

Ukraine: Support in Times of War

A TOOLKIT FOR PARENTS

Presented by



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As the war has put adoption plans on pause for so many, the shift to crisis support may prove to be overwhelming and bring up difficult feelings. This toolkit offers guidance on how to be the best support for both yourself, your family at home, and the children in Ukraine. Inside, we will cover the following topics:

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Introduction

The war in Ukraine has caused an undue amount of stress for both the Ukrainians remaining in the country and those who have been evacuated. It has also heightened stress for you as parents who love and want the best for children who you plan to adopt. Without answers or timelines related to the children's safety, long-term hosting, or adoption, it is natural to feel lost and anxious. It may be difficult for us or the children to label emotions when there are so many or when we feel without words to understand the sensations we feel in our bodies.

Being present for orphans of Ukraine who are living through the unimaginable turmoil of war may be scary and places our own emotions front and center. Without addressing and managing these feelings, we cannot effectively offer hope to children who are displaced and afraid.

As you review each section of this toolkit, we hope that the resources offered help you feel better equipped to handle hard conversations and connect with children living through the horrors of this war. In addition, these tools can be used any time you or those around you encounter difficult experiences or emotions.

Caring for Ourselves

As parents, we give a lot of ourselves to care for our children and others in our lives. It is important to remember that we cannot pour from an empty cup and must be sure to take care of ourselves before we try and be there for others. In times of crisis, we often neglect to take care of ourselves, both mentally and physically. However, in high moments of stress, our bodies and minds require much more care and tenderness.

When supporting children at home or the Ukrainian children as they navigate the war, we encourage you to remember that you are going to be a better parent, partner, employee, etc. if you practice self-care by prioritizing your own physical and mental health. While self-care is frequently discussed, research shows that stress pulls us away from self-care, making it difficult to stay grounded and to manage our needs. Practicing self-care is an act of compassion for ourselves and the world around us. Contrary to popular impression, self-care does not have to be time-consuming; it needs only to meet your needs in the moment.

Besides self-care, it may be helpful to check in with a counselor who is familiar with trauma and adoption. Having access to a professional therapist with experience helping children in crisis may allow you to access tools and techniques to best support your children and yourself. A counselor can also serve as a sounding board to process emotions which can be very helpful when there are no clear solutions, and when we cannot resolve difficult feelings on our own.

If you are unfamiliar with counselors in your area, [Psychology Today](#) is a great search engine for qualified counselors. You can tailor your search to trauma and adoption competent professionals in your area, specify in-person or telehealth services, as well as identifying if a counselor takes insurance or is self-pay. There are also plenty of accessible telehealth counseling services available through companies like [Better Help](#) or [Talk Space](#) who will match you with a counselor in 24-48 hours.

Outside of general self-care activities such as yoga, long showers, watching a movie, or eating your favorite food, we recommend the following techniques to get you through times of crisis:

RELEASE

Work on letting go of overwhelming and stressful thoughts. Take what you are ruminating on and try to view those thoughts like clouds moving across the sky, so they do not have the power to affect your mood.

MANAGE

Prioritize your tasks and workload, identifying what can be delegated or postponed. Our brains have less capacity to accomplish goals when we are stressed and over-burdened. Crisis can make us feel out of control and holding onto tangible “tasks” might make things feel more difficult overall.

BE GENTLE

Recognize that you may not be as productive, have less patience, and may not be the best “version” of yourself right now. This is a time for grace, not self-criticism.

CONNECT

Social support is a key to ensuring you stay in the here and now and finding others in similar situations may help you feel less alone. Be careful about getting into patterns of rumination with others – the goal is to find support, not to fall deeper into crisis.

BASIC NEEDS

Do not forget to meet your physical survival needs – eating regular meals, getting enough sleep, and moving our bodies are the foundations of self-care and will improve emotional regulation.

FOCUS

Mindfulness or relaxation may help you focus on being good to yourself in the moment. These activities offer a “reset” when feeling anxious or overwhelmed. There are many phone apps and YouTube videos available for guidance.

LIMIT

News consumption can increase distress. Try giving yourself set times during the day to catch up on the news and try to avoid connecting emotion to information that is not vetted (what you read on a social media page, hear from a friend vs. what your agency has shared, official new outlets have discussed).

