

# GUIDELINES FOR GROWN-UPS: HOW TO TALK TO CHILDREN ABOUT WAR



For many of us adults, the horrific events in Ukraine are a source of anxiety, grief, even fury. Now imagine what our children are feeling: They may have witnessed the graphic depictions of war on television or social media, watched children like themselves flee from their homes or get caught in the crossfire—and they have no context for what they're seeing and feeling.

And they will turn to you (maybe they already have) with their questions and fears.

Remember that kids are picking up on your behavior, thoughts, and feelings. So as the grown-up, you'll need to assess your own level of stress prior to speaking with children!

## DO YOUR BEST TO MODEL CALM, EMPATHY, RESPECT, AND REASSURANCE

- ★ **Calm** - Speak slowly and at a regular conversational volume. This instantly gives the child a soothing sense that they're okay, because their trusted grown-up is talking in a normal way.
- ★ **Empathy** - Listen closely to your child's words and carefully observe their behavior. Validate the child's feelings (never minimize or dismiss them). Explain that **All feelings are okay—it's what you do with them that counts!** See page 2 for strategies for managing big emotions like fear, sadness, and anger.
- ★ **Respect** - Take their questions seriously. Use age-appropriate language to address their concerns.
- ★ **Reassurance** - Provide comfort and closeness to help them feel safe and secure. For young children, minimize exposure: Turn off the TV and limit social media. For older children, provide clear, brief, factual information. Use a map to show children that the war is happening on the other side of the world, and that it's in the news because it's so unusual.



## HERE ARE SOME MESSAGE POINTS YOU CAN SHARE WITH CHILDREN

War can be confusing and complicated. If you're like most kids, you may have lots of questions about what's happening. Asking questions is a great way to get answers.

- What have you been hearing? Do you have questions about that?
- Your family will always do their best to keep you safe. There are many other helpers working hard to keep you safe.
- Lots of countries are working together to try to make the world a safer place.
- Your feelings are a very special and important part of you. All feelings are okay—and feelings are meant to be shared. Keeping feelings bottled up inside can cause aches and pains, and we don't want that!

## OFFER CHILDREN STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING THEIR FEAR, SADNESS, AND ANGER

### ★ Fear:

- Use positive self-talk—and say it out loud! *“My family is keeping me safe”; “I’m brave and strong!”; “I’m going to be okay!”*
- Listen to calming music.
- Color, read a book, play a favorite game.

### ★ Sadness

- Watch a funny video.
- Do something nice for someone else (that will make you feel better!).
- Cuddle up with someone you love.

### ★ Anger

- Run around outside to let off steam.
- Do some jumping jacks.
- Punch your pillow or yell into it (the pillow can take it!).



*For any of the above: Put on music and dance—it’s almost impossible to be afraid, sad, or angry when you’re dancing!*

**The Moodsters** offer many excellent workbooks (most of them are free!) to help children learn to recognize and manage their emotions, and to develop the resilience skills that will help them thrive now and in the future.

**The Moodsters are here for you and the children in your life!**