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*National Philoptochos Department of Social Services*

*National Child Traumatic Stress Network  
[www.nctsn.org/resources/talking-to-children-about-war](http://www.nctsn.org/resources/talking-to-children-about-war)*

NCTSN The National Child Traumatic Stress Network



## Talking to Children about War

The attack on Ukraine has evoked many emotions including anger, fear, anxiety, worry, and confusion. It has also created safety concerns for the region that reach into our own country. Some families may be worried about loved ones who are directly impacted, including those who live in the area; those who were visiting and are trying to get back to the United States; or those who are deployed as part of the military, government, or a relief organization. When there are events like these in other countries, we may feel the economic impact in the United States including seeing raising gas prices, higher prices for some imported goods, and changes in the stock market. These consequences can lead to additional worries for families that were already struggling financially from the pandemic. Most children will learn about the war and its consequences through the media or social media. Caregivers and children alike may be struggling to make sense of what they are seeing and hearing. Children of all ages will be turning to trusted adults for help and guidance. Parents and caregivers can help navigate what they are seeing and hearing by having a conversation with them, acknowledging their feelings, and finding ways to cope together.

### Potential Impact and Considerations

- For some children and families, the war may serve as a reminder of their own trauma or loss. This may result in feelings of sadness, fear, and helplessness, worries about separation, increased acting out, as well as possible disruptions to their sleep, appetite, and ability to concentrate. Caregivers can provide support to children by 1) learning about common trauma reactions; 2) offering comfort and reassurance; and 3) finding opportunities for connections with family and others important in their lives. To learn more read [Age-Related Reactions to a Traumatic Event](#).
- Military families may be experiencing an increased worry for loved ones who are or may be deployed as a result of the war or who are already stationed in the region. Although military families understand the risks associated with being in the military community, they could use additional supports to help bolster their resilience and to assist them through these challenging times. For best practices providers can read [Working Effectively with Military Families: 10 Key Concepts All Providers Should Know](#), and parents/caregivers can read [Understanding Child Trauma and Resilience: For Military Parents and Caregivers](#).
- Families who have loved ones in the Ukraine, Russia, and the surrounding region may need to take extra time to discuss children's concerns related to the safety of their relatives and friends, and to acknowledge how difficult the uncertainty and worry can be for the entire family. While keeping up with events is especially important when family is involved, finding some time each day to take a break from coverage and engage in other activities is important for everyone's overall coping.

### Talking to Children about War

- **Start the Conversation**
  - Check in by asking what your children know about the situation. Most school-age children and teens will have heard something from media outlets, social media, teachers, or peers.
  - Do NOT presume you know what your children are thinking or feeling. Ask how they are feeling about what is happening in Ukraine and respond to the concerns they share. Remember, their worries and feelings may not be what you think. Validate feelings your children share.
  - Plan to have multiple conversations if they have had a lot of questions or as the situation changes. Checking back in as changes occur helps children to know you are open to talk about difficult situations.