

Dear Families,

Like so many of you, I have been saddened to see the reports out of Ukraine and heartbroken at the violence and division so rife in our world. As always when difficult world events arise, it's important to consider how to frame discussions with our children. This is a particularly challenging time for parents, so I wanted to reach out and provide some support and proposed guidance as we strive to speak to our children about what is happening and what our response should be.

First, as we consider our own families, we can remember that children do not engage with what they see and hear around them in the same ways as adults. Images and sounds are particularly impactful and frightening for them. Young children do not have the ability to distance themselves or contextualize what they see and their first and lasting response is fear. It's a good idea to limit children's exposure to images and sounds that will frighten children and limit exposure to material that is not helpful. It can be challenging when we are trying to remain informed, but try not to watch the news with young children who simply can't process what they're seeing in ways that are helpful.

This does not mean that we as parents should not talk to children about what is occurring or that we should change the subject when children have questions. Children sense and know when something big is happening. We need to have conversations with them and provide context for and a helpful way to process what is occurring and what they are feeling.

Some considerations for daily life...

- Remind children that you and others who love them will do all you/they can to keep them safe, and stick to routines as much as possible. Children find familiarity and regular routines very comforting, particularly in scary times.
- Point out the helpers in our community and those in crisis zones. Wonder about how you as a family and how your children in their own spheres can be helpers too. Even small gestures of helpfulness can have large impacts and imprints!
- Be mindful of how you react to the news. What words are you using? How are you describing people? How do you characterize people you agree with? You don't agree with?
- Be mindful of your children's words, reactions, feelings. Do what you can to comfort them and discuss their fears in constructive ways. Help them to be and to feel safe.
- Answer children's questions simply, but don't feel compelled to point out scary things that are happening. As you talk with older children, a 'wondering' approach

like we use in Godly Play can be very helpful. “I wonder why this happened? I wonder why people are reacting in this way? I wonder what this person is feeling? I wonder why people are angry? I wonder how you would react in this situation? I wonder how God wants us to act?” When wondering, actually *wonder* rather than leading your child to a particular answer. You may be surprised by how they respond! Then you can guide the conversation based on what you learn and what values you want to share.

- With older children, you can also explore ways to provide financial support to people in need. Kids love tangible action! This is also a great way to discuss financial stewardship, generosity, and helpful giving.

I have found this [resource](#) very helpful as I consider how to approach discussions with children and ways to help them frame and process what is happening. Please also see Charlene’s beautiful [prayer for Ukraine](#). May the God of love and peace hear our prayers and show us how to do God’s reconciling work in the world!

I pray many blessings on you and your families as we seek to guide and nurture the children in our care.

Warmly,
Rosemarie

Rosemarie Eichner-Raja
Director of Children’s & Family Ministry
First Presbyterian Church of Berkeley
2407 Dana Street
Berkeley, CA 94704
Office #: 510.280.6151
In Office Tue-Fri
[Children & Families – First Pres Berkeley \(fpcberkeley.org\)](http://fpcberkeley.org)