

Current Situations:

Mental Health Impact

War in Ukraine Edition

The war on Ukraine will have adverse mental health effects on individuals and communities around the world. The attack on Ukraine has evoked many emotions including anger, fear, anxiety, worry and confusion. These consequences can lead to additional worries for families that were already struggling from the pandemic. We've gathered some resources and important tips to offer for children, families, and individuals who need support.

Potential Impact and Considerations

For some, the war may serve as a reminder of their own trauma or loss. This may result in feelings of sadness, fear a helplessness, worries about separation, increased acting out, as well as possible disruptions to their sleep, appetite, and ability to concentrate.

Caregivers can provide support to children by:

- 1) learning about common trauma reactions;
- 2) offering comfort and reassurance;
- and 3) finding opportunities for connections with family and others important in their lives.

Talking to Children about War

- **Start the Conversation**
 - Check in by asking what your children know about the situation.
 - Do NOT presume you know what your children are thinking or feeling. Ask how they are feeling about what is happening and respond to concerns they share. Validate feelings your children share.
 - Plan to have multiple conversations if they have questions or the situation changes.
- **Clear Up any Misunderstandings**
 - Listen and ask questions to find out if your children understand the situation accurately.
 - Gather information from trusted sources. This will increase your confidence in answering questions children may have.
- **Provide Context**
 - Younger children hearing about war may worry for their safety, discuss with them where this is located and assure them of their safety.
 - Help children identify assumptions they may hold about other based on their nationality, place of birth, language spoken, etc. Remind them to treat everyone with respect.
- **Monitor Adult Conversations**
 - Use caution when discussing the war in front of younger children.
 - Monitor the tone of your discussions. Be as calm as possible when discussing the war in language young children can understand.
 - Monitor your expression of worries and concerns about any economic impact the war may have on your family as your anxieties may be unintentionally communicated to your children.

Understanding Media Exposure

- Media coverage of war, combat, and its aftermath may be upsetting to children and adults and could increase fear and anxiety.
- The more time spent viewing coverage of the attacks, the more likely individuals are to have negative reactions.
- Very young children may not understand that the events are not happening in their community.
- Limiting exposure to media coverage, including social media discussions can be helpful for all individuals to protect their mental health.
- Caregivers can support older children by viewing the media together in order to answer questions or explain that they are seeing.

How to Foster Resilience

- Increase Connections
 - Families can benefit from spending increased time together, providing extra reassurance and reaching out to other family or community members.
- Emphasize the Helpers
 - Highlight the many ways people are working to support those affected by war and to end the conflict.
- Keep to Routines
 - As much as possible, keep to your routines and schedules in the face of current events.
- Offer Patience
 - Offer additional patience, care and love to children and yourself as we all may feel increased stress at this time.

How to Help

If you wish to help those impacted by the war, consider ways to do so including sending letters to the troops, sending donations to responding charity organizations, or participating in activities being offered in different community organizations. The following are a few organizations supporting Ukrainian citizens and others affected by the war through volunteer work or charitable donations.

- **United Help Ukraine:** <https://unitedhelpukraine.org/>
- **Voices of Children Foundation:** <https://voices.org.ua/en/>
- **International Medical Corps:** <https://internationalmedicalcorps.org/>
- **UNICEF:** <https://www.unicefusa.org/>
- **The ICRC:** <https://www.icrc.org/en/where-we-work/europe-central-asia/ukraine>

If you are experiencing more anxiety and distress, we offer support for all ages. We also offer a free and anonymous mental health screening on our website at www.EastersealsMichigan.com.

Reference:

APA Statement and Resources on the Mental Health Impact of the War in Ukraine:
<https://www.psychiatry.org/newsroom/news-releases/apa-statement-and-resources-on-the-mental-health-impact-of-the-war-in-ukraine>