

Supporting Children and Young People in times of Conflict and Uncertainty

A Brief Guide for Parent/Carers

Bad news, scary events and tragedy have been a recurrent theme over the past few years and the current crisis in the Ukraine is affecting many people in different ways.

It is not unusual for young people (and adults) to be thinking about “*what if... what if this happens? what if that happens?*” “ However, there are steps you can take to help your teen cope with the worry and also take care of yourself.”

What you can do to help your teen

Space

- Make space *and* time to talk about what is happening. By doing so, you are making it clear that their worries, questions and feelings are important to you.
- Ask open questions that show you want to hear more ... “How does this make you feel?” or “What do you want to know about this?”

Validate

- Let them know that you understand what they are feeling, even if it doesn't make sense to you. Avoid comments like, “don't be silly” or “you shouldn't worry about things like that”.
- Let them know that you can understand why they would feel sad, anxious, angry, etc.

Information

- Be prepared for questions.
- Be informed. This can be particularly difficult with media and reporting and trying to find balanced information, but this can also be shared with your teen. If they use social media the idea of “filters” can be useful in helping them realize that not everything they see and read may be true or accurate.
- Share information about positive steps being taken to keep them safe and about acts of kindness and compassion.

Honesty

- Don't make false promises or guarantees.
- It's better to be honest about the fact that we don't always have the answers and to demonstrate that uncertainty is OKAY.



Normalise

- Make sure that children and young people see that the difficult feelings they might experience as a response to this situation are normal reactions to difficult circumstances.
- It's okay to feel scared, worried and sad. These feelings aren't very pleasant but it's okay to feel them and to talk about them.

News/Social Media/Technology

- With all the benefits of technology come some challenges, including managing our own wellbeing and mental health in the face of 24/7 media and information. This can increase people's sense of fear and worry.
- **Limit exposure to social media and the news.** As well as the possibility of misinformation, the language used in news reporting is often quite sensational, which can be frightening and confusing for children, young people and even us as adults.
- **Switch off**
Consider how you want to engage with current events/news/media/social media. The constant "alerts" on our phone can increase the sense of relentless ad news and increase worry. Consider disabling notifications, unfollowing some channels or deleting apps
- **Balance**
- "Bad news will always exist in the world but that does not mean you are obligated to hear it, see it or read about it."
- Even in the worst of times, there are still positive things happening in the world. Look out for these or even better search them out, this will provide a more balanced perspective than all the scary news which can dominate mainstream media.

Other things you can do

- **Not everyone likes to talk.** Offer other ways for children and young people to express their feelings. This is a very brief video for children and young people which may be helpful [Advice if you're upset by the news - CBBC Newsround](#)
- Often when we feel anxious we also feel stuck or helpless. Even in a crisis young people and families can get involved- volunteering, donating, getting



involved locally can help people feel that they are doing something and therefore feel less helpless.

- Talking positive steps can bring hope and is a way for young people to have a sense of agency and effectively problem solve.
 - Raise money to help related charities e.g. United Help Ukraine www.unitedhelpukraine.org, the British Redcross Emergency Appeal www.redcross.org.uk
 - Write to your MP; www.parliament.uk for info

If you are worried about your child, your teen or even yourself please do not hesitate to reach out and speak to someone; schools, GP, faith and community groups can provide support and signpost you to services if needed.