



# Return of Hostages

## How to Talk to Our Children About the Return of the Hostages

With the signing of the hostage return agreement, January 2025

## A few words of introduction

The anticipated return of the hostages, which is hoped to take place in the coming weeks, is likely to be accompanied by a range of strong and intense emotions. It appears that some of the hostages will return home alive, while others have paid the heaviest price and were killed or murdered during or after the massacre. For others, their fate remains unclear, and we hope for the swift return of all.

For us, as adults, this situation will evoke many feelings and questions. Children, who are sensitive to us, will also experience, to a large extent, what is happening. At this time, many parents are wondering how to explain the situation to their children.

It is important to convey the information to children in an organized and age-appropriate manner and not to wait for the information to reach them indirectly, in ways over which we have no control. The information shared with children should be truthful and accurate, avoiding graphic details or knowledge that is not age-appropriate. Additionally, it is crucial to moderate and supervise the information and images coming from the media.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that every parent, child, and family is unique, and certain aspects mentioned in this document may not align with your preferences. That's okay. If you wish to consider.

\*Please note - a variety of examples of age-appropriate parental responses can be found in the document

# Children's Questions and Parents' Answers:

## **Question: How do children respond to national events like the return of hostages?**

**Answer:** Children may experience feelings of joy and hope. Others might feel confusion, fear, sadness, or mixed emotions. Some may respond with numerous questions, while others may express their feelings through behavior, such as clinging to parents, difficulty sleeping, or emotional outbursts. Others may not outwardly express their emotions at all.

It is important to convey to children that various emotional and behavioral responses, including mixed feelings, are acceptable and appropriate, as long as they do not harm themselves or others. Additionally, it's helpful to explain that these reactions are connected to unusual and uncertain situations and are a normal result of stress.

## **Question: What should parents do if the child asks questions about what the hostages went through?**

**Answer:** It's important to acknowledge that, to a large extent, we don't know the details, and it's the hostages' right to share or keep those details private, either with their loved ones or to themselves. Parents should provide age-appropriate answers without going into graphic details.

It's essential to convey empathy and explain that adults, including security forces, are doing everything they can to ensure the children's safety. Emphasize that the most important thing is their return.

**Question: What should you do if the child is afraid that this might happen to them or their family?**

**Answer:** It's important to validate the fears as natural given what they have heard and the unusual circumstances that have occurred. Reassure the child with clear messages of safety and describe the measures that the state, the army, and the family are taking to protect them.

You can also use games, stories, or everyday examples to help the child cope with their fears.

**Question: How can you explain to a child why people were kidnapped?**

**Answer:** It's important to keep the explanation simple. Sometimes there are groups of people who are in conflict, and one group doesn't know how to solve problems or fight in fair or moral ways. Such people use force and cruelty, which the entire world does not accept, and they do bad things, including kidnapping people, as a way to settle scores later and get what they want.

However, in the end, this method will not succeed, and there are many good people working to rescue the hostages, both in our country and in others.

This way, the child will receive an explanation without feeling overwhelmed.

**Question: How should you handle difficult questions like, "Why were they the ones who were kidnapped?"**

**Answer:** A possible response could be: "We don't always know why things like this happen, but we do know that everyone did everything they could to save them and that now people are helping them return to normal life."

For those who believe in God, the response could be: "We don't know God's ways or His reasoning. But we do know that now they are returning, and we are happy about that."

And if it's very difficult, or continues over time,  
don't hesitate to reach out to a professional.  
We're here for you!



**Question: Should children be exposed to news about the return of the hostages?**

**Answer:** This depends on the child's age and maturity. It's important to remember that news is not only on television, and adults do not always have control over the information children are exposed to.

For younger children, it's better to relay the information in simple words without exposing them to images or distressing details. For older children, you can explain in a measured way and discuss the emotions the news may evoke together.

It's crucial to understand what the child already knows and respond to their questions, rather than providing unnecessary details. In any case, it's important to limit exposure to news as much as possible, both in terms of content and screen time.

**Question: What should you do if the child doesn't respond at all or ignores the topic?**

**Answer:** It's normal for some children to respond by avoiding the subject. Don't pressure them to talk; instead, offer an open space where they can share if they wish.

