

Family Support



Clarecare

Together We Care

Information Booklet for Parents supporting their children through times of conflict and change



This information was developed by the Clarecare Family Support Service with the support of HSE Primary Care Psychology Service and the Tusla PPFS service.

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WHAT PARENTS SAY

“This is very important for us...”

“Thank you very much for taking into account everything...”

“It reveals all the main problems between parents and children”

Foreword

Parents who have lived through war and conflict and who have been forced to leave their homes are the most important support available to their children. It is first of all important to remember that you are in a situation you did not plan and could not have been prepared for, and that's hard, you are doing the best you can and want the best for your child in difficult circumstances.

The information here aims to help you by giving some ideas on how you can help yourself cope, and how you can help your children.

Caring adults help to protect children in difficult times, especially when they are able to be warm, supportive, comforting and to help children make sense of frightening events. It is normal for children to have strong feelings about what is happening and these often drive their behaviour. Understanding the feelings behind the behaviour and supporting them with this, may help them manage the feelings better and reduce their need to act out.

We start by looking at what you might be experiencing, because the ways that adults feel can affect the way that they care for children. Then we talk about ways of helping children. If you find the ideas helpful and want to try them out, take it gently, step by step, and don't try to do everything at once. It may take a little while to work, but if you keep going then after a little while you should see your child becoming more settled.

We hope this information will be helpful for you in caring for yourself and the children in your care.



What might you be experiencing yourself

There are some very common reactions to conflict and having to move home.

- You may find that you become more easily upset or angry than you used to, and your mood may change suddenly.
- You may be especially anxious or nervous or feel depressed.
- You may have vivid memories of your experiences which come back over and over again. These memories, or flashbacks, can lead to reactions in your body such as rapid heartbeat or sweating.
- You may find it difficult to concentrate or make decisions, or become more easily confused.
- You may find that your sleeping and eating change. This can make you very tired.

All of these things are very common and normal reactions in people who have had the experience of living through conflict.

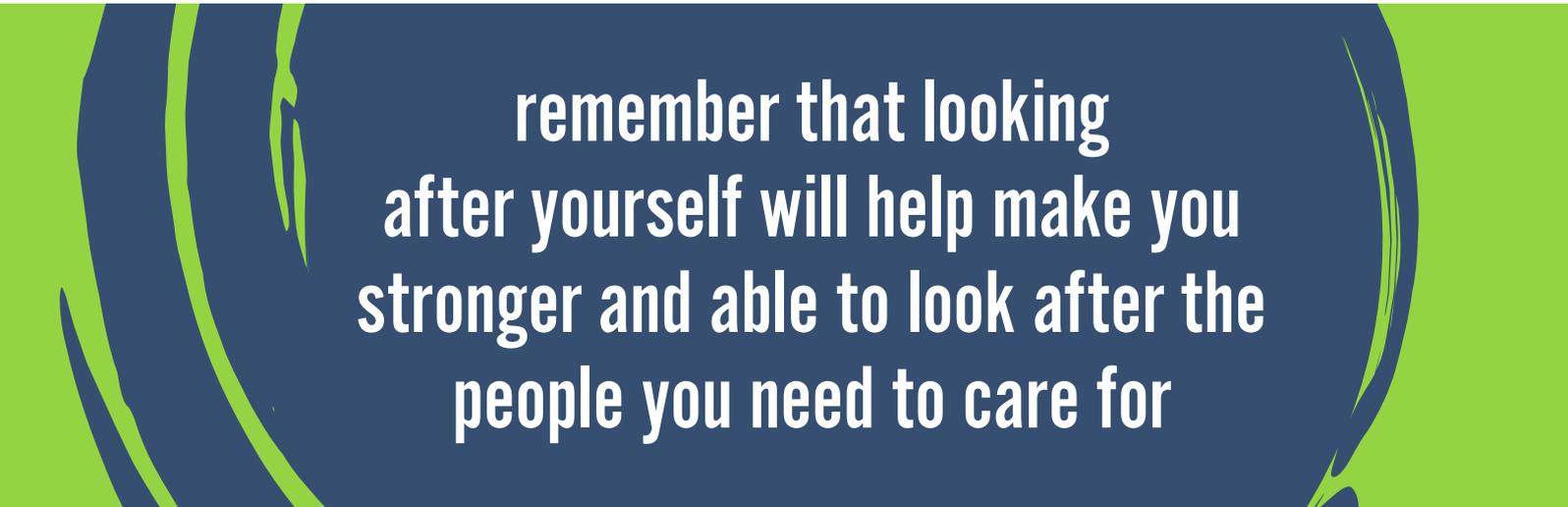
What can you do to help yourself

In times of crisis and change parents often feel they do not have time to look after themselves. At these times it is more important than ever for you to look after yourself as minding yourself makes it easier to attend to your child's needs. When you are feeling OK you are more likely to be able to support your children with their feelings.