ROUTINE

Sticking to a routine may help promote a sense of normalcy. Being prepared for what will happen throughout the day can calm feelings of overwhelm and give us some relief.

ASSIST

Find ways to help during the crisis – donating to groups working in Ukraine, making activity boxes to send with organizations/families traveling to support orphans, or starting a prayer group may provide ways to give to those who have evacuated.

BOUNDARIES

If updating others about the situation is taxing for you, set a firm boundary about how often you will share and what you will volunteer. You do not have to apologize for holding a boundary.

A Difficult Reality

Understandably, general feelings of uncertainty are very difficult. However, in this situation, there is no way to know what to do next and it is ok to not have the answers right now. One of the hardest challenges we must overcome is recognizing that sometimes there are no answers, and we have to sit in our distress. There is power in accepting the lack of current solutions and giving yourself permission to feel frustrated, hopeless, angry, or sad.. This important method of coping in the face of ambiguity is called:

“Acceptance and Commitment”

Avoidance of emotions or feeling shame or guilt about what we feel is damaging in the long term. When we are able to own what we feel, we become better able to empathize with others who may be feeling similarly. Being able to say, “It is ok to feel this way right now,” gives us permission to work through those feelings and resolve them over time.

In this same regard, we do not have to have all the answers for children either. Though they turn to us for answers, we cannot pretend we know or make promises that may not be kept. It is ok to say, “I know this is hard and I am here with you.” Instead of offering false reassurances such as, “We are coming to get you” or “This will be over soon,” we can model for children the acceptance of tough feelings, and then spend time with them supporting those emotions.

In addition to being realistic with what we can provide for children at this time, it is also important to remember that individuals in crisis will not always make the best choices. We may learn that the children are engaging in behaviors we do not approve of, and the absolute best thing we can do upon hearing such information is to provide a non-judgmental response to the child. Now is not the time to consequence or offer disapproval of maladaptive behaviors, and it is possible to disagree with someone’s choices and still provide love and support.

In situations such as this, we encourage you to work with the child on identifying if these are safe choices, helping them make plans for minimizing risk, and finding other options for behaviors that may be more productive. Consider the difference between “Why would you do something like that? You know that is dangerous!” versus “It sounds like you have a lot of freedom right now and I bet it is fun to explore the city. I want to make sure you are safe. Can we come up with a plan for ways you can keep yourself safe next time you go out?”

Staying Connected

It is easy to feel helpless in situations when we are unable to help as much as we would like. Feeling love for another person that is not close enough to support is difficult. In addition, we can expect that what these children are experiencing might be traumatizing and overwhelming for them as well. As the war plays out with no end in sight, it might feel like you are running out of motivation or hope. For families who are in contact with children in Ukraine, you may feel as if you are having the same conversations all the time. Try using the suggestions below to aid in your communication with children:

PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES

- Use art to connect - draw pictures together and talk about your artwork, come up with different topics for what to draw (your favorite thing, yourself as a superhero, etc.)
- Read a chapter book to them finishing a few chapters each time you talk
- Have each person find something in their space that starts with a specific letter
- Play charades and guess what the other person is acting out
- Do count down exercises together – 5 jumping jacks, 4 toe touches, 3 high knees, 2 squats, 1 push up then come up with a new series (or do silly movements instead)

VIRTUAL ACTIVITIES

- A [Kahoot! Kids](#) account offers the interactive games to play with others
- You may also consider accessing online activity resources to find ones that may be appropriate for your child such as [Feelings Board Game](#) or [List of Virtual Activities](#)
- Provide messages of hope and support with this video - [Messages of Hope for Ukraine](#)

VERBAL ACTIVITIES

- Come up with a slogan or mantra they can repeat each day (I am taking things one day at a time, I am going to get through today, I have people that love me) and make sure you recite this mantra every time you check in with them
- Ask them to tell you one good thing that happened, one thing they learned, and one thing they are looking forward to the next day
- Share the same prayer every time you talk and encourage the child to recite the prayer on days when you are unable to connect
- Validate pride in their country and have them share that with you what it is that they want to remember about their country, come up with ways you can honor it
- Have them guess a number from 1-10 and take turns
- Share tongue-twisters or make up jokes
- Play “Would you rather?”
- Ask them to describe their favorite movie and see if you can guess what it is
- Come up with items (fruits, vegetables, etc.) that start with each letter of the alphabet.
- Make up a story together with each person offering a few sentences before the next person takes over, alternate until you finish your epic tale
- Sing songs together or better yet, make up songs about silly things

