

## How to Look After Your Wellbeing - Advice to Children and Young People from Ukraine

The war in your home country, Ukraine, is a terribly shocking event that has had a massive impact on families and young people like you. You may have had very frightening and distressing experiences in your country over the last weeks and also in travelling here. You have probably left family members behind, and you have lost all your normal routines and way of life.

First of all, we want you to know that you are very welcome here in our country and we want to help you, including supporting you with any distressing thoughts and feelings. You might have lots of worries, not just about what is happening at home, but also about your future here and what our country looks like. Being in a strange place can feel very overwhelming, and we would like to support you to in getting used to it, but also tell you that it is really ok not to always feel like you can cope. What you have been through is completely shocking and very hard to understand. It is very understandable that it feels so strange. You are not alone in feeling like this.

Here are some ideas about what we know from talking to other children and young people and some suggestions to help you with a few of the thoughts and feelings that you don't like having:

### Feelings you might be experiencing and what you can do:

- You might experience a reaction to the events you have been through, including difficulty sleeping and having nightmares, feeling strong emotions or having thoughts you can't control, suddenly having images in your head of things you've seen, feeling jumpy when you hear a loud noise or see a sudden bright light.
- You might feel very angry that all the opportunities and choices you had before have been taken away.
- You will experience different and confusing feelings and thoughts about what has happened to you and also about other countries and what they have done or haven't done to help you.
- You may feel lonely at times without all your family and friends around you, especially in a country which is culturally different.
- You might suddenly feel quite sad about everything, and you may feel that things are a bit hopeless.
- These strange feelings are all normal reactions to extraordinary events that have happened to you, and they usually pass if you are able to:
  - Talk to someone you trust about these feelings or experiences. Voice aloud what it is that's going on in your head and also how your body feels. Tell someone close who you think will understand. If you can't say the words out loud, just be near to someone you trust when you feel like this and wait until the strange thoughts and feelings pass.
  - You have lost your normal life and routines. All the things you had before at home and school are different now and it is a bit of a shock. Take time to allow yourself to feel sad, angry, and upset about this. It is not fair. You deserve to have the normal things in your life that other young people have, and these have been taken away from you. It is not your fault.
  - Ask an adult to support you so you can do the things you used to love at home. You might want to join the swimming club, football, music etc. Get help to start doing some of the things you used to enjoy in your life in Ukraine. These things will help you to feel a bit more secure and give you some comfort.

- If you have a faith or religious belief, use this to help you find comfort and make sense of some things that have happened to you.
- Limit the time you spend on your phone and on social media as it can make you feel more anxious. Talking to friends helps.
- Avoid constantly checking the news, seek some distractions from it; thinking about it all the time is likely to make you feel more sad and worried.
- There is a lot that you can try that helps when you feel worried and low:
  - Breathing exercise- breathe in for four seconds, hold for four seconds, breathe out for four seconds, hold for four seconds and repeat. This will help to calm you when you are anxious.
  - Listening to your favourite songs, finding new music you like, or watching films or other things that distract you helps to take your mind off the worry
  - Music can have a really positive affect on emotional wellbeing. Choose music that is calming and has a solid beat to help you breathe slowly and steadily. Slowing your breathing to a steady pace can help you relax if you are feeling stressed
  - Create a self-soothe box- put a few things together for when you get really worried that grab your senses. You could include something to smell, something to touch, something to look at and maybe even something to taste. Include photos or special things that remind you of nice memories. Put things in the box that focus your mind on positive things, and which can help you to feel more relaxed.
  - Engage in some regular exercise, going for a walk or playing a sport you enjoy. At school you may see some new sports that you may want to try.
- Stay connected to other young people from Ukraine who you can talk to and spend time with. You might want to support someone your own age or younger with their feelings when they feel low. They might do the same for you. That is what friends are for.
- See if your school has any youth or young people mentors. You could teach someone in your new school about Ukraine and Ukrainian language and way of life, and they could help you learn English and understand the English way of life.
- You may feel that as no one can understand the things that happened to you, that there is no point trying to make new friends. Please do reach out-it is worth it, you will find someone you like and want to be friends with.

If you are experiencing difficulties, you don't need to suffer on your own. It is always helpful to talk to someone close to you, someone you trust, maybe someone who has had a similar experience who knows what you are feeling.

There will be times when you feel quite strange, quite unlike how you normally feel. This might feel hard as you don't expect to feel like this. But remember you have had terrible and distressing experiences and it is normal to feel the way you do.

### **Who can I ask for help?**

We know it's hard, but don't be afraid to ask for help. You may feel that you don't want to burden other people. But the truth is this – people care about you, and they really want to help you.

First, think about who you would feel most comfortable talking to? Many of us prefer talking to family or friends, or you may want to talk to professionals (staff working at your school or college, your GP (family doctor), health professional) or talk in a support group for refugees.

After you have thought about the different people you could talk to, decide who is the best person to talk to for you.

When you speak to them, explain how you feel and what support you would like. Sharing your worries with someone you trust can help you see your problems in a different way. They can help by spending time with you, talking things through or giving you help.

### **Where can I get help?**

There are 24/7 crisis phone and text lines available in England if you, or someone close to you, is having a mental health crisis. These crisis lines are available to people of all ages, and you can [find your local helpline](#) on nhs.uk.

You can also talk to your GP (family doctor). We recommend that you and your family register with a GP as soon as possible after you arrive. A GP can offer medical advice, treatment and refer you to other services that can help you. If you're nervous about speaking to your GP, you could ask a friend or family member to come along for support.

As well as the above, there are also other places where you can get help and advice if you can read or speak English. Some help is provided through websites, and others through text, phone or email.

- [Better Health – Every Mind Matters](#) website provides support, including tips on how to improve your mental wellbeing.
- [YoungMinds Crisis Messenger](#) provides free crisis support if you are having a crisis – this is available every day of the week, at any time day or night. You just need to text YM to 85258. All texts are answered by trained volunteers, with support from experienced clinical supervisors. Texts are free from EE, O2, Vodafone, 3, Virgin Mobile, BT Mobile, GiffGaff, Tesco Mobile and Telecom Plus.
- [Samaritans](#) are an organisation you can ring at any time of the day or night. They will help you and listen to how you're feeling. You can ring them on 116 123. You can also email them [j](#)
- The Anna Freud Centre has some online resources for young people to help them with their wellbeing and mental health <https://www.annafreud.org/on-my-mind/youth-wellbeing/>