Remember that this is a challenging time, but one that you can work to manage. Think about what has helped you cope in the past; think about the skills and resources that you have personally and how you can use these to help you to stay strong and to help yourself and your family.

- Allow yourself and your children to mourn any losses you have experienced.
- Try to be patient with changes in how you are feeling. These are a natural reaction to what you are going through
- ***Try and keep hopeful*** and to take a positive outlook if you possibly can, even if it is only over small things day to day. These new circumstances can be an opportunity for children to build coping skills and empathy for others, as well as learn a new language and experience a different culture which will help children and teenagers to grow in life. This will help them have hope for the future.
- Support each other and accept help from friends, relatives, community and religious leaders.

- Try to talk about your worries with adults that you trust. Children will often be very watchful of you and want to help, however it is important for parents to talk to other adults about their own distress rather than to their children. Sharing with others can be helpful and can dispel the sense of being alone. It can also be beneficial to discuss with other parents how to handle your role as a parent, and to both give and receive advice.
- Look after yourself as much as possible and try to rest when you can, even for short periods. Many people find that both music and exercise are excellent ways of supporting peace of mind and body.
- As much as you can, try to establish or re-establish routines, such as regular bed times.
- Try to keep yourself occupied with regular tasks, work or hobbies with others around you. Continue on with any religious and social activities you do. These can help calm your body and build up your emotional resources.



**remember that looking
after yourself will help make you
stronger and able to look after the
people you need to care for**



What might your child be experiencing

We know that there are many ways that children living through conflict and displacement show that they are stressed. How children react to stressful experiences can vary depending on a variety of things, for example their age, how long or how many stressful experiences they have had. Here are some common ways children react:

- Physical complaints such as headache, stomach ache, fever, cough, lack of appetite.
- Being fearful and anxious.
- Difficulty sleeping, nightmares, night terrors, shouting or screaming.
- Children may go back to ways that they use to behave when they were younger, for example bedwetting, frequent crying, thumb-sucking, clinging to their parents or caregivers, being afraid to be left alone.
- Becoming unusually active or aggressive or, on the other hand, shy, quiet, withdrawn and sad.
- Have difficulty concentrating.

It is important to remember that more than half of children show these sorts of reactions and behaviours after very frightening and distressing experiences. Parents sometimes blame themselves for changes in their children, but these are normal, very common reactions, and this is something that many families will be going through.

What can you do to help your child

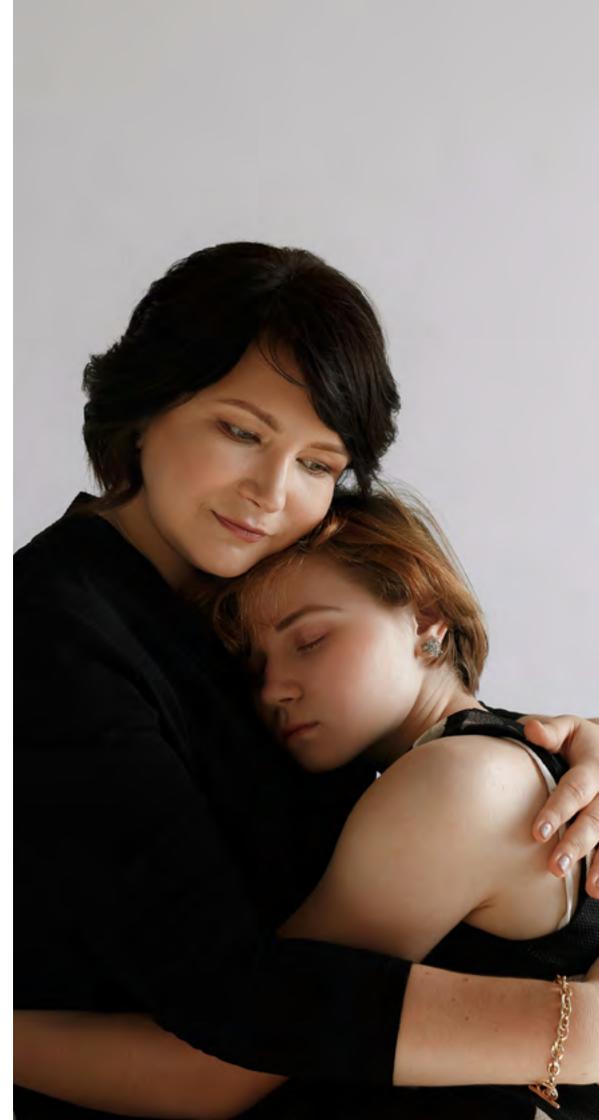
Provide warmth and support – You and your child have been through prolonged periods of stress. Your bodies are still likely to be easily stressed and for children physical touch, warmth and hugs are the most helpful way to calm their bodies.

