

How to Help Children Understand the Russian Invasion of Ukraine

The recent Russian invasion of Ukraine has been distressing for many. Here are some tips for talking with children about these recent events.

Listen to What They Are Saying

Ask what they've heard about the situation. Let them tell you in their own words and answer their questions in an age-appropriate manner. Sometimes it helps to have these conversations during an activity, such as drawing, mealtime, or driving with you in the car.

Explain in an Age-Appropriate Manner

Spend time listening to understand what children already know.

Answer their questions and explain what's going on using simple words and concepts they can understand.

For Younger Children

Briefly acknowledging the war and providing reassurances may be what they need in the moment.

For Older Children

Kids may be seeing news on social media, so help them make sense of it by finding reliable sources of information together.

Focus on Safety

Help children of all ages manage worries by emphasizing that while it is important to know what is going on around the world, these frightening events are occurring far from home. Let them know you will always do your best to keep them safe. Offer reassurance that there are many people focused on ending the violence and helping people who are impacted.

Monitor and Consider Limiting Media Access

Limit media viewing and repeated exposure to distressing images, particularly for younger children. Monitor older children and adolescents' access to media and engage them in conversations with you about what they are seeing and hearing.

Manage Our Own Reactions

It's okay, and expected, that you are going to have reactions to these events. It's also okay to let children see your range of reactions. They'll be watching and taking their cues from you. While it's okay to let children know that you're worried or upset – also demonstrate how you

can stay calm and explain what helps you feel safe. If you are experiencing strong reactions, try processing these events with another adult before sharing them with children.

Maintain Routines

Sticking to a daily structure helps us all to feel safe and in control. Help children of all ages to maintain their daily routines, while knowing that some flexibility may be needed during this time to help children meet their needs.

Keep the Door Open

Encourage children to come to you with questions or concerns anytime. Let them know that their fears and questions are normal and you will always make time for them.

Watch for Behavior Changes

Children may show you through their behavior that they are struggling with what they have seen or heard. They may have physical complaints or regressive behaviors that include nightmares or sleep problems.

Seek out support from your child's pediatrician, school, or a counselor if you are concerned about their behaviors.

