice made because those memories seem as if they are dangerous. Young people can even become afraid of attempting to remember events during activities designed to help them process and heal from those incidents.

While this “forgetfulness” may seem safer to young people, it can actually cause the child to continue to exhibit psychological symptoms longer than necessary. While young people should not be forced to remember and process their experiences, they should be encouraged to do so. Reassuring them the memories will not put them in real danger can help. Acknowledging that their memories may be bad or distressing can make them feel more “normal”. Explaining how their participation in activities can help them begin to process and heal - thereby reducing any unwelcome symptoms - can be motivating. Young people who continue to refuse to think about anything connected to the war or who genuinely seem to have no memories of certain events should be referred to a medical professional.<sup>52</sup>

### **Identifying Emotions**

War can cause young people to experience a wide variety of emotions. Some of these emotions are complex, in that several emotions are intertwined in such a way that it is difficult to identify which specific emotions are involved. These emotions must be analyzed and identified for true healing. While this can be difficult for any young person, young children with a limited emotional vocabulary and children with certain special needs may find this particularly difficult.

Other children may attempt to ignore or repress their negative emotions - especially if they are particularly strong. This can add stress to the young person's life and result in additional negative symptoms, including health issues like dizziness, headaches, stomachaches and more.<sup>53</sup> Children who appear to continue to deny their emotions should be referred to a medical professional.

Lucia Capacchione created five separate categories of negative emotions that young people can experience.<sup>54</sup> Using these categories can help young people analyze and identify their emotions. Although other classifications exist, Capacchione's categories can simplify the process for young people who are struggling. Her categories are:

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<sup>52</sup> Williams & Poijula, The PTSD Workbook p.23

<sup>53</sup> Patel & Patel, “Consequences of Repression of Emotion: Physical Health, Mental Health and General Well Being”

<sup>54</sup> Williams & Poijula, The PTSD Workbook p.154



- Sadness
- Fear
- Anger
- Confusion
- Depression

When working with young people to name emotions, having a larger vocabulary of potential words from which they can choose to describe their emotions may address their frustration with expressing the strength of their feelings<sup>55</sup>. Other young people prefer to work with a numerical scale, where perhaps a mild emotional state would be ranked a “one” and an extremely strong emotional state would be ranked a “five”. Younger and less verbal children will struggle without these aids and may attempt to communicate the depth of an emotion by inappropriate means like biting or hitting. These aids can also prove helpful to young people attempting to separate more complex emotional states. (“My fear was a “two”, my anger a “five” and my sadness a “three” when that happened.”)

Young people may become upset or embarrassed when they experience a positive emotion in the midst of a war and its aftermath. They may believe it is somehow wrong to find something funny or feel joy in the midst of so many terrible experiences. Care should be taken to reassure them that our brains actually benefit from taking breaks from negative emotions - even for a few minutes. This helps keep our brains emotionally flexible and makes it easier to heal and experience days full of positive emotions in the future.<sup>56</sup>

As young people begin to sort through their emotions, it can be important to remind them that even negative emotions have a purpose. Fear, for example, can be a warning that we should avoid something dangerous, like a hungry bear. As they think about the emotions they are feeling, encourage them to think about the ways those emotions can help them, as well as the ways they can hurt them if taken to the extreme. In time, they will hopefully begin to understand why certain events create certain emotional responses in them.

### **Mindfulness Exercises**

Mindfulness (sometimes known as grounding) is a technique of intentionally focusing your intention on what is happening in the present. Various people have promoted mindfulness

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<sup>55</sup> See Appendix 2 for emotion vocabulary words

<sup>56</sup> Kashdan & Rottenberg, “Psychological Flexibility as a Fundamental Aspect of Health”

in ways that can be ungodly, neutral or godly depending upon their worldview.<sup>57</sup> Since mindfulness has been shown to be helpful in reducing anxiety, an attempt will be made here to explain how to use mindfulness with young people in ways that also honor God.

While prayer and meditation on scripture are two ways to help students calm themselves with mindfulness, there are other techniques that can also be used. These often involve forcing one's mind to be more aware of one's current environment. One of the most popular mindfulness exercises asks participants to name three things they can see, two things they can hear and one thing they can touch. Others involve being more intentional about doing everyday activities, like slowly enjoying a cup of tea while paying close attention to how the tea looks, smells and tastes. Many people also consider controlled breathing and certain exercises detailed elsewhere in this chapter as mindfulness activities.

### **Controlled Breathing**

We do not always realize it, but when we are stressed, our breathing and heart rate quicken. This places extra stress on our bodies and can cause our thoughts and emotions to race as well. Controlling one's breathing by slowing it down can help calm one's body and mind as well. When the body and mind are calmed, it is much easier for young people to focus on other activities that can improve their psychological health.

Interestingly, breathing can be controlled through either exercise or some form of intentional stillness. Exercise can work off the chemicals created by high stress levels as well as burning off the excess energy needed to enter a hyper vigilant state with its accompanying quickened breathing and heart rates. Regular exercise also tends to naturally create a slower resting heart rate and reduces the amount of air the body needs for any type of movement, thus slowing breathing rates.

Children can also be taught various exercises that help them gain control over their breathing and slow the rate of breathing in and out. Often these breathing exercises are paired with vivid images, like blowing a bubble, that help young people remember how to do them even when stressed. Certain slower exercise classes, like stretching classes and Pilates also focus on breathing techniques when doing the exercises. These types of physical activities combine the benefits of exercise and controlled breathing techniques.

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<sup>57</sup> Focus on the Family, "Mindfulness: A Christian Approach"

## Comfort Items

Young children often normally go through a stage when they find comfort in a stuffed animal, favorite blanket or other items that they choose. Even children who have outgrown their need for these items, may find the traumatic events they have experienced create a need for a return to using a comfort item temporarily.

Sometimes, the family will have encouraged their children to bring a favorite comfort item with them if they fled or allowed them to return to using a favorite from when they were younger if they stayed in place during the conflict. Some parents may be concerned about what appears to be a regression in their children to an earlier stage of childhood because of the use of any comfort items. This temporary regression in development is quite common with childhood trauma.<sup>58</sup> The need for the stuffed animal or other comfort items will recede as the child begins to heal.

In one study, children were given a stuffed puppy and told the puppy was far from home and needed someone to hug and comfort it. They found the children who provided that care for the stuffed puppy experienced a strong positive effect on their traumatic stress reactions.<sup>59</sup> Although (to my knowledge) similar studies have not been conducted about whether or not using a child's own stuffed animal or other comfort items had a similar impact, I believe one could safely assume that the positive impact would be similar - even if not quite as pronounced.

For children who are experiencing hyper vigilance or other stress responses, other comforting solutions may help. Some children may briefly return to thumbsucking, hair twirling or other behaviors they have used to self soothe in the past. Other children may want a night light or for doors to be kept open or closed. The need to use these behaviors and items to soothe and/or comfort should decrease over time as the child begins to heal. If the behaviors do not lessen after a time or increase in frequency after a period of interventions and no additional traumatic events or if they begin causing health problems (for example, pulling hair out rather than merely twirling it), a professional should be consulted.

Animals of all kinds have long been known to help reduce stress and ease loneliness and depression.<sup>60</sup> If the family owns a pet, encouraging the child to spend time with the animal

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<sup>58</sup> Kadir, "Effects of Armed Conflict on Child Health and Development"

<sup>59</sup> Betancourt, "Interventions for Children Affected by War"

<sup>60</sup> John Hopkins Medicine, "The Friend Who Keeps You Young"

can help. Providing an opportunity for children to interact with animals not owned by the family must be managed carefully. A child who is afraid of dogs, for example, may be further traumatized if pressed to interact with a strange dog. Any animal introduced to children in an attempt to help soothe them should be chosen for its calm and affectionate demeanor. Interestingly, the type of animal does not seem to matter as long as the child is comfortable interacting with it. Dogs, cats, horses and even fish have been successfully used to help reduce stress in children who have experienced trauma.

### **Exposure to Nature**

Although the research is comparatively new, people have somehow always known that nature can help reduce stress and has a healing aspect to it.<sup>61</sup> For Christians, we know that scripture tells us God's Creation not only reminds us of God's existence, but also of God's love and power and of His promises.<sup>62</sup> These reminders of God can be comforting as well.

Walks and hikes through nature are perhaps the best way to expose children to God's Creation. The act of combining exercise with exposure to nature only increases the possible benefits from walks and hikes. If you find yourself in an urban environment or you are in a situation where it is still dangerous for children to spend time outside, there are still ways to expose young people to nature.

For those in urban environments, most cities have parks, gardens or other green spaces. Do not forget that trees along a sidewalk or the sky above are also a part of nature. If you have access to the things needed, consider helping children grow things. Even if seeds are not available, many items can be grown from kitchen scraps that are usually thrown away. If land is not available for planting a garden, a container garden will work just as well in most cases. Growing flowers exposes children to beauty, but growing free food can help children have a sense of providing something their families need. This can give them a sense of purpose and meaning that may have been diminished by the war.

Another way children can interact with nature is through crafts or collections. Encourage children to interact with the things they find in nature in creative ways. Items like rocks, shells, flowers, seeds and leaves make great found materials to use in art projects. Some young people may become fascinated with rocks or shells and want to start collecting them. Before encouraging children to begin collecting any items, however, it is important to consider whether the family may need to move to new accommodations in the future. If

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<sup>61</sup> Robbins, "Ecopsychology:How Immersion in Nature Benefits Your Health"

<sup>62</sup> Psalm 121:1-2 and others

the family is not settled in their living arrangements, having something else to move may add more stress than it resolves.

### **Visualization and Reflection Exercises**

People who have experienced a traumatic event will often “see” the experience replayed over and over again in their minds. This can be during dreams or while awake if something in the environment triggers the memory. The trigger can be someone mentioning the event or it can be some sensory element the brain has associated with the incident. Some young people may actually choose to review their memories of certain events over and over again in an attempt to better understand what happened.

Whether or not young people experience these negative and unwanted memories or images depends a lot upon what the child saw and experienced, as well as dozens of other factors. Some children may experience bad dreams that are not things they actually saw or experienced, but are frightening nonetheless. Guided imagery, sometimes referred to as Imagery Rehearsal Therapy, helps young people replace negative or traumatic images in their minds with more pleasant ones. It has been naturally advocated by many parents for generations (without knowing it was a named therapy). The adage to “think of something pleasant” before going to bed or when faced with unpleasant mental images also has a scriptural basis.<sup>63</sup>

Imagery Rehearsal Therapy is a type of cognitive behavioral therapy. As such, lay people should not use it to diagnose or treat psychological issues. However lay people can teach children how to replace negative images with more positive ones as parents have for centuries. Studies have found that imagery replacement can reduce the frequency of nightmares and reduce the stress often caused by them. It can also reduce PTSD symptoms and anxiety.<sup>64</sup>

As a lay person, there are two aspects of guided imagery that you can try with young people safely - teaching them to control and change their thoughts while awake and teaching them how to change their dreams while still dreaming. It is important to remember that children who struggle with metacognition (the awareness of one’s own thoughts) will have difficulty using guided imagery. With those children, it may be necessary to first do activities to make them aware of their own thoughts and the concept that they

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<sup>63</sup> Phillipians 4:8

<sup>64</sup> Tartakovsky, “What Is Imagery Rehearsal Therapy (IRT)?”

can control them, before attempting to teach them how to use guided imagery to replace negative thoughts with positive ones.

For children who seem to have strong metacognition skills, there are several things you can do to help them manage any negative thoughts or images. First teach them to think of their thoughts as a book. They can “turn the page” on their thoughts just like they do in a book. Help them to understand that while they may not be able to totally prevent a negative thought or image from popping into their brain, they can choose how long they “look” at it. If it is something unpleasant, they can teach themselves to quickly replace the negative thought with something positive.

It can make it easier for children to switch images by teaching them to mentally say the word “stop” as soon as they realize they are having an unpleasant memory or seeing a negative image. Explain that using the word “stop” as a cue to switch images will be easier to do over time. At first, they may have to use the cue multiple times within a few seconds before they can actually get their brains to think about something else. With practice, they should be able to successfully switch images after using the cue once.

It can also be helpful to encourage children to choose specific images they can use to replace negative ones. This will make it easier to exchange mental images than if they have to stop and think about what image they want to use as a replacement. Young people should be encouraged to picture their chosen image in as much detail as possible. Often this is easier if they imagine a favorite place. What do they see when they are there? What sounds and smells do they associate with that place? What do they do when they are there that they enjoy?

Have times when you encourage them to practice switching images in their thoughts. In practice sessions, help them replace a pleasant thought you give them with their own predetermined one. It can help to show them a photograph of the first thought. For example, you might want to show them a photograph of somewhere you have visited. Try to pick some place unusual, so it will not be the same image as one they might have chosen for their replacement image. Encourage them to picture your image fully in their minds (closing their eyes after viewing the photo can help) and then attempt to switch their thoughts to their predetermined image.

Once young people are comfortable switching images in their thoughts while awake, they can attempt doing the same thing during their dreams. The process of attempting to

control one's dreams is referred to as lucid dreaming. Children may have a difficult time believing they can control their dreams to some extent. Encourage them to try the techniques you teach them for a time to see if it will help. Some children will be more successful at it than others, but it takes some practice before anyone can be consistently successful.

The first step in lucid dreaming is to teach children to be aware that they are dreaming. Explain that they can think during sleep, just like they do when they are awake. Teach them to think "This is a dream", as soon as they realize they are dreaming. Most young people will ask how they can know they are dreaming - often because dreams seem so real while we are experiencing them.

To explain, have someone share a dream from the night before or share one of your dreams. Have students point out the "weird" things in the dream that would not happen in real life. Often, it is either someone or something fictional in the dream or some odd combination of people, places and events that do not belong together. Teach students to realize that when their thoughts or what they think at the time are experiences have those characteristics, they are probably dreaming. As soon as they realize it is a dream, they should use the cue, "This is a dream".

Once they have somewhat mastered the ability to recognize when they are dreaming, they can attempt to control those dreams. Encourage them to try and change what is happening in the dream in some way. They can change the characters, the setting or the action - just as if they were writing a story. Whether or not or even to what extent they can successfully change dreams will vary from child to child. Some may find attempting to change the dream actually awakens them from the dream. Studies have found, however, that merely attempting to change nightmares decreases the frequency of them after a time.<sup>65</sup>

(Note: There is a difference between nightmares and night terrors. Parents are generally not aware of a child's nightmares until the dreams awaken the child. Night terrors are generally experienced by younger children and are more disturbing to caregivers because they can involve crying, screaming, glassy eyed appearance without seeming to actually be awake, thrashing, etc. Although night terrors can last as long as forty-five minutes, there is no need to wake the child, although you will want to prevent a child from doing anything dangerous. Children have no memories of night terrors the next day.<sup>66</sup>)

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<sup>65</sup> Tartakovsky, "What Is Imagery Rehearsal Therapy (IRT)?"

<sup>66</sup> Healthy children.org, "Nightmares, Night Terrors and Sleepwalking in Children"

Reflection is a spiritual practice mentioned in the Bible that can also help young people control negative thoughts. Similar in some ways to meditation, it is actually easier for most people and has additional benefits.<sup>67</sup> Reflecting on scripture is not as common in Christian circles today as it was in the past. It is likely the young people to whom you are ministering will have no idea what it means - even if they are strong Christians who know scripture well. While technically not an image that can replace a negative one, switching one's thoughts to a scripture when negative thoughts arise can help refocus thinking as well.

Teaching children how to reflect on scripture is often easier if you suggest a specific Bible verse on which they can reflect. When choosing verses, consider how deeply the average young person will be able to think about it. Verses with the big ideas of Christianity like love, forgiveness, obedience and others often work best. In addition to suggesting a verse upon which they can reflect, it can be helpful to suggest some questions they can try to answer as they reflect on the verse. Do not force them to give written answers or even to use your questions. You want to assist, not micromanage, their reflection time.

How reflection time is structured will be up to the individual. Suggest doing it at least once a day and preferably at the same time every day. Reflecting while they are doing something that is already a strong habit - like eating breakfast or brushing their teeth - can make it more likely they will remember to have their daily reflection time. At first, you may even want to have them practice reflection for a minute or two of Bible class time if you are their teacher (even thirty seconds will seem like forever to them at first). Encourage them to continue thinking about the scripture the entire time and to return to thinking about it if their mind drifts. You may even want to have some of them share their thoughts after these practice sessions.

### **Establishing Order**

Children find comfort and feel safe when they have structure to their lives. Routines, schedules and even rules are part of that needed structure. In the life of an average child, there are usually rules, school classes, activities, bedtime routines, regular meals and other things which naturally provide that needed structure. War, however, brings chaos. Routines are disrupted. Schools are closed and activities canceled. That chaos lays the groundwork for children to feel that their world is unstable and they are no longer safe.

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<sup>67</sup> Pena, "Christian Meditation vs. Mindfulness"



Often, reintroducing some routines and structure - even beginning to have rules and enforce them again - can help children feel more stable emotionally. Encourage parents and other caregivers to have routines - even if they are different than from before the war, because of their new circumstances. Ministries can provide classes and worship services that are held on a regularly scheduled basis. Your ministry may also consider providing regular tutoring sessions or activities that create a sense of routine and schedules for children and their families.

It is tempting to assume children who have been through trauma do not need rules or correction when they disobey those rules. While some leniency during the actual crisis might be acceptable, a return to common childhood rules for the culture should be attempted as quickly as possible. If you are from a different culture than the children to whom you are ministering, it is important to know and respect the common rules for children in that culture. Those rules should be respected by you and your ministry unless they go against God's commands or put the child in actual danger.

Correction and consequences for disobeying rules will be discussed at length in the chapter on behavior. While correction and consequences should be given for rebellious behavior, the manner in which they are given should be trauma sensitive. Correction and consequences signal a return to normalcy, but when overly harsh may cause additional trauma for the child.

### **Giving Choices**

Children who have experienced a war have lost all sense of their ability to control their world or any part of it. War makes the world feel incredibly out of control and children's behavior is often micromanaged to keep them safe. Even choices of how much to eat or what to wear or how to play may be denied them. Parents may feel the need to micromanage behaviors and eliminate choices for the child even after the family is in a safer environment.

While the dynamic is natural in war, continuing to deny children the right to control anything in their environment can lead to a victim mentality and poor self esteem. While they were indeed victims of war, defining oneself as a victim causes children to feel no sense of personal responsibility and to develop a poor locus of control. This in turn often

leads to an overall negative view of life, a lack of any feeling of accountability, risk avoidance and even entitlement and an unhealthy self esteem.<sup>68</sup>

**Locus of Control** - An individual's perception about the underlying main causes of events in his or her life. The stronger a person's locus of control, the more he or she believes that he or she has control over the things that happen in his or her life.

Ministries can help by reintroducing choices into the lives of the children who have experienced war. The choices do not have to be complicated and you may choose at first to limit the choices to two or three acceptable options. Something as simple as choosing which colors of crayons to use or which flavor of beverage to drink is a beginning. Parents and caregivers can be encouraged to gradually offer their children more choices until their children are making the same types of choices they were before the war.

In some cases, children may want to control too many things about the world around them. This often comes from the somewhat mistaken belief that if they had had more control over their environment, the traumatic events would not have occurred. The reality is that some things we just cannot control. This need to control everything will require more individual attention and possibly bridge strategies to help children gradually release control over some aspect of their lives to others.

Bridge strategies are actions young people can take that fall somewhere between an unhealthy strategy they are currently using and the normally accepted strategy under those circumstances. For example, perhaps a child wants doors to be open at all times and to sit next to the door so there is a clear escape route. This is not always practical in normal life nor will it always be within the child's ability to dictate whether or not a door is open. A bridge strategy requires having a conversation with the child about why he or she wants the door to be open.

Reassure the child that the danger has passed, but empathize with the need to feel there is a safe escape route. Work out a plan where the door is gradually closed a little more each day. As the child realizes he or she is still safe with the door slightly closed, the need for controlling whether or not the door is fully open should dissipate over time. If not, the child may need professional help in dealing with fears and the need to control the environment to manage those fears.

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<sup>68</sup> Brennan, "What Is a Victim Mentality?"

For most children, choices and bridge strategies (if necessary) should help restore their original, appropriate sense of the things in life that they can and cannot control. There are also lessons volunteers can do with young people to actively teach and thoroughly discuss the concept of control and personal responsibility in life, as well as God's expectations for both. It is important to note that Christianity is based in part on the idea that people can make choices to change and control their own thoughts and actions and must take responsibility when those choices are poor or sinful. Failing to help young people who have experienced war adequately explore these topics can make it more difficult for them to obey God in the future. (Specific Bible lesson plans on these and other topics will be provided in a later chapter.)

### **Art and Art Therapy**

Although art therapy is a recognized tool used by some professionals in psychology, there are aspects of it that can be safely done by the average person. Professionals can use art therapy as a tool for identifying psychological issues and establishing treatment plans. While it is not appropriate for a lay person to use art therapy in those ways, it can be beneficial to use art in an effort to help young people express their emotions.

Art therapy gives young people a creative outlet for processing their experiences and emotions. It can be especially helpful for memories that are stored as images, which is very common with traumatic experiences and in preverbal children.<sup>69</sup> Art therapy can also help young people release pent up energy and emotions through the movement needed to create various works of art.

Any supplies a child might normally use for arts and crafts activities can also be used in art therapy activities. Your ministry may want to give each student some basic art supplies to have at home so she or he can continue creating works of art. The most common art supplies, that are also affordable and portable, are blank paper of any type (copy paper reams offer the least expensive paper in most cases), crayons, markers, inexpensive watercolor sets with brush, glue sticks, pencils, chalk, clay or play dough, card stock, colored tissue paper squares, scissors and unlined journals or composition books.

If you are setting up an art area for children to use while participating in your ministry, you may want to also purchase or obtain rolls of paper, finger paints (and finger paint paper),

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<sup>69</sup> Lane, "Beyond Regression: An Investigation of Art Material Choice for Children With Trauma"

plastic cookie cutters, old magazines, tempera paints, paint brushes, small weaving looms and loops or yarn, felt, fabric glue, fabric scraps, ribbon and various other arts and crafts supplies. When planning art activities for young people, you may want to consider focusing on projects that require more large muscle movements in the creation process. This will give children the benefits of movement in addition to those provided by the artistic process.

Works of art can be about the object or scene being depicted, but it also allows artists to explore their thoughts, ideas and emotions about the world around them in a more indirect way. Children who have experienced war often initially produce drawings depicting the things they have seen and experienced. The Pinkas Synagogue in Prague has on display numerous drawings children made while in Nazi concentration camps. They clearly depict the experiences of the children during the war.

Over time though, those drawings will become less frequent for most children and other drawings will take their place. These works of art may seem to have no connection to the experiences of young people during a war, but they may still express the artists' emotions about those events. It is important to remember that the process itself is helping them express what they are feeling - even if they never verbalize it. Using art supplies that require more muscle use, like clay or large paint brushes or large canvases can also give them some physical release from stress and tension.

When a young person finishes a work of art, avoid commenting on what you think you see in the finished product. Sometimes overuse of a black crayon is not depression, but the reflection of the child only having access to a black crayon! Instead, ask the child to tell you about the work of art. You can even ask about specifics of why certain choices were made - whether it is the things that are depicted or the colors or techniques used.

Once again, it is not necessary to analyze the children's responses or pressure them if they do not have much they wish to say about the work of art. It can be appropriate in some cases to ask follow up questions like, "How did that make you feel?" or "What do you think that person in your drawing is feeling/thinking?" Remember though, your goal for using art therapy is merely giving the young person a way to express their thoughts and feelings. You should not attempt to diagnose or treat any perceived issues based on their responses. Should anything shared by a child cause you concern, it is best to refer the child for professional help in determining whether or not there is indeed a more serious issue that needs to be addressed.

## Music and Music Therapy

Music therapy can take a variety of forms. From listening to music to playing an instrument or singing in groups or alone, music has been shown to have therapeutic effects on children. The Music Therapy Association promotes music as a way for children to understand and express their emotions, lower their anxiety levels and learn to self soothe, as well as help them identify and cope with any psychological triggers they may have from the traumatic events they have experienced.<sup>70</sup>

Proponents of music therapy believe that it provides a unique balance of both structure and freedom of expression. This allows children to feel safe because of the structure provided by music to explore their thoughts and feelings through the freedom of expression it allows.<sup>71</sup> Unfortunately, even proponents admit not every child benefits equally from music therapy activities.<sup>72</sup>

Since this is considered a therapy practiced by professionals, lay people should avoid using music therapy activities to diagnose or treat a specific psychological issue. Lay people can however, use music therapy activities to help children who have experienced war explore and express their emotions either by listening to or performing music. Learning to play an instrument can also give young people an activity that will occupy their minds, provide some needed movement and give them a productive way to spend their time.

As you may have discovered yourself, the selection of musical moods can prove energizing, soothing, depressing or agitating. Although soothing music like lullabies or energizing music like certain worship songs generally have predictable effects on mood and energy levels, that is not always the case. A study found that while listening to sad music helped adolescent girls and any teen who tends to reflect on problems, it tended to make things worse for the average teen boy and for any teen who tends to ruminate or worry.<sup>73</sup> Another study, however, found that listening to “happy” music boosted mood by 90% and even those with high levels of chronic stress reported improved moods.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Naureckas, “Music Therapy for Traumatized Children”

<sup>71</sup> Ibid

<sup>72</sup> Ibid

<sup>73</sup> Ibid

<sup>74</sup> Feneberg, Anja et al, “Perceptions of Stress and Mood Associated With Listening to Music in Daily Life During the COVID-19 Lockdown”

Studies have found music, particularly what is often referred to as pink noises, can improve sleep. A small study found that those exposed to pink noise (often associated with the sounds of nature like ocean waves) while sleeping experienced longer periods of time in deep restorative sleep and performed better on memory tests the next day<sup>75</sup>. Playlists created to induce or improve sleep can be found online. If children, teens or adults are having sleep issues, it may help to play one of the multi-hour pink noise or sleep music playlists softly during the night.

As lay people, it is probably best to help young people develop playlists of music that they believe provide them with the emotional support they need. This also allows them to choose songs they will enjoy listening to, making it more likely they can use the music they choose to help them manage and cope with anxiety or other emotions. When designing a playlist, it can be helpful for an adult to ask why certain songs are chosen and if they seem to be having the impact on emotions the young person had hoped. Encouraging young people to exchange less helpful songs for ones that seem more helpful can make their personal playlist an effective coping strategy.