Connecting with Teenagers

You may find that older children who remain in Ukraine or who have been evacuated to nearby countries are more disconnected, hopeless, or angry. They may be less supervised than they were previously, leading to more freedom and a false sense of maturity. Older teenagers might be more aware of the political challenges related to the war and have opinions on this. They might be spending more time outside of where they are living and may have decreased expectations of responsibility. They may be working hard to survive this crisis emotionally which can manifest in a variety of different ways. You may begin seeing a very different teenager than you did when you hosted, and that teenager may be making choices that give you pause. On top of all this, language differences can be a barrier to accurate communication which may leave both you and the teen feeling frustrated or the teen feeling underwhelmed by your efforts to participate in their lives.

Although some teens might be able to connect with the activities and tools mentioned in the previous section, additional options for connecting with teenagers may be:

- Share songs with each other – encourage them to share their current favorite songs or a song with lyrics that may hold special meaning
- The Notelt application for Apple phones allows you to send and receive doodles with a connected device
- Each of you draw something you see in front of you, then show your pictures and try to guess what the other person has drawn
- Play board games together online on sites such as [Board Game Arena](#) or try these games
 - [Battleship](#)
 - [Yahtzee](#)
 - [Jigsaw Puzzles](#)
- Practice learning each other's language - try to figure out new words to share before your next conversation
- Play "Two Truths and a Lie" to learn more about each other in a fun way
- Watch a movie together over Teleparty
- Create vlogs to send to each other documenting something interesting about your day. This can also be done with writing or voice messages if video is unavailable.
- Play the noise mimic game – make a sound with an everyday object and then try to mimic the sound using your mouth or body
- Make paper airplanes and have a contest to see who can fly theirs the farthest

Supporting Emotions

Validation of emotions is a very powerful tool. It is something therapists do when they are meeting with clients and something we can do with anyone who is experiencing big emotions in their lives. Being able to tell someone that you see their struggle and hear their emotions can feel very comforting in times of crisis. During our communication, we want to consider the 4 Ss of healthy attachment with children:

“Safety, Security, being Seen, and Soothing”

While focusing on these ideas when building healthy relationships is always important, in times of war or other crisis, all four of are challenged. Meeting these four needs for children may build resiliency, better preparing them for their futures.

SAFETY relates to both emotional and physical safety. Offering supportive communication may allow children to be vulnerable so they can open up about their fears. As caregivers we want to validate fears and provide a safe haven.

SECURITY is feeling stable. While we cannot change their physical stability, we can provide interpersonal stability by showing up and demonstrating that we are going to be there with them through all the changes occurring in their lives.

SEEN means being understood by others. Even if we don't have the answers, listening to a child and connecting to their emotions is key. Being seen through the eyes of others builds a sense of self and allows a child to develop their identity.

SOOTHING is acting in comforting ways towards another person. This can be offered with physical touch or even through communication. Using calming tones may help calm the child's nervous system. As a familiar caregiver, your presence in their lives alone can be soothing.

A very powerful way of relating to others is to “hold space” for them. This means, taking the initiative to be empathetic to another's situation or circumstance and giving them the opportunity to express themselves without judgement or reaction. When we hold space, we meet someone where they are at emotionally, we listen, and we are fully present with them in the moment. Even when the communication is uncomfortable for us, we can hold space by remembering that the individual has deep feelings they need to release and that they believe we are a safe person with whom to do that. While we may not truly understand their experience, we can validate the difficult emotions for them.

Along with emotional validation, some kids might need assistance learning how to regulate their emotions. As this is something we generally model for children as they grow up, we may not know what emotional regulation learning a child we did not raise has experienced.

The following are self-regulation activities you can engage in with a child or offer to them as suggestions if they are struggling with emotions when they are not engaged in conversation with you.