Try to be affectionate with your child often by giving them hugs, kisses or holding their hand.

Try to tell them often that you care about them. Being caring and telling children that you love them will reassure them and help to regulate the distress that they have been through.

Remember teenagers also need touch, comfort and love.

Adolescence is a time of change for young people, their brains are dominated by intense feelings, insecurities, friendships, relationships as well as school and planning for their futures. Physical comfort can help them to be able to listen and to put into words how they are feeling. It is often only then, that they are open to hearing advice and guidance which helps them to look at different ways to manage how they are feeling.

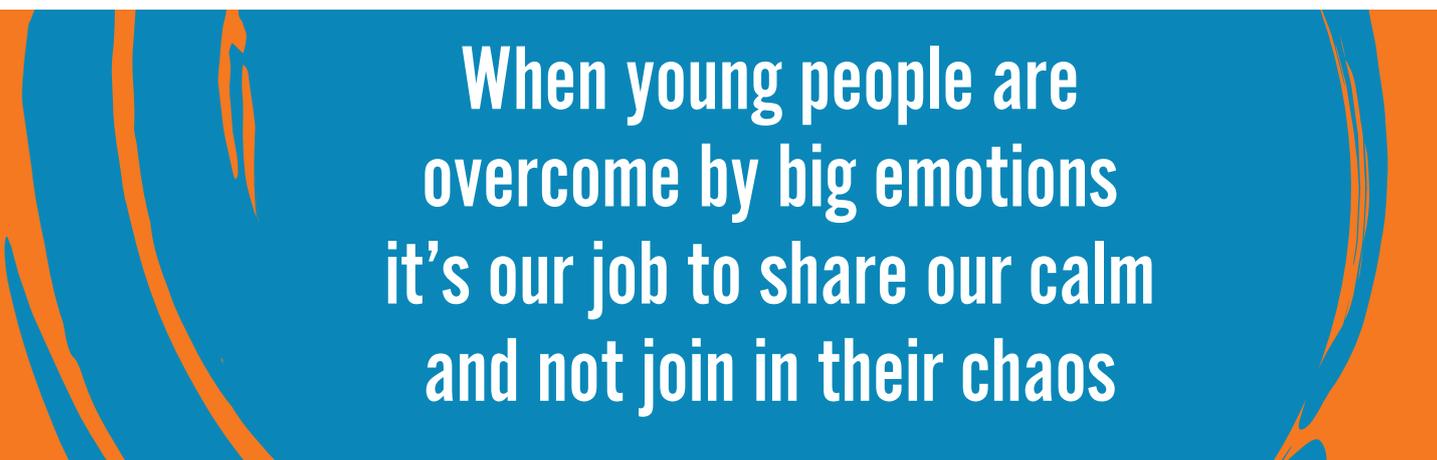




Spending time together – It may be hard to find the time, but spending time together and connecting with your child, whenever you can, will help them to feel more confident and less anxious. Ask how they feel about their experiences and which experiences are most stressful and difficult to adjust to. You know the child best, and can guess at the best way to help them talk to you when they are going through very difficult times. Perhaps you can spend some time walking together or having a cuddle and a chat. This will make a difference to how you and your child feel. If you possibly can, make a little special time for each child.