### **Play and Play Therapy**

The origins of play therapy go back over a hundred years, but the concept of using play to help young children grow and learn is still relatively new outside of Montessori circles (An educational system focused on using play and other natural ways to help children learn, rather than through formal instruction.). While as lay people, you cannot use play to diagnose and treat specific psychological issues, you can use various play activities to help children process their traumatic experiences, express emotions, develop helpful coping strategies and even explore Christian perspectives on life through Godly Play. Studies have found that children unable to express their feelings about the trauma they have experienced can express those same emotions through their play.<sup>76</sup>

**Godly Play** makes use of Montessori methods and other avenues of childhood play to help children explore traumatic events and emotions within the context of a spiritual conversation.

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<sup>75</sup> Northwestern Medicine, "The Promise of Pink Noise"

<sup>76</sup> Leclerc and McCarty, "War, Toys, Play to Heal: Priming Designers to Create Playthings Promoting Resilience in Children in War Zones"

Play can also help children make sense of unorganized memories and fosters understanding of what happened as well as allowing children to reframe internal narratives.<sup>77</sup> Playing with peers and adults has been shown to regulate their hyper vigilance and provides opportunities for sharing experiences and strengthening social bonds, which fosters resilience.<sup>78</sup>

Play can also help children to release energy and give them a sense of normalcy as opportunities for play are often unavailable during a war. This normalcy can make them feel safer and therefore calmer as they interact with the world around them.<sup>79</sup> Play therapy is generally used with children aged four to twelve years. It is important to remember; however, that children often experience developmental regression after experiencing trauma and as a result, some younger adolescents may also benefit from play therapy activities.

There are five basic types of play, with each providing differing benefits.<sup>80</sup>

- Imaginative Play - provides understanding and hope
- Manipulative Play (building things) - provides a sense of control over their environment
- Creative Play (creating toys) - provides an outlet for expressing emotions and ideas
- Narrative Play - provides an opportunity to share experiences and express emotions
- Active Play - provides an opportunity to release pent up energy and emotions

When looking for toys to encourage therapeutic play, it can be helpful to find items that allow for maximum creativity and flexibility in the ways with which they can be played. Because of economic constraints and the often more nomadic lifestyle of families during and shortly after war, it is also helpful to find toys that are low cost, easy to use and require little space to move or store. Your ministry may want to have some of these toys available in your facility or you may choose to give specific toys to children to use in play at home. (It is important to note that some researchers believe children exposed to war should not be given toy soldiers or weapons with which to play, even if they are acting out scenes from the war as part of their natural play. While it is believed there is some value in allowing children to turn these threatening symbols from war into more neutral ones, others believe

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid

<sup>78</sup> Ibid

<sup>79</sup> Ibid

<sup>80</sup> Ibid

these toys encourage children to adopt violence as an accepted strategy or glamorize war.<sup>81</sup>)

Specific toys recommended for play therapy fall into several main categories. Advocates of play therapy often suggest figures and dolls and the equipment that would be needed to enact scenes with them. These extras could include doll houses, toy vehicles, doll clothes and other items. The advantage to these toys is that they often cost less and take up less space than other more realistic toys. Children can also benefit from basic toys like blocks that can be used to create a variety of scenes in play.

The most realistic form of play is pretend or fantasy play where the children play out the various roles. This type of play is often most enjoyed by children when they have dress-up clothes and either pretend or actual items that would be used by adults - like a stethoscope or pots and pans. While not always practical for the average family during a war or its aftermath, your ministry may choose to set up themed play areas in your facility.

*War Toys* is an organization with a unique approach to helping children impacted by war. They advocate using a combination of art and play therapy in their work with children in war zones around the world. They have children produce artworks depicting their lives during the war. Artist Brian McCarty then poses real toys in the actual war environments depicted to recreate the children's art and photographs the result. The child's original artwork is then exhibited beside the toy/real life photographic recreation of it. *War Toys* also advocates providing children with toy figures of the types of people seen during a war - soldiers, medical professionals, military police, fire fighters, etc. to make it easier for children to reenact their war experiences through play.

Godly Play is another unique specific form of play designed to help children examine their experiences and emotions within the framework of Christianity and important spiritual conversations. As its primary purpose is to help the child's spiritual formation and growth, Godly Play will be discussed in more depth in the chapter about interventions for spiritual symptoms.

### **Drama and Puppetry**

Drama and puppetry provide opportunities for young people to explore and express the emotions their experiences in a war have created. Puppetry is especially favored by some

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<sup>81</sup> Leclerc and McCarty, "War, Toys, Play to Heal: Priming Designers to Create Playthings Promoting Resilience in Children in War Zones"



as the puppet acts as a buffer between the children and their emotions. It creates a sense of safety for the child, as it is the puppet and not the child experiencing the traumatic events and/or emotions depicted in the drama.<sup>82</sup>

One study found that the very act of creating the puppets and the puppet show combines the benefits of art and play therapies.<sup>83</sup> Children in the study were asked to create puppets representing family members, emotions or other categories of characters. They were not given more specifics and were provided with a variety of materials from which they could create their puppets. The study found that not only did the creation of puppets help children understand and express their emotions about what had happened, but they also found that children involved in the study were able to stay more focused in class, improved in understanding social relationships and were able to explore their trauma at their own pace.<sup>84</sup>

Skits with human actors may have similar benefits, but require more space, costumes and actors to enact. Dramas using human actors do not necessarily provide the same emotional distance some children need to feel safe in exploring experiences and emotions. While ministries are certainly welcome to use skits and dramas, puppetry appears to be able to provide more benefits with a corresponding more efficient use of resources.

When considering providing children with the ability to create puppets and puppet shows, it can help to know the basic types of puppets that would be easy for a child to create. Puppets can be easily made using socks or paper sacks as the base for the puppet. Items like yarn, fabric, googly eyes and other crafts supplies can be used in decorating puppets. You will also need markers and a strong adhesive to make puppets sturdier. Finger puppets, stick puppets and shadow puppets are other great options for puppets created by young people. While patterns can be found online, allowing children complete freedom in the creation of their puppets is a better option in most cases. (For young people unfamiliar with a particular type of puppet, it can be helpful to have an example to show them how it is generally constructed.)

## **Writing/Journaling**

Giving young people the opportunity to write and/or journal about their experiences could in theory be one of the best options for helping them process what happened and for

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<sup>82</sup> Anderson, "Puppet Creation: A Lost Art in Treating Childhood Trauma"

<sup>83</sup> Ibid

<sup>84</sup> Ibid

expressing their emotions about those events. Unfortunately, since writing is often associated with school work, many young people will find journaling or writing stories and poems boring. For the subset of young people who enjoy writing, however, this can be a great tool to help them work through their traumatic experiences.

Most self-help books for adults struggling with PTSD contain a number of guided writing prompts. Some of these are not appropriate for children and teens, because they are generally designed with an adult soldier in mind. Children with PTSD may also have different symptoms than adults, making some of the prompts about the adult symptoms meaningless to young people. If you are using writing prompts created for adults with PTSD, you may want to allow the young person to choose which prompts interest him or her the most.

Teens may also be interested in interviewing adults from their original community to capture their memories of life there before the war. They can assemble these collections and create books similar to the yizker bikher or community memorial books created by Holocaust survivors. (You can find examples online in the New York Public Library digital collection.<sup>85</sup>)

As with any intervention, writing activities may not appeal to certain young people. Never force a child or teen to write as a healing activity. Those who do not want to write may find writing about these topics makes them feel worse rather than better. Or the very act of writing may seem like schoolwork and be unappealing as a processing or healing activity. For other young people, switching the focus to creating a film will still encourage writing while allowing them to create something that is more interesting and engaging.

(OMIT As with many of the issues experienced by young people who have experienced war,) If you are a teacher or tutor, writing and journaling can overlap with any academic (OMITneeds) assignments the child may have. If your ministry is providing tutoring or other educational assistance for young people who have fallen behind in school because of the war, using writing prompts designed to help those with PTSD can allow you to help them strengthen academic skills while also exploring important topics in their writing.

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<sup>85</sup> <https://digitalcollections.Naples.org/collections/yizkor-book-collection#/?tab=navigation>

## **Bibliotherapy**

Bibliotherapy is the use of books to help children explore negative experiences and their emotions regarding those experiences. While used as a tool by some therapists, it is generally considered acceptable for a lay person to use Bibliotherapy to give young people opportunities to explore and express their feelings about an experience like living through a war. As with other therapies, lay people should not use Bibliotherapy to diagnose a child or as part of a professional treatment plan.

In Bibliotherapy, the books can be read to the child or the child can read the book independently and then discuss it with an adult. The most difficult part of Bibliotherapy is finding the books you think the child will enjoy, while also encouraging the child to explore his or her emotions. It can also be difficult to find books to match the child's reading level, interests and the needs the child has for exploring emotions and experiences. There are some lists available online, but they may not include books that are newer or that are easy to find. Lists of books for Bibliotherapy that are also Christian books are almost nonexistent. If you cannot find what you want with an online search, you can try asking a librarian or book seller for ideas (if you have access to one).

Hospital chaplains working with children suggest offering a child three types of books to read and explore with an adult. They choose one book which helps the adult and child get to know one another better, one book just for fun and one book that addresses either the child's circumstances or explores an emotion the adult believes the child may be feeling. The child is then allowed to choose which of the three books he or she wants the chaplain to read and discuss that visit.<sup>86</sup> This method can also work well for ministry volunteers, parents and caregivers.

## **Movement, Exercise and Sports**

As mentioned earlier, movement, exercise and sports can help young people who have experienced war calm themselves, regulate emotions, work off stress and reduce the amount of energy they have available to be hyper vigilant. Children who have been unable to play outside because of safety issues may also have natural pent up energy and may even have issues with concentration or their health as a result.

Exercising outdoors is preferable if it is safe and weather conditions allow. This gives children not only the exercise they need, but exposure to natural lighting, fresh air and

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<sup>86</sup> Nash et al., *Paediatric Chaplaincy*

nature - even if it is only the sky above. Care should be taken to ensure that children are adequately dressed for the weather and have sunscreen on to protect them from over exposure. The types of exercise in which young people participate should be based on personal preferences, as well as considering practicality and the psychological symptoms participants most need to manage.

Exercises like stretching classes, Pilates and other similar calmer type activities can help soothe children and teach them ways to calm themselves with breathing and relaxation techniques. Popular sports like football (soccer) or playground activities like jumping rope or running races can burn off excess energy and help young people manage their stress.

Vestibular exercises in particular have been found to have a calming and soothing effect on children. These include hanging upside down, bear and ostrich walks, as well as poses like the plow, downward dog and crow.<sup>87</sup>

It is important to note that children who are not particularly athletic will find the very idea of exercise stressful. Forcing them to participate in an exercise they hate may do more harm than good. With those children, it is important to work with them to find a physical activity that they find enjoyable. This may take some experimentation before finding the ideal sport, game or activity.

Often children who are not particularly athletic may also prefer activities that do not involve competition - or at least team competition - because the pressure from their peers to perform at a certain level can be overwhelming. Care should also be taken when playing team sports to assign people to teams randomly. Anyone chosen last for a team as a child can tell you how unpleasant it is. Children who have just experienced trauma do not need unnecessary stress - like whether or not they are picked last for a team - added to their problems.

Some young people may want to explore ways to exercise alone. Introverts in particular may appreciate activities that provide some time away from others - particularly if they have been living in situations with more people than to which they are accustomed. If feasible, taking young people to parks, botanical gardens and other places where it would be safe for them to walk, hike or run alone can be helpful. Or pair young people together as exercise “buddies” who have similar needs for solitude and enjoy the same types of

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<sup>87</sup> OT Toolbox “Vestibular Activities”

exercise. These pairs would provide safety while also giving them the sense of solitude they desire, since both young people in the pairing would want to exercise in silence.

### **Extra Curricular Activities**

For refugee families in certain locations, extra curricular activities can be a great way for young people to make new friends with similar interests. Activities and lessons can also restore a sense of normalcy if they were participated in and enjoyed before the war. The difficulty can be in finding activities of similar types and levels that also have openings for new and temporary participants.

In some locations, schools provide many extra curricular activity options. Asking local parents for referrals can often give you the best idea of private groups and individuals other parents know and trust. Groups ministering to refugees can help by creating a master list of places where young people can take lessons or participate in a wide variety of activities.

Money can be an obstacle to participation if expensive instruments or equipment had to be left behind. Lower disposable incomes can also make it difficult to pay for fees or lessons. Ask if there are scholarships, if needed equipment can be borrowed or rented or if other types of assistance are available to help refugee children participate in their preferred activities.

Some children and teens participate in unique activities that may be considered out of the norm for the area in which you are residing as a refugee. If a suggested group does not have what you need or the space for a new student, ask them for a referral to another group that may be able to help.

### **Resilience Exercises**

One of the keys to recovering from any type of trauma is the resilience of the young person who experiences it. A resilient young person has the ability to easily adjust to and recover from misfortune or change. In other words, resiliency is the ability to pick oneself up and keep going after a negative life event. Even the most resilient children, however, can find their resilience is challenged and weakened when faced with the multiple negative or traumatic experiences and the numerous changes that are often a factor in war.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Cove, "Resilient Children"

Children who were resilient before a war, may merely need to have their resiliency restored to original levels. Much of that recovery may happen naturally since these young people were resilient before the war. Having lessons and activities to remind them of the strategies they have used successfully in the past and providing a supportive network on which they can rely will usually cover any gaps in their resilience. Young people who were not particularly resilient before the war will need help in learning the skill sets used for resiliency and practicing the techniques needed to maintain it.

How can one tell if a child is resilient in a traumatic experience like war? Resilient children will have many of the same reactions - particularly initially - as a non-resilient child might. Resilient children, however, will seem to more quickly return to the attitudes and behaviors they had before the war. They will seem more optimistic, become engaged in school and other activities, make new friends and return to previous levels of personal responsibility and self efficacy (belief in their ability to do the things necessary to achieve their goals).<sup>89</sup>

Children struggling with resilience are more likely to have two or more significant behavior problems, participate in delinquent and/or risky behaviors, be suspended or expelled from school and do poorly academically. They are more likely to have a pessimistic outlook on life, have a weak locus of control and have trouble maintaining healthy relationships.<sup>90</sup> It is not uncommon for young people with poor resiliency to have a victim mindset, which only adds to their problems.

Resilience - or the lack thereof - is often based upon a combination of a child's personality and character traits and the environment in which the young person has been raised. A moderate amount of stress can actually build resilience because it gives young people an opportunity to develop effective coping skills.<sup>91</sup> Too much stress, however, and resilience can weaken. Resiliency can be developed and nourished at any stage of life - even after traumatic experiences. While a young person's ability to change their natural personality is minimal, anyone can be taught skill sets that will increase his or her resiliency. These skills can help young people recover more easily from past trauma and make them more resilient when facing negative circumstances or change in the future.

Children who are naturally optimistic, have a strong internal locus of control, seem to adapt easily to change and who make friends easily appear to be more naturally resilient. It is

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<sup>89</sup> Cove, "Resilient Children"

<sup>90</sup> Ibid

<sup>91</sup> Ibid

important to note that all of those characteristics can be learned to some extent. While it may always be more difficult for some children to be optimistic or to make friends, there are skills they can learn that will help them gradually move towards more resilient attitudes and behaviors in these areas.

Another key factor in a child's resilience is his or her environment. Perhaps the strongest correlation between environment and resilience is the relationship the child has with a parent, caregiver or other adult. Children who have a strong relationship with a parent are more resilient than those who do not.<sup>92</sup> Not surprisingly, having a strong relationship with a parent or caregiver is also mentioned by experts as a key factor in how well children recover from their experiences during a war and its aftermath.<sup>93</sup>

Often the most helpful thing a ministry can do to help children build resilience is to encourage parents to be more engaged with their children in ways that strengthen the bond between parents and children. Since resiliency is more common in children whose parents have strong parenting skills, offering regular parenting classes and support can in turn help build resilience in the children of participants.

It is important to note that the mental health of the parent can impact the quality of parenting needed to foster resiliency. In particular, mothers suffering from depression were found to be half as likely as other mothers to raise children who were resilient.<sup>94</sup> Parenting styles also impact how resilient the children raised in those homes are. The authoritative parenting style was associated with children who had the highest levels of resilience and the lowest levels of problem behaviors when compared to children raised in homes where the parenting style was authoritarian, permissive or neglectful.<sup>95</sup> This is probably due in part to the balance of rules and freedom found in authoritative home environments, giving the children raised in them a strong locus of control and healthy problem solving and coping skills.

**Authoritative Parenting** - A style of parenting in which the parents are nurturing, responsive, and supportive, yet set firm limits for their children.

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<sup>92</sup> Harvard University Center on the Developing Child, "Resilience"

<sup>93</sup> Kletter, "Helping Children Exposed to War and Violence"

<sup>94</sup> Cove, "Resilient Children"

<sup>95</sup> Ibid

In situations where parents are unable or unwilling to give their children the emotional support they need for healing and resiliency, ministries may want to provide mentors who are willing to invest the necessary amount of time and energy needed to create strong emotional bonds with their mentees. A relationship with any engaged, supportive loving adult improved resiliency in young people, even when it was not a parent<sup>96</sup>. In situations where young people are separated from their parents, they can still develop resiliency if they are placed in well supported living arrangements, have an active religious faith and strong social support, as well as healthy relationships with others.<sup>97</sup>

Helping young people learn skills that will help them be more resilient is another way ministries can help children. Many of these skills can be easily included in Bible lessons or other ministry classes and events. Providing activities designed to help develop executive function thinking skills like planning, problem solving and time management, teaching young people how to take personal responsibility for their actions and make decisions that will help improve their futures, helping them find hope, purpose and meaning for their lives in living the Christian life, encouraging them to have Christian character traits like self control and perseverance, and working with them on their people skills can all help build resiliency.

Young people can also benefit from discussions about healthy, godly self esteem (neither too low or too high) and what they can/should or cannot/should not attempt to control in their lives. Understanding the character of God and what He wants for and from His people can help children process what happens in life through the lens of how God sees those things. This can give young people the solid spiritual foundation they need to weather the storms of life in a more resilient manner.

### **Guided Discussions**

Essentially guided discussions could be any conversation an adult has with a child who has experienced war in which the adult takes the lead in the conversation. In therapy conducted by professionals, this is one of the many methods they use to diagnose and treat patients. While those types of conversations should not be conducted by lay people, this does not mean we cannot have helpful conversations with young people about their experiences and emotions. Nor does it mean we cannot have goals in mind as we have these conversations.

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid

<sup>97</sup> Kadir, "The Effects of Armed Conflict on Children"



Initially, conversations should be led by the young person. Even though the child decides whether or not to talk and how much is or is not shared, it could still be considered a guided conversation. Some experts call these conversations psychological first aid and because of inadequate availability of professional counselors and psychologists in war zones, protocols have been developed to make it not only safe, but an essential skill set for any volunteer working with children.<sup>98</sup>

Experts in psychological first aid encourage those working with young people who have experienced war to make themselves available for any conversations the young people may want to have. Particularly during a war or its immediate aftermath, it is important to create a safe space in which the child can have a conversation with you. Depending upon the young person, this may mean finding a space that is perhaps quiet and offers a little more privacy. Care should be taken to observe safety protocols like being within view of other volunteers, parents or adults. Children exposed to war are often in extreme danger from child traffickers. Having conversations in view of other adults can protect both the child and the volunteer engaging in the conversation from any harm or accusations of ill intent.

It is okay to encourage a child who appears to want to talk about experiences, but seems a little shy or reluctant to do so. However, one should avoid pressuring the child to talk. It can take time for the child to trust anyone enough to discuss such deeply emotional, personal and traumatic events. Or the child may still be attempting to process what happened, to analyze their emotions and to organize their thoughts before attempting to have any conversations. Continuing to show love, care and concern for the child and regularly offering to listen will let the young person know you are willing to listen when he or she is ready to talk.

When young people do begin discussing their experiences or emotions with you, it is crucial for you to be fully engaged in the conversation. Failing to do so may discourage them from attempting to have any further important conversations. Every effort should be made to avoid potential distractions by turning off phones and avoiding other interruptions. Look the child in the eyes as he or she speaks. Actively listen by nodding your head, making noises to indicate you hear what is being said and asking clarifying questions if you do not understand something.

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<sup>98</sup> Snider, "Psychological First Aid: Guide for Field Workers"

If the young person is visibly upset when having a conversation, it is best to ask how he or she wishes to be comforted or ask permission to touch his or her hand, give a hug, etc. It is important to understand children who have experienced trauma often feel violated or that they have lost any control over what happens to them. By asking them how they would like to be comforted, you are indicating they do still have some control over what happens to them.

If in the course of a conversation the young person asks you a question, think carefully before answering. It can be helpful to silently pray for God's help before saying anything in response. Make your answers as simple and truthful as possible while still monitoring the content of what you say to make sure it is age appropriate. It is also important to remember God's commands and principles. Although a young person may not be ready to have a conversation about loving one's enemies at that moment, volunteers should avoid reinforcing feelings of hatred and a need to take revenge on the opposing side in the war. It is possible to empathize with the emotions a young person is feeling without also encouraging ungodly words, thoughts and/or actions.

If you decide to share a scripture with a young person in the course of the conversation, be very careful to quote it accurately and make sure you are keeping it in context. Often the things people say in an attempt to comfort others actually make things worse - especially when they misquote scripture in the process. The most common example is telling someone "God does not give you more than you can handle". Not only is that discouraging to anyone who feels like they have indeed been experiencing more than they can handle, it is a misquote of scripture. The actual text states that God does not allow you to be tempted beyond what you can handle without providing a way out, so you can avoid sinning.<sup>99</sup>

It is important to respect the young person's right to privacy. If you feel something was said that should be shared with the child's parents - like suicidal thoughts - explain to the child why you think it is important to share this information. You may want to encourage the child to have this conversation rather than you reporting information to the parents. Offer to go with the young person and support the child as he or she shares the information with a parent. If the young person refuses to talk with a parent, you will need to share whatever is necessary for the parents to know so they can keep their child safe. Anything else the young person shares with you in a conversation should be kept private. It can be tempting to share war stories on social media to garner sympathy or raise funds for humanitarian

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<sup>99</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:13

aid. Since these are personal stories, you should seek permission before sharing them on social media and respect any requests for omitting certain parts of the story or protecting anonymity.

Sometimes the most frustrating thing about these psychological first aid conversations is the listener's desire to "fix" everything for the person sharing his or her story. While that impulse is usually born out of love and concern, be careful not to make things up, promise things you have no power to deliver or over promise what you or your ministry will do to help. Once again, be very careful to represent God's promises accurately. God never promises Christians our lives will be perfect before reaching Heaven. A quick reading of the many serious difficulties experienced by the Apostle Paul and other early Christians makes it clear a perfect life on earth is not promised by God and we should also avoid promising it.

For Christians, guided discussions are best conducted within the context of Godly Play or Bible lessons. These conversations can help young people with psychological and other issues, but are primarily designed to focus on the spiritual health, growth and well being of those involved. As a result, we will address these particular avenues for guided conversation in later chapters.

### **Managing Exposure to Violent Content**

War by definition is violent. Children exposed to war may have experienced and seen things so violent even adults have problems understanding them. Young people often have additional exposure to violence during a war by watching events caught on camera during news reports or on social media. The brain cannot differentiate between what was actually experienced by the child and what was merely seen on a video. Studies have shown that even children watching war events on television can experience a traumatic reaction.<sup>100</sup>

Researchers have found that young people - particularly boys - who are exposed to violent content while playing video games or while watching violent film content are more aggressive afterwards. This seems to have a multiplying impact over time and can lead to aggressive and violent behaviors, bullying, desensitization to violence, fear, depression, nightmares and sleep disturbances.<sup>101</sup> In short, every time young people who have experienced a war interact with violent content, they are at risk of adding to any trauma

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<sup>100</sup> American Academy of Pediatrics, "Media Violence"

<sup>101</sup> American Academy of Pediatrics, "Media Violence"

they have already experienced in the actual war. Young people who have experienced a war should avoid interacting with any violent content for recreational purposes.

Many parents use screens to occupy and entertain their children. While this can be problematic in any situation, war often increases the dependency of both adults and children on screens for information, connection and entertainment. Young people can easily become addicted to screens and have additional issues related to their addiction- especially to social media and violent content. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends using screens only for video chatting for the first two years of a child's life. Children from the ages of three to five should have no more than one hour of screen time daily. Older children and teens should have severely restricted recreational screen time each day.<sup>102</sup> The activities in this book provide numerous engaging alternatives to spending time on screens.

### **Long Term Psychological Health Plan**

Although this has been mentioned earlier, it is such a critical part of helping children truly heal from their experiences in a war, that it is necessary to again emphasize the need for a long term psychological health plan. Over time, many children who have been supported in their attempts to process and heal from their experiences during a war will find their negative psychological symptoms improve. It may be tempting for parents and other adults to believe these young people have fully healed and will experience no additional issues related to the war. Unfortunately, this is often not the case.

Children go through various developmental stages. Along with physical growth and other more obvious changes during each stage, there are new cognitive tools a child receives. The ages in which those tools become available can vary slightly from child to child, but almost every child goes through the stages in sequence. This means any significant events - like the trauma experienced during a war - will be reprocessed by the child with the new cognitive tools they have available in each stage.

Perhaps one of the best examples of this is the shift from concrete to more abstract thinking. Young children are concrete thinkers. Everything is interpreted through a very concrete thought process. Abstract concepts like love and hate are difficult for them to truly understand. Their war experiences are taken at face value and processed that way.

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<sup>102</sup> American Academy of Pediatrics, "Media and Young Minds"

When a young person enters the stage where more abstract thinking is possible - usually around adolescence - he or she may look at the events experienced during a war in a very different way. Motives, philosophical ideas - even emotions - are now used to reprocess what the child experienced when younger. Because adults often think the child is “healed” from the war, they do not notice the young person is once again struggling to process and heal from earlier experiences. Unless the adolescent asks for help or shows signs of severe psychological distress (by acting out or risk taking behaviors), he or she may suffer for years trying to reprocess his or her war experiences alone.

It is important that any ministry to children who have experienced war has a long term plan to provide opportunities for young people to participate in those activities used immediately after the war to facilitate processing and healing every few years until the youngest children have reached adulthood. Studies of adopted children have found that even infants in the womb can experience trauma.<sup>103</sup> In fact, trauma experienced before a child can talk well is sometimes more difficult to process because it is stored in images and not words. As a result, even children who are thought to be too young to remember the war, should be given regular opportunities to participate in activities to help them process and heal from early memories they cannot even verbalize when older.