Self-Regulation Activities FOR KIDS

 <p>FREEZE DANCE Linking movement to our senses to gain awareness of their bodies</p>	 <p>DRAWING May improve mood & give children an outlet for emotional expression</p>	 <p>WALKING Can relieve stress & help release pent up energy or emotions</p>
 <p>ACT IT OUT Role play can help children identify emotions & encourage empathy</p>	 <p>READ TOGETHER Helps children learn to sit and listen & can assist with bonding</p>	 <p>BUBBLE BREATHS Allows children to practice deep breathing which can reduce anxiety</p>
 <p>TENSE & RELEASE Tense & release various body parts to ease tension & support relaxation</p>	 <p>LISTENING Music or meditation audio can shift focus from negative emotions</p>	 <p>TIME IN 1 on 1 connection in a quiet space is a key component of self-regulation</p>



During our conversations with the children, we have a unique opportunity to actively assist children with their emotions using the following tools:

Talk to them about the importance of taking some time out for relief. Identify if there are activities available to them where they are located that may give them quiet time (board or card games, journaling, meditation). If they have a phone, there may be apps to play games – some of these games you may be able to play together.

Remind the children that you will continue to show up and take their calls, even though you cannot fix this situation for them. You are an important and available lifeline and can provide reassurance, patience, care, guidance, and love.

Use visual imagery to help them feel connected to you – ask them to imagine that you are holding them, hugging them, putting your arms around them. You can do this with them on the phone or even by sending a physical message “I have my arms around you, and I am holding you tighter. I am with you and am here to support you.”

Encourage them to follow a routine – wake up, read or play or talk with a friend, spend time with people they enjoy, then bed – reminding them not to skip meals whenever possible and to go outside for fresh air if it is safe to do so.

Teach guided imagery to give them an “escape” – ask them to think of their favorite place really focusing on the sights, sounds, and smells. There are plenty of guided imagery videos YouTube, such as - [Crystal Healing Cave Meditation](#) - that you can watch to learn how to do this with a child.

Help them to practice mindfulness – what do they see, hear, smell, feel – and to focus on these things when they are feeling overwhelmed or upset so they can remain grounded.

Support the child practicing the use of positive self-talk (I am taking things one day at a time, I am going to get through today, I have people that love me).

Helping them to understand how their body sensations are connected to their emotions – some children may do better talking about “butterflies in their stomach” or “a heavy head” – and we can link those feelings to emotion words for them.

Encourage them to name their emotions and help them identify feelings words - scared, lonely, hopeless, angry, etc. Using a feelings chart such as the one in this toolkit may help them put words to their emotions.

Encourage them to put their phones down. Media can upset children and increase fear and anxiety. Sometimes social media can be overwhelming as it can have inaccurate information – help them set boundaries with their media consumption and discuss being cautious with sources of information.

Assure them that the world is aware of what is going on and is standing with them. Let them talk about their frustrations with aid not being given and validate their emotions.

Help them to learn to respond to their true feelings instead of reacting blindly to a situation (acting out is often connected to anger for instance). Offer to them techniques to help calm their bodies and minds such as deep breathing, going for a walk, counting to ten – and give them personal examples of what works for you so they are encouraged to cope in adaptive ways.

Videos such as this – [Managing Anger](#) – or similar can provide a child with tools for emotional regulation.

Talk to them about using channels – Channel 1 (past), Channel 2 (present), and Channel 3 (future) – while we think through all of them at various times, we have the most control of Channel 2. Help them to focus on managing their bodies and minds on Channel 2.

Promoting Safety

There has been some information identifying that the children who have been moved from Ukraine are living somewhat unsupervised and may be encountering unsafe situations. One way we can “parent” from afar is to make sure we are teaching safety skills with children. We can help them understand what experiences may expose them to unnecessary risk or peer pressure. Safety skills are important to teach all children as they grow up.

Body Safety

TALKING POINTS

Body Autonomy

Teach that we have control of our bodies and no one has the right to touch us unless we want them to. Have them role play telling someone they do not want to be touched.

Personal Space

Explain personal space by having them reach their arm out to define their own space that no one has the right to enter. Give them language to use if someone wants to enter their space without permission.

Safety with Peers

Help them practice how to handle peer pressure and encourage them to go out with trusted peer groups when they leave their residence.

Appropriate Touch

Educate children on the difference between good, bad, and scary touches. Practice “no means no” and how to find an adult if someone touches them inappropriately.

