

Response to Ukraine crisis

Over the past week our thoughts and focus has been on the conflict occurring in Ukraine and the devastating impact on the people in that region.

Inevitably the attention to news cycles, awareness of social media, and their own playground discussions, will mean that children and young people will be aware of the events and the significance of them. This may well create some fear, anxiety and questioning by children, and below we provide some ways to support children and young people when conversations about the current conflict and war arise:

Listen to their concerns and thoughts

We can't control everything children hear, and in the absence of the truth they will piece snippets together and create their own narrative. Open conversations will help you to deal with the exaggerations and panic that can develop on social media and WhatsApp groups.

Ask what they have heard and how they are feeling, and listen to their responses. Validate their feelings. None of us like to be told to calm down or to stop worrying. The feelings are real and being allowed to express those helps us feel understood. Provide a safe space for children to ask questions and share fears.

Active listening involves giving children our full attention, repeating back what they have said to ensure we understand their point of view. How we respond will obviously depend on their age and emotional maturity. Be honest but reassuring at the appropriate level. Younger children require safety messages, while older children and adolescents tend to need facts and context.

Get more information about this document

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Help them feel safe

Children need to see the world as safe and predictable. Experiences of trauma, or even images of trauma, can make the world feel an uncontrollable and unpredictable place. Look out for signs of fear or worry that they may not be willing or able to express.

We can't (and shouldn't) hide what is happening in the world, but we can limit the exposure by monitoring internet usage (depending on age) and not having constant news in the background on to and radio. It might help to show a map of the world to demonstrate how far away the fighting is.

[BBC Newsround has produced a short programme](#) explaining to children what is happening in Ukraine. This resource will be useful to watch with children to provide factual information if they are confused and are seeking information about the conflict. Allow time after watching this for children to ask any questions they may have. If children feel they have an understanding of what is happening, and confusion is reduced, they are less likely to feel anxious. Ensure that you provide simple factual information at an age appropriate level. A good guide for this is to be guided by the questions children are asking; if they asking, they need information.

You may be supporting children who have direct experience of war and have had to leave their home countries as a result. [Much work supporting schools with refugee pupils](#) has involved reassuring and affirming what they are already doing. School provides a secure environment with a predictable routine, clear expectations consistent rules, opportunities to develop social networks, create a sense of belonging, access information, and have recreational outlets.

Look out for those who might be more vulnerable

Refugee and asylum seeking pupils may have experienced trauma. This can increase the risk of psychological distress and potential social, emotional, behavioural and learning difficulties. Trauma experiences increase the risk of psychological distress and potential social, emotional, behavioural and learning difficulties. However, it is important to emphasise that not all refugee pupils will present with traumatic distress as a result of their experiences. Many display resilience, resourcefulness and high functioning despite the adversities they have encountered.

It is often the [post-migration factors](#), related to family, peer, community, school and service provision, that can either mitigate or exacerbate mental health difficulties.

Agency, play and positivity

We want to foster compassion and empathy. Helplessness and apathy are the real enemy. We all feel better when we can do something, so supporting action and agency in children is important also. You might then want to engage them in a discussion about how they could be involved in building a better, safer, kinder world. This might involve befriending the child in their class who doesn't speak English yet; perhaps donating to a charity or bringing them to an anti-war protest.

Play is fundamental for wellbeing and holistic development (cognitive, social, emotional and physical). Children may re-enact or try to make sense of what they see on the news through their play, or perhaps through their drawing. We should encourage this where appropriate. These forms of storytelling can help them process without the need for words, with the added value of helping us to see where they are at.

Many children will feel upset for a short time after a frightening event but over time this will fade. If you become worried that children continue to have problems after the event, which may particularly effect those that have a direct link with the incident, then please do seek further advice and support from your visiting educational psychologist.

Other resources you may find useful

[Help for teachers and families to talk to pupils about Russia's invasion of Ukraine and how to help them avoid misinformation. - The Education Hub \(blog.gov.uk\)](#)

[Advice if you're upset by the news - CBBC Newsround](#)

[Talking to Children about War and Violence](#)

[Childline | Worries about the World](#)

[Downloadable Resource: Worrying about War and Conflict](#)