

Russia's invasion of Ukraine: information and support pack

How to talk to your child about what's happening

No matter how calmly you manage the current environment, children are likely to be anxious. They will pick up bits of information from their friends, from the news and from listening to adults talking around them – but they can misunderstand what they're hearing. It's important to talk to them about what's happening.

Start by finding out what your child knows already

Use open-ended questions to give them the chance to tell you what they think. See page 7 of the resource ['worrying about war'](#) for examples of questions to ask (you'll find the resource at the bottom of the page.)

Tackle the news head-on and talk about it openly and calmly

Use real words and don't shy away from the truth. Be prepared to explain and define keywords they might be hearing to help them make sense of what's going on. For example, words like invasion, missiles, sanctions, refugees etc. Use age-appropriate material such as this [Newsround resource](#), which includes definitions.

Stick to the facts

But don't discuss everything you hear. For example, be careful about talking about speculation around nuclear warfare. Reassure them that the chance of 'World War III' breaking out is highly unlikely.

Educate them about reliable sources of information

Explain how some stories on social media may be based on rumours or inaccurate information.

Use reliable news sources like Newsround, which is age-appropriate. Watch and discuss with your child this [Newsround video on spotting fake news about the crisis in Ukraine](#).

Encourage your child to ask questions and share their feelings

Remember, it's OK not to have all the answers. Tell them that you'll let them know when you know more. This will be an ongoing discussion.

Allow for repetition, you might have to answer the same thing again. Younger children in particular tend to repeat themselves when they're feeling uncertain or worried.

Reassure them that they're not the only ones feeling this way and encourage them to share their feelings with you or their teacher.

Be a role model

Recognise and manage your own worries first. If you notice you're feeling anxious, take some time to calm down before you decide to talk about the events with your child.

Be open about sharing your feelings with your child – e.g. I'm also finding the news a bit worrying, so I'm doing X (baking cakes, going on long walks, swimming etc.), which helps me to relax.

Encourage them to think about what they can do to relax.

Reassure them and let them know it's normal to be concerned

Explain that we're not at war with Russia and that they don't need to worry about it happening in their neighbourhood. Reassure them they're safe and that the UK is taking steps to help the people of Ukraine. Encourage them to take breaks from listening to or reading the news – overexposure isn't helpful.

Do something positive with your child

Organise an aid package to send to Ukraine. For example, research local groups that are organising aid packages and contribute to these with your child.

Alternatively, [take a look at this article](#), which includes different ways you can help.

Further resources on how to talk to children about the war in Ukraine

- > [How to cope with traumatic news – an illustrated guide](#)
- > [Tips for parents and caregivers on media coverage of traumatic events](#)
- > [Talking about Ukraine with our children](#)

If your child struggles with higher levels of anxiety

Some children are naturally more anxious, such as those with existing phobias or obsessive-compulsive disorders. The current situation can make those anxieties worse. If you have relatives in the armed forces or in the regions (Ukraine, Russia, eastern/central Europe), your child might be susceptible to higher levels of anxiety.

- > Get them to do activities such as counting, ordering and sorting tasks, which can help them calm down
- > Encourage them to use relaxation techniques such as controlled breathing
- > Help them stick to routines they know
- > Look out for obsessive or compulsive behaviours and try to get ahead of them early by challenging unhelpful thoughts and assumptions
- > If you're worried about your child's anxiety, **YoungMinds** is a charity dedicated to children's mental health. They have a [parents' helpline](#) for confidential, expert advice. You can reach them at 0808 802 5544

Helplines and websites for children and young people

If your child would like to speak with someone confidentially, there are helplines and websites specifically for them.

| ORGANISATION | CONTACT INFORMATION |
|--|--|
| <p>Shout Free, confidential support via text, available 24/7</p> | <p>Text SHOUT to 85258 in the UK to text with a trained crisis volunteer who'll provide active listening and collaborative problem-solving</p> |
| <p>The Mix Free confidential telephone helpline and online service that aims to find young people the best help, whatever the problem</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Call 0808 808 4994 for free (11am to 11pm daily) • Access the online community • Email The Mix |

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| ChildLine Confidential telephone counselling service for any child with a problem | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Call 0800 1111 any time for free• Have an online chat with a counsellor (9am to midnight daily)• Check out the message boards |
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Help us tackle racism and bullying related to the events

If you hear your child saying or doing hurtful things linked to the events happening in Ukraine, such as generalising that all Russians are bad and want a war, you can use the following examples to help dispel such misconceptions:

- Explain that the decision to invade Ukraine was made by the Russian government and its leader, Vladimir Putin, not the Russian people. People don't always agree with the things their governments do
- Explain that the vast majority of people that live in Russia:
 - Want peace with Ukraine, they don't want war
 - Enjoy living in their country, much like you and I
- Talk about the Russian people who have protested in Russia against the war. Explain how many of them have been arrested and risked their lives doing this because their country doesn't allow its people the freedom to protest peacefully if it goes against government decisions. This is in contrast to the British values we have in our country
- Remind them it's not OK to say 'I don't like Russia/Russians' but instead encourage your child to think about this in terms of 'I don't like what the Russian army is doing'