You can say: "There's a lot of excitement about the return of the hostages. If you have any questions, I'd be happy to try and answer them." For younger children, you can incorporate games or activities as an indirect way to help them process their emotions.

**Question: How can parents support children experiencing feelings of helplessness?**

**Answer:** Parents can help by providing a sense of control through small actions, such as assisting with tasks at home and establishing a clear routine.

Additionally, allowing the child to help others in small ways, like writing notes of encouragement for the hostages, can strengthen their sense of control and focus their energy on what they can do.

**Question: What should you do if the child develops existential questions like "Why is there evil in the world?"**

**Answer:** You can say: "There are things that are hard to understand, but we are all trying to learn how to resolve conflicts in ways that are less violent and cruel. Maybe one day, more and more people will join this effort. From a young age, we try to learn this within our families and communities.

There is also a lot of good in the world and many people who help others. We need to focus on the good and do good ourselves."

**Question: How can you help children express their emotions in a healthy way?**

**Answer:** Encourage the child to draw, write, play role-playing games, or share openly in a conversation. It's important not to judge or try to "fix" the child's feelings but rather to listen and validate them.

## Questions and Answers by Age Group:

### Parents First

**Question: How can parents cope with intense emotions they experience following the return of the hostages?**

**Answer:** Parents may feel joy, relief, anger, confusion, or mixed concerns. It's important for parents to acknowledge their emotions and allow themselves to process them, whether through talking with close friends, emotional therapy, or personal journaling. Awareness of their emotions helps parents regulate themselves so they can project calmness and confidence to their children.

**Question: Should parents hide their emotions from their children to protect them?**

**Answer:** There's no need to hide emotions, but it's important to regulate them and adapt how they are shared based on the children's age. For example, you might say: "I feel relieved and happy that they've returned, but I'm also thinking about what they went through." Sharing in this way can teach children how to handle complex emotions without overwhelming them while remaining authentic.

**Question: What can parents do if they feel helpless or anxious about the family's safety?**

**Answer:** Parents can focus on actions that reinforce their sense of control, such as maintaining a clear daily routine, talking with experts or supportive friends, and keeping open communication with their children. Additionally, it's important to remind themselves and their children that the situation is being managed by strong systems working to protect everyone.

**Question: How can a parent serve as a positive role model for their children in processing emotions related to the return of the hostages?**

**Answer:** A parent can share their emotions in an age-appropriate way, such as saying: "This is a topic that excites me and also makes me think a lot." By doing so, they demonstrate how to express and discuss emotions. Additionally, engaging in practical actions, such as writing a support letter to the hostages' families, can show children how to channel emotions into positive actions.

**Question: What should parents do when they feel overwhelmed by the situation and are unsure how to manage their emotions around their children?**

**Answer:** When feeling overwhelmed, it's important to take some time for yourself to regulate your emotions—for example, by taking deep breaths, talking to someone close, or engaging in a calming activity.

With the children, you can say: "I need a moment to think and calm down, and then I'll come back to talk with you about it." This way, the parent models to the child how to handle emotional overwhelm in a healthy way.

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# Questions and Answers by Age Group: Parents First

**Question:** How can parents cope with their personal concerns about the future security implications of the agreement?

**Answer:** Concerns about the future impact on personal and national security are natural, especially in complex situations like prisoner exchange deals. To manage these concerns and support yourself, consider the following:

1. **Focus on what is within your control:**

Maintain routines, strengthen a sense of personal and family security, create a safe environment, and ensure open communication with your children.

2. **Create emotional "anchors":**

Emotional anchors can include calming activities such as sports, meditation, or quality family time, which reinforce a sense of stability.

3. **Seek balanced and reliable information:**

Avoid unnecessary exposure to dramatic news and prefer sources that provide balanced and more optimistic interpretations.

4. **Express your concerns in a supportive framework:**

Share your feelings with close friends, family members, or support groups to release stress and understand that you are not alone in your thoughts.

5. **Remember your values as a parent:**

Focus on the value-based message you want to instill in your children, such as solidarity, optimism, and faith in society's ability to handle challenges.