Play is the language of children, particularly young children, they don't naturally sit and talk things through. Making time to play with them will support them to be able to relax and make sense of their world, watching and being curious about the shared play might give you a sense of how they are.

Sometimes, when children need help to manage big feelings, they try hard to make a connection with someone who will notice and listen to them. Sometimes they do this through loud demanding behaviour, increased crying, whining, demanding. Time with you will help meet these needs and the behaviours will probably reduce.



**When young people are
overcome by big emotions
it's our job to share our calm
and not join in their chaos**



Listening. The most helpful way to support them is to really listen to what they are asking and think about how this is making them feel. You will not be able to fix or take away many of the worries and fears that they have but by listening and comforting them they will know that they can turn to you with their feelings.

Many of the things that they worry about might appear small – ‘I really miss my favourite sweets’ and it can be easy to dismiss their feelings about this, however their experience of you listening and empathising, allows them to know that you are there for them. They might not be able to put into words some of the bigger real worries that they have at this time. Making sure that your child knows that you want to listen is very important for them.

If your child is looking for your attention but you can't give it straight away, make sure that the child knows that you will listen to them as soon as you can. This will also help them learn that they can cope while they are waiting a little while for you to be available to them. This will make it more likely that they will talk to you when they need to. Sometimes, when no one seems to be listening when a child wants to say something, they may just give up, and not try to communicate as much. It is important that children know that someone will listen to them.

Talking - Children will vary in relation to how much information about what is happening they can manage. Be open and try to give children accurate information about what is happening. Remember though to keep information at a level that the child can understand, and try to explain in a way that will not increase their fears.

Do not promise children things you cannot provide. Children need to know that you are honest and that they can trust what you say.

If you need someone to talk to, look for another adult to share your feelings with so that you can stay as strong as possible for your children. Remember that they are children and try not to overload them with things you may be worried about, for example a missing family member. This might be hard but keeping this in mind might help you protect your children.

Boundaries, structure and supervision - you have all been through so much, you are living in shared, unusual, temporary living arrangements. It is helpful to think about how you put in place the boundaries, structure and supervision to keep your children safe.

- Regular routines - e.g. school attendance, mealtimes, bedtimes, access to technology; all of these things help your child feel more secure and that things can be predictable after a time of uncertainty and fear. These things are going to be more difficult to organise when sharing rooms but it can be helpful to come up with a clear plan for what will work for everyone as best as you can.
- For mothers who have left their partner behind, the oldest child, especially sons, may want and try to take on more responsibility and become the other parent. But sometimes older children and teenagers can help in crisis situations; encourage and allow opportunity for them to be helpful. Finding safe ways for them to contribute and help in the situation may help them feel more in control and might help make sure that they are not missing out on important childhood experiences in trying to be the adult.

- Supervision – living in a shared accommodation can bring both elements of support and challenge. It might be more difficult to be close by to your children in a big hotel space and it is helpful for them to be able to know that you are close by. Sharing this supervision with other families if you need to attend to something else and negotiating what level of supervision is needed will be part of the settling into the new environment. Remember that children may express their feelings loudly and that this is normal, sometimes parents can feel embarrassed in front of other parents which might lead them to shout or punish their child. This is a difficult situation and everyone will need as much support and comfort as possible during this very distressing time.
- Teenagers need space to explore their new experiences and time alone. All of this is hard to manage in shared common accommodation but think about how you might create this, e.g. going for a walk by themselves; using headphones in a room etc.
- Boundaries – being clear with your children about what is acceptable and safe behaviour is still important. They might have witnessed fighting and introduce fighting into their play, but, they still need clear guidance about what is play and what is dangerous or hurting others.



Some helpful information about other supports:

Children who have experienced trauma or loss may be particularly vulnerable to news of war and conflict and may need extra support. Children with relatives in the regions impacted by conflict will also need special attention.

Please remember that at times if you or your children are struggling with your emotions and the hardships you have been through the supports below are available to support you and your children.

Family doctors (also called G.P.'s). Please contact your doctor if you feel you or your child needs extra support or has additional needs.

Shannodoc for urgent out-of-hours medical services when your GP surgery is closed. Call 0818 123500 or 061 459500.

