



The Schools Counselling Partnership is working to improve the emotional wellbeing of children, parents and staff by working with the whole school community.

How to talk to your child about the war in Ukraine

No matter where in the world you live, it's hard to watch the news from Ukraine. The news is constant so our children can't help becoming aware of it. And because the conflict is upsetting to us, it can be hard to answer our children's questions about it.

This newsletter will give you language to answer questions about the war in an age-appropriate way for children from nursery age to pre teens. Your child may be hearing about the war, drawing conclusions and feeling anxious. It's important to let your child know that they are safe; and reduce their anxiety by answering any questions they have.

First, here are some general guidelines.

- Turn off the news. You can check in periodically yourself, but avoid exposing children of any age to upsetting screen images and reporting. Fear shouldn't set the tone in your home, even when there is a war.
- Watch your own tendency to react strongly in front of your child. Children take their cues from us, and our overreactions make them feel less safe. Calm yourself before you talk with your child.
- When your child asks you a question, first ask them what they have already heard about the issue, so that you can correct misinformation and alleviate anxiety. So even more than giving your child information, you want to listen to their worries, instead of dismissing them. At the same time that you acknowledge the sadness and fear, reassure your child that they are safe. This is true for children of all ages, even into the teen years.
- Help your child keep this in perspective. Children don't have context for big world events like this, and our constant stream of social media and news reports makes current events very immediate. This can greatly increase the anxiety of a child who may worry that a war anywhere in the world poses a threat to their own safety. In addition to reassuring your child that they can trust you to keep them safe, you'll also want to help your child keep this in perspective: this is a tragedy AND our life goes on. This helps us to see how much we have to be grateful for and to treasure our many blessings.
- Empower your child. When children see unfairness and pain in the world, it can make them (like the rest of us) feel despairing and cynical. So when you talk with your child about tragedies, always talk about the people who are helping, working to make things better. Then, ask your child what he or she can do to help. Feeling that we have any ability at all to help is an antidote to the powerless that we otherwise feel in the face of tragedy. Young children who don't have much understanding of money may want to draw a picture, say a prayer, or send love. Older children and teens might want to donate some of their saved pocket or birthday money or raise money to donate to one of the many organizations working to save lives in Ukraine.

Guidance for age-specific support for your child is overleaf

Nursery Age:

Children this young should not be exposed to the news, but they may overhear things, or hear from their friends. If your child raises the issue, ask what they've heard. Accept any fears they may express: "It could be scary to hear that," and reassure them that this is happening very far away and they are safe. Explain that sometimes even grownups forget to use their words and that can lead to fighting, which hurts people and is always sad. Ask if they would like to draw a picture and to send love to the Ukrainian people.

Under 10s:

With children under the age of ten, you don't need to raise the issue, but do be alert if your child raises it. Ask what they've heard, and what they think about it. Ask if they've been wondering anything about what is happening and why. Listen to their fears without dismissing them, and then reassure your child that you will keep them safe: "Bombs here in London? That IS a scary idea. Thank goodness, that is not going to happen. The fighting is far away. And I will always keep you safe no matter what."

Answer your child's questions simply in terms they can understand, such as:

- Ukraine is now an independent country, but was previously part of Russia and many of the people who live in Ukraine speak Russian. There have been ongoing arguments about whether parts of Ukraine should again be controlled by Russia.
- Mr. Putin, the long-time leader of Russia, initiated a military invasion of Ukraine.
- The Russian people do not necessarily agree with the war, and there have been many Russian protests against it.
- This is happening a long way from here and you are safe.
- This is a good example of why it is so important to use our words and work things out when we get mad. Physical fighting hurts people and does not solve anything.

Preteens

Children aged ten and up will be very interested in what's happening, so don't hesitate to discuss it with them. However, be aware that their sophistication can mask anxiety. Always start by asking what they've heard, what they think about it, and if there's anything they've been wondering about what is happening.

Acknowledge their fears without dismissing them: "Your friend said there could be nuclear war? That's a very frightening thought. I don't think that will happen, but I understand why the idea would scare you. Sweetheart, thanks for telling me that you were worrying about this. I will keep you safe no matter what."

You can discuss all the points listed in the "School Age" section above, and ask your child questions such as:

"Do you think it should be a crime to invade another country?"

Acknowledge that the situation is terribly sad; and consider with your child what your family can do to help, such as raising money to donate.

Please remember, every Tuesday at 9-10am, Roxy holds a safe and confidential space to meet with parents/carers who would like some support. She is here to help you to either think through some of your concerns with one of your children, or to support you with a personal struggle, such as grief or loss.

If you would like to make an appointment to speak to Roxy, please email her at roxy@schoolscounsellingpartnership.co.uk or call/text her on **07730 416 019**.