6. **Seek professional guidance if needed:**

If your concerns are affecting your quality of life, consider reaching out to professionals such as psychologists or psychotherapists to process your feelings and receive tools for coping.

Paying attention to your personal needs as a parent and as an individual is critical so you can serve as a source of support and security for your children.

# Parents First

**When a parent takes care of themselves, they strengthen their ability to be a source of security and stability for their children.**

Just like on an airplane, where it's recommended to put on your own oxygen mask first, in parenting too, the ability to help your children starts with your ability to remain calm and balanced.

Children are very sensitive to their parents' emotional state, and when a parent addresses their own feelings, they prevent the transfer of stress and anxiety to their children. Taking care of yourself can include getting enough sleep, talking to a close friend, engaging in a calming activity such as exercise, or simply having quiet time for yourself.

When you make time for yourself, you are better able to listen to your child with empathy and respond to their needs in an appropriate way. A parent who replenishes their energy becomes a role model for their children, demonstrating how to face life's challenges with balance and calmness.

## And now that we understand, we can help the children.

### Questions and Answers by Age Group

#### Preschool Children

**Question:** How do preschool children respond to situations like the return of hostages?

**Answer:** Preschool children may respond through behavior, such as clinging to their parents, regression (e.g., bedwetting), fears of the dark or strangers, and simple questions like "Where were they?"

**Question:** How can you explain the return of hostages to preschool children?

**Answer:** Use simple and reassuring words, such as: "People who were far away

from their families have now come home. They are now in a safe place with people who love them and take care of them."

**Question:** What should you do if preschool children are afraid that it might happen to them?

**Answer:** Reassure them with simple messages, such as: "Mom and Dad are keeping you safe, and there are many people helping to keep everyone safe, like the army and the police."

**Question:** How can you help preschool children express their feelings?

**Answer:** Encourage drawing, role-playing, and storytelling. You can also play a game together that shows how "the whole family is together and safe

**Question:** What should you do if preschool children ask questions like "Why did they go?" or "Why weren't they at home?"

**Answer:** Preschool children need simple and clear explanations. You can say: "Sometimes people have to be far from their families for reasons that aren't always clear, but now they've come back home, and everyone is taking care of them."

It's important to emphasize that they are now safe and that there are adults who are always looking after them. If the child asks additional questions, listen and respond simply without overloading them with unnecessary details.

You can also help them process their questions through play or drawing. For example, playing a game about "a family returning home" can help strengthen their sense of security.

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## Questions and Answers by Age Group:

### Elementary School Children

**Question:** How do elementary school children respond to such a situation?

**Answer:** Children at this age may ask more complex questions, such as "Why did this happen?" or "Why were they kidnapped?" They may also express fears related to personal or family safety.

**Question:** How can you explain the return of the hostages to elementary school children?

**Answer:** You can say: "There were people who couldn't come home, but now they've returned. People are taking care of them and helping them feel better." It's important to adjust the explanation to their level of understanding.

**Question:** What should you do if a child asks difficult questions, like "Why were they the ones who were kidnapped?"

**Answer:** An appropriate response could be: "We don't always know why things like this happen, but there are many people doing everything they can to help."

**Question:** How can you help elementary school children cope with their fears?

**Answer:** Create an open dialogue, ask how they feel, and offer ways to cope, such as sharing positive experiences, playing together, or talking with friends

**Question:** What should you do if elementary school children avoid talking about the topic?

**Answer:** Respect their choice, but offer a space for open dialogue, such as a family conversation or a discussion through a story related to the topic.

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## Questions and Answers by Age Group:

### Teenagers

**Question:** How do teenagers respond to such events?

**Answer:** Teenagers may show deep concern, ask philosophical questions about justice and evil, or try to seek information on their own. Some may hide their emotions to appear strong.

**Question:** How can you talk to teenagers about the return of the hostages?

**Answer:** Share age-appropriate information, encourage open discussions about their feelings, and ask what they feel or think about the situation.

**Question:** What should you do if teenagers show indifference to the topic?

**Answer:** Understand that indifference can sometimes be a defense mechanism. You can gently ask their opinion on the topic or give them time to express themselves in their own way.