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<sup>103</sup> Enlow et al., “Maternal Lifetime Trauma Exposure, Prenatal Cortisol and Infant Negative Affectivity”



## Chapter 6 - Interventions for Addressing Behavioral Symptoms

Trauma often encourages various behaviors which could be viewed as the brain's attempt to protect the child from danger. Often these behaviors appear very similar to the things some children do in rebellion to rules and commands. In the cases of children who have experienced trauma, however, these behaviors are more reflexive than intentional choices. This does not absolve the child from making poor choices, but often different strategies must be used than when addressing the poor choices of a child who has not experienced trauma.

It may be tempting to remove any rules and boundaries children had before the war or to no longer give corrections and consequences when rules are broken. Children actually feel safer when there are consistently enforced rules and boundaries. Removing these markers of the life they had before the war can leave them feeling even more unsettled and unsafe. While some rules may have to be loosened or changed due to circumstances, eliminating all boundaries and consequences is ultimately not in their best interest.

(OMITIt is important to understand that) While it may seem as if the goal of correction is merely to change behaviors, the real target is the heart of the child. Children can do what pleases adults - especially in their presence - and still have a rebellious heart. Some children may have a heart that is trying to be obedient, but they may struggle with other issues that make their behaviors less than desired. If the child's heart is focused on obedience to God, rather than rebellion, the appropriate behaviors will be more genuine and more consistent. A child with a rebellious heart, will not only disobey adults, but ultimately God.

It is important to understand that even children who have experienced a war or some other trauma are capable of intentionally making poor choices that have nothing to do with a response to their trauma. The difficulty as a caregiver is deciding the underlying cause of any poor choice a child makes and how it needs to be addressed to help the child make better choices in the future.

If we had the ability to see each other's hearts like Jesus did, it would be easier to understand what is happening in a child's heart and mind before and during a poor choice. Since we do not, we have to think of ourselves as detectives - examining the evidence and organizing it to reach conclusions and make informed decisions.

## Four Roots of Negative Behaviors

Let us pretend that you only have one child in the house at the moment. You hear a loud crash and walk into a room with a broken lamp. What happened? You quickly determine the child was involved in some way with the breaking of the lamp, but there are four possible underlying causes that may have impacted the lamp's current broken state.

- **Mistakes** - the breaking of the lamp was caused by a lack of knowledge or experience, missing information, or a lack of ability in areas like motor skills
- **Trauma** - the breaking of the lamp was caused - at least in part - by a symptom of trauma, like the brain's flight, fight and freeze modes
- **Special Needs** - certain special needs like fetal alcohol syndrome, autism spectrum disorder and developmental delays can make it difficult for a child to remember or carry out commands or can increase the frequency of accidents due to poor motor control or lack of spatial awareness
- **Rebellion** - the child's heart was set on personal desires rather than obedience. Rebellion is willful and intentional disobedience of a command or rule. The child broke the lamp because he or she disobeyed a rule against (for example) throwing a ball in the house.

## Analyzing Negative Behaviors

There are questions you can ask yourself to help determine which of the four underlying causes was involved in an incident. Occasionally, there may be more than one underlying cause that impacts the situation. It is not always clear which underlying cause is involved in a negative incident. Efforts must be made to determine the underlying cause to avoid responding in a way that makes things worse. In general, parents tend to over react to mistakes and under react to rebellion. This can cause issues in the parent child relationship and send unintended messages about the importance of working on a rebellious heart.

- What emotions does the child seem to be experiencing - especially before correction?
- Does the child appear remorseful before correction? Remorse does not mean rebellion was not involved, but at least it shows the child's heart still feels bad about being rebellious at times. If there are no signs of remorse - even after correction and consequences - it can be a sign of a hardening, rebellious heart. It is important to note that if a child has experienced trauma, it is possible that the lack of apparent emotion could also be a trauma based reaction.
- Does the child seem frightened (especially before correction)? This may be a sign of trauma or trauma in combination with another underlying cause.
- Does the child seem genuinely confused about what happened or why it may be a problem? Rebellion is almost never accompanied by confusion. By definition rebellion is a willful, intentional disobedience.
- Does the child attempt to lie to cover up what happened? This is a coping strategy to avoid negative consequences and can also be an indication of rebellion.



- Does the child display “protective” anger or is it more of a rebellious spirit? “Protective” anger is a defense mechanism of trauma and is more likely to occur before correction rather than during it.
- Does the child run and hide or appear frozen before correction is given?
- Does it appear the child attempted to obey, but did not succeed? What were the barriers to complete obedience?
- Given the same circumstances, could anyone make the same mistake (like accidentally knocking over a glass)?

## Addressing Negative Behaviors

Regardless of the underlying cause of the child’s involvement in a negative behavior, the behavior must be addressed in some way to prevent any similar problems in the future. A change in a child’s behaviors can be instigated by:

- **Correction.** Correction will be given in all four categories, but will vary slightly depending upon the underlying cause of the behavior.
- **Training.** Training should be given for mistakes, trauma responses and special needs. It is rarely needed for rebellious behaviors, because the child often knows exactly what is to be done and how to do it, but refuses to do it because of a rebellious heart.
- **Atonement.** Children should be encouraged to atone for their mistakes whenever possible, regardless of the underlying cause of the behavior. Atonement for our purposes is attempting to correct any damage caused - similar to the way Zacchaeus offered to repay the money he had stolen.<sup>104</sup> The child should help clean up spilled milk, repair damage, etc. Atonement is not always possible and in those cases the “victim” should be asked by the “perpetrator” to suggest something else that can be done to help atone for what happened.
- **Consequences.** Consequences are given for rebellion in an attempt to correct the heart of the child with discipline as recommended in scripture.<sup>105</sup> In cases where the underlying cause was not rebellion, the “consequence” is the negative event itself (like spilled milk). If a rebellious heart was not involved, no extra consequences are needed. Rebellion requires consequences for the same reason God gave out consequences in the Bible - as an admonition that self examination, repentance and change are required.

## Understanding Mistakes

True mistakes are not sinful. A mistake is an action or judgment that is wrong, but does not violate one of God’s commands, like accidentally spilling or breaking something. Christian parents and children often struggle with this concept. As a result, they both tend to overreact to mistakes in the mistaken belief that they are sins. Children who have experienced war may over or under react to their mistakes. Their reaction can be tied to

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<sup>104</sup> Luke 19:1-10

<sup>105</sup> Proverbs 13:24

misguided beliefs about mistakes or it may be part of their psychological reaction to the trauma they experienced during the war.

If you are ministering to children who were not raised by you, it is important to remember that common knowledge is not necessarily common knowledge. Do not assume a child was taught something or somehow automatically knows your rules and expectations for behavior. It is difficult to determine whether a negative incident was the result of rebellion or a mistake unless you are certain the child knew a rule and rebelliously decided to break it.

When introducing children to any new environment, it is important to clearly define the behaviors expected there. During a war and its aftermath, families often move multiple times and find themselves in a variety of very different living situations which may also have radically different expectations for behavior. While an adult may adapt quickly to these changes, children will often need more clear directions. This is particularly true when the definitions of expectations for words like “quiet” or “clean” change from place to place.

If you are asking children to do something that is new or unfamiliar to them, you may need to take the time to teach them the steps necessary to be successful. Young people may also need demonstrations and guided practice before they can be expected to fulfill a new command or follow a new rule with ease. If the new task or expectation is complex or difficult developmentally for the child, it is important to praise the child’s efforts at compliance - even if you must still critique the execution in some way.

Children who have experienced a war are often overwhelmed by the trauma they have experienced and the constant life changes that are a part of war. They are more likely to make mistakes because they misheard or misunderstood a rule or command. Trauma can also cause a temporary developmental regression in multiple areas. This may mean a young person who could execute a multi step command before the war may only be able to handle a one or two step command during or immediately after the war. As children begin to heal from their trauma, they should gradually return to their original abilities to remember and complete more complex directions.

Children are often growing rapidly - sometimes overnight. War can also mean a child is malnourished or sleep deprived. Any of these factors can cause short term clumsiness. Children with certain special needs are also likely to have poor muscle control. Children who have problems with muscle control and spatial awareness are more likely to have accidents and will have difficulty completing tasks that require those skills.

### **Correcting a Child’s Mistakes**

If you have determined a negative behavior was merely a mistake on the part of the child, the child should be expected to help correct the mistake when possible. (Help clean up spills, etc.) This correction of mistakes is a form of atonement. It will be tempting to do this for the child who has experienced a war and in some cases, that may be appropriate. Many times, however, being expected to help correct the mistake will also help children regain a

sense of control and personal responsibility that has been hampered by the trauma they experienced. You may want to assist the child in correcting the mistake to reinforce a sense of healthy relationship and/or community as well.

Children may have an extreme emotional reaction to their mistakes. This can be due to a mistaken belief they have sinned, as a symptom of trauma they have from the war or due to hunger, sleep deprivation or other factors. Allow the child to cry, but comfort him or her as he or she does so. The weeping may also be helping to release other pent up emotions from war experiences. As you soothe the child, carefully explain why you believe what happened was a mistake and your belief that the child can recover from the mistake - no matter how bad it may seem at the moment. Reassure the child that both God and you still love him or her. While these may be principles you have regularly discussed with the child, they may not feel valid in the moment and reminders can help.

After the child has corrected the mistake and calmed emotionally, help the child develop strategies to avoid making the same mistake again. Encourage the child to develop his or her own strategies when possible. Giving the child the permission and the responsibility to develop strategies for future behaviors helps strengthen the locus of control and self efficacy. For children who are struggling with developing future strategies, asking leading questions can help guide them without removing the benefits of developing strategies independently. Be ready to provide guided practice for strategies that may require new skill sets or that may be difficult to remember.

## **Understanding Trauma**

Children who have experienced a war have by definition experienced trauma - even if their personal experiences were relatively minor in comparison to others. When a child's brain believes the child is in danger - whether or not the child actually is in danger at the moment - it moves into what could be termed "emergency operations".

The human brain is designed so that when we are confronted with danger, it can quickly control the muscles required for avoiding danger without the need for prolonged intentional thoughts and decision making. When danger is imminent, we often have only a second to protect ourselves from harm. We do not have the luxury of carefully considering every possible option. Brain science often refers to this protective brain function as operating from the "lower" brain.

The lower brain is designed to be used for a particular dangerous incident and then the person normally returns to higher brain functions when the danger has passed. These higher brain functions allow us to make informed decisions and plans, learn new information, have self control and more. Children who have experienced war often become hyper vigilant. It is as if their brains become stuck in the lower brain functions. Because the brain has experienced so much unexpected danger, it assumes there is danger around every corner.

When the brains of young people begin to operate almost entirely in the lower brain, it can impact their behavior. Some of the options the lower brain uses to protect the child from danger can appear to be rebellious behavior. These reactions still need to be corrected, but should be handled differently than rebellion. It is important to note, however, that even children who have been severely traumatized are still at times capable of rebellion. When a trauma response and rebellion are mixed, the responding correction should address both issues.

The lower brain has three basic responses to perceived danger. It is important to remember that a child's brain may perceive correction or consequences as danger, regardless of how loving those may be - especially if the correction is given by someone other than a close relative. The three responses have easily recognized behaviors associated with them:

- **Flight** – In flight mode, the brain encourages the child to run from danger. Young people in this response to perceived danger may run when they realize they have made a mistake or that someone is upset with them. Children in flight mode may also run away when you are attempting to talk about what happened.
- **Freeze** – In freeze mode, the brain encourages the child to literally appear frozen – making as few movements as possible, and saying as little as possible. It is as if the brain believes being frozen will help the child become invisible to the predator. Children in freeze mode will often cease movement or refuse to talk.
- **Fight** – In fight mode, the brain encourages the child to fight back against the danger as a way of protection. Children in fight mode may become immediately combative – even before any correction is given. This aggression can be verbal or physical. At times fight mode is difficult to distinguish from rebellious anger. Over time, however, anger caused by the fight mode will naturally lessen as the young person begins to feel safe again. Rebellious anger must usually be addressed in other ways and can be difficult to eradicate without the child's intentional assistance.

Young people need to be able to spend the majority of their time using their “higher brain” functions in order to learn and grow in normal ways. Yet they can move into “higher” brain functions only when they feel safe in an environment. Children who have experienced war may need additional help from adults to feel truly safe again. This can be difficult, but not impossible, if the child is still exposed to danger or is changing housing on a regular basis.

Children who have experienced trauma from a war can benefit from spending as much time as possible in a trauma sensitive or soothing environment. The details of such an environment are discussed in Chapter 3. If your ministry can create trauma sensitive areas in the places where you minister to young people or assist families in more permanent living arrangements in creating these spaces in their home, the child will benefit. Children can also get many of the same benefits from spending time in nature - assuming it is safe to do so.

Young people who have become hyper vigilant and operate primarily from the lower brain functions may also find many of the psychological interventions discussed in the previous chapter help them feel calmer, safer and more able to control their environment, emotions and behaviors. As children feel safe for longer periods of time, their brains will gradually allow them to spend more time operating with their higher brain functions. This in turn can improve decision making and behaviors - partially by eliminating the flight, freeze and fight modes, but also because the child is making conscious decisions which are more likely to eliminate negative behaviors as a viable option.

### **Correcting a Child's Trauma Responses**

The flight, freeze and fight modes in the traumatic responses of a child can at times put the child in more danger from the response than the child was actually in from what triggered the response. Children may run into a street full of traffic, hide somewhere dangerous or freeze when they need to move quickly out of the path of danger. So while one could argue that the flight, freeze and fight mode behaviors are not disobedience, they are still problematic behaviors that need to be corrected and replaced with safer responses to stressful situations.

Traumatic responses can also be paired from time to time with either mistakes or rebellion. While the child is probably unaware of the dual layering of behavioral issues, the adult needs to differentiate between the multiple issues possibly involved in an incident of negative behavior and deal with each issue appropriately. For example, a child who has a traumatic response after making a rebellious behavior choice will need to have the trauma soothed to be able to process the serious correction that will be given for the rebellious choice.

When correcting a child who is having a traumatic response, it is crucial to monitor the tone and volume of your voice during correction. Try to be as loving and soothing as possible. Your volume should be as low as possible and your tone should have a calming aspect to it even when there is a need to be particularly firm (If for example, the child ran into the street without looking.). You and the child may need to take a brief time out to have an opportunity to get emotions under control before giving any verbal feedback. Depending upon the child, he or she may need your help in calming. Often, comforting the child and reassuring him or her that he or she is safe helps soothe raw emotions.

Once the child is soothed and calmer, it will be easier to address any additional issues like mistakes or rebellion. Purely trauma based reactions should be addressed in a fashion similar to mistakes. Chances are that the child having those responses does not like the out of control feeling that often accompanies trauma responses. Teaching the child to identify triggers (as mentioned in Chapter 3 under the section regarding triggers) and replace any trauma-informed behaviors with more appropriate ones should work well, especially as the child begins healing from the trauma experienced during the war.

In addition to traumatic response in behavior, the brains of children who have endured a war can become "stuck" in negative emotional states, making it more difficult to make wise

behavioral choices<sup>106</sup>. This happens most often when a young person has stayed in the same emotional state for a long period of time without switching to other emotional states. Young people who are having issues with this may be described as being angry, sad or frightened all of the time. Some children will need professional and possibly medical help to become “unstuck”. Others can be helped by having times when you intentionally help them switch into a more positive mental state, by doing things like reading a funny book or doing something silly or fun.

Encourage parents to help their children switch emotions for at least a few minutes every day to make it easier for them to control their emotional state in the future. Both parents and children may need to be reminded that while they cannot control their initial emotional reaction to an event, they can control whether or not they choose to remain in that emotional state. They may also need help in devising personal strategies that help them switch from one emotional state to another.

While trauma-informed correction can help children move back into the same behavioral patterns as the average young person, how long this process takes will vary from child to child. Some children will return to pre-war behaviors and ways of thinking quickly, while others may struggle for months or longer to move away from hypervigilance and trauma-informed behavioral responses.

## **Understanding Rebellion**

Rebellion is an intentional disobedience of rules. As the Bible explains, rebellion often results because the selfish desires of a young person have been allowed to control the young person's choices rather than a willingness to obey God, parents or other authority figures. Rebellion can also result from unhealthy or poor parent/child relationships, an authoritarian parenting style, or as an effort to “punish” an authority figure because the young person believes that person has been responsible for his or her unhappiness or misery.

**Authoritarian Parenting Style** - An extremely strict parenting style that places high expectations on children with little corresponding nurturing of them.

Rebellion must be addressed, as rebellion against parents or other authority figures will soon turn to rebellion against God and at times a rejection of God entirely. It is important to remember that while rebellious behaviors may be the most disturbing to many parents and adults, the heart of the child is actually the bigger concern. Ultimately rebellion is about control, selfishness or entitlement - although not necessarily all three simultaneously.

Some young people make a rebellious choice, even though their hearts are basically still focused on obeying their parents and ultimately God. When corrected and given

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<sup>106</sup> Kadir, “Effects of Armed Conflict on Child Health and Development”

consequences, these children may not be happy, but usually make an obvious effort to repent, make atonement and change. They may still break rules on occasion, but it is not the norm.

For other young people, rebellious behaviors increase over time. If these behaviors go unaddressed or are not addressed appropriately, a rebellious attitude begins to take root. Some children are quite open with their rebellion, while others attempt to hide it behind a facade of obedience and respect. The longer a child has a rebellious attitude, the more likely that attitude will become a heart that hardens to anyone who tries to set rules or standards for behaviors- including God. Helping a young person with a hardened, rebellious heart return to the attitudes and behaviors God desires can be a difficult and painful process for everyone involved. It must be addressed, however, for the child's spiritual health and wellbeing.

While it is important to address any rebellious behavior from a child, during a war and its immediate aftermath, it may be necessary to focus for a time on only the most obvious incidents of rebellious behavior or those that put the child in some sort of immediate danger. This should only be a short term strategy. If young people begin to realize they only have to obey authority figures and rules some of the time, it will be more difficult for them to avoid developing a rebellious attitude.

Your ministry may be working with some children who are temporarily separated from their parents or have been orphaned. They may have gone without any real caregivers for some time. Living without rules and no or inappropriate correction can create a sense of chaos in the life of the child. These young people sometimes develop their own code of behavior - especially if they have lived in groups with peers. This code may have little resemblance to what most adults would consider appropriate behavior.

When trying to establish rules for children who have not had any real rules for some time, it is important to prioritize any desired behavioral changes. Asking a young person to quickly change a large number of behaviors that have become habits can cause overwhelming frustration for both the child and any caregivers. It can be helpful to only focus on a few behaviors at a time and add others gradually as those are mastered.

### **Addressing Self Control**

Young people who make rebellious choices often struggle with self control. Self control is a fruit of the Spirit,<sup>107</sup> but it is possible for young people to begin working on their self control even before becoming a Christian. Christians with poor self control will struggle and often fail to obey God's commands. Children have a sort of internal timer for the amount of time they can maintain perfect self control. Any time past that limit is stressful and they are more likely to make poor choices. This time limit will vary from child to child and is often a factor of both personality and their home environments.

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<sup>107</sup> Galatians 5:22-23

Young people can work to improve their self control. Often activities designed to help children develop patience and perseverance also improve self control. Many board and playground games require children to have self control in some way. Exercises can also be done to help young people become more aware of the aspects of their lives they can and should control, as well as strategies to have better self control.

Impulsivity is an aspect of self control, but there are specific strategies that can help young people be less impulsive. Impulsivity is the tendency to act without thinking about what consequences the action may bring. A child who acts impulsively usually appears to be reacting rather than acting intentionally. Children who are impulsive can feel out of control because their reactions appear to occur before rational thought.

The best strategies to help young people conquer impulsivity are ones that encourage them to stop and think before saying or doing anything in a given situation. Teaching them breathing exercises they can use to slow down their response time, encouraging them to literally say the word “stop” in their minds and pausing before reacting, reminding them to count to ten (or more) before speaking or taking action, encouraging silent prayer first, as well as other similar strategies often work well in lessening impulsivity.

### **Addressing Power Struggles**

Power struggles are one of the ways rebellion can be displayed. A power struggle is when a child begins to compete with an adult for the ability to control his or her behavior. It is often manifested when a young person is determined to do the opposite of what an adult asks, even if he or she knows obeying the adult is the best option. For example, a child may want to wear a summer outfit outside in a snowstorm. When the parent explains the need for winter clothing, the child refuses to comply - even though the child will be much happier in appropriate clothing. A battle of words and wits often results and can last for hours and even days.

There are strategies adults can use to minimize power struggles. One strategy is to give the child two choices that are both acceptable to the adult. This gives the child a sense of control - important for children who have experienced war - while still keeping the options acceptable to caregivers. Should the child attempt to choose an option not on the list, calmly and firmly saying “I’m sorry, but the choices are x, y and z.” usually ends a potential power struggle.

Other comments that can diffuse power struggles are, “I’m sorry, but that’s not an option.” “Sometimes we just have to do things we do not like to do.” and “I know you aren’t happy about this, but unfortunately, there is not another option.” Yelling, counting, threatening, or other obvious attempts to control the child’s behavior will only serve to escalate the power struggle.

Adults will sometimes try bribery, behavior charts and rewards in an attempt to end power struggles and control a child’s behavior. While these strategies can sometimes work short



term, they generally lead to more power struggles in the future.<sup>108</sup> These strategies can encourage a child to attempt to manipulate a situation so he or she receives another bribe or reward. Studies have also found rewards do not work well for long term behavioral change in children or for even short term changes in the behavior of teens. Researchers have found when the reward disappears, so does the desired behavior.<sup>109</sup>

If a young person is really struggling making a change and is obviously putting a lot of effort into the attempt to change, a reward may be appropriate. This type of reward can either be used to encourage the child who has worked very hard for a long amount of time or to celebrate the final “victory”. When using this type of reward, it often works best if the reward is infrequent and unexpected by the child.

When correcting a child of war for rebellion, it is important to bear in mind where the child is in the healing process. Taking a few minutes to help calm and soothe the child can help his or her brain move from lower to higher brain functions. This will in turn make any correction and consequences given more effective. This pause can also give you time to gather your thoughts about what you want to say to the child and which consequences may be most appropriate

Younger children - especially toddlers and preschoolers - need to have any correction and consequences occur as close to the undesired behavior as possible. While an infraction committed by an older child or teen can be addressed hours later in perhaps a more appropriate environment, young children will not make the connection between their behavior choice and your correction or consequence if too much time has lapsed. It is still appropriate to calm and soothe young children first, but as soon as they have calmed down, correction should be given regarding the undesired behavior.

Rebellion sometimes worsens if a young person attempts to address an adult’s incorrect understanding of what occurred and is not allowed to share that information. It is important to note that any real information should be given a respectful hearing, while attempts to whine or manipulate should be stopped. It may be helpful for older children and teens to think of this opportunity as they would a court case. If what they have to share is actual “evidence” you will listen, but if it would not be considered “evidence”, it probably does not need to be shared with you before correction is given.

Adults will often ask a child they suspect has been rebellious what he or she was thinking when the decision was made to disobey a rule. Meta cognition is the ability to recognize one’s own thoughts. Young children, children with trauma in their background before the war and those with developmental delays will probably have poor metacognition skills. They may also not have the vocabulary to express or (in their opinion) adequately express their thoughts and emotions. Often when a young child responds that he or she does not know what the thoughts were preceding disobedience, it is the truth. Metacognition skills

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<sup>108</sup> Utah Valley Pediatrics, “Child Bribes vs. Rewards”

<sup>109</sup> Gneezy, “When and Why Incentives (Don’t) Work to Modify Behavior”

can be developed with special activities, thereby helping the child in expressing his or her thoughts.

If you have allowed a young person a chance to provide you with extra information about the incident, listen actively and respectfully. Reflect the behaviors you want him or her to use when you correct him or her. Rebellion sometimes grows because the child does not feel heard. Try to listen without interruption unless it becomes apparent the young person is using the conversation to delay your correction, not provide new information. You can address any issues you may have with what is shared later as part of your correction and instruction

### **Addressing Manipulation**

It is not uncommon for children who have experienced traumatic events to develop a victim mindset. This can occur because of the way adults helped the young person understand what happened or because the child was overindulged by adults in an attempt to somehow compensate for what happened. While children who have experienced a war are indeed victims of that war, defining themselves as perpetual victims hampers not only their healing, but also any future growth.

Young people with a victim mindset believe they will always be a victim of the negative actions of others and there is nothing they can ever do to protect themselves from these negative circumstances. In addition, children with a victim mindset often believe others are always to blame for the bad things that happen to them - even if in reality the negative event was caused by their own actions. Additional warning signs that a young person is developing a victim mindset are not taking responsibility for personal decisions and their consequences, showing little interest in making changes that would improve current circumstances, having a sense of powerlessness, lack of self-confidence, anger, frustration and resentment. It is important to be watchful for a victim mindset or an attempt to manipulate – especially in older children.<sup>110</sup>

You may have noticed that the list of warning signs for a victim mindset is almost identical to some of the trauma induced symptoms a child has who has experienced a war. The difference, however, is crucial. Young people were victims of the war. With proper interventions like those shared in this book, they should be able to eventually adopt the understanding that those experiences were a terrible time in their lives, but they are in the past. They can look forward to the future and are making choices that will improve that future. Someone once described the mindset goal for children who have experienced trauma as having one foot in the past, one foot in the present all while looking forward to the future.<sup>111</sup>

Young people with a victim mindset are stuck in the past, constantly blaming others for their problems in the present and have no hope for the future and no plans or efforts to

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<sup>110</sup> Brennan, "What Is a Victim Mentality?"

<sup>111</sup> Anon.

make it brighter. Children with a victim mindset often use manipulation to take advantage of their victimhood by encouraging the guilty feelings of others - even those uninvolved in creating any problems for them. Ironically, a victim mindset also puts young people at greater risk from predators who might harm them. Young people with a victim mindset always look for others to solve their problems for them and predators look for children with that belief system and take advantage of it.

You can begin addressing a victim mindset in young people by acknowledging that they were indeed victims of the war, but that it does not have to define the rest of their lives. They can take back control of their lives by making good choices that will improve their present and their future.

For those with a victim mindset and young people who are rebellious, manipulation is often a favored way of getting what they want from adults who might otherwise deny them their goal. Children use manipulation as a way to “trick” adults. Often, the best deterrent to manipulation is to recognize it for what it is and let the young person know you are aware of the attempted manipulation. It can also help to calmly inform the child that those strategies do not work with you.

