

# News Release

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**For Immediate Release**

May 27, 2004  
Release No. 04-28

**Explaining the Iraqi Prison Situation to Children: Tips for Parents and Teachers  
by Trustee at Large, David Fassler, M.D.**

The coming months may include additional revelations about the evolving Iraqi prison situation. As a result, children may be exposed to images of humiliation, abuse and torture. There are ways parents and teachers can help children deal with these disturbing experiences. These include:

1. Monitor children's television viewing. Images of torture, humiliation and death are distressing for anyone. They are particularly upsetting and confusing for young children.
2. Answer kids' questions openly and honestly. Let them know what you're thinking and feeling. Explain that such behavior is always wrong, no matter who's involved. Try and give answers geared to the child's developmental level. Too much information or complex information can be confusing and lead to misunderstandings.
3. Avoid stereotyping people by their religion or country of origin. Such attitudes and responses foster intolerance and promote prejudice.
4. Talk to your child's teacher. Ask how these issues are being dealt with in the classroom.
5. Children with parents or other relatives on active military duty or in prison need extra attention and support. Consistent and predictable routines and accurate information to address questions and concerns are particularly important. Regular contact with parents and relatives, when possible, is also extremely reassuring.
6. Children previously exposed to trauma, abuse, or violence may also be particularly vulnerable. News reports and images may trigger painful memories of experiences in their own lives. Watch for signs of increased stress including trouble sleeping, increased irritability, or reluctance to go to school. Some children may also develop physical signs and symptoms such as headaches or stomachaches.
7. If children become overly anxious or fearful, or preoccupied with thoughts or questions about war related themes, talk to your pediatrician or family doctor. A consultation with a trained and qualified mental health professional may also be helpful.

Fortunately, most children are quite resilient. They will take recent events in stride and go on with their lives. However, thoughtful attention and monitoring can identify children who may be experiencing greater difficulties and minimize the risk of ongoing emotional consequences.

Dr. Fassler is a board certified child and adolescent psychiatrist practicing in Burlington, Vermont. He is a Clinical Associate Professor in the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Vermont College of Medicine. Dr. Fassler is also a Trustee of the American Psychiatric Association ([www.psych.org](http://www.psych.org)), a Fellow of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry ([www.aacap.org](http://www.aacap.org)), and a member of the Board of the Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health ([www.ffcmh.org](http://www.ffcmh.org)).

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