Body Respect

Discuss how we are in charge of respecting our bodies and the bodies of others. Just as we have personal boundaries, others do as well. Practice asking others for physical closeness such as a hug or hold their hand

Sexual Activity

Be open in discussions of sexual activity. If it is happening, avoidance of the topic can result in difficult consequences. Help teenagers understand about abstinence and also about the benefits of using protection.

Writing About Experiences

Although journaling is not for everyone, writing out our thoughts can be a powerful tool to release and navigate difficult emotions. The process of journaling promotes mindfulness and provides a powerful opportunity to work through difficult thoughts and feelings. This may be an activity you or the child can do on your own with the option to discuss your responses with each other on calls or through messaging. The writing topics can be focused on feelings about the war or be completely unrelated. If writing is not of interest, the prompts can also be used as conversation starters.

An internet search for writing/talking prompts can provide you with a quick list of topics for this activity and you can also use the prompts below to get started:

If you could have any superpower, what would it be and why? What do you think is the worst superpower?	What is your favorite thing about yourself? Why is that your favorite thing?
Make a list of things you accomplished this week and talk about how it feels to accomplish such tasks.	Imagine that you met a dragon while walking in the forest. Describe what happens next.
If you could do something you have never done before, what would it be? Why would you want to do that thing?	If you could go into the future, what would you like to do or to find out?
Think about one of your favorite things and describe this item using words that explain how it looks, smells, sounds, and feels so someone who has never seen it can picture it in their mind.	If you could travel to anywhere in the world, where would you go and why? What would you do there?
What is the best and worst thing about being your age?	Describe a time you were the happiest. What was happening? Who was there with you?

Additional Resources

ARTICLES: The articles linked here provide some additional information on how to help children from Ukraine cope with their experiences

[How Parents Can Help Children Cope with War](#)

[Helping Kids Cope with the War in Ukraine](#)

[Talking to Children About War](#)

[Helping Children Cope with War](#)

[How Children are Coping in Ukraine and How Parents Can Help](#)

[How to Talk to Your Children About Conflict and War](#)

BOOKS: The books linked here may provide ways to help connect with children or to support their emotions

[Growth Mindset Workbook for Kids: 55 Fun Activities to Think Creatively, Solve Problems, and Love Learning \(Health and Wellness Workbooks for Kids\)](#)

[My First Ukrainian Book: Ukrainian-English Book for Bilingual Children](#)

[In My Heart: A Book of Feelings](#)

[What to Do When You Worry Too Much](#)

[Worry Says What](#)

[How is My Body Feeling](#)

WORKSHEETS AND POSTERS: Following this page you will find the resources below that support topics covered in this toolkit

Emotions Feelings Chart – to assist younger children with identifying emotions

Feelings Wheel – for older children and caregivers to understand a broader range of emotions

Inside Out Feelings – a 5-step guide to helping children become more in touch with their feelings

10 Body Safety Rules – rules you can teach children to support body safety

Grief Fact Sheet – talking points for discussing grief with children

Mindfulness Exercises for Children – to assist in teaching how to use mindfulness to reduce stress

Problem Solving Worksheet – an activity you can do with children to facilitate problem solving

Strengths Exploration – give children an opportunity to find their personal strengths

Three Good People – a strengths-spotting exercise to develop a strengths focused mindset

Stress Exploration – to discover factors that cause and protect against stress

Your Happiness – an activity for identifying what makes us happy

Three Good Things – a way to help the child keep track of good the encounter in their lives