If you are unfamiliar with manipulation, it generally takes one of several common forms.

- **Gaslighting.** Gaslighting is an effort to make you believe you imagined whatever happened. With young people, this is often expressed by statements like, “You are not seeing what you think you see, so and so did it, not me.”
- **Projection.** Projection is trying to make the adult believe that the young person’s negative attitude is only negative because the adult has a negative attitude. In effect, he or she is claiming your attitude controls his or her attitude and therefore he or she bears no personal responsibility for it.
- **Overstating.** Overstating is when a child takes something you said - usually while correcting him or her - and makes it sound much worse than what was actually said. For example, if you tell a child he or she needs to pick up the toys or the room is not clean, a child who is overstating would then respond by accusing you of calling him or her stupid, because he or she did not know how to clean a room.
- **Changing the Subject.** In this manipulation strategy, the young person attempts to distract the person giving correction for a negative behavior by changing the subject.
- **Using Emotion Charged Language.** This can take the form of name calling, cursing or saying things like, “I hate you!”
- **Threatening Language.** These threats can be that the child will hurt himself or herself or that you will be hurt in some way either by the child or by someone whom the child tells what you have done.
- **Apathy.** While the apathy is often faked, the manipulator will try to make you believe he or she does not care about any consequences you choose to give or about whether or not you are upset about what happened.

- **Divide and Conquer.** A favorite with many young people, this technique usually involves pitting two parents against one another to force them to give the child what he or she wants.
- **Guilt Trips.** A young person using the guilt trip strategy will attempt to convince the adult to give the child what he or she wants merely because the adult should feel guilty about something unpleasant that happened to the child.
- **Flattery.** Many young people know this does not often work as a real strategy, so they will pretend to use it to soften up the parent before asking for something the parent may deny. It can make adults laugh and as a result they are often more open to at least listen to the child's request.

### **Correcting a Child's Rebellion**

It can be easy to lose one's temper when a young person is rebellious. Unfortunately, correction given in anger only tends to reinforce rebellion. Correction can be firm without being harsh, unkind or cruel. If you are angry about what the young person did, it may be necessary to give yourself a few minutes to get your own emotions under control. Many parents find saying a quick internal prayer to God helps calm and center them quickly.

Regardless of where young people might be in the healing process when they rebel against a rule or command, it is important to remember they have recently been exposed to situations where some adults believed violence and other ungodly behaviors were the best way to solve problems and resolve differences. If you are angry and harsh in your correction, in their minds you may resemble those responsible for the war they endured. Keeping your tone loving, but firm and the volume of your voice low can improve the chances they will listen to you.

It can also help to have predetermined "scripts" for correction and a list of consequences for common infractions. These tools can help you avoid having to be creative in the moment and improve consistency of correction and consequences. Informing the child of potential consequences for disobeying rules and commands can also help the child know what to expect for rebellious behavior. Knowing what the rules are and how they will be corrected for disobeying them gives young people who have experienced war the structure and boundaries they need to begin feeling safe again.

When a child is disobeying a rule or refusing to do what was asked of him or her in your presence, never count to a specific number to give the child extra time to comply with the rule or your command. Counting only teaches the child that he or she can continue disobeying until you reach the final number. Children also realize that the mood of the adult can give them more or less time in the same theoretical counting to three or five and they will factor that into how quickly they obey.

Other behavior management systems that give the child multiple chances to obey without correction or consequences also set a dangerous precedent. The expectation should be that children obey rules and comply with requests from parents, teachers and other appropriate adults immediately unless there are extenuating circumstances. (These

extenuating circumstances should also include the right to disobey any adult who is asking them to break one of God's commands. This exception can help protect the child from predators.)

When giving correction to a child, get on the child's eye level and look the child in the eye. Lower your vocal register and limit volume to regular conversational levels or even a whisper. State the rule that was broken clearly and calmly. Make firm statements instead of raising your inflection at the end of a correction statement as if it were a question. It is never appropriate to use ugly words or phrases like "You are a bad child". Instead, opt for phrases like "That was a poor choice." Because children who have experienced war are often hyper vigilant and easily startled, try to avoid quick, abrupt movements that could be interpreted as preparing to physically harm the child in some way.

Be careful to avoid laughing at a child who has made poor behavioral choices - no matter how funny those choices may seem. Rebellion is not funny and laughing at the child can encourage further rebellion. It is also inappropriate to tell other adults what a child did in ways that make it seem as if you are proud of the poor choice.

Do not be afraid to introduce God into correction conversations. God should not be used to threaten a child, but as a loving God who knows and wants what is best for him or her. This includes obeying God's commands and showing respect for authority figures and parents. If a child is struggling to obey a particular rule, it can sometimes help to have him or her memorize appropriate verses the child can remember when tempted.

### **Giving Consequences for Rebellion**

Throughout the Bible, God gave people earthly consequences when they disobeyed His commands. The Bible also teaches that parents should give consequences to children who are disobedient. The stories of King David and his children are an example of what unaddressed rebellion becomes as children grow older. In fact, the Bible even explains that Adonijah rebelled because his father had never rebuked him for his behavior<sup>112</sup>. For children who have experienced war, however, there are special considerations regarding which consequences are given.

When giving consequences for rebellious behavior, it is important to make them natural and on par with the infraction. It makes sense to deny a child the right to play with a toy if the toy was part of the rebellious act. It is also important to avoid giving overly harsh consequences. Regardless of your personal beliefs about the use of corporal punishment as a consequence, it is probably not the best option for a child who has recently experienced the violence of war. In some countries foster parents, school teachers and others are denied the right to use corporal punishment on a child under their care. Yet, many have found using the correct non-corporal consequences consistently is as effective in changing undesired behaviors.

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<sup>112</sup> 1 Kings 1:6

Consistency is a critical part of effective consequences. Correcting rebellious behaviors only periodically or when you are in a bad mood does not encourage the young person to eradicate the behavior. Great variation in the severity of the consequence for the same infraction also sends mixed messages to the child. (The possible exception is if the undesired behavior is not lessening over time.) It is important to correct rebellious behavior each and every time it occurs. Over time, consistency in correction becomes its own deterrent to the behavior.

It is important to remember that consequences can lose effectiveness over time - especially with constant use. It is important to notice when a consequence no longer acts as a deterrent to future poor choices and develop a more appropriate, effective consequence. Using natural consequences usually works well because the child is not getting the exact same consequence every time he or she makes a rebellious choice.

As with mistakes, proper atonement for their rebellious behavior should be made. In some cases, that may be an adequate consequence. For repeat offenses, in cases of frightening or dangerous rebellion or when it appears the child is developing a rebellious spirit, additional consequences may be necessary. Once again, consequences should be natural ones when possible and reflect the seriousness of the rebellious behavior. Be careful to avoid giving excessively harsh consequences - especially for relatively minor offenses. Often overly harsh consequences are a reflection of the anger in the adult and not the actual behavior of the young person.

If your ministry is serving children who have been uncorrected for some time or are struggling to make good choices (in particular because of their trauma), it can be helpful to the young person to have an adult help analyze the problem. What are the factors that make him or her more likely to make that type of poor choice? What can be done to avoid those triggers for inappropriate behavior? If the young person cannot avoid one or more of the triggers, what other strategies might help him or her avoid making rebellious choices?

Allow the child to lead the conversation, if possible. Often young people are more likely to make use of strategies they devise than ones given to them directly by adults. If you are working with a child who struggles to find answers and strategies, asking guiding questions or offering several alternatives can help the child take more ownership of the solution. As with mistakes, complex or difficult new strategies to help young people avoid making rebellious choices may need to be taught. The young person may also need guided practice to make it more natural to use those strategies when tempted.

Children who have gone without food or faced other deprivations during a war may steal and/or hoard food. This was a coping strategy the child likely developed without adult feedback in order to survive a situation where adequate food was often not available for long periods of time. Young people engaging in these inappropriate strategies may need bridge strategies to help them move towards more acceptable coping mechanisms. For example, if the child is taking food into the sleeping area and hoarding it under a bed, the food may attract vermin or spoil. An appropriate bridging strategy would involve reassuring

the child food is now readily available (if it is) and that you will make sure the child is properly fed. Until the child feels confident food will always be available, you can allow the child to keep a wrapped snack bar in his sleeping area to calm the child's anxiety about food. Any additional food found in the sleeping area will be considered disobeying a rule in the future.

Storytelling and books can also help children who are struggling to change inappropriate or rebellious choices. Often learning how a character in the story changed a similar habit and hearing about the better results of that strategy impacts young people more than discussions and lectures. Stories can also help children explore why they may be making poor choices.

Ultimately, the best deterrent to rebellion is often helping the child understand that rebellion hurts the child more than anyone else. This logic can eventually appeal to the child's sense of reason. It can also be helpful to share stories from the Bible of those who were rebellious and the consequences they received for their poor choices.

It is crucial that after you have given a child correction and consequences, you do something to help re-establish the positive emotional connection between you and the child. If the young person is still emotional about the experience, it may take some additional time and/or effort before the child is ready to hear or accept attempts to reconnect emotionally. In those cases, the initial attempt should be made, but then revisited periodically until the child is ready to reconnect.

## **Conflict Resolution**

Children who have experienced a war have seen first hand what happens when conflicts are poorly resolved. This does not mean they will automatically know how to resolve conflicts in more productive, godly ways. Godly conflict resolution uses a set of skills that should be actively taught to young people. They will also need guided practice to make the techniques natural for them to use when confronted by a conflict with another person. While some people will not respond to godly conflict resolution, the techniques can often serve to de-escalate a conflict, even if it does not ultimately resolve it.

Conflict resolution can be taught and practiced in a step by step format. It is important for everyone involved to understand that conflict resolution models work best when everyone in the conflict is following the model. Those who have been trained in conflict resolution can encourage others who are untrained to use the model. If they refuse, the model can still be used by only one of the people involved in the conflict, but the results will not be as effective in most cases.

Children who have experienced war have seen the worst possible conflict resolution skills - name calling, lying about the other side, violence, etc. They should be motivated to use more godly and effective models. Young people will still need regular guided practice to make it natural for them to resolve any conflicts they have using the model.

This particular model for conflict resolution is probably one of several possible ones that could be used. It is worded in such a way, however, that should make it easier for children to understand and remember.

1. Give those involved in the conflict time alone to gain control of their emotions, behaviors and thoughts.
2. Ask each person to think about how they feel and what they think is making them feel that way.
3. Have each person calmly tell the other(s) how he or she feels, using the following sentences. "I feel \_\_\_\_\_ when you \_\_\_\_\_, because \_\_\_\_\_. I would like \_\_\_\_\_."
4. Those involved in the conflict should avoid calling others names, cursing, verbally threatening others or making blanket statements about the appearance or character of others.
5. After each person has made his or her statement, the other person should summarize what was said in his or her own words.
6. The one making the statement should correct any misunderstandings the other person has about what was said.
7. Those involved in the conflict should work together to create a list of all possible options for a solution to the conflict. Most people stop after listing the three basic solutions where one or the other party gets everything or the two split the decision and each gets half of what they wanted. Often the best solution for everyone involved is not identified until those in the conflict list five to ten possible solutions.
8. Hopefully the two parties will at this point be able to agree upon a solution that benefits both parties equally.

Young people may find themselves in conflict with parents and caregivers over a difference in opinion. Often it is because the young person is unhappy about a decision the adult has made about a needed change for the family. Parents and caregivers may understand why their children disagree with them, but still believe their choice is in the best interest of the children. The best strategy is often to be empathetic and use healthy techniques to help the young people accept the change as necessary.

At times, however, the parents may be truly perplexed as to why their children are so upset about a change the parents view as positive. They can become frustrated when their children refuse to see their point of view. Any adults involved with children who are overly upset with coming changes should listen empathetically without undermining parental efforts to do what is ultimately in the best interest of the child. In severe cases of conflict, an informal mediation by a third party and strategies to make the transition less painful for the children can help.

### **Screen Time and Behavior (OMIT and Rebellion)**

During the chaos of war or in refugee situations where there are not enough activities designed to keep children amused for long periods of time, it can be tempting to use



screens as a way to amuse children and manage their behavior. While every parent has probably done that in an emergency, it is not an effective or healthy long term solution for entertaining children or teaching them self control.

Studies have found that children who use screens more than recommended, sleep less than children who spend less time using screens. They also found children with high screen usage were likely to act impulsively and make poor choices. As mentioned earlier, interacting with violent content on screens can make young people more aggressive and they engage in physical altercations more often.<sup>113</sup>

Although young people may not have had much access to screens during a war, that can change after the war or in refugee shelters in some areas. Some parents may use screens to keep their children safe and prevent interruptions (OMITengaged) while they deal with the repercussions of life during and after a war. As tempting as it may be to use screens as a babysitter, it is important to severely limit screen time. This will limit the negative impact screens can have and make it easier for your children to heal from any trauma.

Recommended amounts of screen time vary slightly depending upon the source, but most experts agree on the following limits:<sup>114</sup>

- Under age 2 - No screen time
- Ages 2-12 - One hour of screen time a day
- Teens - Two hours of recreational screen time a day. This total should include all apps, streaming, games, texting, etc.

As stated earlier, it is also important to ban all violent content including movies, tv, games, etc. If your ministry is not caring for the child, it is important to educate parents and encourage them to set appropriate limits for their children.

### **Addressing Risk Taking Behaviors**

Some young people who have been exposed to war will begin to engage in a number of risk taking behaviors like alcohol and drug use, sexual encounters, eating disorders or participating in activities that carry a high risk of injury or death. The motivations for participating in these activities can vary, but have a direct correlation to the trauma they have experienced. Some young people find risk taking is a form of self medication, while others are attracted to behaviors that make them feel more in control of their lives (especially eating disorders). Others may turn to them for comfort or excitement.

Risk taking behaviors in their early stages can lessen once those participating in them begin expressing their emotions in healthier ways. Doing the activities in this book can help. Some young people have a personality that enjoys risk taking- even before the added trauma from war. These children and teens can benefit from taking part in activities that

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<sup>113</sup> American Academy of Pediatrics, "Media Violence"

<sup>114</sup> Morin, "How Much Should You Limit Kids' Screen Time and Electronics Use?"

manage the risk to some extent. Rock climbing, skiing, snowboarding, extreme sports and other similar activities, while still somewhat dangerous, are considered healthier than smoking, alcohol or drug abuse and other negative high risk behaviors. Since risk taking behaviors are by definition dangerous to the health and well being of young people, anyone engaging in risk taking behaviors who does not respond to interventions or who appears to be addicted to an unhealthy activity should be referred to a medical professional for evaluation and treatment.

### **Understanding the Role of Special Needs in Behavior**

When addressing the behaviors of a child with special needs, it can be helpful to better understand what those special needs may be. Some children with special needs are capable of meeting the same behavioral expectations as other children their age. Young people with certain special needs, however, may struggle with one or more of the various skill sets needed to understand and obey a rule or command. It does not mean they are incapable of obedience, but rather that they may need special strategies to make it possible for them to obey.

While young people with special needs may need additional strategies to make it easier for them to obey rules and carry out commands, one must be careful to avoid setting behavioral expectations that are too low. Most children with special needs are capable of obeying commands and carrying out assigned tasks once parents, caretakers, teachers or other adults have helped them find the things hindering them and helped them develop strategies to overcome those issues. In some cases, the strategies will be obvious, but in others it may take some trial and error before finding a strategy that works for a specific child.

The most common hindrance to obedience for some children with special needs is the ability to remember rules, commands or lists and sequences of every day tasks. For children with cognitive delays or memory deficits, this inability to remember the things needed for complete obedience is fairly consistent, but can in some cases improve over time.

For conditions like Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, the forgetfulness can appear uneven. One day a child may remember everything he or she needs to do before bed and the next day may not only forget the list, but also how to perform one or more of the tasks. As Fetal Alcohol Syndrome is routinely missed by doctors and teachers alike, this random forgetfulness can appear to be rebellious behavior.

**Fetal Alcohol Syndrome** - A condition that results from a child being exposed to alcohol while in the womb. Fetal Alcohol Syndrome can cause brain damage and other health problems.

The most helpful tools for any young people with special needs that have impacted their memory are visual reminders of any rules, lists of chores or self care tasks and in some

cases, reminders of the steps needed to complete a task. For non readers or early readers, images can be substituted for words if they are carefully chosen to serve as clear reminders.

Another issue children with special needs may experience when trying to obey rules or commands is the length of time it often takes them to learn new tasks. They may need extra time to master any motor skills required, understand what is to be done or other parts of compliance routinely mastered by the average child. At times, young people can become as frustrated with the learning curve as the adults working with them. Finding a task analysis of the desired skill online can make it easier for both the child and the adult helping him or her learn the new task.

A task analysis takes something we have grown to believe is one simple task - like brushing teeth - and breaks it down into several smaller tasks that must be mastered sequentially in order to master the entire task. These smaller tasks are less frustrating for the young person to master, which can increase both patience and perseverance. Task analysis sheets can also help caregivers and teachers know the correct sequence in which to teach the various steps.

If you are helping someone with special needs learn how to do a new task, make sure to give lots of encouragement and praise during the learning process. Do not overdo it, but do not wait for perfection to praise and do not pressure the child to immediately learn the next step in the process before celebrating the one just mastered.

Young people who have issues with sight or hearing may struggle to hear and understand any rules or commands given in ways targeted to the impacted sense. They may also have processing difficulties. If the speed of processing is an issue, children may not respond for a length of time until what was said is fully processed by their brains. Some young people have brains that appear to scramble what was said to them or what they read. This can frustrate adults who believe they have communicated their expectations clearly. In cases where these issues are suspected, it can be helpful to ask the child to repeat what was asked of him or her and explain it in his or her own words. This gives the adult an opportunity to correct any misunderstandings before they cause problems. Another strategy is to only give one step of any instructions at a time (rather than two or three steps). This will give the child's brain less information to process before acting.

Children on the autism spectrum are the most likely to have fixations. They are often passionate about one or two subjects and like to spend all of their time engaged with those things. This can be problematic if an adult expects the child to immediately stop the current activity to do something the adult requires. Children with fixations often respond better when given warnings of upcoming transitions. Having a timer and telling the child what you need him or her to do when the timer rings in five or ten minutes can ease the child from the favored activity to the task the adult wants accomplished.

**Autism Spectrum Disorder** - A neurological and developmental disorder that affects how people interact with others, communicate, learn and behave.

For children with certain special needs, change and too many options can become overwhelming. Too much sensory input can also frustrate them. Since war is often accompanied by many changes and lots of unpleasant sensory input, it can make any issues the young person may already have even worse. It can be helpful to use the calming strategies suggested throughout the book. It can also make things easier for the child if changes and choices are kept to as few as humanly possible, while still keeping the child safe. Children with certain special needs also often find security in routines and schedules. If you can keep even some semblance of a schedule amidst the chaos of war, it can be soothing for the child.

Young people with special needs can be socially awkward at times. There are a lot of different factors impacting social ability, but a child who is socially awkward may say things that an adult would consider disrespectful or uncomfortable. Parents and those working with the child can help the child use replacement behaviors that are less likely to cause these relational issues. There are scripts known as social scripts you can use to help the child practice these new interactions. These can often be found online for free or to purchase.

Some young people with special needs have trouble regulating their emotions and behavior. It can be helpful to help them learn how to identify and manage their emotions. Discuss the acceptable options of things to say and do when the young person is in a negative emotional state. Help them think of ways they can de-escalate their own negative emotions.

For some children, it can help to use a number scale to measure the strength of their emotions like anger. What does a two on the anger scale feel and look like versus a ten on the anger scale? What incidents merit a two response on the anger scale versus incidents that might require a ten response? What are acceptable things that can be said and done at each emotional level? Children prone to tantrums can often reduce or eliminate them without adult help once they learn these strategies.

Children with special needs may have triggers that can lead to regulation issues and tantrums that have nothing to do with the trauma they experienced in a war. Often these triggers may be very similar to and even overlap the triggers many children have after a war experience. Since triggers, regardless of their original cause, are dealt with in the same manner, any triggers a child with special needs may have can be handled in the same manner as discussed in an earlier chapter.

Another strategy for young people who make poor choices when they cannot adequately regulate their emotional state is to teach them how to change their emotions from a negative one to a more positive one. The best ways to teach them to do this may vary from child to child. Some young people will be able to change emotional states by repeating

encouraging sentences like, “Today was a rough day, but tomorrow will be much better.” Others can repeat scriptures that remind them of God’s love for them or other verses they find encouraging. Young people can also try changing their facial expressions and posture to those used in positive emotional states. Studies have found, for example, that smiling can make one feel happier and sitting up straight can improve energy levels.<sup>115</sup>

Some children with special needs have difficulty understanding the emotional cues given off by others. They may also be unaware that their words and actions can impact the emotions of others. Once again these skills can be taught. Show children who struggle to recognize emotions in others photos of people with various emotions. Have the children name the emotion and what might have happened to make the person feel that way. Discuss ways young people might make the various people in the photos feel better or worse by their interactions with them.

Young people with special needs may also find it easier to regulate their emotional state and behavior when they have exercised regularly, had healthy meals and snacks and gotten adequate sleep. They can also benefit from participating in the activities mentioned in the last chapter that can help children process and express negative emotions in healthy ways.

If you are ministering to a child with special needs and are struggling to help, do not be afraid to consult school teachers, therapists or medical professionals who have experience working with children with special needs. They can help you differentiate between behaviors arising from a child’s special needs and those arising from trauma or rebellion. These professionals can also help you develop more effective strategies with the needs of the specific young person in mind.

Finally, it is important to note that some parents, educators and medical professionals believe medication is the one and only solution for children with special needs who are struggling to obey rules and carry out required tasks. While in some cases, medicine can make it easier for a child to regulate emotions or behavior, it will still require effort on the part of the young person to develop and use the strategies needed to meet behavioral expectations.

If a child has been prescribed medication before the war to help with behavior, it is very likely the parents have been unable to get the prescription refilled during the war. They may have taken the child off the medicine entirely or be rationing it in some off label fashion. (For example giving medications meant to be taken daily only on days when the child attends school.) These types of drugs are usually not meant to be stopped and started abruptly. This off-label use can cause reactions or make the drug less effective even on the days it is taken. If you suspect a family has a problem with a child’s medications, it

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<sup>115</sup> Veenstra et al., “Embodied mood regulation: the impact of body posture on mood recovery, negative thoughts, and mood-congruent recall”

can be helpful to introduce them to a medical professional who can determine what the child needs and write the appropriate prescriptions.

## **Chapter 7 - Interventions for Addressing Academic Symptoms**

Often even before a war officially begins, young people may find their normal academic life is interrupted. Teachers may be distracted by news or rumors of war. Curriculum schedules may be sped up or slowed down in efforts to prepare for possible future school closures. Students are distracted or worried, finding it more difficult to focus or concentrate on their school work.

At the outbreak of war, parents may pull students out of school as they move to safer locations. Schools may be short staffed or close entirely. While remote learning is popular in some areas of the world, many young people may not have access to computers or the support of electricity or internet access to participate.

Even after a war has ended, young people may find they struggle academically. Those who are studious and intellectually above average, may catch up quickly. Most young people, however, will struggle for months or even years to regain lost academic ground. This provides many opportunities for ministries to provide educational assistance as a community outreach ministry.

### **Determining the Academic Impact of War**

As with any other area impacting children who have experienced war, the academic impact may vary greatly from child to child. Some young people will have missed little time in classes. Others may have not attended school for weeks or even months. A large number of children may have become refugees in a country that speaks a different language, further delaying any educational progress. The trauma young people experience during a war and its aftermath can cause a wide range of academic issues.

Your ministry may decide to help young people regain any academic progress they may have lost and prepare them to be able to learn new material to the best of their abilities. It will be important to do an unofficial educational assessment and create a type of educational plan for each individual child. Once you better understand what each child needs, you may find a number of children have similar needs and can be grouped together as ministry volunteers work with them on those specific needs.

Your informal assessment should include an understanding of their educational level, classes and any issues before the war. It is important to understand how much school has been missed and what, if anything, the child has done independently to pursue knowledge or practice academic skills in the interim. Students should also be encouraged to share any differences they have noticed in their ability to perform routine tasks in schools, like concentrating on lessons, remembering important information or new struggles in subjects like math and vocabulary.

If students are in a new country where a language different than their own is spoken, it is important to understand the current level of their fluency in the new language. While there may be formal assessments available in some languages, they are not needed for your

purposes. Basically, you want to be able to group children with similar levels of fluency together. For example, you may have a group of young people who only know a few words, another group with children who can already speak a few sentences, a third group who is ready for reading and writing skills practice and a fourth of young people who are already fluent, but need extra practice to feel comfortable. Each group can then have lessons and activities that will help increase their fluency.

## **Academic Burnout**

Children and teens of school age may have educational expectations placed upon them by the school systems in their original locality as well as in the area where they are living as refugees. In some cases, children may be attending their local school in person during the day, while also being expected to participate in online classes given by their previous schools at night. When added to the stress of attending an unfamiliar school, taking different classes or classes in a new language and other changes, young people can quickly become frustrated and develop academic burnout.

Whether or not it is in the actual best interest of students to attend two different school systems simultaneously depends upon multiple factors. Children under the age of twelve will probably benefit from only attending their local school. The opportunity to experience a new culture, language and classes, as well as make local friends is enough education in most cases. For most children, any academic losses (primarily in their original language) experienced from not attending online schools in their original area will be quickly regained if and when they return home.

Teenagers, unfortunately, may have to continue to attend both schools due to local attendance laws and the need to have transcripts for university applications from their original school. It is worth checking, however, on local homeschooling laws. You may find that your child's online education will meet or exceed local homeschooling requirements.

If not managed well, academic frustration and burnout can lead to increased stress and lower grades. Older students may express a desire to quit school before completion. Encourage parents and caregivers to contact both school systems in hopes of lessening the burden - especially for elementary aged children.

Empathizing with young people regarding their heavy workloads can help. It can also be beneficial to remind them that the extra academic load will disappear once the hostilities cease and they can return home. If the daily or total workload cannot be lessened in some way, try to give young people a long break between the lessons of the two systems. The break should include outdoor exercise whenever possible.



## Addressing Academic Behaviors

Concentration and memory are two crucial academic behaviors needed for success. They are also the most likely to be impacted by war.<sup>116</sup> While many of the interventions in previous chapters may also improve the child's ability to concentrate or memorize academic material, there are other activities designed to help young people improve those skills.

Young people may not share with you that they are struggling to concentrate or focus in school. In fact, if they have weak metacognition skills, they may not quite realize it themselves. There are some signs the child, caregivers or you may notice that suggest concentration is problematic for a young person.

