

## TEACHER TO TEACHER

### Practical Tips to Guide You Through Delicate Discussions

by Mary Rose

**A**s students hear talk of “our country at war,” they will look to teachers for both information and reassurance. It is important both to help children understand what is happening in the world and to help them feel safe at a time when they can sense adult anxiety. Here are some practical suggestions for managing discussions of this difficult subject.

- **Try to limit the initial discussion period.**

Choose a time about 20 minutes before students will leave for lunch or another activity, providing a natural closing time.

- **Avoid jumping in with a big plan.**

It is difficult to anticipate children’s specific fears, misinformation, or interests. Ask if they have questions and let them take the lead. Use this first conversation to determine the direction of future lessons.

- **Be sensitive** to what may seem like irrational questions or misinformation. They would not ask if they already knew the answer.

- **Provide a feeling of security and intimacy.**

Children need to know that, as

much as possible, their lives will continue as before. Eat lunch with a few students or find time to chat with individuals or small groups. Your presence and calmness will make them feel secure, and they may be more likely to open up to you in an intimate setting. Keep your daily routine as normal as possible.

- **Use the situation as a teaching opportunity.**

Concentrate on background and or general information. Have students bring in newspaper articles. The more knowledgeable children are, the less fearful they will be.

- **Organize an e-mail campaign**

to show support for American troops (see box, below). Children will want to know what they can do “to help,” and this will provide a positive sense of involvement.

- **Help students**

**understand** that this is not a religious war. Emphasize that our government believes that

the war is necessary to protect our country.

- **If the war continues for a long time, designate a time of the day or week for discussion.**

This will provide a forum for your lessons and help you avoid protracted discussions that can upset young children. Avoid focusing attention on the casualties of war. Aim to provide knowledge without alarming young children.

- **Speak with trusted parents for feedback.**

They may offer insights about children’s fears or questions that have not occurred to you. Check with parents periodically to help determine the depth of the lessons you plan and their potential effect on students.

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**\*NOTE TO TEACHERS ABOUT WRITING TO U.S. TROOPS:** Because of concerns about mail delivery, the U.S. military is not currently supporting a campaign for print mail to troops. The Department of Defense recommends sending email through Operation Dear Abby at <http://anyservicemember.navy.mil/>