Wondering About War . . .

During these uncertain times, students will be looking to you for comfort and information. You’ve probably already started fielding their concerns, from the reservist who was deployed for active duty to the student who has high school friends on an Iraqi-bound aircraft carrier. It’s impossible to envision all of the scenarios. Yet, it’s crucial that you remain as aware as possible in order to best serve student needs.

Some war-related issues to consider as you work with students include:

- the fact that they may be at odds with friends who they previously thought had the same values as them – when it comes to issues of war vs. peace, even friends can get into heated discussions which might result in some fallout
- their uncertainty about the future
- the emergence of social justice issues becoming topics for conversation, such as, “Is it right to kill innocent Iraqi citizens?” and “Who is it that gets sent to war?”
- anxiety about what to do in the event of a disaster on campus
- their desire to stay informed about the latest happenings
- the need for accurate, educational information to be shared via programs and bulletin boards
- the possibility that biased statements and actions – perhaps even hate crimes – will occur as a result of emotions running high – know what to do!
- international students may feel unsafe and unwelcome
- politics and diversity issues may come up more frequently during casual conversation
- worry for friends and family members who are in the military and/or living overseas
- helping students who have been called up for active duty to take care of things back on campus (i.e. financial aid, housing for next year, pro-rated reimbursements, etc.) – some may ask you to be their go-between.
- the different reactions this situation may elicit among different students – one may organize peace protests while another vehemently supports war while another takes it all in and doesn’t express an opinion
- some students may be so wrapped up in their “campus bubble” that they seem not to care when talk of war comes up – this can be a coping mechanism or they may really just not care or think about it
- the various ways that people cope with scary scenarios
- the need for some students to talk with professional counselors to sort out feelings

Whatever issues arise during this difficult time, remember that you don’t have to do this alone. Yes, students may come to you, needing to talk about their fears. Yet you can rely on your supervisor and other staff members for support when you’re not quite sure what to do. Don’t get in over your head, as that doesn’t help anyone. Know your limit, listen with care and refer people when necessary. This is a brand new territory for most of us . . . we’re figuring it out as we go along.

By Julie Phillips, a member of the PaperClip editorial staff.