- Staring into space/looking out the window during lessons or homework time
- Unable to complete a line of thinking internally or when speaking or writing
- Needing to have directions constantly repeated - especially simple ones
- Having to constantly call the child's name to get the child to listen when spoken to by someone
- A sense of being unable to calm down enough to complete an activity. This may look like an inability to stay seated, fidgeting with things nearby, being easily distracted by external stimuli or frequently asking to do something other than the task at hand

Often, the first time young people or caregivers realize there is a memory problem is when grades begin to fall because of poor test scores. Even then, there may be an assumption that poor scores reflect a poor understanding of the topic rather than an inability to remember the information. As with concentration, there are signs the child, caregivers or you may notice that a young person is having memory issues.

- Difficulty answering simple questions about something that was just taught
- Inability to remember recent events
- Consistent issues with remembering the date, day of the week, year, names, etc.
- Poor test scores, particularly if the child claims to have understood the information, but had been unable to remember it during the test

It is important to note that some children struggle with memory and concentration who have not experienced a war. While the same interventions can help, children with certain conditions or special needs may also need medical support. A young person who reports having memory or concentration issues before the war (that perhaps have worsened) or children who have suffered head injuries during the war should be referred to a medical professional for evaluation.

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<sup>116</sup> Kadir, "Effects of Armed Conflict on Child Health and Development"

## Interventions for Issues With Academic Behaviors

There are two basic ways to help young people struggling with concentration and memory. First, there are games and activities that can be done to gradually improve those skills. In addition, children can be taught strategies that can make it easier for them to concentrate or memorize.

Thankfully, many of the interventions to help young people improve concentration and memory are the same. Since children who have experienced a war have so many possible issues and needed interventions to help them heal, this chapter will primarily share those activities that will benefit both issues.

Games involving an aspect of concentration and/or memory are a fun way to practice those skills. Many of these games involve using a set of matching pairs which are shuffled and then placed so the images are hidden. Children must then find a matching pair by turning over two images. If they do not match, the images are hidden again and the next turn is taken. Children who can concentrate on the images other players reveal and remember them will do better in the game. These types of games can also be played by one player. If board games are available, look for those requiring strategy and remembering what other players have done to win the game.

Jigsaw puzzles also help young people practice both skills. It requires focus to complete a jigsaw puzzle and those who remember where they have placed specific pieces from which to choose tend to finish jigsaw puzzles more quickly. It may be better to start with puzzles that have fewer pieces and increase the number of pieces as the child seems comfortable with a particular sized puzzle.

Finding activities or hobbies a young person enjoys can make focusing for longer periods of time easier. As a child starts an activity, take note of how long the young person is engaged by it before losing focus or wandering away from it. In subsequent sessions, set a timer for a slightly longer period of time and encourage the child to continue working on the activity until the timer rings. This same technique can be used with schoolwork, but is not nearly as fun for most children. Music, crossword puzzles, knitting or crocheting, learning a new language, cooking, jewelry making (involving specific patterns of beading), sewing and woodworking are common hobbies that require concentration and memory.

There are several strategies young people can use in situations where they need to concentrate, but are struggling. These strategies can make concentration a bit easier in the short term and help young people eventually improve their ability to concentrate for longer periods of time. Some young people will find certain strategies are more helpful for them than others. Encourage them to continue trying the various strategies or combinations of strategies until they see improvement in their ability to concentrate.

- Eliminate as many distractions in the environment as possible. Distractions will vary from child to child. Some young people find any noises distracting, while others find complete silence distracting. They should focus on eliminating sights, sounds and

activities they enjoy from the environment where they are attempting to concentrate (whenever possible). When it is not possible, using earplugs, facing walls instead of windows and other strategies can help minimize distractions.

- Make sure all personal needs have been addressed before starting an activity and anything needed for the activity is readily available without having to change positions. This should minimize the need to go to the restroom, grab a snack or find something needed to complete the task at hand. Staying seated is a huge part of staying focused on an activity.
- Use timers and take breaks. As mentioned earlier, timers can help young people stay focused on homework or other tasks. Knowing they only have to focus for a certain number of minutes before being allowed to take a break can help improve concentration.

There are also several popular strategies students have used for years to improve their memory of information needed for a test. These same strategies can improve a child's memory of anything that needs to be remembered. Over time, using these strategies can also improve a young person's memory in general.

- Creating a rhyme or song of information to be remembered. Often young people can use the tune of a popular children's song and replace the words with words they need to remember. (Note: This is easier to do when matching the current words of the song syllable to syllable with the new words. For example a two syllable word in the original song should be replaced with a two syllable word in what is to be memorized.) Songs and rhymes that are silly, but make at least some sense are easier to remember.
- Creating acrostics or acronyms. Acrostics use a word or name in which each letter can be attached to a fact or word that needs to be remembered. In English, for example, the fictitious name Roy G Biv is used by students to remember the colors in the rainbow. R is for the English word "red", O is for the English word "orange", etc. Acronyms are pronounceable words created from the first letter of the words or facts needed to be memorized. Often these words are then arranged to form a silly sentence that is easy to remember. For example, in English, the sentence "My very educated mother just served us noodles" is used to help remember the names of the planets in our solar system. "My" stands for Mercury in English, while "very" stands for Venus, etc.
- Use images to represent lists of words or facts. For some young people, it is easier to remember images than words. For example, remembering the image of a boot and associating it with the shape of the country Italy can make it easier for a young person to find Italy on an unlabeled map. Some people find placing these images within a "memory house" can help. For instance, in English, if you were trying to memorize the capital cities of Europe, you would picture a bull named Gary sitting on a sofa in the living room. This image would help you remember Sofia, Bulgaria. Keeping the same number of things in each room in the house can also help students remember how many items they should be listing.

- Create mind maps. In this strategy the child creates a map of sorts showing how all of the information is connected to each other. Following the map in their minds can help them remember the information along various segments of the map.
- Repetition. Not the most fun memory technique perhaps, but it works. With repetition, the young person just repeats the same information over and over until it is memorized. Having multiple practice sessions over multiple days can help move that information from short term to long term memory.
- Having the child teach someone else the information the student needs to memorize. Preparing the lesson and teaching it to someone also improves the ability of the “teacher” to remember the information.<sup>117</sup>

### **Benefits From Reading**

Schoolwork often involves reading textbooks or novels. Studies have found that reading can reduce stress levels by up to 68%. Reading quality fiction has also been shown to improve empathy<sup>118</sup>. As mentioned in an earlier section on Bibliotherapy, books can also provide a way to encourage children and teens to discuss their emotions, thoughts and fears. Reading aloud to children also provides opportunities to give them the extra attention they need and can strengthen emotional bonds from having a shared experience. Making time for young people to read should be a priority for parents and caregivers. Many localities have public libraries where books can be accessed for free.

### **Addressing Issues With Academic Skills**

Academic skills in many subjects build upon previously learned skills. In math, for example, a child learns addition to be prepared to later learn multiplication. When a young person misses school for a period of time, not only does he or she miss learning new information, but also the basic skills needed before learning new material may have been forgotten.

Ministries can help young people review basic skills and practice new ones through faith based tutoring. This method can also be used to teach children a new language if they are refugees in an area where they will need to speak a new language to do well in school.

Faith based tutoring uses elements of stories in the Bible to naturally tie Bible stories to learning and practicing basic academic skills. For example, the story of Creation contains the element of time within it. Basic math activities like telling time, calculating elapsed time and more could be taught and practiced in activities that began with the telling of the story of Creation. Children in faith based tutoring then learn Bible stories as they practice academic skills.

Schools in many countries are didactic or lecture oriented. This type of teaching does not work well in faith based tutoring. Activities should be engaging, hands-on and memorable.

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<sup>117</sup> Stock, “Want Students to Remember What They Learn? Have Them Teach It”

<sup>118</sup> NAMI California, “Why Reading Is Good For Mental Health”

The Teach One Reach One website<sup>119</sup> has hundreds of free activity ideas for faith based tutoring. Currently, that section of the website is in English, but activity ideas can be copied and a translation app used to translate the activities into the language that the tutors speak.

It is important to remember that faith based tutoring has two goals - academic advancement of students and introducing young people and their families to God. The key to a successful faith based tutoring program is for tutors to constantly invite parents and students to worship services and other activities of the local church. Without these invitations, faith based tutoring will only reach a fraction of its potential to teach people what God wants them to know.

### **Addressing School Social Issues**

Young people who have experienced war are different children when they return to school. They have experienced trauma. Many of the symptoms children can experience during and in the aftermath of a war can impact their relationships. They may be less trusting, less willing to have conversations, their coping mechanisms may appear unusual to peers or they may have other symptoms that make it difficult for them to form healthy friendships at school.

Some may return to schools in their original area or within their country of origin. They are usually joined at school by peers who have also experienced trauma during the war. Some children will have begun to process and heal from their trauma, while others have not. Trauma symptoms can lead to more frequent conflict between students and more disruptions in friend groups because of the conflict. Some young people will also attempt to handle issues in a more aggressive fashion than before, leading to an increased likelihood of physical altercations.

If young people have moved as refugees to a different country, they may soon realize they are a minority population. Their status as a refugee can sometimes impact their social status at school as well. There is also the dynamic of being the “new” student in a school even without the added complexity of being a refugee from another culture. Young people may find themselves socially excluded or even bullied.

While it is impossible to “fix” all of the social issues young people may have at school, ministries can help by providing lessons that better equip children to handle these problems. These lessons can be taught within the context of a Bible class or in separate classes focusing primarily on these issues.

Classes on friendship should include reminders of how to be a good friend as well as how to choose friends who will be nurturing and supportive. Young people should have lessons on bullying and the unacceptable behaviors it includes. Children should be taught effective and godly ways of protecting themselves and others from bullies. These classes should

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<sup>119</sup> [www.teachonereachone.org](http://www.teachonereachone.org)

include guided practice skills such as asking a peer to stop saying mean things, walking away from the bully without responding and asking a trusted adult for help.

Parents, caregivers and ministry volunteers should listen carefully when a child complains about peer interactions at school. Some of these are a normal part of childhood and adolescent friendships. If the behavior has become bullying, however, the child needs to be supported by an adult in any efforts to stop it.

At times, children will be afraid to tell adults about being bullied. This may be particularly true if the young person believes his or her parents are already overly stressed dealing with the impact of the war on their family in other ways. Unaddressed, bullying can lead victims to become depressed and even suicidal. Young people who have experienced war may find these symptoms are worsened because of any trauma symptoms they may already be having.

There are some signs that a young person is possibly being bullied at school.

- Complaining of constant stomach aches or headaches or even faking illness to avoid going to school
- Difficulty sleeping and nightmares
- Begging to stay home from school
- Obvious avoidance of certain peers, hallways, methods or routes of getting to school, etc.
- Sudden loss of new friends or inability to make any friends
- Unexplained injuries, torn clothing or missing items taken to school
- Unusual hunger after school or suddenly wanting to take extra food or money for food to school
- Lowered self esteem

You may have noticed many of these signs of bullying overlap with possible trauma symptoms from their war experiences. It can be difficult to differentiate between the two issues without the help of the young person involved. Young people need to have adults in their lives with whom they have strong, healthy, loving relationships. Having adults they can trust and talk to about anything makes it more likely children will let an adult know they are being bullied.



## **Chapter 8 - Interventions for Addressing Spiritual Symptoms**

When conducting research for this book, it was interesting to find how many secular studies recognized “religion” as one of the keys to helping young people heal from war.<sup>120</sup> Quite a few went on to mention the impact war can have on the spiritual lives of children.<sup>121</sup> Yet, it is virtually impossible to find any materials with specific lessons and activities parents, caregivers and ministries can use to help young people deal with the impact of war on their spiritual lives.

As a result, this chapter will address the topic using the information found in the Bible and secular research, as well as the lessons and activity ideas Teach One Reach One Ministries believes best address the spiritual needs and issues of young people who have experienced a war.

### **Addressing the Loss of Hope**

Young people who have experienced war often lose hope.<sup>122</sup> This may be hope that the war will end or hope that their current life circumstances will improve. Ultimately, they have lost hope in the future. We may not realize it, but hope is a crucial part of a healthy spiritual life. Hope is also necessary for our psychological health. People who have lost all hope often become depressed and even suicidal.

Unfortunately, we cannot honestly promise young people things will improve for them in their lifetime - although hopefully their life circumstances will get better at some point in the future. Most young people, however, will continue to experience at least periodic trials throughout the remainder of their lives. This is why every secular program appears to struggle with helping restore hope in children who have experienced war. They cannot honestly promise life circumstances will improve for young people. Secular programs find it nearly impossible to instill hope in young people when they have nothing to offer that will give them hope.

Christianity is hope filled. Christians find their hope in Christ and in spending eternity in Heaven. God never promises Christians an easy life, but He does promise He will love and support Christians during their struggles and trials. Helping young people tap into this hope will not only help them heal from their experiences during a war, but also better prepare them to face any future challenges or struggles in their lives.

Many Bible stories contain the experiences of people who were in hopeless situations, but their hope in God sustained them. Sometimes God fulfilled that hope by rescuing them - like during the Israelites’ escape from Egypt. In other stories, the hope people had in God helped them endure their trials - like the numerous tribulations Paul experienced in his

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<sup>120</sup> Kletter, “Helping Children Exposed to War and Violence: Perspectives from an International Work Group on Intervention for Youth and Families”

<sup>121</sup> Betancourt, “Interventions for Children Affected by War”

<sup>122</sup> Kadir, “The Effects of Armed Conflict on Children”



lifetime. Using these Bible stories in Godly Play or Bible lessons with guided discussion (Both techniques will be discussed in depth, with sample scripts and lessons in later chapters.), can help young people regain their sense of hope.

Dreams of the future are signs of young people who are filled with hope for that future. War can make even the routine dreams for the future of most young people seem unrealistic. It can help to explore the idea of seasons in life as expressed in Ecclesiastes. Encouraging young people to dream godly dreams and teaching them how God can shape those dreams can be crucial in helping them adapt their personal dreams when circumstances dictate, without becoming discouraged or losing all hope. Of course in Christianity, the ultimate dream for the future is spending eternity in Heaven. Reflecting on the hope in that promise alone can restore hope in young people.

### **Addressing the Loss of Meaning and Purpose**

Young people who have experienced a war often feel as if their life has no meaning or purpose.<sup>123</sup> While this is a common struggle for any adolescent, it can be worsened when a young person has experienced a war. God's mission for Christians can give young people the meaning and purpose for their lives they may have lost or had never found - even before the war. God's mission for Christians of finding and accomplishing the good deeds God has prepared for them in advance<sup>124</sup> and sharing their faith with others<sup>125</sup> will give the lives of young people meaning and purpose.

Gift discovery, development and use is vital if young people are to do the good works God has planned for them. Young people will need assistance from adults discovering and developing the gifts God has given them to serve Him. They will need guided practice and encouragement to begin using those gifts to serve God by noticing and seeking ways they can minister to others.

The list of spiritual gifts found in the New Testament<sup>126</sup> can be confusing for young people. This can hamper their efforts to discover their personal gifts. It can be easier for them to understand the more concrete types of gifts or talents God gives, like those used in the building of the Tabernacle.<sup>127</sup>

Some young people will have already discovered at least one of their talents, but may need help in developing them or understanding how to use them to serve God. The vast majority of children, however, will often have no idea what talents God may have given them. Many times, clues to their talents can be attained by discovering what they enjoy doing, what

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<sup>123</sup> International Institute for Peace through Tourism, "The Impact of War on Children"

<sup>124</sup> Ephesians 2:10

<sup>125</sup> Matthew 28:16-20

<sup>126</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:8-10

<sup>127</sup> Exodus 31

they do well and the things people either compliment them on or about which they are asked for their help or advice.

Some talents are perhaps more obvious than others, but every talent can be used to serve God in some way. Adults tend to focus on obvious talents like artistic or musical ability. There are many other talents that can be used to serve God, like organizational skills or making friends easily. You can find an extensive list of potential gifts or talents a young person may have been given by God in Appendix 3. The process of helping young people discover, develop and use their gifts to serve God is time consuming, but it is one of the best ways to help young people explore the meaning and purpose of their lives.

Understanding God's plans for their personal salvation and the importance of sharing that Gospel message with others can also add purpose and meaning to the lives of young people. Even younger children can begin exploring the overarching story of the Bible that includes Creation, the Fall and the Messiah. Christian teens should be exploring ways to share their faith with others in both casual conversations and more formal Bible studies. Guided practice can give them the confidence to not only become Christians themselves, but to accept God's mission for Christians of helping others understand what God wants for them and from them.

### **Addressing Shifts in Ideas of Right and Wrong**

When a young person's entire world is threatened or destroyed by the violence of others, it can shake his or her perceptions of what is right or wrong. Watching adults commit not only sinful, but also unbelievably evil acts against other human beings, can make it seem as if the world has turned upside down. Young people who believed love was the answer to life's problems may even find themselves verbally or emotionally celebrating retaliatory violence or the death of enemy soldiers. It is no wonder studies have found young people exposed to war often change their ideas of right and wrong.

While Christianity includes grace and forgiveness for sins of which Christians repent, it also requires an obedience to God's commands. These commands are not always accepted by those in the secular world - particularly during a war. Young people may find themselves under extreme pressure from governments, adults in the community and peers to do things that are in obvious rebellion to God's commands. Others may find they no longer have a strong moral compass and are suddenly questioning every concept they once had of right and wrong.

To address these issues, it is important to start at the very beginning. Why was Creation perfect? What brought about the Fall? What happened when sin entered the world? Why does God give us commands to obey? What happens when we disobey these commands? Do the concepts of grace and forgiveness mean we no longer have to obey God's commands? Do humans have the right to reject God's commands if they do not like them?

These concepts can be covered in age appropriate ways through Godly Play or Bible lessons and activities. There are a lot of topics that will need to be taught and discussed to

help young people reset their moral compass to match God's expectations. This includes reviewing the various commands and what obeying those might look like in their everyday lives. Young people may also benefit from understanding the earthly consequences that often accompany disobeying God's commands, as well as the spiritual implications of rebellion.

Even once young people understand what God wants from them, they may not have the skill sets to do those things easily. Children who have only seen conflict resolved in ungodly ways, for example, may have no idea how to resolve disagreements in the ways God would want them resolved. As badly as they may want to obey God, they may have no idea how to actually do it. Actively teaching them these Christian life skills can make it easier for them to obey God's commands. The Teach One Reach One website has numerous free Christian life skills Bible lessons in English<sup>128</sup> which can be translated into other languages if needed, using an app or translator.

### **Addressing Anger and Forgiveness**

The atrocities of war can cause anyone to feel angry. While the Bible makes it clear the emotion itself is not a sin, it can quickly lead to sinful behaviors. Not surprisingly, many of these sinful behaviors have also been shown to have a negative impact on the physical health and well being - both emotionally and spiritually - of the person who is angry.

Anger in children and teens may be expressed in ways other than the tantrums and outbursts one might expect. Signs that a young person may be struggling with anger can also include:

- Aggressive and/or destructive behaviors
- Shutting down
- Withdrawal
- Crying
- Name calling
- Appetite changes
- Change in affect - redness, frown, etc.
- Avoidance of certain people or situations
- Physical changes like clenched fists and jaws, tense muscles
- Headaches and digestive issues
- Rapid heartbeat and heavy breathing

Young people who hold on to their anger (in opposition to the scriptures commanding Christians to not let "the sun go down on your anger"<sup>129</sup>) may find their anger hurts them more than it hurts those with whom they are angry. Studies have found that uncontrolled anger is a contributing force to the three leading causes of adolescent death - homicide,

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<sup>128</sup> [www.teachonereachone.org](http://www.teachonereachone.org)

<sup>129</sup> Ephesians 4:26

suicide and injuries.<sup>130</sup> Adolescent anger was also found to be a factor in high anxiety levels, drug use and depressive symptoms in young people.<sup>131</sup> Anger can lower self esteem and optimism levels, as well as have a negative impact on other relationships<sup>132</sup>. Uncontrolled anger can also lead to aggressive and violent behaviors<sup>133</sup>.

The problem during a war and its aftermath is that many of the adults ministering to young people are struggling to manage their own anger in godly ways. Every time they fail, it can reinforce inappropriate attitudes and behaviors in the young people surrounding them. For young people to process and heal from the anger they are feeling, they need not only guidance, but also positive role models.

Christian adults must be extremely careful in how they express their frustration and anger about what has happened during and after the war. They need to model not only healthy ways of processing and releasing anger, but also the forgiveness God commands all Christians to extend to others. Christian adults should also strive to actively demonstrate loving their enemies - even those who participated in known atrocities.

The confusion young people often have about anger and forgiveness is connected to a mistaken belief they have that forgiveness somehow releases the perpetrator from any personal responsibility for what happened or may even condone the attitudes or actions that were hurtful or sinful. Their internal sense of justice makes this unthinkable.

It is important to help them understand that the forgiveness God commands of Christians is the same forgiveness He extends to us. God never condones our sinful acts. He merely chooses to forgive them and remember them no more. (Admittedly, an oversimplification of the full theology of forgiveness in the Bible.) God gives us the opportunity to change and be better than we were before.

When young people forgive those who hurt them during a war, it does not condone those actions. It does, however, allow young people to emotionally and spiritually let go of those wrongs as they forgive. They may never fully forget what happened, but they no longer allow their thinking to dwell on those wrongs. Their forgiveness also leaves room for those who have wronged them to change.

Lysa Terkeurst, in her book on forgiveness, writes that there are two layers to forgiveness. She found that people are often confused when they believe they have forgiven someone, but still seem to be struggling to forgive fully. This is because they have only addressed the first layer of forgiveness - forgiving the incident. Until they also forgive the person for the negative impact the incident had on them, they will continue to struggle. She suggests

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<sup>130</sup> Puskar et al., "Anger Correlated With Psychosocial Variables in Rural Youth"

<sup>131</sup> Ibid

<sup>132</sup> Ibid

<sup>133</sup> Ibid

being very specific and forgiving each negative consequence of the incident in order to avoid a trigger bringing a specific hurt back to mind.<sup>134</sup>

Christian adults and adolescents will sometimes attempt to justify their anger, bitterness and rage as “justifiable”. They will often point to the story of Jesus cleansing the Temple as their rationale. While their anger may be justified in the sense that the other person did sin against them, it does not excuse holding on to their anger or sinning in that anger. Pointing out that Jesus prayed for those very people while he was on the Cross can perhaps help them view the cleansing of the Temple in a slightly different light. While they should stand up against sin, the Bible does not condone them sinning in the process.

For some young people, it can be helpful to analyze the attitudes behind the sinful choices that often anger young people during a war. People who commit heinous acts were not loving, kind people one day who then became people who murder, rape and steal the next day. Over the years, they made lots of little decisions that led to their hearts being hardened. They slowly killed off the love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness and self control inside of them. Instead their hearts became filled with anger, bitterness, rage and hate and those emotions justified (in their minds) their heinous acts. Young people need to understand this is a cautionary tale. If they hold on to their anger, they are at risk of becoming just like the people with whom they are currently angry.

For many young people, Bible lessons combined with prayer, mentoring and anger management techniques can help them diminish their anger levels<sup>135</sup>. It is important to remember that for children who have experienced more severe trauma or who had issues with anger before the war, this will take more time and effort than for children who experienced little trauma and are more naturally good natured. If young people have anger that is putting themselves or others in potential danger, a professional should be consulted.

Some young people will try to ignore their feelings of anger about the war, believing this equates to forgiveness. While forgiveness does involve choosing to not dwell on one's anger and the circumstances causing it, failing to recognize and admit the emotion of anger can be unhealthy as well. It is important to remind students that the Bible does not say it is a sin to feel the emotion of anger or explore what events caused that anger, rather that one quickly releases anger and avoids sinning while feeling angry. This is particularly important for children who may have refused to address their anger about events during the war, and believe any current angst is actually about a recent minor offense by someone close to them.

It can be helpful to explore why you believe their current anger is out of proportion to the recent offenses and help them explore the things that made them angry during the war.

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<sup>134</sup> Terkeurst, “Forgiving What You Can’t Forget” p.49

<sup>135</sup> See Appendix 4 for a list of anger management techniques

Done properly, exploring those memories and thoughts can allow young people to leave them in the past and encourage them to begin to release their anger. There are many stories in the Bible when someone chose to forgive people who had harmed them. Perhaps the best example was Jesus on the cross. Exploring those stories can help young people develop strategies that will help them move away from their anger and towards forgiveness.

Forgiveness also makes it easier for young people to obey the command to love their enemies. Once again, Christian adults ministering to children who have experienced war may be struggling with this concept themselves. Loving one's enemy during a war and its aftermath is often not possible to do in the same way one might show love to an enemy who is one's next door neighbor. Usually during a war, attempts are made to avoid being in the presence of one's enemy to avoid the real possibility of physical danger.

During the aftermath of a war, however, it may be easier to find ways to love one's enemies. Since wars are often between two neighboring nations or ethnicities, young people will often encounter people from the opposite side of the war - especially after it is over. These encounters are often benign social exchanges that can become toxic once the people realize they were on opposite sides during the war. Helping young people find ways to be loving and kind to people during these interchanges is a great first step towards learning to love one's enemies.

Often war creates additional poverty and loss for the average person on both sides of the war. Depending upon your location and logistical circumstances, you might be able to find ways for young people to serve people who are suffering on the opposing side of the war they experienced. Of course, the ultimate way to love one's enemy is to share the Gospel message with him or her. This can have the added benefit of turning the hearts and minds of people away from the hate that often leads to war and towards the love God calls His people to have for everyone.

### **Addressing Trust**

Children from healthy home environments have learned they can trust their parents or caretakers. They usually know when they can expect food and rest. They have learned there will be clothes for them to wear and a roof over their heads. If they attend church and school, they have begun to extend that trust to others like teachers and ministers. This ability to trust others is a huge part of them feeling safe in their world. That feeling of safety in turn, allows them to learn and grow more easily.

War undermines trust. Everything they have come to believe they can trust may fail them in a short amount of time and in possibly dramatic ways. They can easily go from a situation where they knew exactly what time dinner would be each night to perhaps being unsure when there will be enough food available to eat at all.

Children may suddenly feel as if there is no one they can fully trust as the changes and hardships of war take away any sense of security they had developed for trusting people.

Adolescents are often old enough and mature enough to understand they can still trust those they have trusted before. Teens know a sudden lack of food is not due to the untrustworthiness of a parent, but because of the hardships of war. They may, however, develop a serious mistrust of those on the other side of the war and even God.

