



How to respond to our children about what is happening in Ukraine

There is no 'one way' approach, because of the age of the children, what they have heard so far and the community in which they belong/live. What we have to remember is that some of our children are of Ukrainian/Russian descent and have family currently living there. Families from Poland and other Eastern European countries may also be affected. Please consider this when you talk to the children about their thoughts. I am pretty certain that our older children will want to talk about it.

It is important that the subject is treated with sensitivity and understanding of what children need to know, weighed against what they are hearing from other sources.

Children may be getting information from unreliable, unfiltered social media outlets. Children will see and hear about it on their smartphones or hear about it in the playground from other children. Social Media, including TikTok, unfortunately is saturated with inappropriate content that is terrifying. I would recommend that any parent shields their child/young person from social media.

Children may overhear us adults talking about it and the same applies in the home. We need to be mindful of our audience and 'listening ears'. Children will formulate their own response based on ours so we need to make sure that we allow the children to talk to us and at the same time provide them with information from accurate sources.

Children of all ages will also feel more worried when they think that no one is willing to talk about things that are worrying to them – they will think that it is too scary or upsetting to talk about, which then adds to their worries.

We have already had some of our Year 6 children make comparisons with World War Two having just learnt about that war. This could be an appropriate time to share concern or potential fears and worries in a context that is based on fact. Avoid asking the children why they are worried. Children often struggle to understand their emotions, which can lead to further anxiety. Instead, ask them questions to help them work out solutions to their worries.

There is, however, a delicate balance between informing children, and feeding into their anxieties by talking about it too much.

Listen to what they're asking, and don't give more information than they are asking for. We can sometimes be guilty of oversharing, which isn't necessarily helpful. If you don't know all of the answers to their questions, don't be afraid to say you don't know and perhaps then take this opportunity to discuss a possible response with a Senior Leader that does feel confident in providing a response.

We need to tell anxious children that the world has been in situations like this before and they have been resolved. We also need to emphasise how far away this conflict is to them. It is important to make sure they know they are safe and that what is



happening is not in the country that they are living in – perhaps showing them on a map or globe, so they can grasp the distance. Again, just be aware that whilst they are in a safer place, family members might not be. Do reassure them that family members responsible for them will be making sure that plans are put in place to keep family members safe.

If children directly ask 'will there be a World War III?'- 'will we be invaded?' do say 'no'. Let it come from them. What we mustn't do is provide a likelihood of this happening. Providing reassurance is important.

We must use this opportunity to remind the children of the different communities that make up our wonderful school and the reason it is wonderful is because we:

Value the different children and staff that we work and learn with

Listen to each other

Enjoy learning with each other

Celebrate who we are and our identity-what makes me me

Respect each other's belongings and feelings

We share and take turns

We look to find ways to resolve conflict

We understand our responsibilities-we know what is right and we know what is wrong

If you are concerned about what any child is saying or how they are behaving towards others when it comes to this subject matter, please record your concern and speak to a Senior Leader.

If you are feeling anxious yourself please do seek the support of a colleague or leader to help manage your personal fears. It is perfectly reasonable to admit you are feeling worried too.

Please do not share BBC Newsround with the children, unless you have watched it beforehand so that you are prepared with what they will be seeing. I am not sure that BBC Newsround was always helpful during the pandemic so please be aware that what you have to say may be controlled by you and not the 'surprise' of what might be deemed to be filtered by a child's version of 'what is in the news'.

I would start the conversation with the children if and when your children start speaking about it with you and their friends.

Thank you and please do ask if you would like any support at all. Take care. **Mrs Bull.**