

# Helpful Information for Talking to Children and Young People about War and Conflict



**With news stories of conflict and war dominating the news, you may be worried or concerned about how to communicate with your young people about difficult issues in the world.**



Young people often pick up information from news outlets, social media and peers that make them feel worried or anxious. It is natural and healthy for young people to have a wide range of emotions about any conflict. Whilst some may be fearful for their own family's safety; others will be confused about how to make sense of the events. Some will respond with excitement and anticipation, while others will have a mix of emotions. Sometimes young people may ask you questions that you are not sure how to answer, these

questions may even evoke emotion in you that make talking about this issue more difficult.

The last two years have been incredibly difficult for young people's social, emotional and mental health, due to the pandemic and now they are faced with an even more uncertain world with war and conflict. It is important that we don't stop talking to our young people about what is going on in the world whilst supporting them emotionally with feelings this may bring. The following sources are a great start for supporting children of all ages.



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# Talking to Children and Young People about the news



## How to Approach the Subject

- ▶ Children and young people are very receptive. They will have picked up bits of information from different sources eg. the news, peers, social media.
- ▶ We need to address our children's concerns. If we avoid this conversation it may increase anxiety.
- ▶ Children who have experienced trauma will be more vulnerable.

## Managing Your Own Feelings First

- ▶ Adults too will be emotionally effected by the news.
- ▶ We do not want to burden our children and young people with adult concerns about the situation.
- ▶ Adults must manage their own emotions first, before having this conversation with a child or young person.

## Be Honest

- ▶ Listen empathetically to the child's comments and use this as a starting point for your discussion.
- ▶ Accept and validate the child's feelings and concerns. 'I can see that you are worried...'
- ▶ Provide basic facts and clear information.
- ▶ Be honest with what is happening, including when you do not know the answer.

## Example of something a child may ask:

*Will there be a world war?*

*This is a big question. I wonder if you are feeling scared? That's normal. I feel scared too. I don't know the answer but I know we are safe now.*

*What would help you to feel safe if you think about this question again?*

From @dr.martha.  
psychologist

# How much information is the child or young person ready for?

## Ages and stages

Children and young people may not fall into their age category. You will also need to consider the child's developmental stage when deciding how much information may be appropriate.

0-8 yrs: Children will struggle making sense of concepts like death and war. Their brains are still developing abstract thinking skills and they may blur fantasy with reality.

8-12yrs: Children have an understanding of war and that war can lead to people dying. At this age children may have covered war topics in history lessons.

Teens: Children will know what war is and have info at their fingertips. They may have been exposed to false information.

From @dr.martha.psychologist

School and parents may not agree on how much information the child is ready for. Be cautious of the parent's concerns.

## Help them to Feel Safe

- ▶ Put the child's concerns into perspective. It may be appropriate to use a map to show the child where they live and where the conflict is happening.
- ▶ Remind the child or young person that you are there to keep them safe.
- ▶ Predictability will provide children and young people with a sense of safety and security. Maintain a normal routine as much as possible

## Moving Forward

- ▶ Thank the child for sharing their feelings with you and affirm that you both are very caring and want people to be safe.
- ▶ Be aware of where the child is getting their news. Limit exposure to unhelpful news sources.
- ▶ Encourage the child to come to you with other concerns in the future.

## Take Positive Action

Plan a way to support those affected by the conflict in Ukraine.

*Non  
uniform  
day*

*Bake sale*

*Fundraising  
projects*

*Collect  
clothes  
donations*

# Thinking Critically About the News

To spot bad and misleading information, ask yourself these three simple questions:

*Where's it from?*

*What's missing?*

*How do you feel?*

## Where's it from?

Is there a source?

Is it a trusted source?

Does it look right? Watch out for unusual URLs, bad spelling

## What's missing?

Get the whole story, not just the headline

Do the images look edited?

Check the sources they give

## How do you feel?

Is the article trying to manipulate your feelings? Articles that evoke strong emotions eg. anger get more clicks!

If it looks too good to be true, it might be. Hope can also be used to manipulate us and get more clicks.

*This information is from [fullfact.org/toolkit](https://fullfact.org/toolkit).*

## Further Concerns

If you have further concerns about a child, always seek further advice.

- ▶ SENCO
- ▶ Headteacher
- ▶ Parents
- ▶ PREVENT Team

### Helpful resources for adults when talking to young people:

- ▶ **Family Education, Talking with Children about War and Violence in the World**

<https://www.familyeducation.com/life/wars/talking-children-about-war-violence-world>

- ▶ **The British Psychological Society, Supporting Children to Manage Anxiety Over War, Conflict and Crisis**

[https://www.bps.org.uk/news-and-policy/supporting-children-manage-anxiety-over-war-conflict-and-crises?fbclid=IwAR1xHGduPW3vdQs\\_j6XdT9-5CiU-laoaQxu77ote7G0TWL8uwO4KwlfKEpw](https://www.bps.org.uk/news-and-policy/supporting-children-manage-anxiety-over-war-conflict-and-crises?fbclid=IwAR1xHGduPW3vdQs_j6XdT9-5CiU-laoaQxu77ote7G0TWL8uwO4KwlfKEpw)

- ▶ **MindShift, War, Crisis, Tragedy: How to Talk to Kids When the News is Scary**

<https://www.kqed.org/mindshift/59143/war-crisis-tragedy-how-to-talk-with-kids-when-the-news-is-scary>

- ▶ **Mental Health Foundation, Talking to your Children about Scary World News**

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/talking-to-your-children-scary-world-news>

### Helpful resources and support for young people:

- ▶ **Childline, Worries About the World**

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

- ▶ **Newsround advice if you're Upset by the News**

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/13865002>