

Managing the Emotional and Behavioral Health Impact of the War in Ukraine

The War

Since February 21, 2022, the world has watched as the Russian military aggressively invaded Ukraine in an effort to deny and dissolve the sovereignty of the Ukrainian government. This aggression is an escalation of the longstanding military standoff that has existed between these two countries since 2014. This invasion has been identified as the single most significant military invasion to occur among European nations since 1945 during World War II.

The Stress of War

For many, these events have created an emotional onslaught of anxiety, fear, discomfort, and distress. The development of this conflict may leave us feeling helpless, scared, and unsure of the future.

You May be Wondering?

How long will this continue? What will be the long-term ramifications? How will this impact me, my family members, friends, and community? What will this mean for the future of the world, the economy, my family, and my safety?

Whatever your emotions or questions regarding the conflict between Ukraine and Russia, know that they are to be expected. Even though you may feel alone, know that you are not alone in your concerns.

Below are some common responses to the conflict:

- Anxiety, frustration, sadness, anger, stress
- Fear, concern, worry
- Feeling insecure and a loss of control
- Difficulty falling or staying asleep
- Increased alcohol and drug use
- Increased agitation or irritation when interacting with others
- Social isolation
- A surge of memories associated with past traumatic events
- Being hyperalert and jumpy

Navigating Emotional Difficulties Associated with the Conflict in Ukraine.

The war between Ukraine and Russia is not an isolated incident. Political divides and tensions in the United States have left many feeling unsafe in their communities. The fact that the world has been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic for over two years means that lives have been upended for a long period of time. Add to that, layers of trauma and difficult situations in our personal and family lives can make life even more challenging. It can leave us feeling unable to manage well our daily lives.

How to Address Challenging Emotions Related to the Conflict in Ukraine.

The good news is that you can do something about the challenges that surround you. As much as possible, pay attention to yourself and what is happening inside you. Attempt to stay present in the moment and also present to the people in your life. Ask yourself, “Am I being triggered now by something from my past or present?”

When it becomes difficult to manage on your own, reach out to trusted people who can help you manage the emotions and behaviors that feel out of control.

Tips to help you manage difficult reactions.

Listed below are some ideas to help start your own thinking about how to best deal with difficult emotional and behavioral responses. You will have your own ideas and helpful solutions.

- Ask a friend or family member for emotional support
- Increase daily structure and routine
- Eat healthy foods and stay hydrated
- Engage in physical exercise
- Practice meditation, prayer, and other spiritual forms that encourage peace and calm
- Identify and focus on what you can control
- Find ways to get involved in support of the conflict
- Decrease media consumption, including social media

- Talk with your children about the conflict in age-appropriate ways. (Visit The National Child Traumatic Stress Network -NCTSN.org - for helpful tips on talking to children about war)
- Do one small positive behavior that benefits you!
- Show an act of kindness to a stranger
- Practice changing unhelpful thoughts
- Seek professional therapeutic treatment

Keep in mind that humans tend to be resilient in the face of adversity.

This is also a common response to uncommon situations like war. Not everyone impacted by the war will experience distress. It is ok if you are feeling stable and free from worry. This is not necessarily an indication that you are ignoring the situation or pretending it doesn't exist.

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