

**Psychology and Wellbeing Team**

**Guidance for schools  
and colleges**

**Supporting children and  
young people who experience  
war, conflict and crisis**



**achieving  
for children**

[www.rbwm.gov.uk](http://www.rbwm.gov.uk)



**Royal Borough  
of Windsor &  
Maidenhead**

## **What is trauma?**

Trauma is when an inescapable stress is too much, too sudden and overwhelms existing coping mechanisms. In most cases, the symptoms of trauma develop during the first month after a traumatic event, but in a minority of cases, there may be a delay of months or even years before symptoms start to appear.

Children and young people fleeing conflict, war and crisis may have experienced some of the following and their experience of trauma may be ongoing:

- loss of control and threat to life (or perception of)
- exposure to prolonged violence and suffering
- separation from family members and fear for the safety of fathers, family or friends fighting in the conflict
- exposure to adversity as they flee their country (surviving in cold temperatures without access to essential supplies)
- experience of loss (belongings, home, community, culture)

## **How to notice the signs of trauma**

When a young person is experiencing trauma some of the things you might see are outlined below. These symptoms may emerge through non-verbal communications such as play or drawings.

- Trouble sleeping
- Nightmares
- Vivid memories
- Flashbacks (feeling that the traumatic event is happening again)
- Getting angry and upset easily
- Difficulty concentrating
- Clinginess
- Jumpiness and hypervigilance (being very watchful of what's going on around them)
- Parent reports the child not wanting to think or talk about what happened
- Tummy aches, headaches and other physical complaints
- Behaving like a younger child, for example, bed wetting and thumb sucking
- Irritability or disobedient behaviour
- Feeling disconnected

We have developed some questions to help clarify these symptoms further which can be accessed [here](#). The best way to use the information you gather will be to hold a conversation with your school [Education Mental Health Professional](#), school link educational psychologist or [Wellbeing Team Link](#) to decide how to work together. Following this the need for further specialist support may be identified.

## **Supporting children and young people in your school**

Children and young people will be hearing and seeing a lot of confusing images and information about the conflict. In times of stress and insecurity, it is important to share age appropriate, accurate information with our young people and allow them time to ask questions. The following resources will support these conversations.

Look at this if you:

- [Want to talk to children of different age groups about the conflict in Ukraine](#)
- [Want to talk to teenagers about the conflict in Ukraine](#)
- [Want to share advice with a young person who is upset by the news](#)

## **Tips for supporting cohesion and belonging in your school**

- Make the first time you meet with the child or family non-threatening and welcoming. Introduce yourself and help them to know the names of the key school staff and other children.
- Consider encouraging pupils to make a 'welcome to our school book' with photos and videos of the school.
- Make sure the child is able to orientate themselves to the school, feel safe and help them understand the school routines using visual aids and multilingual signs.
- It can help to let the family know you are there to help and not part of the immigration process.
- Find out all you can about the child and family (what they eat, wear, language, religious observances, interests and school experience)
- Teach 'school survival' language (toilet, book, desk, playtime). Also, consider teaching pupils some basic Ukrainian or home language such as greetings 'hello' and 'goodbye'.
- Think about setting up a buddy for the child.
- Repeat and reinforce key messages.

The following documents will give you more ideas on how to support refugee children and families in your school and to help you understand the local authority's guidance for schools and colleges in supporting unaccompanied asylum seeking young people.

[Welcoming Refugee Children to your School](#)

[Psychoeducational information on trauma and PTSD - translated version](#)

[Supporting Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Young People in education](#)

## **A final thought...**

At times of high stress and anxiety we need to be thoughtful of our own emotional responses, as this will shape how we think, feel and react. It is important to be mindful of this when communicating with children and to remember to take time to connect with your own peers and support systems.

**Developed by Achieving for Children's Wellbeing Team and Educational Psychology Service**

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