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Children in warzones



This is not a word-for-word transcript.

Neil

Hello, this is 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English. I'm Neil.

Becca

And I'm Becca.

Neil

Now, today, we're going to be talking about the very serious topic of war and how it affects children.

Becca

Some of the discussions you hear will mention death and trauma. We won't go into detail, but if you think you feel may uncomfortable, you can check the transcript for this episode before listening to it on our website, bbclearningenglish.com.

Neil

Yes. And remember, you'll find all this episode's vocabulary, along with a free worksheet, and many other 6 Minute English episodes on our website. Again, that's bbclearningenglish.com.

Becca

The most recent figure from 2024 says that 520 million children are living in conflict zones. That's about one in every five children worldwide.

Neil

In this episode, we'll hear from Fergal Keane on the BBC World Service Programme The Global Story. Fergal is a BBC reporter known best for reporting from war zones around the world and, as a result, developed PTSD, a type of stress disorder. We'll be finding out what PTSD stands for at the end of the programme.

Becca

Now, in the clips we'll hear journalist Asma Khalid asks Fergal Keane about his own experience with childhood trauma. Fergal grew up in a home with an alcoholic father. Asma wanted to know how his own trauma affected his reporting on the experiences of children in warzones:

Fergal Keane

I was **hyper-vigilant** from the very earliest age, obviously watching out, you know, am I under threat, is there a danger to me here?

Neil

Fergal mentions that he was **hyper-vigilant** because he was in dangerous situations as a child. The adjective **vigilant** means to always be careful to notice things, particularly when there is a possibility of danger.

Becca

Yes. And the prefix **hyper-** expresses that there is a lot of or even too much of something. Though neutral, it is often used in negative or critical contexts.

Neil

So, **hyper-vigilant** means very, very careful and thoughtful. Hypervigilance, the noun, is a state of extreme alertness and sensitivity to surroundings, possibly of extreme anxiety.

Becca

Now let's hear from Fergal as he talks about research on the experience of children in warzones:

Fergal Keane

I mean, they disagree about a few things, but on this they're absolutely **of one mind**. And that is that you can't recover from war trauma if you're living with continuing trauma.

Neil

Fergal mentions that 'they', the researchers, disagree about their findings. But they're absolutely **of one mind** when considering the recovery of war trauma. If you **are of one mind**, you are of a group of people that share the same opinion, desire, or viewpoint on a matter. Researchers may disagree on whether the experiences of children in warzones is improving, but on the point of recovery, they **are of one mind** on that you can't recover from war trauma if you continue living with it.

Becca

Fergal goes on to talk about some of the ways in which these children might be helped:

Fergal Keane

And so there's a new field of theory, well I mean relatively new field of theory which encourages children to slowly and carefully try to **confront** obviously not death and massacre again, but things like learning to sleep alone, not having to sleep with a parent because that's what they did during the war because they were so consistently terrified. Now, it sounds like a simple thing, but as anybody who's tried to put a child to sleep, who's had a **nightmare**, a child who hasn't been traumatised will know it's very difficult.

Neil

Fergal says that children should be encouraged to slowly and carefully try to **confront** their experiences. To **confront** something is to meet with it or deal with it. For the children to **confront** their terrifying experiences, they must start with more simple things, like learning to sleep alone.

Becca

Sleeping alone seems simple enough, but Fergal compares the experiences of a children of in a warzone to that of children who have **nightmares**.

Neil

Yes, and a **nightmare** is a very scary or upsetting dream. It can also be used metaphorically to describe unpleasant events or experiences. Now, let's hear Fergal talk about what he has learned from reporting on children in warzones:

Fergal Keane

The big lesson is that, given a chance, the human spirit, and especially children, are **phenomenally resilient**.

Becca

Fergal describes the children as being **phenomenally resilient**. The noun phenomenon, or phenomena in its plural form, refers to an observable fact or event that can be experienced through the senses. The adverb **phenomenally** describes something being done or felt in an extreme or surprising way.

Neil

To be **resilient** is to be able to recover from and come back from something difficult or bad that's happened. So, Fergal says that children can be surprisingly positive despite the negative things happening around them. They are **phenomenally resilient**.

Becca

A result of these negative things could be PTSD. Earlier we mentioned PTSD and it stands for post-traumatic stress disorder.

Neil

Yes, and the P in PTSD stands for post-, as we've just heard. And the prefix post-expresses something that happens after or as a result of the event it's attached to.

Becca

Now, let's recap the vocabulary. We first had **hyper-vigilant**, that is to be very careful or maybe almost too careful to notice things, particularly when there is a possibility of danger.

Neil

To **be of one mind** is to be part of a group of people that share the same opinion, desire, or viewpoint on a matter.

Becca

We had **confront** something. That is to meet with it or deal with it.

Neil

A **nightmare** is a scary or upsetting dream.

Becca

To do something **phenomenally** is to do it in an extreme or surprising way.

Neil

And to be **resilient** is to be able to recover and come back from something difficult or bad. That's happened once again. Our six minutes are up. You'll find a quiz and a worksheet to practice the vocabulary we've learnt from this episode on our website BBC Learning English. Goodbye for now.

Becca

Bye.

VOCABULARY

hyper-vigilant

be very careful or almost too careful to notice things, particularly when there is a possibility of danger

be of one mind

be part of a group of people that share the same opinion, desire, or viewpoint on a matter

confront

meet with it or deal with something

nightmare

a scary or upsetting dream

phenomenally

do something in an extreme or surprising way

resilient

able to recover and come back from something difficult or bad



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