



General advice for school staff and parents/carers on talking with children and young people about the conflict in Ukraine

Children may have seen or heard things about the current conflict in Ukraine, leading to feelings of uncertainty and worry. This is on top of living through a global pandemic over the last two years. This is some general advice for staff in education settings, and for parents/carers, on talking with children and young people who are worried, but are not necessarily directly affected by the conflict (i.e. do not have family or close friends in the Ukraine, Russia or neighbouring affected countries, although a lot of the advice will still be relevant).

❖ Put things into perspective and support with ways forward

Reassure children that they are safe and that what is happening is far away and will not affect them directly, you might say, 'I know you may have seen/heard some scary things on TV or on the radio, but we are safe in our home/school with our family/friends.' At the same time, offer reassurance that there are adults from all over the world who are working hard to help people in Ukraine and trying to stop the conflict.

Children may also want to help in some way and could have ideas about fundraising and it is good to support them to do this at home/school. Some children may prefer to explore how they are feeling through drawing, writing, music, or acting out scenarios through play. Be patient and give them the space to express themselves in a way that they find comfortable.

Use the idea of distance to reassure younger children that what is happening, is far away. It may help to compare the distance in geographical terms to a holiday they have been on in the past or a long journey, e.g. 'do you remember when we went on holiday to..., it is much further away than that'. For some children it may be beneficial to physically show them on a map or a globe to demonstrate the distance between ourselves and the conflict.

❖ Be open and honest

Children need to feel as though they can trust school staff and their parents so be open and honest when talking to them. If they hear something different from somewhere else this could cause distress.

Make sure that any information you give is appropriate for the child's age and level of understanding. Do not give more detail than is needed as this could cause unnecessary worry.

Give extra emotional support and reassurance. Create a safe environment for them to share their thoughts and feelings.

Validate their concerns and ensure that they feel listened to. Do not try to distract them or change the subject if they seem upset. All questions deserve an answer and if it is not answered by an adult, the child may come to their own conclusions or look elsewhere for information which could be inaccurate. Let them know that it is normal to feel worried or afraid, but that they are safe.

If your child comes to you with information they have seen or heard online, encourage your child to share this with you, e.g. 'That's interesting, I'm glad you are showing me that', offer additional age appropriate explanations to what is happening and address any misunderstandings.

❖ Misinformation and media exposure

Media and social media platforms are important to us and our children regarding finding out and sharing information, particularly at this time. We need to be cautious about the sources of information and the amount of time spent engaging with the media, particularly with the continuous availability of news, which can easily become overwhelming. It is important to limit exposure to the coverage which can include upsetting scenes and distressing language. Experiencing this can cause heightened levels of anxiety and distressing thoughts.

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For children and young people, media platforms can be a potentially confusing and harmful places without additional support, guidance and opportunity to ask questions about what they have seen. There has been a surge of misinformation and distressing videos relating to the current conflict, particularly on platforms such as TikTok and Snapchat. Try to monitor what your child is looking at more closely and ensure that information sought is from reputable, age appropriate sources. Provide additional reassurance, guidance and gently dispel any misinformation when appropriate.

Monitoring and reducing the amount of time that children are exposed to the media and turning off devices can make a vast difference to a child's well-being.

Take a break and try to do something that relaxes you and your child, turning off news/social media notifications.

❖ Take a child or young person's lead

Some children will be captivated by the conflict in Ukraine and want to talk about it and find out more; some will be concerned or have a feeling that something is wrong, but others may show no interest at all. Do not bring the topic up if the child seems uninterested. It is helpful to respond to the level of interest shown by the child, letting them lead the conversation and also recognising signs when it is helpful to move on and talk about something else or do something different.

To begin conversation from your child's starting point, use open ended questions such as: 'What do you know about what's happening?' 'How do you feel about it?'. Let them know that they can come and talk to you anytime and check in with them after a day or two.

❖ Maintain normality and model calmness

Maintaining normality in daily routines helps children to feel secure at school and at home. Children will recognise that their life has not changed even if the outside world seems chaotic and this will be reassuring for them.

It is important to keep calm, even though you may not feel it inside. Children are perceptive and can sense how the adults around them are feeling. They will look to their parents and teachers for indicators as to how they should behave, so model calmness and reassure them that other people/countries are helping.

Be extra mindful when talking to other adults about the situation if a child is within earshot – it would be worrying for a child to hear one thing from you and then hear you saying something different to someone else.

If you are a parent/carer who is worried about your child, consider having a conversation with your child's teacher in the first instance.

Useful links

https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2022/02/25/help-for-teachers-and-families-to-talk-to-pupils-about-russias-invasion-of-ukraine-and-how-to-help-them-avoid-misinformation/?utm_source=1%20March%202022%20C19&utm_medium=Daily%20Email%20C19&utm_campaign=DfE%20C19 The Education Hub from the DfE also offers related guidance for teachers and families of older children about talking to children about complex emotive news stories.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/13865002> For reliable age appropriate information for young people.

<https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/your-feelings/anxiety-stress-panic/worries-about-the-world/>

This website has a Calm Zone for children and young people who are feeling worried and gives calming activities to help.

<https://www.smilingmind.com.au/> This has an App supporting mindful approaches for young people which may be helpful in supporting relaxation

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