



OU ISRAEL PARENTING COLUMN

Michal Silverstein, MS

Managing Relationships During Wartime

Everyone needs to feel a sense of belonging. It breeds safety and stability, especially during times of uncertainty.

That being said, maintaining relationships requires energy, which runs low during times of war and stress. So how are we supposed to maintain relationships when we are depleted?

Consider the different relationships in your life. There are colleagues, neighbors, friends and relatives. There's the immediate family and extended family, in-laws, aunts and cousins. It's important to recognize that in times of war people become more irritable and needy and less patient. This makes it more difficult even to connect to your immediate family, spouse and children and requires more effort, patience and understanding than usual.

Since one's physical and emotional reserves

dwindle during periods of prolonged stress, it's important to use your limited energy wisely.

If you're a parent, put yourself in the center and consider the people who need you the most, most likely a spouse and /or children.

Taking care of children during wartime is more demanding than usual. There are a lot of sleep disruptions, constant food preparation, managing zoom school schedules and homework, and providing extra emotional support. Many parents are also trying to work part time and lack regular childcare. Add this to the regular demands of taking care of a home and family and parents are left feeling depleted.

Then focus on relationships that serve you. Which connections fill you rather than drain you? Surround yourself with people who fill you with energy and reach out to others who can help lighten your burden such as babysitters.

Find activities that give you energy and recharge your batteries such as exercising, watching something enjoyable, reading a book or learning something, to keep yourself physically and emotionally strong.

I recommend letting go of obligations, over-extending yourself and spreading yourself thin for others who don't serve you. While

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you may feel like you're being "nice" you're using up energy you won't have for the people who do need you.

Make sure you set boundaries. If neighbors or friends want to come over or ask for favors that you're uncomfortable with, communicate what you CAN do in a clear, assertive, respectful way. Giving to people in a way that fills you with purpose, like getting involved in a chessed project can also energize you.

During prolonged times of war, when so many things are uncertain, be clear about what your needs are and what keeps you functioning at your best. Focus on the things within your control. You may not be in control of the sirens and your sleep patterns but you are in control of what you eat and if you get out in the sun and fresh air. Staying calm, coping well and self-care starts with parents.

Like the safety protocol on the plane, put your oxygen mask on first so that you can breathe freely and help your children put on theirs. May we experience quieter days. ■

Feel free to send in any **parenting questions** you may have to **parenting@ouisrael.org** (Details will be changed to preserve anonymity).

Michal Silverstein has a MS in educational psychology and counseling. She facilitates parenting workshops in and around Jerusalem and maintains a private practice.

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Yaniv +972.52.614.1442
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