

How to cope with stress and anxiety caused by the war in Ukraine

As the conflict between Russia and the Ukraine continues to unfold, many people are left feeling a sense of loss, frustration, hopelessness and fear. Tragic events can cause a range of intense physical, emotional and psychological symptoms. People often experience shock and disbelief and find it difficult to accept the reality of what is happening. Children are also impacted, and their reactions depend on their personality, the severity of the event, the availability of support and previous experience of trauma.

Following are some suggestions to help you through this challenging time:

Limit media exposure. Limit or prevent exposure to disturbing news and social media coverage of the event. Children who see graphic images or hear distressing news stories may become re-traumatized. Be aware of how you are reacting and manage your own stress. Stay calm and offer hugs and reassurance to help restore your child's sense of safety and security.

Recognize that people will have different reactions. Everyone experiences a trauma differently, and no trauma is "worse" than the other. If it hurts you, then it hurts you—and your feelings and experiences are valid. You can share information about the event with your child and answer their questions honestly. Remember to listen to your child's fears and let them know it is okay to share their feelings at any time.

Stay connected. Spend time with people who give you a sense of security, calm or happiness. Talk about your concerns with people you trust. A supportive network is very important for emotional health. It may feel safest to bury painful feelings and avoid confronting them, but recognizing what has happened and how it has affected you is one of the healthiest things you can do.

Engage in positive activities. Try to engage in positive, healthy or meaningful activities, even if they are small, simple actions. Doing things that are rewarding, meaningful or enjoyable, even if you don't feel like it, can make you and your family feel better.

Practice good self-care. Look for positive coping strategies that help you manage your emotions. Listening to music, exercising, practicing breathing routines, spending time in nature or with animals, journaling or reading inspirational text are some simple ways to help manage overwhelming or distressing emotions.

Help is available. Your program is completely confidential and here to help you and your household members 24/7/365. No situation is too big or too small.

Contact your program or visit your member website to get started.

Sources: healthblog.uofmhealth.org, verywellmind.com, nasponline.org