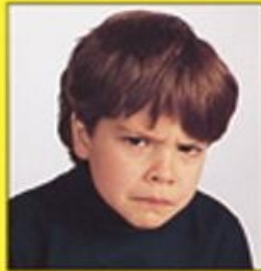
Emotions



happy



sad



angry



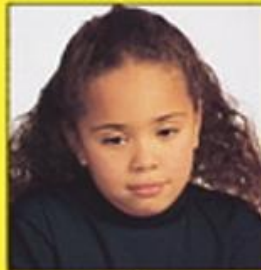
excited



afraid



shy



guilty



tired



jealous



loved



hopeful



bored



proud



sorry

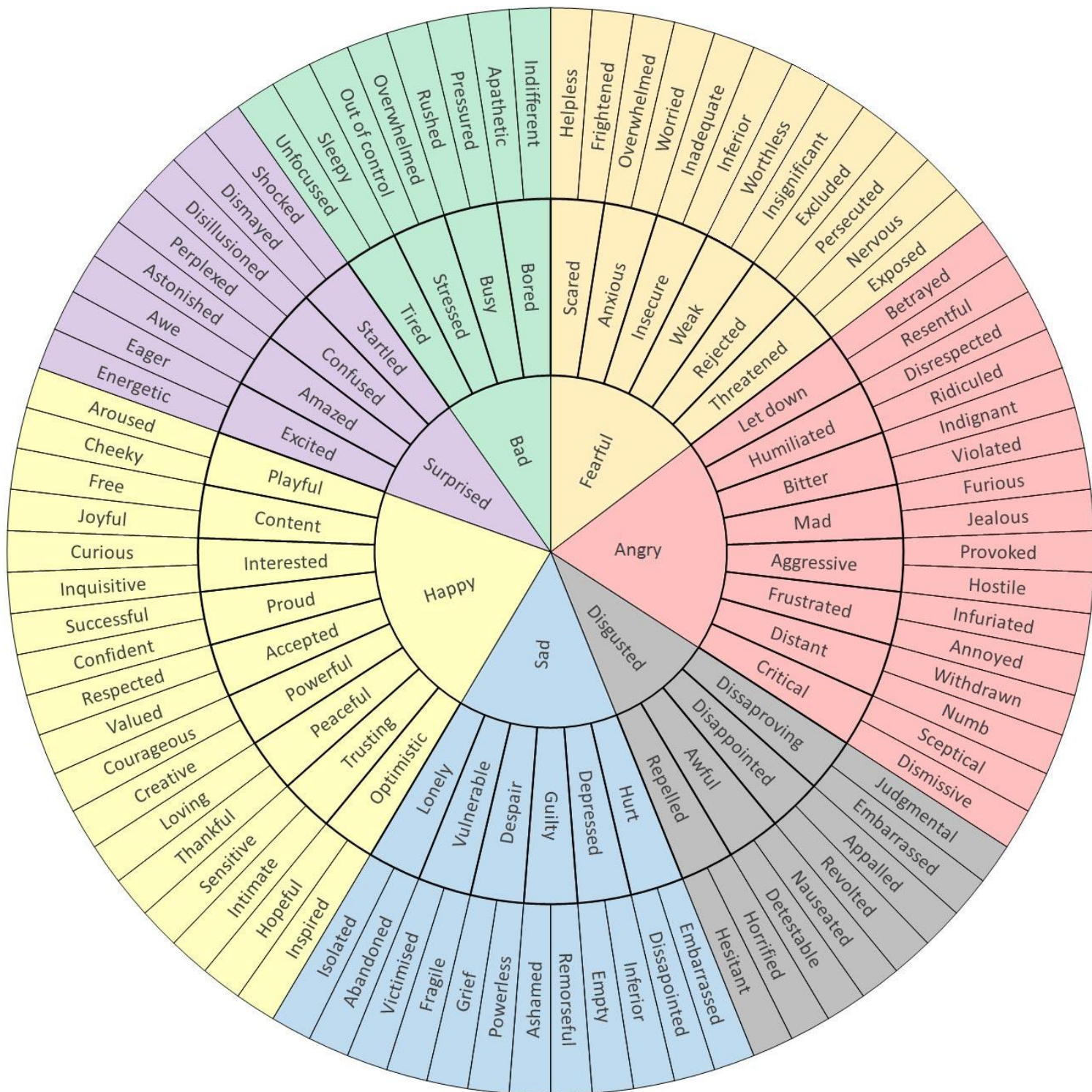


embarrassed



surprised

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INSIDE OUT FEELINGS

How do you help kids feel their feelings?
Start with a "positive" experience and
follow the steps below.

1

A Good Memory

Think about a happy, glad, joyful, or in some way positive memory or experience. It can be anything, but try to select a single positive aspect of the event or experience.

2

Focus on the Memory

Close your eyes and focus your attention on the positive experience you've chosen. Do you notice any sensations in your body when you focus on the memory?

3

Find the Associated Feeling

Emotions/feelings are felt as sensations in the body. Scan your body and find the sensation associated with the memory. Your 'happy' may be felt in a different way and place than your child's 'happy'.

