Russia’s invasion of Ukraine is distressing and concerning, and we understand children and young people may have questions or be seeking reassurance. We know that schools are well placed to talk to pupils about the images they are seeing and help them navigate the concepts and issues this brings up. We’re also aware that these are issues schools, teachers and parents may never have encountered before.

Here is some useful advice and resources for schools and teachers, but will also be helpful for families and young people themselves.

How to talk to young people about distressing complex, emotive news stories.

- **Establish the facts** by pointing children towards “trusted, reputable sources that explain the what, where, when, why and who”.

- **Explore a range of diverse perspectives** by considering the different voices and views involved, showing solidarity with potentially marginalised voices and views and make sure it’s not left to a pupil to stand up for a particular minority viewpoint alone.

- **Be comfortable without an answer for everything – and help your children feel comfortable with that too** – by being clear that in many circumstances there is no one ‘right’ answer and two sides to every story.

- **Encourage students to debate ideas** by facilitating discussion and helping pupils know that debate can happen without it becoming personal – by, for example, encouraging pupils to say they disagree with someone’s idea, rather than with the person.

**Be Honest** - Children have to know above all else they can trust their elders, young children will hang on every word they say. It can be detrimental to the interests of children if you have told them one thing and they later find out that it’s not true. Teenagers are likely to know a lot already, so discussing it is important. Spend time talking to them about the current conflict in Ukraine. With so much social media and online presence, it is also good to talk about different perspectives and narratives. Check for misinformation, use facts to your advantage.

**Try to stay calm or at least seem to be, even if you don’t feel it** - Children often look to their parents and teachers as role models on how they should feel, but it’s okay to say, I’m a bit worried too and that you don’t know everything. None of us have all the answers, so you don’t need to pretend that you do. Be aware of ‘Little pitchers have big ears’, children are master eavesdroppers and their young ears pick things up from the next room without even trying. Be careful of how you are talking about the situation to other adults. Not saying one thing to them, and something very different in the next conversation which can be more worrying for children.
Listen to children - It is imperative to listen to what children think about what’s going on, and how they feel about it. For younger children who seem disconcerted, you should give them a chance to express how they feel. Set a few minutes aside around an hour before school finishing or when its bedtime for a chat. Ask them how they are feeling, and if they are worried about anything. Relate those feeling to your own.

Don’t bring it up if children seem uninterested - Some children will be fascinated by what is happening in the world and want to know more, some will be worried, but others may show no interest at all and that’s fine. It depends entirely on the child. Its about judging each child’s interest and responding to it in the right way.

Relating situations to things they know - For some children picturing things can help them understand them better, relating them to events in their life that they will remember. It could be looking at a map. You may want to reassure the child that they are safe, this could be mentioning a holiday pointing the destination out on the map and how long it took to get there, then point out where the conflict is in relation to the holiday which might be even further away. Reassure them that you are going to keep them safe.

More information and resources

If you would like to view the Webinar ‘Helping children cope with world conflict’ it is being delivered live on **Tuesday 15th March at 12:00pm**, please use the following link to register for this session

https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/98042773815154957

If you are unable to join the webinar live, a recording of the session can be accessed using the same link above after the webinar has taken place.

If you feel you may need some support following the current conflict in Ukraine you can contact Care first. Care first is a leading provider of confidential, professional counselling, information and advice services. All employees are eligible to use Care first, our services include; telephone counselling, information services and online support. Call Care first on the Freephone number provided by your organisation and you can speak to a professional in confidence.

**Care first**