Trust may be destroyed quickly, but it is built back over time. Children will again learn to trust adults who are always honest with them and keep their promises. Adults need to be incredibly careful to avoid lying to children. Hard truths can be shared in age appropriate ways to prevent emotionally overwhelming young children. If an adult must break a promise to a young person struggling with trust issues, it is important to communicate as early as possible that the promise will have to be broken and the reasons why. When possible, an attempt should be made to keep the promise at a later date.

### **Addressing Empathy**

Christians rarely use the word empathy, but it is a key component of the type of love God commands Christians to have for everyone - even their enemies. Empathy is the ability to understand the feelings of another. Empathy does not require you to necessarily agree with those feelings, but it does require an attempt to see life from the other person's point of view. Empathy is crucial for loving others, because without it, brain science has found our minds tend to view those whom we see as very different from us in the same way we would inanimate objects.<sup>136</sup> When people are viewed as being the same as inanimate objects, it makes it easier to justify doing horrid things to them - after all a lamp or a book cannot feel pain or suffer. Empathy reminds us of the humanity of others and can act as a deterrent to harming them.

The story of the Good Samaritan gives us excellent examples of empathy, the lack of empathy and the resulting impact on loving one's neighbor as God commands. In the story, the priest and the Levite saw the badly beaten man. If asked, they would have probably said that they loved him. In fact, under other circumstances, they might have even tried to help him in some way. At the moment they saw the injured man, however, they could not imagine themselves in his place or feel empathy for him. The Good Samaritan, however, felt empathy for the man - even though he was supposed to hate him because the man was a Jew. We do not know for sure what he thought, but it is probably safe to assume he reflected upon what he would feel like under the same circumstances. That empathy made him do the truly loving thing and give the man the help he needed.

Although it does not excuse the ungodly choices of people, it can help children to be reminded that "hurt people hurt people"<sup>137</sup> People who live a life surrounded by loving, godly people rarely lash out in the violent, horrific ways some people do during a war. Usually, the people who are doing those horrific things have been hurt horribly themselves. Once again, pain is no excuse for sinful behavior. Recognizing the pain in the life of a

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<sup>136</sup> Simon and Gutsell, "Recognizing Humanity"

<sup>137</sup> Terkeurst, "Forgiving What You Can't Forget" p.53

perpetrator of harm does however make it a bit easier to have compassion and a form of empathy for them. Empathy in this situation does not mean you agree with the choices that were made, but that you empathize with the pain they have experienced in their lives.

As an abstract concept, empathy can be difficult to teach - especially to young children, who are still concrete thinkers. In addition to Godly Play and Bible lessons, there are empathy activities that can be done to help young people understand empathy, as well as explore ideas like prejudice and bias that can hamper efforts to feel empathy and love for others. Carefully guided service learning opportunities can also help children develop empathy. At times, it may help to begin by serving those for whom it will be easiest for young people to feel empathy. Over time, opportunities can be given to serve those for whom it will be more difficult for them to love and serve - including those supporting the opposite side during the war.

### **Addressing Locus of Control and Obedience**

Locus of control is the degree to which people believe that they, and not external forces, have control over the outcome of events in their lives. Young people with a healthy locus of control understand what they can and cannot control in life. Christian young people also understand what God is supposed to control and what He expects them to attempt to control.

Unfortunately, war can confuse young people about the issues of both control and obedience. They may have been unable to control anything that happened or any choices that were made. They may have been asked to obey orders that were in direct opposition to God's commands. As discussed earlier, they may have also developed a victim mentality and believe bad things will always happen and there is nothing they can do to ever improve outcomes.

Confusing the matter even further is that often ideas about control and obedience are addressed from a secular point of view - even by some Christians. This also leaves young people with critical unanswered faith questions that can lead to doubts. If these doubts are left unanswered, they can lead to an eventual rejection of God. Perhaps the biggest of these questions is, "If God loves me/us, why did He allow these horrible things to happen?" Or in other words, "If God is in control, why did he choose not to control the actions of the people who caused the war or did horrible things during it?"

While we may not understand all of God's thinking about a particular incident, like a war, there are general principles that apply. Perhaps the most important concept to help young people understand God's locus of control is to understand the concept that God gives us free will. He did not create robots that He carefully programmed to make only correct choices. God wants us to choose to love and obey Him. Unfortunately, some people use their free will to reject God and His commands.

When people choose to sin, their actions can create negative consequences for themselves and others. It is the reality of living in a fallen world. It is also why Jesus was so passionate



about Christians teaching others about what God wants for them and from them. When people choose to become Christians, they attempt to make more godly choices. It only makes sense that if we shared our faith with more people, more people might be making better choices. If these and other concepts are carefully and accurately explained, young people can begin reconciling their understanding of God, the world and their own locus of control.

While some of the theological issues to be explored are abstract and difficult for young children to truly understand, Godly Play can give them opportunities to begin exploring the ideas of sin, free will, God's love and other relevant topics. Older children and teens can benefit from Bible lessons and activities exploring the various aspects of the topic. Both young children and teens will also need guided practice in how to make godly decisions and to act responsibly through the lens of a biblical worldview.

### **Addressing Guilt**

Young people who have experienced a war and its aftermath, may have feelings of guilt. This may be because of things they said or did at some point. Often, however, this guilt can have no basis in reality. How young people understand mistakes and sins can play a role in any guilt they may feel. It is not uncommon for young people to feel survivor guilt. Survivor guilt often results when young people believe they experienced fewer negative consequences than other people they know who had similar experiences. It can be particularly pronounced if someone they know was killed or severely injured in an incident in which they too were involved, but survived or had more minor injuries.

Ultimately, survivor guilt is the mistaken belief one could have somehow prevented the other person from being seriously injured or killed. In the vast majority of cases survivor guilt is felt by someone who actually could not have done anything to prevent the negative incident or its outcome. Adults who experience survivor guilt often engage in self harm in an attempt to make the outcomes more "fair". This can also take the form of self sabotage in young people.<sup>138</sup> They may, for example, purposefully do poorly on an important test to avoid receiving the additional benefits from getting good grades, thereby making their survivor guilt even worse.

Bible studies and conversations about mistakes, sins, guilt, repentance and forgiveness can help. It can also prove helpful to help young people closely examine the instances creating their guilt and determine what, if any, influence they actually had on the outcome. In the rare case that a young person was indeed guilty of committing a sin, helping the young person repent and make atonement can also help him or her process and heal from the incident.

For those rare young people who participated in something during the war that they personally consider horrific, the issue can be that they cannot forgive themselves. Ironically, they may accept God's forgiveness (or believe that they have), while still stating

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<sup>138</sup> Williams & Poijula, "The PTSD Workbook" pg. 173

they cannot forgive themselves. When ministering to these young people, it can be helpful to remember that often when people say they cannot forgive themselves, what they often mean is that they do not believe it is actually possible (for anyone) to forgive what they did.<sup>139</sup> Of course, this also means that on some level, they also doubt God's forgiveness.

### **Addressing Joy and Happiness**

Young people who have endured the trauma of war may struggle understanding joy and happiness. Happiness is an emotion that is largely dependent upon circumstances. When things go well, children and teens may experience happiness. Our brains need to cycle between negative emotions and positive ones like happiness on a regular basis. If not, our brains can become "stuck" in negative emotions and find it difficult to feel positive emotions. Feeling happy can help prevent young people from becoming "stuck" in anger or sadness.

Young people may actually feel guilty that they feel happy when everyone around them is suffering because of the war. They should be encouraged to be grateful for whatever made them happy. Children should be encouraged to embrace the emotion of happiness, while understanding that others may not feel the same way. They should also be taught how to be respectful of others in their expression of happiness.

Joy is unlike happiness in that joy can be experienced even when bad things happen. Joy is a choice and thus can be controlled. God commands us to be joyful in all circumstances. Our joy is based, not on our conditions, but in being beloved children of God. In the Bible, there are many scriptures about joy and examples of people who expressed joy even when their circumstances were unfortunate. With appropriate discussions and emotional support, most young people should be capable of experiencing happiness from time to time and joy on a consistent basis. Those who still struggle after several weeks of interventions may need the help of a professional to experience positive emotions again.

### **Addressing Godly Relationships**

War puts additional stress on every relationship. Relationships that were struggling before a war may be further damaged or even broken by the additional stress. In addition, teens may look to romantic relationships to ease the pain and isolation of war. A sense of impending doom and the trauma resulting from experiences during a war can make it more likely adolescents will ignore God's boundaries and commands for those romantic relationships. These factors, combined with the confused moral compass discussed earlier, can mean young people may be involved in a number of unhealthy and/or ungodly relationships with family, friends and romantic interests. They may have no idea how to make those relationships healthier and more godly.

The best way to help young people reset their relationships is to examine God's original perfect plan for them. How did God intend for parents and children to relate? Siblings?

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<sup>139</sup> Terkeurst, "Forgiving What You Can't Forget" pg. 243

Friends? People who are dating? What was God's original perfect plan for marriage? By setting a godly standard for these relationships, it will be easier to analyze the various relationships of students by comparing them to the standards God set. When areas are identified that need correction, strategies can be developed to help both the student and the other person in the relationship make needed changes.

### **Addressing Gratitude**

It may sound odd to discuss gratitude in the context of ministering to children who have experienced a war. Gratitude, however, has a strong tie to acknowledging that God is alive and working in our world today. Encouraging young people to focus on their blessings, rather than constantly thinking about all that was lost, can also help them move towards a more positive outlook on life.

Studies have found that gratitude not only encourages positive thinking, but also reduces the use of negative words.<sup>140</sup> Gratitude also alters hormones that control stress and dopamine and serotonin levels.<sup>141</sup> In short, gratitude helps people feel less stressed and happier. Encouraging young people to focus on finding things for which to be grateful may also help them experience more positive emotions and moods.

Christianity encourages gratitude. In fact, the Bible repeatedly commands Christians to be thankful to God for anything and everything.<sup>142</sup> Helping young people analyze their experiences and find areas for which they should thank God can shift their attitudes. The exercise can also help them understand the various ways God worked to help them survive incredibly difficult circumstances. With time and encouragement, even those who blame God for refusing to stop the war can begin to see how sin caused many of the problems, but God was with them through those difficult times.

### **Addressing Entitlement**

When children become victims of a war, there are often well-meaning adults who want to help minimize the negative impact the war has had on young people. This aid may go beyond providing basic necessities. Children may be given toys, special experiences their families normally couldn't afford and other treats. When this assistance lasts for a long period of time or is excessive, children can become entitled. They can also develop a victim mentality when they realize their life improves in many ways when people view them as a victim.

It is important to remind young people that God does not intend for them to define themselves as perpetual victims, even though they have been a victim of war. The hardships endured by early Christians like the Apostle Paul were great, but they defined themselves as children of God, not perpetual victims. God also does not want people to

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<sup>140</sup> Chowdhury, "The Neuroscience of Gratitude and How It Affects Anxiety and Grief"

<sup>141</sup> Ibid

<sup>142</sup> Ephesians 5:20

constantly receive from others when they are able to work and obtain these items for themselves.

Often the best way to combat entitlement and reinforce the need to work hard and serve others is to encourage young people to plan and execute service projects. This can take the form of helping other victims of the war or doing something for those who have helped them in some way. After they have served others, it is crucial to have a time of reflection. Discuss how their hearts, words and actions are impacted by being served versus serving others.

### **Addressing God's Role in War**

As mentioned earlier, one of the biggest faith struggles young people have is the struggle to understand why God did not stop people from doing horrible things during the war and its aftermath. They may admit they are struggling to “forgive” God for his role in what happened.<sup>143</sup> This can be a topic with which some will struggle for the rest of their lives if not properly addressed. It can also cause them to reject God entirely.

It is important to revisit the overarching message of the Bible when helping young people understand this important topic. They need the background of the Creation and the Fall to understand the role sin plays in the bad things that happen in our world. They need to know that perfection will be restored in Heaven. Most importantly, they need to be taught the role free will plays. Because God gave us free will (as opposed to creating robots He programmed), He will not take that away. He may mitigate the poor choices of some on occasion, but that is not always the case.

Of course, the question then becomes, “Why does God seem to intervene and protect some people from harm and not others?” This can be difficult to explain as thoroughly as some young people would like. We know that God often has a different perspective than humans. God views situations from an eternal perspective. He also has wisdom that is beyond our comprehension. Sometimes we later understand how God turned something bad into something good. At other times, we have to reconcile ourselves to not fully understanding God's ways until we are in Heaven.

Ultimately, God does not need to be “forgiven” because God does not sin. The bad things that happened were not God's fault. They occurred because we live in a fallen, sinful world. The real enemy when bad things happen is Satan. We need to be careful to avoid blaming God for the problems sin causes in our world.

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<sup>143</sup> Terkeurst, “Forgiving What You Can't Forget” pg. 164



## Chapter 9 - Mourning

Young people who have experienced a war and its aftermath are often in mourning. Those mourning for people who died during the war are easily noticed. Even those whose family has been separated by the circumstances of war normally receive emotional support for their (hopefully temporary) loss. Those who have not lost family members or friends, may still be in mourning. They may be mourning the loss of their home or belongings. They may mourn being separated from friends or having to change schools. Some have had to leave behind family pets or are no longer able to participate in favorite activities. Children mourning other losses need as much support for their mourning as young people who have lost loved ones during the war.

Each young person will mourn differently. The way they mourn may be influenced by their age, culture, religion, family traditions and personality, as well as what loss is being mourned and how they perceive their mourning will be accepted by others. If young people, for example, believe others may tease them for mourning the loss of a previous school, they may not share that they are mourning with anyone. This can mean they are suffering emotional pain without the emotional support normally provided in mourning by friends and family.

### Symptoms of Mourning in Children

Children may have reactions when mourning that appear strange or even inappropriate to adults. These behaviors are actually a reflection of the inability of children to stay in an intense emotional state for long periods of time. While adults can stay in a constant state of mourning for about a year, young people will mourn for a short time and then take a break from it.<sup>144</sup> They can cycle in and out of mourning for months and even years.

If you notice young people who have experienced some form of loss during a war and are exhibiting the following behaviors, it can be safe to assume they may be in mourning.

- Appearing unemotional while constantly announcing the loss to anyone they encounter. It is believed this is the child's way of gauging the reactions of others in order to decide what his or her own reaction should be.<sup>145</sup>
- Playing games reenacting the loss. As with the war in general, play is used by children to attempt to understand what has occurred.
- Asking the same questions about the loss over and over. Researchers believe children asking the same questions over and over are doing so to compare responses and make sure they are being told the truth.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Osterweis et al., "Bereavement During Childhood and Adolescence"

<sup>145</sup> Ibid

<sup>146</sup> Ibid

- Acting as if nothing has happened. This most likely means the child is taking an emotional break from mourning.<sup>147</sup>
- Angry outbursts or misbehavior.
- Crying.
- Looking for a replacement for whom or what was lost.

### **Developmental Stages in Mourning**

Research has found that like many things in childhood, mourning is impacted by a child's developmental stage. While the ages in these stages can vary slightly from child to child, it is generally believed all stages are reached in the same order. Studies on grief and mourning have found differences in the way children process loss - especially death - during the various developmental stages.<sup>148</sup>

- Birth to three years. These children are considered too immature to have any understanding of loss - particularly death.<sup>149</sup> This does not mean, however, they will fail to notice the absence of a dependable parent or caregiver who dies or is suddenly absent for a period of time.
- Three to five years. Children in this developmental stage think of death as only being less alive or asleep.<sup>150</sup> For Christians, mourning is more complex, because scripture teaches us that the dead are merely awaiting Judgment Day, when they will be resurrected and spend eternity in either Heaven or Hell. Children in subsequent developmental stages will have an understanding of death that is perhaps more accurate in a scientific way, but need to be reassured of the existence of a soul, the resurrection of everyone on Judgment Day and the possibility of spending eternity in Heaven.
- Five to nine years. Children in this stage understand the finality of the death of a body, but think it only happens to other people<sup>151</sup>. However, some children in this age group may seek reassurances that the death of someone they know is not somehow "contagious" and will result in the death of a parent or themselves.
- Ten years and beyond. Once children reach this stage, they are able to understand death and loss in the same ways as adults<sup>152</sup>.

### **Addressing Mourning**

When ministering to a child who may be mourning a loss of some type, it is crucial that the young person is reassured that his or her mourning is "normal". The fear of being viewed as different, can make it more difficult for children to mourn their losses - especially if the

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid

<sup>148</sup> Ibid

<sup>149</sup> Osterweis et al., "Bereavement During Childhood and Adolescence"

<sup>150</sup> Ibid

<sup>151</sup> Ibid

<sup>152</sup> Ibid

loss is not the death of a loved one. Young people in mourning should be comforted, while also encouraged to express their emotions. Allow crying as it helps young people express their emotions and can release oxytocin and endorphins into the body naturally. These chemicals produced when crying can ease both physical and emotional pain.<sup>153</sup> Be careful to avoid using food - especially sweets - as an item to provide comfort. This can lead to unhealthy eating habits when food is considered a coping strategy for loss.

If young people want to talk about their grief and mourn any loss, avoid critiquing what they are mourning or how they are feeling about the loss. It may seem inconsequential to you, but mourning is emotional, not intellectual. Likewise, children may feel different emotions than adults when mourning. There is no "correct" emotional response. Young people should be counseled to avoid making unwise or sinful choices as a reaction to their mourning.

Some young people may be reluctant to discuss what they are feeling. Give them opportunities to talk with you, but do not attempt to force them to discuss it with you. Being patient and available usually works best with those who are reluctant to share their emotions. When a young person does begin talking about a loss, listen actively. Avoid distractions and give signs you are listening carefully to what is being said. Asking clarifying questions is fine, but in general allow the child to lead the conversation.

When working with multiple young people mourning the same losses, it can be tempting to compare how each is mourning. This can put additional pressure on children who are already under emotional stress. There is no correct way to mourn and therefore one cannot compare the emotions and behaviors of different young people.

During a war and its aftermath, it can be tempting to make promises to young people that their losses will be restored. Avoid making promises that you do not have the power to keep. Adults should be careful to have conversations about hypothetical situations in private. Children often hear more than adults realize, without necessarily having the ability to thoroughly comprehend what is being said. This can cause children to become frightened or to begin mourning losses that may never actually occur.

If you are ministering to young people who are mourning someone or something you too are mourning, it is acceptable to show your own emotions. It can be good for children to see a healthy expression of sadness. Becoming teary, crying or admitting to sadness or frustration is appropriate. If, however, you are going to have a total emotional meltdown in which you appear out of control, it is best to do it in private. Children who have experienced a war need to feel the adults caring for them will be able to help them navigate the next crisis or problem. When adults appear unable to control their emotions, thoughts and actions, this can cause young people to lose any feelings of safety and security that those adults normally provide them.

War and its aftermath can cause young people to feel the loss of all sorts of people, places, things and experiences. The losses may be occurring regularly at first, but can continue until life returns to some sense of normalcy. As with other aspects of processing and

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<sup>153</sup> Newhouse, "Is Crying Good For You?"



healing from war, young people may find themselves mourning previous losses months and even years later. If a young person does not seem to go in and out of mourning and/or is unable to function while grieving, a medical professional should be consulted.

## Chapter - 10 Signs of Healing

Healing from the trauma caused by war is often uneven. As mentioned earlier, the intense response immediately following a specific incident can fade after a few weeks under the right circumstances. Some young people will appear to get better and then months or years later manifest new symptoms - often because of entering a new developmental stage. Some children will only exhibit trauma related symptoms when they encounter triggers. Others may hide symptoms to avoid worrying the adults in their lives.

As a result, it can be difficult to know if a particular young person is beginning to heal from the trauma he or she experienced during a war. In general, it is best to revisit earlier strategies periodically - especially if new symptoms appear or old ones fade and then reappear. There are signs that interventions are having a positive impact on young people and that they may indeed be healing from any trauma. These too may vary from young person to young person, but the more of these positive signs you notice, the more likely healing is occurring.

- Reduction in any previous trauma symptoms - physical, psychological, behavioral and/or spiritual (See Chapter 1 for complete list of possible symptoms.)
- Returning to age appropriate behaviors - especially when encountering unfamiliar people or places
- Showing a willingness to do things independently- especially exploring a new environment
- Showing appropriate emotional responses for a given situation - neither overreacting or under reacting
- Creating and maintaining healthy friendships
- Handles separations and reunions with parents or care givers in age appropriate ways
- Handles temporary separations well
- Appearing to have a healthy sense of self
- Exhibiting an age appropriate amount of self control
- Exhibiting fewer incidents of hyper vigilance
- Exhibiting a sense of relationship with God through prayer and Bible study (Note: For young people being raised in Christian homes this will hopefully be a return to a previous faith in God. Those not being raised in Christian homes may struggle to develop faith in God, but doing so can make their healing easier and more complete.)

Helping young people recover from the trauma of war is a journey. You and your ministry need to be willing to help them on their journey for as long as necessary. This can make it more likely that they will be able to become who God created them to be in spite of their experiences during a war.

## Chapter 11 - Godly Play

Godly Play is an approach that attempts to combine aspects of the Montessori method with religious education. Jerome Berryman and Sofia Cavalletti began developing the method in Italy in 1971.<sup>154</sup> Pediatric chaplains have found Godly Play to be particularly useful in ministering to critically and chronically ill children. They believe it allows children to better place their emotions and questions within the context of a spiritual discussion.<sup>155</sup> Those in other types of ministry to children have found Godly Play is also helpful when wanting to engage younger children in spiritual conversations within the context of play.

While we cannot explore Godly Play in depth within the context of this book, there are a few general principles that can help you incorporate godly play into how you minister to children who have experienced a war. Godly Play requires the use of objects that represent people, animals, things and ideas in the Bible's and in life today. You can purchase Godly Play sets or create your own with handmade or purchased figures dressed in biblical and modern clothing, representations of various objects in the Bible - like animals or everyday items - and a play surface that a child could use while playing with the objects. The surface should be large enough to accommodate several objects, but small enough that it can be managed by a bed ridden child.

Once you have gathered the objects the child can use, you must decide the beginning theme or Bible story with which you would like to frame the child's play. For example, you may want the child to explore prayer through his or her play, or the story of Creation. Each play session has a script the adult can use to guide the child's play. You can find many of these scripts online for free or write your own. (Some scripts found online may need to have the theology within them modified.)

The typical Godly Play script consists of the adult asking questions like, "I wonder..." followed by the child using one or more of the supplied items to answer the question in ways that have personal meaning. When using Godly Play to explore a Bible story, the adult must find ways to engage the child without altering the story itself. This can be done by asking the child to guess who certain figures or items might represent in the story or using objects to make applications from the story to his or her own experiences. Bible stories are

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<sup>154</sup> Spirit Play, "About Godly Play"

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

generally greatly simplified from the normal version that would be told in a Bible class setting.

Children who have experienced a war can be encouraged to reveal their emotions and how they view God working in their situation during a war and/or its aftermath by asking questions like, “I wonder where you see yourself in this story?” or “I wonder what is something we could ask God in our prayer time?” Some children will benefit from slightly deeper questions like, “I wonder what emotions the people in the story were feeling? With which person do you have the most emotions in common?” or “I wonder if David felt a bit scared when he stepped out to fight Goliath? What would you tell him about being afraid and being brave?”

Godly Play is often done with individual children to give them more opportunities to share their thoughts and emotions. At times, the child to whom you are ministering may have a sibling close by when you are playing with the child. Godly Play is formatted in such a way that you can use it with multiple children. This is often accomplished by having the children alternate using figures and objects to answer your questions. Using this method will allow you to perhaps minister to both the original child and his or her siblings, while engaging in godly play with them. While Godly Play can also be used with a small group of unrelated children, the number of children per adult and play set should be no more than three or four. Using Godly Play with larger groups, while technically possible, does not give each child enough time to share without the others becoming bored.

## **Godly Play Supplies**

There are multiple websites dedicated to Godly Play. To make it easier for you to assemble your own Godly Play sets, the information below should help you assemble a basic Godly Play set. It is not necessary to purchase every item to begin engaging children in Godly Play. You or your ministry can begin by making or buying a play surface and the figures and small items that can be used in multiple ways. There are websites with ideas and patterns for making every item from craft supplies. Prepackaged Godly Play sets are available for purchase online, but the cost is usually higher than if you assembled your own.

## **Supply List**

- Small, portable, shallow sandbox
- Playmats representing grasslands and ancient cities

- Small dolls or figurines dressed in appropriate clothing to represent people in Bible stories and modern stories
- Small trees, animals, ancient tents and clay houses, clay jars and other items in scale to the dolls or figurines. The actual items needed will depend upon the Bible story you are teaching.
- Small items in the various Parables like pearl, seeds, sheep, shepherd, donkey, people, etc.
- Water and containers to represent seas and rivers, boats, fishing nets, fish
- Bibles
- Art supplies like paper, crayons, markers, journals, paints, scissors, clay, glue sticks, etc.

### **Writing Scripts for Godly Play**

It is possible to find pre-written scripts for Godly Play online for free or to purchase. Some of these scripts may not meet your needs. Below is the basic framework for writing a Bible story script, a Parable script and a script revolving around a theme. Scripts are generally memorized and told from memory.

#### **Writing a Godly Play Script for a Bible Story**

- Read the story in multiple versions of the Bible - including a children's Bible.
- Determine what play surface and items you will need for the child to act out the story.
- Write the story as simply as possible.
- Ask the following "wondering" questions during the script
  - I wonder what is your favorite part of the story?
  - I wonder what part of this story is most important?
  - I wonder where God is trying to speak to you in the story and what He wants you to know?
  - I wonder if there is something God wants you to do after you hear this story?

#### **Writing a Godly Play Script for a Parable**

- Read the story in multiple versions of the Bible - including a children's Bible.
- Determine what play surface and items you will need for the child to act out the story.

- Write the story as simply as possible.
- Ask the following “wondering” questions during the script
  - I wonder what this (pearl, mustard seed, etc.) could represent?
  - I wonder what God wants you to learn from this Parable?
  - I wonder if there is something God wants you to do after hearing the Parable?

### **Writing a Godly Play Script for a Theme**

- Find several Bible verses and at least one Bible story that apply to the theme.
- Think about how the child with whom you will be playing would interact with or encounter the theme in his or her life.
- Determine what play items the child could use in play. You may want to include items to represent a Bible story or a real world scene.
- Write a very short story that includes the child reflecting on the theme in the scripture or Bible story in his or her life.
- Ask the following “wondering” questions during the script.
  - I wonder what God thinks about (the theme)?
  - I wonder what this verse/Bible story teaches us about the theme?
  - I wonder what (the theme) would look like today?
  - I wonder what questions you have about (the theme)?
  - I wonder what you learned about (the theme) that you did not know before/had forgotten/need to practice more/would teach someone else?