**Question:** How can you help teenagers cope with anxiety or fears?

**Answer:** Talk about ways to manage their emotions, such as volunteering in the

community, participating in social activities, or processing feelings through writing, conversations, or sports.

**Question:** How do you handle existential questions like "Why is there evil in the world?"

**Answer:** Talk to them honestly, explaining that it's a part of the world, but there is also a lot of good. Encourage them to think about how they can contribute to doing good in the world.

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## Mediating the Return of the Hostages:

For professional assistance, you can contact:

### Educational Psychological Services

#### Local Authorities:

The local educational psychological services (EPS) operate within the educational framework under the local authority and the Ministry of Education. You can contact your local EPS to request the assistance of a psychologist for the school attended by your child.

#### Ministry of Education Helpline:

Emotional support counselors provide assistance to parents, students, school principals, and teaching staff.

#### Operating hours:

Sunday–Thursday: 8:00 AM–8:00 PM

Friday: 8:00 AM–2:00 PM

**Contact:** \*6552 or 073-3983960 ext.

## Empathy Association Index:

### About the Empathy Association:

- Empathy is an organization dedicated to the psychology of parenting, based on the belief that improving the mental well-being of parents will also enhance the mental well-being of their children.
- On the association's website, you can find a directory of certified therapists who can assist both parents and children.



## Natal – Israel Trauma Center for Victims of National Trauma

Natal is committed to creating a resilient Israeli society in which individuals, families, and communities affected by trauma related to national events can lead meaningful and fulfilling lives.

The organization specializes in providing mental health support and treatment for victims of post-trauma related to national circumstances, as well as their surrounding communities.

Among its services, Natal operates a mental health helpline for individuals affected by trauma stemming from terrorism and war:

1-800-363-363

## YAHAT Index – The Association for Therapy Through Arts in Israel

The YAHAT index provides access to certified therapists specializing in therapy through the arts. This mental health profession uses creative and artistic expression to address mental, behavioral, developmental, and organic disorders. Therapy may focus on one of six artistic fields: visual arts, bibliotherapy, drama, music, psychodrama, and movement/dance.

On [YAHAT's website](#), you can find a therapist in this field near your area of residence.

## Metiv – The Israel Center for the Treatment of Psychotrauma

Metiv is a pioneer in the fields of trauma therapy, training, and research, with over 20 years of experience.

As part of its children's clinic, Metiv has been operating WhatsApp groups to address parents' questions since the outbreak of the war. Additionally, therapy services are available for children, parents, and adults.

### Contact:

02-6449666

[Metiv Kids Linktree](#)

[www.metiv.org](http://www.metiv.org)



## About the BOU Initiative – Coming to Save Them and Ourselves

The BOU initiative brings together Israel's leading physical and mental health professionals to support the hostages and the Israeli society as a whole. Over **700 speakers** have joined the initiative, with more than **300 lectures** already delivered, all on a fully voluntary basis.

We invite you to schedule a lecture or meeting to discuss the critical situation of the hostages in captivity and the impact of the ongoing crisis on all of us.



## Get Help Israel

Get Help Israel - The Israel Association for Mental Health Professionals - is the leading organization dedicated to empowering and supporting Israel's English-speaking public and professional community in the field of mental health.

**Get Help Israel** - The Israel Association of Mental Health Professionals is a trusted resource helping clients access the best services for their mental health needs. Get Help Israel is committed to elevating the standards of mental health care in Israel. By nurturing the professional community, facilitating collaboration, and raising awareness, we strive to create a society where mental well-being is a fundamental priority and individuals can access the support they need to lead healthy, fulfilling lives.

In addition to assisting English-speakers find the right help in their mother tongue, GHI consults with dozens of organizations, schools, and government offices to provide customized mental health services for their individual needs. This includes over 50 Gap year programs, Aliyah organizations, and various embassies/consulates of English-speaking countries. The association is recognized and respected for its rigorous verification of the professionals' credentials in accordance with Israeli law.

[www.gethelpisrael.com](http://www.gethelpisrael.com)

