

4th March 2026

Dear children of England,

My name is Dame Rachel de Souza. I am the Children's Commissioner for England, which means that my job is to protect and promote the rights of every child in the country.

I don't work for the Government, but I do tell them what children think about things, and when they make decisions that impact children's lives, they have to ask me what I think is best.

I am writing to every child and their family today because I know that many of you will have seen the news over the weekend about war in the Middle East.

In my role, I have heard from many children who are worried about how events unfolding abroad affect them and their families, both here and overseas. As one 16 year old boy put it, *"Teach students about world issues such as war and climate change, as I believe that the younger you are when you hear about these issues, the more concerned you will be and try to fix it."*

Having worked with children for 35 years, I know how keenly children feel conflict. They may have family in an impacted nation. They may have parents who are serving, or have served, in the armed forces. They may have friends who have experienced armed conflict – for example, one of the 60,000 Ukrainian children fleeing the invasion of Ukraine to whom we have opened our arms.

Even further removed from such personal connections, children care passionately about the world around them, especially other children. I delivered two of the largest surveys ever done with England's children, and there is a clear theme in both *The Big Ask* and *The Big Ambition*: so many responses where children wish for world where other children - all children - are warm, fed, safe, and happy.

War threatens all of those. It takes not just life, but that which children require to have their most basic needs met.

We are only a few short days into this conflict, and there have already been scores of children who have been killed in the Middle East. Thousands more will be harmed in some way. Trauma, displacement, injury, deprivation of the physical essentials.

To the children of England, I want to say this: know that you always have places to turn to talk about things that are troubling you. Speak to your family, to carers, or to trusted adults in your lives. It is okay to feel afraid because of things like war. The grown-ups in your life might feel worried too, but it is

their job to help you get through difficult times.

To the adults who may be reading, particularly those who care for or work with children, never forget that the diminished responsibility of children does not mean diminished understanding. When there is conflict, we should not hide what is happening, but support children in understanding it. We must remember that children can find solace in being part of a wider community that is comprehending and responding to these events.

I do not write to you because these things are easy to talk about. I write to you precisely because these things are hard. For many families, for many people who work with children, there is an instinct to protect them from the world, to talk about happy things rather than war. I understand this instinctively.

But we live in an imperfect world, in which awful things happen. Talking to children about difficult topics such as war can help them work through their feelings. Adults can help children express their feelings in different ways – talking or perhaps making art or music. Furthermore, it serves as a protection against children seeking out, or being shown by online algorithms, content about war. When adults speak to children about difficult things, they can control the tenor of the conversation, admit what they don't know, and provide context for some of the most difficult parts. Online content will never offer the same context. Instead, it will often push the most shocking depiction of violence, shorn of context or additional information. If I could remind you of one thing, it is this: online content is served up for children by people who do not love them but want their attention.

I hope for an end to this conflict. We all can, and should, strive towards a place of greater understanding, where diplomacy is given its proper role, and the wellbeing of peoples, who yearn for peaceful existence founded on justice, is upheld.

But we should acknowledge the world as it is and know that providing a safe haven for children does not mean protecting them from the knowledge of evil, but rather a secure and reassuring relationship within which to engage fully with your feelings.

Yours sincerely,



Dame Rachel de Souza
Children's Commissioner for England