



Supporting Children and Young People in a time of War Advice for Parents/Guardians

Talk and images of countries at war can be very upsetting for children and adults. It can threaten their view of the world as a safe and predictable place. It can cause different reactions and emotions with some children and young people, being more affected than others. Vulnerable groups at the moment may include:

- Children and young people of Ukrainian and Russian heritage;
- Children and young people who are seeking protection in Ireland (asylum seekers and refugees);
- Those who have experienced separation and loss;
- Those with pre-existing risk factors;
- Those with additional needs.

The support of a trusted adult at this time will support children and young people to feel safe and secure and to manage their thoughts and feelings. Parents/ guardians can help support children and young people in the following ways:

- **Model a sense of calm** – Children and young people look to the adults in their lives to guide them on how to cope with worrying and stressful events. If the adults in a child or young person's life are overly worried, their anxiety may rise. Equally, when adults are calm it helps to reduce children and young people's anxiety.
- **Tend to your own wellbeing needs** – Remember you are an important support to your child and young person at this time. Be mindful of your own wellbeing and how you are feeling and take steps to manage your own self-care. See supports and resources available from the HSE and community support services [here](#).
- **Maintain routines** – Supporting your child to maintain everyday routines and engage in activities that they enjoy will help to reduce any stress or anxiety.
- **Give information in reassuring ways** – Children and young people will have different understandings of what is going on, and without the facts, they often imagine situations far worse than reality. They need factual, age appropriate information about the war in Ukraine. Let their questions and their age guide as to how much information to provide.
 - Very **young children** need brief, simple information and reassurance that they are safe and that the people they care about are safe.
 - **Older children** may need help to separate reality from rumour and



fantasy. Having the facts can help them feel a sense of control. They may also be concerned with their mortality, fairness and moral and/or ethical issues. Give them space and opportunity to discuss these in a supportive and safe way.

Be aware of what you are saying if talking to other adults about the war in the company of children and young people.

- **Limit media exposure**– Limit what they see and hear on the news. Images and reporting of war can be upsetting and frightening.
- **Foster a sense of control** – Encourage children and young people to think about small ways they might help: e.g. supporting fundraising appeals.
- **Be mindful of difference** –Adults can influence how children and young people view or react to others. Be careful and compassionate in how you talk and treat people of different nationalities.
- **Monitor vulnerable groups** – For the vulnerable groups listed above watch for signs of distress or anxiety e.g. clinginess or attention seeking behaviour.

For further advice on supporting children and young people, click on the links below.

- [Wellbeing Advice and Resources – gov.ie](#)
- [Your Mental Health - HSE and community support services](#)