



HOW TO SUPPORT UKRAINIAN CHILDREN ?

TIPS FOR COMMUNITIES, SCHOOLS AND GUESTFAMILIES

1. SAFE ENVIRONMENT

Every child who fled the warzone needs an environment where she feels safe. This includes a warm and safe climate and connectedness at home.

POSITIVE CONTACT

A short contact can help to reduce the stress level. A supportive smile, a soft tap on a shoulder, a kind word. Observe the reaction to learn which type of interaction works best.

RESILIENCE

Appeal to the natural resilience of the child. Following a traumatic event, children usually show sufficient strength and flexibility to heal.

You can enhance child's resilience by offering:

- Support from community.
- Resources buffering negative consequences in daily life.
- Feeling safe at home and in the community.
- Connections with others.

STRENGTHS AND TALENTS

Help the child to identify and reinforce successes. Focus on their talents.

- Using strengths and talents helps to stay in the here and now.
- Noticing the talents and encouraging their use also reinforces the connection between the child and the adults.

EMOTIONS

When a child is experiencing strong emotions, try to recognize and name them. When the emotion is named, it can go to rest. If child's fears sound vague or jumbled, you may summarize what you're hearing: "It sounds like what you're feeling is..."

MEDIA COVERAGE

Media coverage of an ongoing war may be abundant. Disaster research has shown that unexpected messages or images could

cause a reappearance of stress-related problems. Moreover, watching the disaster coverage may lead to "secondary victimization" causing emotional and physical problems with the viewers.

It is best to not allow children to watch news coverage of the war and limit your own exposure to it.

2. STABILIZATION

Help the child to learn to experience emotional stability.

INTRODUCE A ROUTINE

Regularity, repetition, rhythm create a structure, make the world a predictable, safe place. This helps to keep the stress system in check.

PREDICTABILITY

Agreements and rules also offer predictability and clarity which increases safety. Having the rules apply to everyone in the household increases the feeling of belonging.

CLARITY

Be clear about your expectations, for example participating in the house life and other activities. Use visual support such as pictures, notes, pictograms, white boards etc. where possible.

RITUALS

Changes, even nice ones, may become a source of stress for a traumatized child. Free time, transitions between activities can be experienced as stressful due to a lack of clarity and additional social interaction. Rituals such as putting on some music, setting up the table before a meal or drinking tea after supper can help to feel safe at moments like this.

PATIENCE

Offer your support in the learning of new things. A traumatized child may require more explanation and practice to learn to follow the rules.

CALM ENVIRONMENT

Sensory stimuli (sounds, smells etc.) can trigger traumatic memories. Learning to recognize and handle the triggers can help to stabilize the child in daily life.

COLLABORATION

Be collaborative and include the child in choices wherever possible (e.g. house rules, organizing their space, technology use, etc.). Having their voice heard and respected helps to regain confidence and a feeling of control in life.

3. TALKING TO CHILD WHO EXPERIENCED A TRAUMATIC EVENT

TALKING ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED

If children keep asking the same question over and over again it is because they are trying to understand; trying to make sense out of the disruption and confusion in their world. They repeat inquiries because they expect everything to return to normal.

- Notice when children have questions and want to talk.
- Initiate the conversation. Just because children aren't talking about a tragedy doesn't mean they're not thinking about it. They may be too overwhelmed by their own feelings to express them.
- Be a good listener by giving the child your full attention, not judging or minimizing what they're saying. Use clarifying questions, such as: "That's interesting, can you tell me more about that?", "What do you mean by...?", "How long have you been feeling...?"
- Use the child's language. Using the terms children use can validate their experience by demonstrating that you are actively listening to what they are sharing.
- Ask about factual information to understand what the child actually knows. Asking questions in a respectful manner would convey a sense that you genuinely want to understand the child's experience. In the context of trauma, it is important to refrain from asking about the personal experience at the moment when the traumatic event took place.
- Give honest, simple answers to their questions. Some questions may be tricky to answer, in which case you may say that you do not know the answer.
- Use words or phrases that won't confuse a child or induce additional fear.

- Reassure the child. You may achieve that by saying that:
 - They are safe.
 - Things will get better. Feel free to point out some of the measures that are being taken

ENCOURAGE THE CHILD TO EXPRESS THEIR FEELINGS

Encourage children to express their feelings. If child's fears sound vague or jumbled, you may summarize what you're hearing: "It sounds like what you're feeling is..." A non-verbal way to express the feelings is through drawing, writing, singing, or play. Create opportunities for children to talk with other children about what happened and how they are feeling

MAKE SURE THE CHILD REMAINS CALM

It is okay to listen to the story when the child is telling it calmly. However, if the child is getting agitated and overwhelmed by bodily sensations, feelings of helplessness and fear, she may be reliving the traumatic event. This could lead to retraumatization.

- If a child seems to be experiencing a lot of distress, you may interrupt her and say, "Do you want to stop and take a deep breath? Let's take it slowly. We can stop if you want to"
- Even if the child is not exhibiting distress, you may stop and ask, "How are you doing with this? Is it OK to keep going?"

SHARING HOW YOU FEEL

You may share your feelings with the child. Best to express your emotions with a reserve, such as, "You seem sad when we talk about this. I feel sad, too." This approach validates what the child is feeling, shows empathy, and acceptance of what you're feeling.

HERE AND NOW

You can also be a good listener when it comes to here and now topics such as how did you sleep last night, how did you like your breakfast etc. This helps the child to stay in here and now.

ENCOURAGE THE CHILD TO ACT

Encouraging a child to act upon what they're feeling can help restore their sense of control. Suggestions may include volunteering, raising money for charity, sending thank you notes to volunteers, medics, firefighters, or army. This may help the child to step out of their position of powerlessness.

WHEN TO SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP

If after 3 months the child is still suffering from anxiety, distraction, fear, feeling of hopelessness or helplessness, sleep problems, nightmares, sadness, angry outbursts, headaches or tummy aches, it is best to seek out professional help.

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