



## Guidance for Parents and Carers from Ukraine on Supporting the Wellbeing of their Children

This is not an easy time for you as you adjust to your new circumstances in a new country. Your family's lives have been significantly disrupted. You have had to leave your home, your extended family and friends, your country and everything that is familiar. Your child has to start a new school, learn a new language and adapt to different living arrangements. That is a lot of change to manage. In the last few weeks and months you and your child will have had a range of different experiences. What is happening in Ukraine will have threatened your view and your child's view of the world as a safe and predictable place. Your child may be feeling stressed, anxious, sad, afraid, fed up, angry, frustrated, shocked or even numb or they may be feeling nothing at all. They also could be feeling relieved to be in a new country. There is no right or wrong way to feel, and feeling a range of emotions is a normal and healthy reaction at this stressful and traumatic time. Your child needs time to settle and adapt to their new environment. Here are some ideas that may help support your child's wellbeing at this time:

### Staying healthy and well

- Try to encourage them back into their normal sleep routine. There are helpful tips on getting a good night's sleep [here](#).
- Encourage them to eat healthy food and to drink lots of water.
- Find ways for them to keep active as this helps to release tension.
- For older children talk to them about the importance of avoiding smoking, drinking or drugs. Some young people may use these as coping mechanisms for stress and anxiety but they will cause greater difficulties and make a difficult situation worse.



### Keep to routine

- Keep to routines and schedules to help them feel a sense of normality. A structured and predictable day can help them feel more secure and reassured.
- Encourage your child to keep doing their schoolwork and other social and physical activities, but don't push them if they seem upset or overwhelmed.
- Let them know that it is important for them to do enjoyable things and that it is ok to have fun.

### Listen

- Try to give them a little more of your time and attention to talk about their concerns, fears, and questions. Sometimes children find it easier to talk when involved in a shared activity like play or a walk rather than sitting down face to face for a conversation.
- Watch out for clues that they may want to talk, such as hovering around you while you are doing tasks. Young children will often ask a question, go back to playing and then return with another question.



- Listen to their questions: this will give you an idea of what they might be able to understand and what facts to share and what not to share.
- Acknowledge the difficulty of the situation, but help them to see how people can come together to cope during this crisis.



### Talk

- Talk to them about how they are feeling and what worries they may have. Let them know that all feelings are ok. Help your child to understand that many of their feelings, thoughts and behaviours are normal responses to the current situation.
- Talk to them about ways they can manage their thoughts and feelings. Share with them the things that have helped you when you have felt worried or upset.
- Reassure your child that they are safe and that they will make new friends and settle into their new school.

### The media and the facts

- We often try to protect our children from distressing information but they may hear it from another source. Hearing information from you is best. This keeps their trust in you and stops them worrying about what you are not telling them. Talk with them about what they are seeing on the television or online about the war.
- Your child will need facts shared with them using words that they can understand for their age. Without the facts, they can sometimes imagine the worst.
- Younger children need short, simple information. They need to know that they are safe.
- Older children will access information via social media. Encourage them to stick to reliable, trustworthy mainstream news sources and to be mindful of 'fake news' being shared via social media.
- Remind them that Governments around the world are working hard to try to end the war.
- While it's important for children and young people to have access to information, be careful about over-exposure to ongoing news reports about the situation in Ukraine. Taking breaks from worrying information is also helpful.

### Calm

- Be aware of your own thoughts, feelings, and reactions, as these may affect your child. How you cope and behave in this situation will influence how your child copes and behaves.
- Tell children what they can do to mind themselves and make themselves feel calmer. Encourage them to try relaxation or distraction techniques e.g. deep breathing, reading, singing. Download a Ukrainian/Russian calming, relaxation app. See [here](#) for more information.
- Encourage them to be kind to themselves by using positive self-talk, such as '*I am doing ok with all the changes that have happened in my life*', '*I will make new friends*', '*I will be ok*'.

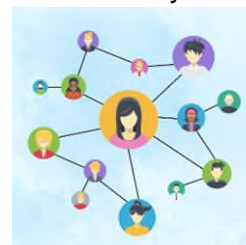




- Let them know that you recognise how brave they are in the way they are handling this difficult situation.
- Help and encourage them to reward themselves frequently and to plan for things that will motivate them to get through this time.
- Take steps to look after your own wellbeing. This will help you to be able to support your child. This may mean creating time in your day for some self-care, like going for a walk, exercising, reading, watching a favourite film/TV series, practising some relaxation techniques. When you have taken time to support yourself you will be in a stronger position to support your child.

### Stay in touch with others

- Encourage them to stay in touch with their Ukrainian friends on social media or by text. If they have Ukrainian friends who have also relocated to Ireland, show them where they are living on a map of Ireland and plan to meet up when possible. If possible use video calls and zoom to connect with others.
- Encourage and support them to make new friends too.
- Keep in contact with other parents who have moved to Ireland to talk and share experiences.



### Language

- Continue to speak to your child in your home language.
- Help them communicate using translation apps e.g. Microsoft Translator and Google Translate.
- Let them know you recognise how hard it is to communicate through a second language, for example they will be more tired than usual. Praise them for trying and/or when they attempt new words or phrases.

### School

- If your child does not have a confirmed place in a school make contact with TESS [here](#).
- If you know what school your child will be attending look up the school's website with them to see videos, photographs, school news and communications.
- Talk to them about their strengths and interests and how they will use these in their new school.
- Ask your child what they would like their new school to know about them.
- Visit the school and talk to school staff.
- Practice ways that they can communicate with peers for example hand signals, pictures, translator apps (Microsoft Translator and Google Translate).
- Contact the school if you have any queries. Don't be afraid to ask for help. School staff will be happy to help you both to problem solve around issues you are experiencing or advise you to where you can get some help.





**It will take your child time to settle and adjust. Feeling safe, secure and having good relationships with those around them is key to recovery and wellbeing.**

- If your child is upset or worried, ask them to **share** what they are thinking/feeling.
- Let them know you are there to **listen**.
- **Watch for signs** of distress or anxiety e.g. clinginess, attention needing behaviour or regression. These behaviour are normal while they settle and adjust and should ease with time. **Seek further advice** from a GP if these difficulties persist.

**You can find information on the supports and services available while you are in Ireland [here](#).**