### **Godly Play Script Topics for Children of War**

It is virtually impossible to find Godly Play scripts designed to specifically address the spiritual needs of children who have experienced a war. There are, however, scripts which use various Bible stories, parables or themes that would be applicable to children of war with perhaps some minor changes. If you cannot find a script you like online, you can use the templates above to write one using the chosen story, parable or theme from the list below and adding any elements that are impacting the children with whom you are playing. (Note: This list is not all inclusive. You may find additional stories, parables or themes you believe will help the children with whom you are playing.)

## **Bible Stories for Godly Play**

- The Creation and Fall
- Tower of Babel
- Abraham and Lot (resolving conflict over wells, etc.)
- Jacob Reunites with Esau (will need to summarize what has happened between the two brothers before the reconciliation)
- Joshua
- Israelites Escape From Egypt (and any wilderness stories you believe mirror what the children have experienced as refugees)
- Ruth
- David and Goliath
- David Spares Saul's Life Twice
- Solomon Asks for Wisdom
- Elijah and Mt. Carmel
- Naboth's Vineyard
- Jonah
- Shadrach, Meeshach and Abednego
- Daniel and the Lions' Den

## **Parables for Godly Play**

- The Mustard Seed - Matthew 13:31-32
- The Sower - Matthew 13:1-23
- The Lamp - Matthew 5:14-16
- The Lost Sheep - Matthew 18:10-14
- The Unforgiving Servant - Matthew 18:23-35
- The Prodigal Son - Luke 15:11-32
- The Talents - Matthew 25:14-30
- The Good Samaritan - Luke 10:29-37
- The Persistent Widow - Luke 18:1-8

## **Themes for Godly Play**

- Prayer
- Forgiveness
- Love (including love for one's enemies)

- Hope
- Joy
- Sadness
- Peace
- Patience
- Perseverance
- Faithfulness
- Obedience
- Wisdom (including specific verses from Proverbs)
- God
- Why bad things happen
- Self control
- Godly conflict resolution
- Generosity
- Emotions (including specific emotions like anger, fear, etc.)
- Trust

### **Ending a Godly Play Lesson**

Jerome Berryman, one of the original creators of Godly Play, suggests giving children opportunities to explore what they have learned in a Godly Play lesson by creating works of art.<sup>156</sup> He suggests allowing them to create a piece of art about the current lesson or any previous Bible lesson. He believes this gives them the freedom to revisit topics with which they are still struggling or are trying to process.<sup>157</sup>

If a Godly Play session is conducted in a classroom setting, Berryman suggests releasing students from the class one at a time. When each child is called to the door of the classroom, the teacher should take a couple of minutes to have a private conversation with the child. Berryman believes the conversation should reflect the teacher's belief in the ability of the child to make good choices, positive feedback on the child's participation during the lesson and reassurances of the teacher's love for the child.<sup>158</sup> These mini conversations give each child some critical individual attention.

While Godly Play is not a substitute for a robust Bible class curriculum, it does have applications that can prove beneficial to children who have experienced a war and its

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<sup>156</sup> Godly Play p.89

<sup>157</sup> Ibid p.89

<sup>158</sup> Ibid p.89



aftermath. As such, it can be an important part of addressing the spiritual issues these children may be facing.

## **Chapter 12 - Bible Lessons for Older Children and Teens**

Older children and teens need to understand how the Bible can help them process and heal from their experiences during a war. They also need to learn how obeying God's commands can help them reach their full godly potential. Young people need to understand God's perfect plan for the world and how sin filled the world with problems. They need to understand God's character and what He wants for them and from them.

It is important to remember that the young people to whom you minister may have no Bible knowledge. They may need help even believing that God is real. Launching into advanced biblical themes with young people who do not believe in God can leave them confused. Often, it is better to start with a few basics like God's overarching story in the Bible including Creation, sin and salvation.

The idea of God as the source of all wisdom can also appeal to young people with no previous exposure to God. The book of Proverbs is great because it is very practical and comparatively easy to understand. Explaining how various proverbs relate to either what did or should have happened during the war can help them see the wisdom of God in ways a general lecture may not.

Once young people are somewhat comfortable with the basics mentioned above, it can help to explore various themes that can aid in their processing and healing from experiences during a war. The themes can be explored through both Bible stories and scriptures unattached to stories. Activities can be added to teach young people important Christian life skills related to the theme. Many older children and teens will also benefit from guided practice or creating items to help them continue to process and use the wisdom learned from God about the theme.

Below, you will find sample outlines for Bible lessons designed to help older children and teens explore various themes that will help them process and heal from the trauma of war. These lessons can also help answer questions and doubts that arose in part because of the war. These lessons are not meant to exclude other quality Bible lessons from other sources. They are merely provided as an aid to those who would like all of their resources in one volume.

## Hope

**Opening Activity:** Explain that hope is the feeling of expectation and desire for something to happen in the future. Give Bible students a couple of minutes to jot down their hopes for the future. Have students share items from their list they believe others their age would list as well. Create a master list from their suggestions that everyone can see. Ask them what might happen that would cause them to give up hope on something that is on their list of hopes for the future. Capture their answers where everyone can see them.

**Key Scriptures:** Genesis 3, Psalm 2, Isaiah 53, Luke 2:22-38

### Important Lesson Points:

- Sin created the need for the Messiah
- Jesus did not come to Earth immediately
- Bad things continued to happen off and on for several thousand years before Jesus finally came
- God sent prophets to remind the people to have hope in the future
- Anna and Simeon realized what a special blessing it was to see the Messiah, but they lived in hope even before they knew they would meet him
- Our Hope still rests in the future and Jesus
- That hope is eternal life in Heaven with God
- Hope on Earth rests on trusting God to keep His promises

**Skills Activity:** Have Bible students identify a Bible verse that is encouraging to them/gives them hope. Provide various art supplies. Encourage them to create a work of art incorporating the scripture they chose. Providing nicer art supplies will make it more likely they will display the finished work of art where they can see it. You may want to provide stencils as one of the supplies. Some young people are uncomfortable creating art so things they can trace or copy will make it more likely they will be happy with their finished project and display the scripture in their homes.

## Meaning and Purpose

**Opening Activity:** Ask students to name people whom they believe knew what they wanted to do with their life from a young age. You may want to do a little research before class to find people from the Bible students' culture who fit the criteria. Often those in the

fields of medicine, the arts and ministry remember wanting to work in those fields since they were children.

Choose one or two of the people the young people in your class seem to know the best. Ask them what impact knowing what they wanted to do from an early age had on their ultimate success. Have them give their theories as to why they believe it made their ultimate success more likely. Record their answers where everyone can see them.

**Key Scriptures:** Isaiah 40:3, Malachi 3:1, Luke 1:5-25 and 57-66, Matthew 3:1-17, Matthew 14:1-12, Ephesians 2:10

**Important Lesson Points:**

- John the Baptist knew from childhood the good works God wanted him to do
- He still had the free will to avoid doing them, but chose to fulfill the purpose God had planned for him
- Knowing and fulfilling his purpose gave John's life meaning
- Having a life full of meaning and purpose did not mean John's life was perfect
- John continued to fulfill God's purpose for his life, even though he knew it would get him killed
- God has purposes for your lives
- These purposes include becoming a Christian and following Him, doing the good deeds He has planned for us by serving others and sharing our faith
- When we fulfill God's purposes for our lives, our lives will have more meaning
- Even if we have purpose and meaning in our lives from obeying God, it does not mean our lives will be perfect
- We should continue to fulfill God's purposes for our lives even if doing so means we will suffer more hardships

**Skills Activity:** This lesson can be followed by one of several basic activities. If the young people listening to this lesson are not yet Christians, spend the activity time sharing your faith with them. Tell them the overarching story of the Bible. Share with them about Jesus. Teach them what God wants them to do to become a Christian.

If the majority of your Bible students are already Christians, this lesson provides a great opportunity to help them discover the gifts God has given them to serve Him. Focus for now on more concrete gifts and talents mentioned earlier in this book. Once young people

have identified at least one gift, help them create a realistic plan for developing the gift and using it to serve others.

For young people who are already using their gifts to serve God, spend time helping them discover natural ways for them to share their faith with others. More advanced students can benefit from discussing common issues people may raise when they share their faith and ways to answer them well.

## **Right and Wrong**

**Opening Activity:** Read an article from a news source about someone accused of a crime. Then read an article about something someone has done that some people believe was wrong and others believe was right. Ask Bible students how the people in the two articles decided something was right or wrong. Then ask them to think of other ways people decide if doing something is right or wrong. Capture their answers where everyone can see.

**Key Scriptures:** 2 Samuel 11 and 12, John 14:15, James 4:1-2, New Testament verses with commands that would apply to situations your Bible students encounter or with which they may be currently struggling

### **Important Lesson Points:**

- King David wanted to be with Bathsheba even though he knew it was wrong
- David knew it was wrong because he followed the commands of God as the ultimate definition of what was wrong and what was right
- Most of the rulers of that time would not have thought David did anything wrong
- One sinful choice led to David making more sinful choices
- David repented once he was confronted with his sins
- David suffered earthly consequences for his sins, even though he had repented
- God forgave David when he repented
- We need to measure our choices against God's commands to determine what is right and wrong
- When our culture disagrees with God's definition of right and wrong, we need to obey God - even if it makes us unpopular or cause other problems for us

**Skills Activity:** Create a game using scenarios that would be familiar to your Bible students. In each case, they must decide what is right or wrong. You may want to begin

with obvious choices and gradually make them more difficult. Encourage students to give examples from Bible stories or find scriptures that support their decision. If possible, cover as many of the possible sins your Bible students might be tempted to commit as possible in your scenarios.

## **Anger and Forgiveness**

**Opening Activity:** Give Bible students newspapers or copies of various news articles. Ask them to find those where anger played a role in what happened. Have them speculate how things might have gone differently if one or more of the people involved in the incident had controlled their anger. Ask them to share some of the bad things that can happen when people are angry. Capture the list where everyone can see it. Then have them add to the list the bad things that can happen when people hold on to their anger (grudge, resentment, etc.). Make sure they include the bad things that can happen to the person who is angry on the list.

**Key Scriptures:** Judges 13-16, Ephesians 4:26-32

### **Important Lesson Points:**

- Samson had a lot of problems in his life that were created in part because of his inability to control his temper
- Anger is not a sin
- God does not want us to hold on to our anger
- God wants us to avoid sinning when we are angry
- God wants us to forgive others
- When we stay angry and sin in our anger, it ultimately hurts us more than it hurts the people with whom we are angry

**Skills Activity:** Ask Bible students if there is anything they would add to their list of the consequences of anger from the life of Samson. Share with them the research from this book on how anger can impact the health of those who are angry and add those items to the list. Explain that since anger is a natural emotion, we will all feel angry at times. The goal is to quickly address and lessen those feelings so we do not sin while we are angry or allow the anger to become a grudge, resentment or hate.

Have students share some of the strategies they use to get control of themselves when they are angry. Capture their suggestions where everyone can see them. Share any other strategies mentioned in Appendix 3 of this book. Help them remove any strategies that are ungodly from the list.

Ask students which strategies they believe would be helpful. Have them choose a strategy they believe they would need to practice in order to be able to remember and use it when they start feeling angry. If time allows, have them share realistic scenarios they believe would cause them to feel angry. Have them choose which strategies might work best in that particular situation. (Students may have different answers.)

## **Empathy**

**Opening Activity:** Read a news or other true story about something someone on the other side of the war has suffered or is suffering. Be careful to omit any details that would make Bible students realize it is someone from the other side during the war. Make sure to choose a story you know will appeal to your students' empathy. After reading the story, ask them how they feel about the story and the person who was suffering. After a few students have shared their feelings, reveal the background of the person suffering. Ask your Bible students if their feelings changed even a little bit when they realized the person was on the other side of the war.

**Key Scriptures:** Luke 10:25-37, Romans 12:15, Matthew 7:12

### **Important Lesson Points:**

- Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another
- The priest and the Levite did not have empathy for the man who was beaten
- The priest and the Levite's lack of empathy allowed them to be more concerned about their personal agendas than the badly beaten man
- The Good Samaritan should have seen the beaten man as his enemy as the Samaritans and Jews generally hated one another
- The Good Samaritan's empathy allowed him to think about how he would feel if he were the beaten man
- The Good Samaritan's empathy made him consider what he would want someone to do for him if he were badly beaten

- The Good Samaritan then did for the beaten man what he would want someone to do for him
- The “Golden Rule” is different from similar sounding rules in other religions. Those rules focus only on avoiding doing evil towards others. The “Golden Rule” commands Christians to go the extra mile and do the good things to others they wish people would do for them
- God expects Christians to apply the “Golden Rule” to everyone - even our enemies

**Skills Activity:** Before class, ask several people you know to name five things that best represent them. Try to capture answers from a wide variety of people - vastly different age groups, men and women, different backgrounds and ethnicities, etc. Tell students you are going to name five things a specific person thinks best represents who they are, without revealing anything else about the person. After each list, they need to give what they believe are the demographics of that person (age, gender, background, ethnicity, etc.).

After students have guessed, reveal the identity of the person if it is someone they know or give the correct demographics if it is someone they do not know. Ask students why they believe their answers were so often wrong. Explain that bias and prejudice are our brain’s way of organizing information - all old people are a set that goes together, etc. This ability is helpful when knowing which animals are dangerous or how to answer certain math problems. Unfortunately, bias and prejudice are not so helpful when it comes to people and can even be sinful.

God views each of us as an individual with our own particular strengths and weaknesses, preferences, etc. He treats us all equally in that each of us has the same choice of becoming a Christian and spending eternity in Heaven. Although we are supposed to try to be just like God, we can find it hard to feel empathy for people we believe are too different from us. That is why it can be so easy to do something hurtful to an old person whom we view as an enemy, but we would never even think about hurting our own grandparents in that way.

Explain that having empathy for others begins in realizing those we believe are so different from us actually have things in common with us. This helps our brain group all people with ourselves - making it easier to have empathy for everyone and obey the “Golden Rule”.

Have students work together to find things they have in common. If the class is large, you may want to divide them into groups. Give them suggestions if you would like, a food they



all enjoy, a place outside of their city they have all visited, an unusual food they have all tried, etc. If they were separated into groups, have each group share their answers. Ask them how doing the exercise made them feel about people when they realized they had something in common they had not known about them before.

Have students think of questions they can ask someone they just met or someone they now consider very different from them that will help them find things in common. Encourage them to avoid interrogating the other person, but to use these questions to casually find things they have in common. Capture the list where everyone can see it.

### **Loving Others (Including Enemies)**

**Opening Activity:** Ask students to list some of the ways they know someone loves them. This includes family, friends and potential romantic interests. Capture the list where everyone can see it.

**Key Scriptures:** Ruth, 1 Corinthians 13, Matthew 5:43-48

#### **Important Lesson Points:**

- Ruth did not have to go with Naomi, but did so because she loved her
- Ruth's love was active. She went to the fields and gleaned for food so Naomi would not have to do it
- God and Jesus define love
- Paul gave us an excellent description of what active love is in 1 Corinthians 13
- The Bible tells us we cannot pick and choose the people we love. We must love everyone - including our enemies

**Skills Activity:** Starting with the list students created in the opening activity, have them add everything to the list they learned about love from the scriptures shared in the lesson. Ask if those new descriptions of love mean they need to remove anything from their original list. Ask them if the lesson made them think of anything else to add to the list.

It is important to know where your Bible students are in the process of processing and healing before continuing the lesson. If they are still extremely angry about the things that happened during the war, proceed to doing a project as a class that serves someone.

Encourage them to find something kind to do for someone they do not particularly like at school or in their neighborhood.

For classes where the students are beginning to release their anger and show some signs of forgiveness, you can directly address the concept of loving the enemy of their side in the war. Allow them to share why that would be a struggle for them. Encourage them to develop a description similar to 1 Corinthians 13 that would help anyone (including themselves) know whether or not they were truly loving their enemies. If feasible, plan and complete a service project benefiting someone who was on the opposite side during the war.

## **Healthy Relationships**

**Opening Activity:** Share with Bible students a recent story in the news about two people who obviously have an unhealthy relationship. The relationship could be parent/child, siblings, friends, husband/wife, etc. Try to find one that details either the negative things they are saying to or about one another or negative things they have done to each other. The negative incidents can all come from one side of the relationship if that is all you can find.

After sharing the article, have students share attributes of a healthy relationship and an unhealthy one. Create the two columns and record responses where everyone can see them.

**Key Scriptures:** Genesis 25:19-34, Genesis 27-28, Genesis 33:12-20, 1 John 4:20, Proverbs 17:17, Matthew 5:22, various verses in Proverbs regarding relationships

### **Important Lesson Points:**

- Jacob and Esau had a troubled relationship that did not seem to include loving each other
- Jacob and Esau made poor choices in their interactions that made their relationship worse
- Jacob finally asks for Esau's forgiveness and tries to make atonement
- God has given us wisdom on how He wants us to treat others - in general and in specific types of relationships

- While many of the verses in the New Testament mentioning brothers are actually about fellow Christians, the underlying principles could also apply to actual siblings
- It is important to become familiar with scriptures about relationships so we can make sure we are behaving the way God would want us to in those relationships

**Skills Activity:** Have students look through Proverbs for verses that apply to any type of relationship. (You may want each of them to skim different chapters or have a prepared list of examples to make it go a little faster. You can also teach them how to use Bible study aids to find other scriptures like Ephesians 6:1 that apply.) Create columns for each type of relationship and capture the wisdom, principles and commands that apply to each of them. Do not forget to include general instructions like those found in 1 Corinthians 13.

Have students look at the finished lists. Which relationships do they have where they find it difficult to do what the list for that relationship tells us God wants them to do? Why are those things difficult? Why is it important to God that they work on changing so they reflect the list for every category of relationship? For more advanced Bible students you may want to add “enemies” as a category of relationship and go through the same process with that relationship specifically as to how it would apply to how they treat people on the other side of the war. Be extremely careful to avoid political and military discussions and focus on how they personally should treat a person they encounter who they find was on the other side of the war.

## Gratitude

**Opening Activity:** Share with students the story of George Washington and the key from the Bastille in France. “If you visit Mt. Vernon, the historical home of the first President of the United States, George Washington, there is a large key hanging on the wall. It is a key from the historic Bastille Prison in Paris. The French people gave it to Washington to thank him for encouraging them to pursue a fair, republic government. The political prisoners were freed from the Bastille as a result of that effort, so they gave Washington the key to thank him.” Washington did not want a war with England. The French people did not want the French Revolution. Many people died in both wars. Things were destroyed by the fighting. Families were broken. People had disabling injuries from the war that lasted the rest of their lives. The people could have chosen to continue to focus on all of the bad things that happened. They chose instead to find things for which to be grateful instead and to thank those who had helped make those good things possible. We even have

records of some of them thanking God for His deliverance from those who survived the war.

**Key Scriptures:** Genesis 8, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, James 1:17, Psalms 105:1

**Important Lesson Points:**

- While we do not know for sure how Noah felt about the Flood and being in the Ark for so long, we do know he expressed his gratitude to God by offering a sacrifice as soon as they left the Ark
- Throughout the Bible bad things happened. Many times people remembered to pay attention to the ways God was working in the situation and were grateful to Him
- Bad things will always happen in our world because of sin. Things will not be perfect again until Heaven.
- God does not always do what we want Him to do during bad times, but we have to trust His love for us and that He is working in our ultimate best interest
- We have to avoid focusing on the bad things that happen and look for the ways God is blessing us - even in the midst of bad times
- We need to be grateful to God for every blessing He gives us no matter how big or how small

**Skills Activity:** There are multiple activities you can do with students to help them focus on being grateful. For young people who seem to be struggling with finding anything for which to be grateful, try sending them on a gratitude treasure hunt. You can have them search for things for which they are grateful that are certain colors or the words for those things start with certain letters. You may want to give broad categories like something in your home, something in your school, etc.

For young people who are learning about God for the first time, it may be easier for them to begin by expressing gratitude to people. Have them design and execute a project doing something nice for someone to whom they are grateful. Maybe they can each put together a little bag of goodies or work together to bake treats. They may also choose to write thank you notes and deliver them.

For young people from a Christian background, who understand the need to be thankful to God in all circumstances, you may want to encourage them to create a gratitude journal where they can list a certain number of things for which they are thankful each day. Explain that it is easy to get distracted by the cares of the world and forget to notice God's

blessings and thank him for them. A gratitude journal can help them remember to stay grateful.

## **Trust**

**Opening Activity:** Set up an obstacle course that can be easily changed. Have students work in pairs. Blindfold one person in each pair so they cannot see how the course is changed. Have the other person guide the blindfolded one through the course. (Make sure safety precautions are taken so no one can be hurt if there is a mistake.) Continue blindfolding students and changing the course until everyone has had a chance to play both roles.

Ask students how difficult it was to trust the person guiding them. What made it easier or more difficult? What if the person could only give verbal commands? What if some part of the obstacle course had involved an actual danger of being seriously hurt? What makes it easy or difficult to trust someone? (Record their answers to the last question where everyone can see them.)

**Key Scriptures:** Matthew 8:23-27 (also Mark 4:35-41 and Luke 8:22-25), Proverbs 3:5, Psalm 9:10, Joshua 1:9, Matthew 6:25, Jeremiah 17:7-8

### **Important Lesson Points:**

- The Apostles should have trusted Jesus would take care of them
- They woke Jesus when their fears became stronger than their trust
- Jesus rebuked them for their lack of complete trust, but calmed the storm anyway
- God wants us to trust in Him and that He will keep His promises
- We can use scripture and prayer to remind us to trust in God
- When we fully trust God, our anxieties will lessen
- It can be hard sometimes to remember to trust God, but we have to keep trying

**Skills Activity:** Although it is a long term project, a prayer journal is often a good way to be reminded that God can be trusted to keep His promises. It is important to reinforce that God can answer a prayer with “yes”, “no” or “wait”. When God denies our requests or makes us wait, it does not mean He no longer loves us. Rather it means God has information we do not have. We have to trust that his answers are ultimately in our best interest - even if we are not happy with them.

Record student prayer requests as a group and encourage them to keep a private prayer journal. Periodically review previous requests to see how God has answered them. Point out and encourage Bible students to share times when God has said “no” or made them wait and they later realize it was for the best. This project works best if continued for several months. (Young people will need regular reminders that God has answered their prayers - even if He denied the request or made them wait. It may also be necessary to explain that many times we will understand why later, but once in a while, we may not fully understand until we are in Heaven.)

## **Obedience**

**Opening Activity:** Give Bible students a piece of paper that is either origami paper or cut to those dimensions. Give them verbal instructions for how to make a specific origami figure. Do not demonstrate the steps or let them know what the finished figure will be. If you suspect some of your students may have done origami before, choose an unusual figure on a complex one.

Have everyone hold up their completed figure. Show them what it should have looked like. It does not matter if some got it right and others did not. The point is how important it is to obey instructions exactly when making origami if you want the finished product to look like the example. Ask students to name other instances when exact obedience is mandatory or negative consequences can happen.

**Key Scriptures:** 2 Samuel 6:1-7, 1 Chronicles 13:9-12, John 14:15, James 1:22, Matthew 7:21, Romans 7

### **Important Lesson Points:**

- Uzzah would have been well aware that he should not only avoid touching the Ark, but also should not have been anywhere near it. He should have also known they were transporting it in a way that was against God’s commands
- While Uzzah’s consequence may seem harsh, God was making an emphatic point that His people are to obey His commands exactly - even if they don’t make sense or seem silly to us
- There are always consequences when we disobey God. They may be dramatic or we may not realize them for a very long time, but there are always consequences

- The ability for Christians to receive forgiveness for their sins does not give them license to go out and sin intentionally or live a life enmeshed in sin
- We should avoid being like Uzzah and convincing ourselves our disobedience is justifiable

**Skills Activities:** It is important to remember that one of the aspects of war that impacts young people is the concept many adults have of situational ethics. This is the principle that one can break any or all of God's commands if one can somehow find a way to justify it based on the circumstances. The activity for this lesson needs to be a discussion about obedience to God that is not situational, but a constant goal. The spiritual background of your Bible students and their experiences during and after the war will impact the direction the conversation may take. One of the most important underlying principles is that they *always* have a choice. The choice may not be a great one - like the Christian martyrs, but they *always* have the choice to obey God's commands.

For this discussion, it can be helpful to review many of God's commands, especially ones like the command "Do not lie" that are often broken in both a war situation and the everyday lives of young people outside of a war situation. Conversations should also include a discussion of strategies they can use to remind themselves to be obedient even when it is difficult, scary or dangerous.

### **Locus of Control/ Sense of Responsibility**

**Opening Activity:** Create a target out of a small wastebasket. Ball up sheets of paper or use a soft foam ball. Allow students to try and make a basket, using whatever methods they choose. Then do the activity again, but this time control some variables that could make it more difficult for them to make a basket, like making them stand very far from the goal, having a strong fan create a breeze over the goal, making a rule they have to shoot with their back to the goal or their eyes closed, etc.

**Key Scriptures:** Luke 12:16-21, Acts 2

### **Important Lesson Points:**

- While the parable is ultimately about greed, it also makes it clear there are some things we can control, some things God controls and some things we try to control (and theoretically can) but should allow God to control

- Our choices in life do impact ourselves and others
- That impact of our choices can lead to things in the future being better or worse
- Even though in times like a war, some of our choices are taken away from us for a time, there are always some things we can control, like our attitude and our choice to obey God (or not). These choices we make often impact our future more than choices others take from us during a war or at other times
- We are responsible for what happens as a result of our poor choices. We can ask for forgiveness and make atonement, but we cannot blame others for our poor choices

**Skills Activity:** Have students draw three large circles on a large sheet of paper or one circle on three different sheets of paper. One should be labeled “Things I can control” “Things others control” “Things God controls/should control”. Start by giving them an example like what they eat for breakfast. Deep thinkers will tend to overthink the activity, so watch for them to think of a way every scenario fits into all three categories. You want to choose things that are as clear as possible. So, in the breakfast example, if mom fixes breakfast, it goes under control of others. If they choose themselves, it goes under their control. Once again avoid answers like God should control because He wants me to be healthy or He can send rain.

