

HOW TO HELP CHILD AND ADOLESCENT VICTIMS OF WARS



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Below are some ways through which adults can help child and adolescent victims of wars understand and cope with their emotions.

WHAT IS THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF WARS?

Wars can have a traumatic impact on wellbeing of children and adolescents. Victims of wars can have physical symptoms (e.g., headache, tiredness, loss of appetite), cry, feel anxiety, agitation, depression, irritability, guilt (e.g., for having survived), confused, suffer insomnia, have nightmares, be unable to take action, avoid talking, regress to childish behaviours (e.g., thumb sucking).

Remember that these are normal reactions to abnormal events!

WHAT EMOTIONS CAN VICTIMS OF WARS FEEL?

They can feel emotions such as...



FEAR



SADNESS



ANGER

HOW YOU CAN HELP CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS COPE WITH FEAR, SADNESS, AND ANGER?

LOOK FOR SOLUTIONS

Take steps to help solve the problem

- Make sure that basic needs are satisfied (e.g., shelter, food, water, hygienic services).
- Protect from further physical and psychological damage.
- Know that it is always possible to do something.
- Always try to be understanding.

Talk about facts

- Help them understand the situation.
- Give clear and age-appropriate information.
- Do not make false promises and do not invent things you do not know.
- Use a calm tone of voice when giving information.

SEEK AND GIVE SUPPORT

Understand and express your emotions

- Reassure them that what they feel is normal.
- Encourage them to express their emotions (e.g., talking, drawing, writing).
- Ask: "What helps you feel better?".
- Avoid unhelpful advice such as: "You must not feel that way" or "Your pain will pass quickly".

Receive and give help

- Offer practical assistance and support without being intrusive.
- Respect differences in culture, age, gender.
- Do not force them to talk and accept silence.
- Try to reunite children and adolescents with their families or with those who can take care of them.

UNDERSTAND WHAT IS IMPORTANT

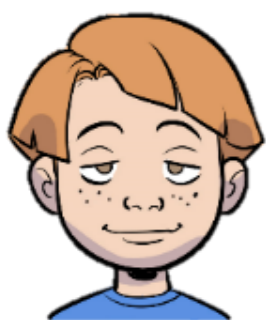
Take some time to focus on other things

- Help them think about positive topics.
- Suggest relaxing activities (e.g., walking, singing, playing).
- Suggest that adolescents involve younger children in leisure activities.
- Organize school and educational activities.

Adapt

- Identify the most urgent needs.
- Find out what is most important for each person in that moment.
- Respect each person's right to make their own decisions.
- Do not be judgemental about any activities or feelings.

We want they feel emotions such as...



RELAXATION



ENJOYMENT



HOPE

AS AN ADULT HELPER, REMEMBER:

Rest and take care of yourself.

Accept both what you can do and what you can not do.

Do not think/act as if you have to solve everyone's problems for them.

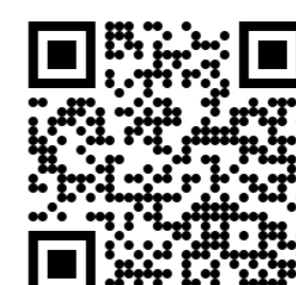
Contact supporting services if children and adolescents are disturbed for a prolonged period.

There are many ways to **cope with fear, sadness, and anger**: we can find ways that work for us and also invent new ones!

See the following link to access further useful initiatives and resources: <https://www.hemot.eu/risorse-querre/>

References:
• National Child Traumatic Stress Network, & National Centre for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (2006). *Psychological first aid. Field operation guide* (II ed.). NCTSN, NCPTSD.
• World Health Organization, War Trauma Foundation, & World Vision International (2011). *Psychological first aid: Guide for field workers*. WHO.

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