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Taking your child to an Anzac service? Prepare for loud noises and big questions

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Tens of thousands of Australians are expected to attend Anzac Day marches and services over the weekend.

Many children will also be there with their families or school groups.

Anzac events are often very sombre and can provoke serious questions from children. This year, with conflicts raging overseas, and terrorist attacks at home, the questions may be even more serious.

How can parents and educators best approach these events that focus on grown-up topics such as war and service?

Are these events appropriate for children?

The Australian Curriculum says educators should teach children about commemorations from Year 3 – or around the age of eight or nine. In many schools, children are taught about commemorations through Anzac Day and Remembrance Day services.

These provide a chance to teach children about our history and to learn more about our community and how people participate in it.

Why are we doing this?

Whether you choose to attend these services or watch from home, it is important children understand what they are observing. Thoughtful preparation is key to making the experience meaningful and respectful.

You can start with what your child already understands about the broader purpose of Anzac commemorations.

One way to explain it is: families remember happy things together all the time, including birthdays, religious days and holidays. These are celebrations.

Commemoration is different. It's how we remember something sad, like the anniversary of a grandparent's death. Your family might focus on the positives of what that person meant to you, but the feeling is quieter and more reflective. Anzac Day works the same way, but at a community scale.

What's going to happen?

Anzac events involve moments that may be frightening for young children. This includes the use of ceremonial weapons, the noise of a 21-gun salute and occasionally protestors.

Children may find it easier to cope with these events when they know what to expect.

Knowing what's coming supports children to understand when they are expected to be quiet and still, and when they can participate (such as singing or laying a wreath), or when simply standing still for a minute is a way of showing their respect.

Government websites like the Australian War Memorial and the Department of Veterans' Affairs explain the order of service.

There are also useful picture books, online interactives and activities, short age-appropriate videos, and resources for recent immigrant families.

During the ceremony

Keep your child close and let them know they can whisper questions if they need to. A quiet warning before a loud noise, like a bugle call, can go a long way.

Remember younger children take their cues from the adults around them. Model the calm behaviour you wish to see, and offer them a small smile or nod when they behave appropriately.

If they become restless or upset (as young children do), then that's OK. Quietly stepping to the side or back of the crowd is always an option.

When you're on your way home

The conversation on the way home after the ceremony can bring up some big thoughts or questions.

Ask your child what they noticed and what they want to know more about. Older children might want to talk about the symbolism, such as the poppies or the rosemary and ask what they stand for.

You can also broaden the picture. Explain that not everyone who has served chooses to attend public services. Some prefer to commemorate in private or not at all, and that is OK.

You can also point out that defence personnel are not alone – others also put themselves in dangerous situations for the benefit of the community. Police, paramedics, fire fighters, volunteers and other first responders also demonstrate values such as sacrifice and mateship.

With older children, you could have a conversations about what is often overlooked or only briefly mentioned at this time of year. This might include the [contributions of women](#) and [Indigenous service personnel](#), [service families](#), volunteers and the [Australian Frontier Wars](#).

You could also reflect on how it's often easier to talk about long-ago wars than recent ones because it's less confronting.

I don't want to glorify war for my kids

When you are talking to your children you could mention the many impacts of conflict.

Let them know war hurts people visibly through [physical injuries](#), but also invisibly through [mental](#) and [moral impacts](#) (if people have done or seen things they think are wrong). These can stay with veterans and their families for a long time.

Those who serve carry their experiences with them, and so do the people in countries where wars are fought.

Honest, age-appropriate answers are sufficient – you do not need to go into graphic details.

Why do we have wars?

Children will sometimes ask the hardest questions on the drive home. Or maybe just before bedtime or days later.

If they ask “why do we have wars?” you could refer to conflict between children and their siblings or friends involving a few people. Usually, they can work out a solution, or agree to disagree, and move forward. When whole countries have conflict, it can become a war if they can't negotiate.

If they ask “will there be more wars?” you can ask them, “will you ever fight again with your siblings or friends?” Unfortunately, humans tend to have conflict, but we hope negotiators can help solve the conflict so the wars end.

Beyond the day

Lastly, remember attending ceremonies or services is only one way to remember.

You can also do this through supporting veterans, reading books or watching films about conflicts, history projects at school and having conversations about what happened and what we have learned from the past.

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