Once they understand the exercise, provide more difficult real world examples. Make sure to include examples of things they probably believe are controlled by others, but could be controlled by them and things they are probably trying to control but should be allowing God to control. There will at times be overlap, but primarily focus on clear examples. Allow them to suggest ones they find confusing. By the end of the exercise, they should have several examples in each circle.

## **Guilt**

**Opening Activity:** Give Bible students the “evidence” in a trial. The trial can be real or fictitious. Have students determine the guilt or innocence of the person on trial and how they came to that conclusion.

**Key Scriptures:** 1 Kings 21, 1 John 2:2, Acts 2:38, James 5:16, Hebrews 8:12

### **Important Lesson Points:**

- Ahab wanted a vineyard he did not own.



- When Naboth refused to sell his vineyard to Ahab, Jezebel created a situation that resulted in Naboth's death, allowing Ahab to seize the vineyard
- God told Elijah to tell Ahab and Jezebel they would both be punished for the atrocity
- When Ahab repented of his part in the sin, God lessened Ahab's earthly consequences
- Jesus was crucified because of the sins of everyone who has ever lived
- His death gives us the chance to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of our sins
- Christians can repent through their prayers (There is no need to be rebaptized each time we sin.)
- When God forgives our sins He remembers them no more

**Skills Activity:** Discussions are possibly the best activity for this lesson. The smaller the groups are discussing the lesson with an adult's guidance, the more likely Bible students are to be open about their concerns regarding guilt and what happened during the war. Care should be taken to avoid assigning guilt, but rather helping students focus on the concepts of repentance, atonement and forgiveness. Principles in previous lessons may need to be reviewed during the course of the discussion. Any students who appear to be struggling with a sense of personal guilt may also benefit from more private mentoring sessions.

## Self Control

**Opening Activity:** Before class, find out what cookie or candy each student loves and purchase or make the most popular one. Place one in front of every student. Tell them they can eat it now or wait awhile and they can then have an additional one to eat as well. Leave the room for a few minutes. Stay where you can hear what is happening, but they cannot see you.

Re-enter the classroom. Discuss not only who ate the treat and who waited, but whether or not they behaved while you were gone. Explain that self control is being able to do hard things like control our emotions and actions because we know that it is best in the long run.

Ask them to name some times when self control is important as well as why it is often difficult to have self control.

**Key Scriptures:** Matthew 14:22-33, John 18:10, John 18:15-27, Acts 2:14, 37-41, Galatians 5:22-23, Proverbs 25:28, 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

**Important Lesson Points:**

- Peter had trouble with controlling his words and actions
- Peter's lack of self control often had negative consequences
- Jesus kept teaching and mentoring Peter
- Peter eventually improved his self control and because of that was able to preach the first sermon on the Day of Pentecost, even though just a few months before he had denied even knowing Jesus
- Self control is a fruit of the Spirit, but we can work on having self control even before we are Christians
- If we have poor self control it can result in negative consequences for us and those around us just like it did for Peter
- We need to ask God to help us have more self control and do things that will make it easier for us to have self control

**Skills Activity:** The activities you choose can focus on two different aspects. There are games that require players to control their body movements or the things they say (or do not say) in order to win. These games can help young people actually practice self control.

In addition, there are strategies young people can use to make it easier to have self control. It is often best to encourage them to work together to come up with as many strategies as they can without adult assistance. You can use carefully worded questions to encourage them to think of any strategies they may have missed.

Some of the strategies to include are:

- Remove temptation (If there are no cookies in the house, it is harder to eat a cookie.)
- Spend as little time as possible with people who encourage you to avoid attempts at self control
- Remind yourself of the negative consequences from not having self control in a given situation
- Make a plan for how you will handle a specific situation you cannot avoid, but that you know will test your self control in some area
- Get enough sleep, exercise and regular healthy meals and snacks

- Remind yourself why you want to have self control over a certain area
- Think of strategies to make it easier to have self control over each specific challenge

## **Conflict Resolution**

**Opening Activity:** Share a non war related news item when two or more people who were engaged in a conflict. Have students analyze how the conflict was handled. What things did the people do well? What things did they do that actually made the conflict worse? What could the people involved have done differently to resolve the conflict?

**Key Scriptures:** 1 Samuel 24 and 26, Matthew 18:15-17, James 1:19, Proverbs 15:1, Romans 12:17-21

### **Important Lesson Points:**

- David and Saul had been in conflict for years
- David knew God was going to make him the King after Saul
- David had two opportunities to kill Saul, but chose to let God handle things instead
- God wants us to handle our conflicts with people in ways that are kind and loving
- God has given us wise ways to lessen or avoid conflicts

**Skills Activity:** Teach Bible students the conflict resolution skills found in Chapter 6. Divide the students into groups of two or three. Give them various real life scenarios when they might encounter conflict. Have them use the strategies in Chapter 6 in an effort to resolve the conflict. If possible, each group should have an adult working with them to guide them through using the conflict resolution model. Students may need multiple practice sessions before they are truly comfortable using the conflict resolution model in their everyday conflicts.



## Chapter 13 - Activity Ideas to Encourage Processing and Healing

While previous chapters discussed the various types of activities that can help the children who have experienced a war process and heal from their experiences, few specifics were given. Although many activity ideas in each category can be found online, this chapter will give a few ideas for activities that can also be tied to Bible stories in meaningful ways. This will allow you or your ministry to incorporate Bible instruction in activities that will also help young people meet their goals for processing and healing from their trauma.

Because you may be ministering to children who are of vastly different ages, an attempt was made to highlight activities that would appeal to a variety of age groups. Care should be taken to adapt activities as necessary to make them more appropriate for children who are either unable to do the things necessary in the activity or who may find the activity too juvenile. (Note: Younger children may be able to do the activities with a little extra assistance from adults. On the other end of the spectrum, many teens enjoy doing activities they remember from early childhood. These are often activities they enjoyed when younger, but are no longer given opportunities to do. Often it can be best to try a few activities and see how teens respond before assuming they will not enjoy them.)

### Breathing Exercises

Breathing exercises are designed to help children learn how to control their breathing. They will then be able to slow their breathing when anxious or stressed, helping young people calm themselves. Most breathing exercises are taught in a way that can help children remember how to do it when they need to slow their breathing. The examples below incorporate common breathing exercises into Bible lessons, providing an opportunity to connect Bible truths to breathing exercises.

**Bible Story:** Creation, Noah or any story involving animals

**Exercise:** Have children lay on the floor. Place a toy (stuffed or lightweight) animal on their diaphragm area. Have them try to move the animal up and down by taking slow, deep breaths in and out.

**Bible Story:** Jonah, Jesus Calms the Storm or any Bible story involving a storm

**Exercise:** Give each child a small bottle of bubbles and a bubble wand. Explain how the wind blows very long and hard in a storm. Have them take deep breaths and blow long and (not too hard) to produce as many bubbles as possible.

**Bible Story:** Verses about flowers like Song of Songs 2:1 or Matthew 6:28-29

**Exercise:** Give each child a real or fake flower. Have them breathe in the “smell” of the flower to the count of three and then breathe out the “smell” to the count of three.

### **Relaxation Exercises**

Relaxation exercises help children release the tension and stress from their bodies by tensing and then relaxing the various muscles in their bodies.

**Bible Story:** Jesus Calms the Storm

**Relaxation Exercise:** Explain that the Apostles in the boat during the storm were probably very tense until Jesus calmed the storm. Have children practice tightening and then relaxing the various muscles in their body. It can help to teach them to start with their forehead and tense and relax every muscle in their body all the way down to their toes.

### **Art Activities**

Art therapy activities led by lay people are used to give children ways of expressing their emotions and processing the things that happened to them during a war. The following activities also allow children to explore their ideas about God and how their faith may have been impacted by their experiences.

**Bible Story:** Creation or any other Bible story when God is quoted in the story.

**Art Activity:** Allow children to choose art supplies of their choice from various drawing and or painting supplies. Explain that while we cannot see God like we see other people, we know a lot about Him. Have them depict God in any way they choose. (Note: Children who have no previous experience with Christianity may struggle with this activity.)

**Bible Story:** Joseph, Ahab, Jonah, Peter or the stories of anyone in the Bible who expressed strong emotions

**Art Activity:** Have students choose any art materials they would like to use. Encourage them to do a two part work of art. One part should depict the emotions of the person in the Bible story and the other should depict their current emotions.

**Bible Story:** Esther, Rebekah, Jacob and Esau, Absalom, John the Baptist or any Bible story where the appearance of the person in the story is mentioned

**Art Activity:** Have children choose their art supplies of choice (If possible, include sculpting materials, like clay. Collages can also be made into a self portrait by using words and images from magazines to create the outline of the child.) After discussing how the person

might have seen himself or herself in the story, have them create two self portraits - one of the way they see themselves and one of the way they think God sees them.

**Bible Story:** Israelites in the Wilderness (particularly the stories when they complained), Mary at the birth of Jesus, and the many stories like the Exodus and Deborah where people expressed gratitude to God

**Art Activity:** Give children large sheets of heavier art paper (if possible). Have them use photos and words cut from magazines, bits of torn paper and other art supplies to create a gratitude collage. Have those who are willing to do so share their finished creations and the things for which they are grateful.

**Bible Story:** Descriptions of the beauty and perfection of life in Heaven

**Art Activity:** Have children use art materials of their choice to depict their view of their future.

**Bible Story:** Creation

**Art Activity:** Have children use art supplies of their choice to create a work of art that depicts how they see the world. Encourage them to define the concept of “world” in any way they choose.

### **Musical Activities**

Music therapy activities led by lay people use music to help children express or manage their emotions. It is important to remember that not every child has musical talent. The goal of these activities is not for children to create and perform great music, but for them to engage with music in ways that help them express their emotions.

**Bible Story:** David Plays the Lyre for Saul

**Music activity:** Explain that David probably chose to play music for King Saul that would help calm and soothe him. Ask them to think of songs that make them feel better when they hear them. Help them create a personal list of songs they can sing or listen to that will help them calm down or make them feel better. Children who know a number of hymns or worship songs should be encouraged to include those on their list.

**Bible Story:** Songs written by Miriam, Deborah, Mary and others in the Bible

**Music Activity:** Have students compose a song that explains the last year of their life - experiences, emotions, thoughts, etc. They can focus on the words and then add them to a

familiar tune from a childhood song. (Note: To make it easier, encourage them to use the same number of syllables in the new word that were in the original word in the song.) Those with musical training and talent may choose to compose the actual tune.

**Bible Story:** Book of Psalms

**Music activity:** Explain how the psalms in the book of Psalms were actually pieces of music. Unfortunately, the original tunes have been lost over time. Explain that many Psalms express the emotions of the person who wrote them. Often they were written after a specific incident in the life of the writer. Start by reading a couple of short Psalms and asking children what type of tune they would write for that Psalm (happy, sad, energetic, etc.). Then encourage them to write their own Psalm to God letting Him know their emotions about something that has happened to them.

### **Play Activities**

Godly Play is perhaps the best way to integrate teaching children the Bible and play in ways that can help children process and heal from the trauma of war. There are, however, other ways you or your ministry can use play to minister to children. (Ideas for creating toys from discarded items can be found on the website *Toys From Trash*.)

**Bible Story:** Gideon, David and Goliath or any Bible story about a battle or a war

**Play Activity:** Explain that wars may have been fought differently during Bible times, but some things remain the same. Ask children to name the ways the battle or war impacted the people in the story. Have them use play items of their choice to reenact the Bible story. Then tell them they can continue to play with those toys or choose new ones to show how war impacted them. (It can be helpful to have small toy figures of various types of helpers children may have encountered in their experiences.) Do not direct their play, but you can ask them questions about the toys they chose, etc. Any questions asked should help explain or extend play - not control it.

**Bible Story:** Joshua, Elisha or any other Bible story where the main person experiences good times and bad times

**Play Activity:** For this particular activity, tell the story after play time. Provide a variety of items that might be used in a home or that refugees might have taken when they fled. Have plenty of dress up clothes, tote bags (use safety precautions with very young children), pretend phones, doll babies, etc. Instruct them to “play pretend” or with older children, ask them to create and perform a skit using the items. Do not control the direction the play takes, but you can ask appropriate questions, like why certain choices



were made, how characters might feel, etc. After the children have played for a time, tell the Bible story selected. Point out that God loves us in good times and bad and that He can help us through the bad times we have in life.

**Bible Story:** Tower of Babel, Walls of Jericho, Nehemiah, or any other Bible story that includes the building and/or destruction of structures

**Play Activity:** Give the children blocks. Tell them to build a city. Allow them to build and knock down as much as they like. This can help them release pent up anger as well as explore the ideas and emotions connected with the construction and destruction that often accompany war.

### **Puppet Activities**

Puppet shows can help children work through their experiences and emotions connected to their war experiences. The act of constructing the puppets can also give them a creative outlet for their thoughts and emotions. Professionally created puppets can also be used, but don't give children the additional benefits of creating their own.

### **Types of Puppets**

- **Paper bag puppets.** Children can decorate paper bags with all sorts of art supplies. The greater the variety of supplies provided the more creativity the activity allows.
- **Sock puppets.** Sock puppets are made from...socks. Children can attach items like fabric, yarn and buttons using fabric glue or by hand sewing them on to the sock. (Note: Young children should not use sewing needles.)
- **Stick puppets.** These puppets are drawn on paper, decorated and then cut out. Finished puppets are glued to craft sticks that are used to move the puppet.
- **Shadow puppets.** Shadow puppets are created by placing hands in various positions in front of a flashlight or other light source. The resulting shadow on the wall usually resembles an animal or person.

### **Themes for Puppet Shows**

While children should create their own scripts for puppet shows, it can be helpful to give them a theme. They should, however, be reminded that there is not a specific story that is required within that theme. Teens may also enjoy creating puppet shows for younger children. It is important to remember that the goal of this activity is to give young people a safe way to share their thoughts and emotions. Care must be taken to avoid critiquing the script. If the show will be performed for others and there is an obvious theological problem

with the script, suggesting a couple of scriptures they can read to make sure their script presents biblical ideas accurately can help. When performances are for those ministering to them, the content of the puppet show can be a starting place for important conversations with the children involved in the show.

Puppets can also be used in a more free form way. In this technique, the child and the adult ministering to the child each make a puppet. The adult should ask the child what character the puppet he or she creates should represent. The show itself is scriptless. Have the child begin the dialogue. The adult should use his or her puppet to respond to the child, making sure to use techniques discussed throughout this book. This particular puppet method often resembles a conversation, but the child has an emotional “protector” in the form of the puppet.

There are many possible themes you can suggest, but here are a few ideas to get you started.

- Emotions
- Family
- Friends
- Home
- Trusting God
- Gratitude
- Love
- Forgiveness
- Church

### **Journal Activities**

While many young people would find journaling helpful, only a few will actually enjoy journaling. If your ministry is providing faith based tutoring for young people, journaling can be given as a writing activity. Some young people who journal find it easy to capture their thoughts and emotions on paper. Others benefit from using questions provided by a journaling guide as the basis of their journal entries. Reluctant writers may prefer bullet journaling, where they write words or phrases as bullet points to create answers to prompts or to list items in a category of their choosing.

When providing journal prompts or questions, it is important to remember to give young people lots of options. It can be easier to journal when young people can choose a prompt that inspires them at that moment. Care must be taken to allow them to reject prompts or

to insert their own ideas outside of prompts. The goal is to give them a space to process their experiences and emotions.

Those ministering to children who have journaled need to respect the young person's desire for privacy. Many children of war have had their boundaries violated. Some may have given up on trying to establish boundaries designed to keep them safe. Giving young people the option of whether or not to share their writings and with whom can give them practice in establishing boundaries for other situations and people.

### **Journal Questions and Prompts**

- Describe an incident in the last year that had a major impact on you. Include the emotions the incident made you feel and how you think you changed because of what happened.
- How have your experiences during the war changed you?
- Are you an optimist or a pessimist? How do you know which you are?
- What do you do to feel better when you are sad? Angry?
- What are your dreams for your future?
- Describe God.
- How does your faith shape your beliefs and choices in life?
- If you could change one thing about the world, what would it be? How would you go about changing it?
- If you could go back in time, what is one thing you would change? How would you change it? What would be different about your life today?
- If someone who knew nothing about Christianity asked you to describe it, what would you tell him or her?
- What is your favorite Bible verse or passage? Why is that your favorite?
- What questions do you have about God, the Bible or Christianity?
- Whom do you trust? How do you decide whether or not to trust someone?
- What does it mean to be emotionally close to someone? What does it mean to love someone? Who are those people in your life?

## Appendix 1 - Signs of Possible Child Abuse

While different cultures define acceptable methods for correcting children in varying ways, there is a worldwide standard for child abuse and neglect. Children are often reluctant to share what is happening in their home with those who may be able to help them. Often abuse and neglect leaves visible signs which can alert volunteers to the possible abuse or neglect of a child. These signs may be misinterpreted, however, and if child abuse is suspected, the local authorities should be alerted so they are able to conduct any investigation deemed necessary.

Children often become injured in play and for other innocent causes. Abuse is usually suspected only when injuries are severe with no feasible explanation, repeated frequently - often with weak explanations, or are hidden and the child appears frightened when the injuries are discovered or are accompanied with other behaviors indicating a child may be living in constant fear. It can be difficult during a war to separate symptoms that may have resulted from the war and those that are as a result of abuse. Since (as mentioned in a previous chapter) abuse is more common when parents have fought in a war or are under extreme stress, any areas of concern should be vetted by local experts.

- Bruises
- Welts
- Burns (Especially from cigarettes)
- Cuts
- Multiple or repeated broken bones
- Multiple serious injuries at different states of healing (indicating time between serious injuries)
- Imprints on the child's body indicating being beaten by hand, belt, etc.
- Marks on the body indicating the child has been bound by ropes or other restraints
- Extreme hunger (Note: Poverty is not considered neglect in most places. This is hunger from being denied food when it is or could be available.)
- Very young children left at home with no supervision - especially for long periods of time
- Very young children demonstrating sexual behaviors children their age generally have no knowledge of
- Consistently wears dirty and inappropriate clothing for the weather
- Serious untreated medical and/or dental issues
- Child appears fearful of going home

- Child is fearful of being touched
- Child has bloody underwear (not from menstruation) or is bruised, torn in genital area
- Depression, low self esteem and other psychological issues (Note: These can result from causes other than abuse and neglect.)
- Running away from home

## **Appendix 2 Emotion Vocabulary Words**

When attempting to increase children's emotions vocabulary, it can help to introduce them to words that express varying degrees of the same emotion. This list makes an attempt to group helpful words for children to know under the primary emotion to which they are normally connected. (Note: The words listed are nouns, most have a corresponding verb.)

### **Anger**

- **Mad**
- **Fury**
- **Frustration**
- **Dislike**
- **Hatred**
- **Rage**
- **Outrage**
- **Hostility**
- **Agitation**
- **Disgust**
- **Irritation**
- **Annoyance**
- **Resentment**
- **Contempt**
- **Revulsion**
- **Exasperation**

### **Fear**

- **Alarm**
- **Fright**
- **Hysteria**
- **Panic**
- **Horror**
- **Nervousness**
- **Anxiety**
- **Angst**
- **Apprehension**
- **Dread**
- **Uneasiness**

- Shock
- Tenseness
- Worry
- Terror

### **Happiness**

- Joy
- Contentment
- Delight
- Euphoria
- Glee
- Jubilation
- Satisfaction
- Pleasure
- Hope
- Pride
- Relief
- Enthusiasm
- Excitement
- Exhilaration
- Thrill
- Enjoyment
- Gladness
- Relaxation
- Calm

### **Love**

- Affection
- Adoration
- Caring
- Compassion
- Liking
- Infatuation
- Friendship
- Fondness

### **Sadness**

- **Disappointment**
- **Dejection**
- **Dismay**
- **Embarrassment**
- **Homesickness**
- **Humiliation**
- **Loneliness**
- **Depression**
- **Despair**
- **Grief**
- **Hopelessness**
- **Misery**
- **Unhappiness**
- **Guilt**
- **Regret**
- **Agony**
- **Suffering**
- **Hurt**
- **Anguish**
- **Insecurity**
- **Insult**
- **Isolation**
- **Boredom**
- **Exhaustion**
- **Tiredness**

#### **Surprise**

- **Shock**
- **Amazement**
- **Awe**
- **Astonishment**
- **Confusion**





## Appendix 3 (OMIT2) - Possible Gifts or Talents of Young People

People often assume young people are not given gifts by God that can be used in service to Him. This is far from the truth. The following tools will help you identify the gifts God has given various children and how those gifts can be developed and used to serve God. Helping young people who have experienced a war identify, develop and use their gifts from God can give them a sense of purpose and belonging in God's Kingdom and should be a top priority for those ministering to them.

God can give many talents. Often Christians may believe children did not receive a gift from God because their gift is one that may be more subtle or unusual than a more obvious gift like art or teaching. The following is a list of some of the gifts a young person may receive from God that can be used in service to Him. It is important to remember that even God-given gifts and talents will need development (including training) to be fully realized.

Ability to Focus	Generosity
Accounting	Greeting/Outreach, Networking
Adaptability	Human Resources/Talent Identification
Athletic Ability	Humor
Audio Visual	Imagination
Automobile Repair	Intelligence
Analyzing	Juggling
Art	Listening
Asking Questions	Marketing
Building	Math
Computer Coding	Medicine
Cooking	Mercy
Counseling	Music
Crafts, Wood Working	Organizing
Decorating	Photography
Detail Oriented	Problem Solving
Drama	Public Speaking
Editing	Research
Emotional Intelligence	Risk Management
Encouragement	Science
Enthusiasm	Self Control
Faith Sharing	Service
Fashion/Clothing	Social Media

Stewardship  
Teaching  
Time Management

Typing  
Video Production  
Writing

## Appendix 4 (OMIT3) - Anger Management Strategies

Young people who have experienced war are often angry for any number of reasons. Bible lessons, prayer and mentoring can help most children do a better job of working through their anger in godly ways - without holding grudges or sinning in their anger. It can also help to share some anger management strategies to make it easier for them to process and heal from their anger.

Young people may have to experiment for a time to find the anger management strategies that work best for them. This list is not meant to be all inclusive. Children may have creative ideas that work better for them than these. Some young people will need guided practice using strategies in common scenarios for their age in order to be able to comfortably use these techniques in real life. Children who are still struggling with anger after interventions, find their anger growing worse or harm themselves, others or property in their anger should be referred to a medical professional.

- Do not say or do anything until you have taken ten slow, deep breaths.
- Immediately stop and silently pray to God and ask Him to help you regain your self control before you say or do anything.
- Mentally count to a specific number before saying or doing anything. The angrier you are, the higher the number should be.
- Give the level of your anger a number from one to five where one is barely bothered and five is beyond furious. Think about what you believe made you angry. Does it really deserve the number you gave it? (With practice, this can help young people avoid overreacting to minor irritations.)
- If you struggle with feeling angry, but only overreact some of the time, try to identify what is triggering your overreaction. What does each incident have in common? Do not forget things like you were tired, hungry, hormonal, etc. Once you have identified your triggers, you can manage them so you do not overreact when those triggers are present.
- Notice the signals your body gives as you begin to get angry, like gritting your teeth or balling your hand into a fist. When you notice your body starting to do those things, give yourself a time out to calm down before saying or doing anything.
- If you feel angry much of the time, try exercise classes that can help you relax like Pilates, stretching classes, and non-religious or Christian varieties of yoga and martial arts.

- If you feel your anger is giving you excess angry energy, try a more active sport like running, football (soccer), etc.
- Squeeze a stress ball or hand grip strengthener
- Take a walk or hike in nature
- Read a book that makes you laugh
- Make something with clay
- Listen to calming music
- Jump rope or play any game that requires jumping
- Talk to a trusted adult about your feelings
- Play with a stuffed animal or pet
- Journal about your feelings
- Make an “anger box” (can be made from cardboard or recycled from some sort of container). Put blank pieces of paper and a golf pencil in the box. When you are angry, write down what is making you angry on a piece of paper. Pray to God about the situation and ask Him to help you to stop feeling angry. Then put the piece of paper in the box to symbolize that you will trust God to work things out - you are choosing to let go of your anger.
- Use the STOP technique before saying or doing anything. “S” stop - do not say or do anything “T” think - what are you really angry about “O” what options do you have in this situation “P” Pray for God to help you choose the best option

## **Appendix 5 Tips for Adapting to a New Culture**

If a war forces families to become refugees, they may find themselves living in an unfamiliar culture. The ability to adapt quickly will make the transition easier for everyone, even if they are only living there on a temporary basis. Companies that require employees to move frequently often make these basic suggestions for adapting to a new culture within a country or in a new country.

- Do not be afraid to experience unfamiliar things.
- Do not be afraid to make mistakes. Most people expect those new to their culture to have a learning curve.
- Be respectful of your new culture, even if there are aspects you do not appreciate or can barely tolerate. You do not have to agree or assimilate in every area, but you can still be respectful and kind.
- Keep an open mind. You may find new things to enjoy or appreciate from the new culture.
- Remember that change can be a process, so allow yourself time to adjust.
- Adapting to a new culture can be stressful, so make sure you are getting plenty of sleep, exercise and healthy foods.
- Find ways to meet people who are permanent residents and ask them to help you understand their culture.
- Do not isolate yourself or restrict your social circle to fellow refugees.
- Learn as much as you can about the local culture including customs, language, food and the arts.
- Allow yourself to simultaneously enjoy the new culture while missing your home culture.

## **Appendix 6 Tips for Learning a New Language**

Children often learn new languages quickly and without much effort, especially if they are immersed in the language during their school day and in their interactions with peers. Teens and adults may struggle a bit more to master a new language. Language learners have found that certain practices make learning a new language easier.

- Do not be afraid to make mistakes. Most people are patient with someone trying to learn their language.
- Do not be afraid to ask for help. Native speakers are usually happy to supply a needed word, phrase or verb tense.
- Find people who are willing to let you practice with them. This may be a little more difficult, but keep asking until you find someone who will be patient with your efforts to speak the language.
- Ask if there are free classes or practice sessions in the language. Many areas offer free classes to refugees and others who need to learn a language. Some areas even have small groups of language learners who socialize regularly in order to practice their new language skills.
- Read in the new language. Reading is often easier than conversation and is a great way to learn new vocabulary words.
- Watch content with subtitles. Many language learners have used television shows and movies to improve their language skills.
- Listen to the conversations of others. Part of the difficulty in learning a new language is developing an ability to recognize unfamiliar sounds or combinations of sounds. Listening to the conversations of those around you can help your brain adjust more quickly to the local accent and dialect.





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