Clare County Council <https://www.clarecoco.ie/ukraine/> for information on various supports for Ukrainians in County Clare.

Limerick and Clare Education and Training board <https://lcebtb.ie/ukraine/> for information needed to access education and training services, including English language classes.

Gardai – National Police Service, Abbey St, Lifford, Ennis, Co. Clare, V95 TR83. (065) 6848100

National Parent Council for queries on any aspect of your child's primary or early year's education npc.ie - NPC Helpline for Ukrainian parents.

Clare Immigration Support Centre for access to appropriate state and community services for the immigrant community in Co. Clare. Clare Immigrant Support Centre, Unit 6, Clonroad Business Park, Clonroad Ennis, Co. Clare V95 CV06, Tel: 065 682 2026. Mob: 085 267 1278. Email: ciscennis@gmail.com

Clarecare parent support line, offering a listening ear, parenting tips and guidance and signposting to other relevant services. Monday, Wednesday and Fridays 10am – 1pm. 065-6828178

Clare Youth Service (CYS) have a range of programmes and supports available for young people aged 13 to 21. They may simply need a space to relax, connect with peers and positive adults, get involved in activities or get information about other opportunities for teenagers in the area.

The Youth Service has a Community Training Centre (CTC) in Ennis for young people aged 16 to 21 who are not in education but who want to obtain certification. If you would like to find out more about CYS or just want information about what is in Clare for young people please contact youthinformation@clareyouthservice.org who will be happy to help you or your teenager.

Family Resource Centres (FRC) which provide a range of services and development opportunities that address the needs of families.

- Shannon FRC – Shannon FRC, Community Building, Rineanna View, Shannon, Co. Clare V14 XV97. Tel: 061 707600 Email: shannonfrc@gmail.com
- Killaloe FRC – Killaloe/Ballina Family Resource Centre, The Green, Killaloe, Co. Clare. (061) 374 741 info@kbfrc.ie
- West Clare FRC – West Clare Family Resource Centre, Community Centre, O’Gorman Street, Kilrush, Co. Clare. 065 905 2173
- North Clare FRC, Ennistymon - North West Clare Family Resource Centre, Parliament Street, Ennistymon, Co Clare. 065-7071144. info@northwestclarefrc.ie

Tusla – Prevention, Partnership and Family Support: Working with local services we aim to help parents and children by providing information and sign posting to relevant services. Meitheal is a way of working with a family to help to identify the child and family’s strengths and needs and brings together a team around the child to deliver a supportive plan. We also work to promote the Child and Family Support Networks (CFSNs) in Co Clare to improve outcomes for children and highlight any service needs. Tel: 065 6863902 <https://www.tusla.ie/services/family-community-support/prevention-partnership-and-family-support>

Tusla Social Work Services: To discuss or report a concern, Duty Social Work can be contacted as follows: Duty Phone Monday to Friday Office Hours: (061) 588688; or <https://www.tusla.ie/get-in-touch/duty-social-work-teams/>

Any concern in relation to children out of hours should be reported to: An Garda Síochána Tel: 112 or 999

Health Service Executive HSE – government organisation which provides health and personal social care services to the general public

<https://www2.hse.ie/services/healthcare-in-ireland/ukrainian-refugees.html>

You can also visit www.hse.ie/ukrainianvideos for videos on common health topics.

Find information about all the mental health support available at www.YourMentalHealth.ie or by calling our HSE YourMentalHealth information line on 1800 111 888.

Clare Haven Services: If you are experiencing violence and abuse from your partner or a family member, Clare Haven can help.

This is how we support women and children who are subjected to domestic violence.

- Free 24-hour Hotline – 0656822435
- Safe housing for women and children forced to leave their homes due to domestic violence
- Informational and explanatory work and support of the community - an employee of the support service will meet with you and provide information and advice
- Preparation for the ship and Escort service
- Child and youth support service

To get help, call us at phone number **0656822435 (24 hours a day)**. Email us at clientcare@clarehaven.ie

ISPCC - The Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children provides a range of services to children and families <https://www.ispcc.ie/category/parenting-hub/ukrainian-articles/>

Clare Local Development Company (CLDC) <https://t.me/CLCDUkrainians> and <https://www.facebook.com/Clare-Local-Development-Company-support-Ukrainians-104674359056807>







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www.clarecare.ie