

## Helpful Tips for Teens Affected by the War in Ukraine

The invasion of Ukraine by the Russian military is concerning. Some people may worry about family and friends in Europe, the possibility of service members being at risk, and the potential consequences of the war escalating. The best way to deal with your concerns and sort out your questions is to talk with your friends, family, and teachers. The following suggestions can help.

### BE AWARE OF YOUR FEELINGS

You or your peers may have varying emotional reactions. The intensity of these feelings may vary from person to person or day to day. You or your peers may feel:

- **Fear.** This can include fear for the safety of yourself, your families, friends, and the population at large.
- **Loss of control.** The current world events are something over which people have little control. Lack of control can be overwhelming and confusing.
- **Helplessness.** You may want to do something but not know what to do, or you may feel as if there is not anything you can do.
- **Loss of stability.** It can feel as if things are changing fast.
- **Anger.** Some people may feel angry about what is happening, or anger may be covering other emotions arising from uncertainty.
- **Confusion.** Some people may feel confused about the current conflict, what further dangers might arise, and when the violence will stop.
- **Isolation.** Some people may feel as if they're the only ones having the feelings they do. It is normal to feel this way, but you are not alone in these feelings—talk to friends, family, or a trusted adult.
- **Hypervigilance.** Being preoccupied with thoughts of the conflict or the need for more news.

It may be hard to concentrate in school or sleep at night. It is better to deal with these feelings than pretend they don't exist. Talk to your friends, parents, or another trusted adult if you find your reactions getting in the way of your typical daily activities (like eating, going to school, or socializing). **Tell an adult immediately if you or a friend feels distressed or overwhelmed.**

Don't worry if adults seem concerned or uncertain. Many adults have strong feelings about current events. Like you, they may be upset at the human and economic costs of war. The heated nature of debate at home and demonstrations around the world is not wrong; it simply indicates how important and difficult this conflict is. Remember: Your parents' and teachers' priority is to help you understand what is happening and ensure your welfare.

### MAINTAIN YOUR NORMAL ROUTINE

Keep up with your schoolwork and extracurricular activities to the extent possible. Sometimes simply helping around the house, participating in a hobby, listening to music, or reading a book can help you feel more in control.

Take care of yourself.

- Stress or anxiety can affect your health, and being run-down can affect your outlook.
- Healthy eating, adequate sleep, and exercise can help reduce stress.
- Limit your caffeine and junk food.
- Spend time with friends instead of online.

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- **Don't use drugs or alcohol.** They may temporarily mask unpleasant feelings, but ultimately they **always** make problems worse.

### LIMIT EXPOSURE TO MEDIA AND SOCIAL MEDIA

It is important to stay informed, but watching endless war coverage is likely to heighten anxiety.

- Limit your exposure to the news for a structured amount of time.
- Be sure to get your news from multiple sources, such as print, radio, TV, and internet, in order to gain as broad and accurate an understanding of the facts as possible.
- Differentiate between fact, opinion, and rumors. Fact is what actually happens. Opinions are how we feel about what happens. Our opinions should be based on fact, not rumor or supposition.
- Find activities that can replace the time spent watching news or using social media (talking to someone, going for a walk, exercising, reading a book, studying, playing or listening to music).

### DO SOMETHING POSITIVE TO HELP OTHERS

Contributing to the community or country helps us feel more in control and builds a stronger sense of connection.

- Be allies for peers who may be struggling or working alongside a family affected by the conflict.
- Volunteer with programs or organizations that can help with immediate or longer-term needs of those affected.
- Support and share opportunities for fundraising and collections for food and necessities.
- Engage with local, state, or federal policy makers or attend a town hall, city council, or other local meeting to raise awareness for refugees and gain support for them.
- Remember that everyone's contributions, regardless of how big or small, are important.

### TIPS FOR TALKING WITH OTHERS

Some of the people closest to us may have different views or opinions about the war. This may lead to heated discussion, which emphasizes the importance of the topic and that it can be emotionally charged. Try not to start conversations about sensitive issues when you are extremely emotional, tired, or feeling vulnerable.

- *Explore and express opinions respectfully.* You can discuss ideas without attacking others. Try stating your thoughts with opening phrases like, "I believe" or "Have you thought about" instead of "Anybody who" or "No one should." Differentiate between fact, what actually happens, and opinion, how we feel about what happens.
- *Act respectfully.* Anger can be a natural reaction when we feel anxious or at risk. Often, we want to blame and lash out at someone, but hate and anger only make things worse. Hurting or threatening someone because of their background is wrong and will not make us safer.
- *Think positively.* The events and suffering inflicted by the war in Ukraine is horrible, but the world is working together to end the war and help those most immediately affected. We can feel grateful to those risking their lives and inspired by the many acts of solidarity and support being made by individuals.

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