4

Describe and Name the Feeling

Once you've found the feeling ask: Where is it? How big is it? What shape is it? What color? Is it hard, soft, pointy or fluffy? Is it moving? Changing? What is the name of this feeling?

5

Attend to the Feeling

Keep your attention on the feeling. Stay with it as long as you can. Does it fade away or change? After a short time, the sensation may change and move as it fades away.

No matter how far you get, acknowledge your child and yourself! Read more: katiemcclain.com/inside-out-feelings/

10 BODY SAFETY RULES

- 1 Teach children the correct names for their body parts.
- 2 Explain that our private body parts are those under our bathing suit (also include the mouth).
- 3 Instruct that no-one can touch your private body parts or show you pictures of private body parts.
- 4 Explain you must never touch another person's private body parts even if an older child or adult asks you to.
- 5 Discuss Early Warning Signs, i.e. sweaty palms, racing heart, sick tummy; always act on your early warning signs.
- 6 You can shout, "Stop" or "No!" (hand held out) if touched on your private body parts.
- 7 Tell a trusted adult straightaway if you are: touched on your private body parts, shown pictures of private body parts, or your Early Warning Signs kick in.
- 8 Keep on telling until you are believed.
- 9 Never keep secrets that make you feel uncomfortable or unsafe.
- 10 Be strong, be brave and **ALWAYS** speak out!



Grief Fact Sheet

Grief hurts, but it can be helpful. The process of grieving often involves sadness, anger, loneliness, and other painful emotions. However, grieving can help you come to terms with loss and move forward in life, while still cherishing memories of your loved one.

Everyone grieves differently. Although others may have opinions about how to grieve correctly, your grief is yours and yours alone. Some people need to express their grief, while others prefer to process in silence. Some feel anger, while others feel sadness, numbness, or relief. Everyone has different reactions to loss, and different needs during the grieving process.

The circumstances of a loss have a major impact on grief. Deaths that are unexpected, traumatic, or stigmatized (e.g. suicide) can complicate the grieving process. Personal factors, such as a history of mental illness, or a strained relationship with the deceased, can also contribute to difficulties.

Grief does not have a set time frame. Grief can last for weeks, months, or years. It may come and go around holidays, anniversaries, and major life events, or it might always be in the background. However, grief does tend to lessen in intensity over time.

Grief may contribute to other problems. Grief increases the risk of developing other health problems, mental illness, and relationship difficulties. This is especially true if the death was traumatic, if you feel guilt about the death, or if grief is prolonged.

It's okay to seek help. Support from family and friends can prevent grief from growing out of control. Although grief will improve over time for most, this isn't always the case. When grief is especially debilitating or long-lasting, support groups, therapy, and other resources may be beneficial.

Not everyone experiences significant distress. About 1 in 3 people respond to a loss with resilience or relief. Feeling this way does not mean that you don't care, or that you love the person any less. Nor does it mean that your grief is unfinished, or that you have a problem.

Moving on doesn't mean forgetting. You can continue to live your life, have new experiences, and form new relationships, while continuing to love the person you lost. The goal of grieving isn't to forget, but rather to figure out how you would like to remember, while moving forward.

Mindfulness Exercises for Children

The Feeling Exercise



Collect a number of interesting objects such as feathers, putty, stones, or anything else that might be interesting to hold. Give each child an object, and ask them to spend a minute just noticing what it feels like in their hand. They can feel the texture, if their object is hard or soft, and the shape. Afterwards, ask the children to describe what they felt. With bigger groups, pair children off to take turns completing the exercise together.

The Seeing Game



Ask the children to spend one minute silently looking around the room. Their goal is to find things in the room that they've never noticed. Maybe there are some big things like a poster or a picture, or just little details like cracks in the ceiling or an interesting pattern on the door. After the minute is up ask the kids to share the most interesting new things they noticed.

Ocean Breathing



Have the children sit or lie down in a comfortable position. Ask everyone to slowly breathe in through their nose, and then out through their pursed lips (as if they are blowing through a straw). Point out that the slow and steady breathing sounds like ocean waves, gently crashing on shore. Let the children continue breathing and making the ocean sound for one to two minutes.

The Power of Listening



Ring a bell, a wind chime, or anything else that creates a long trailing sound. Ask each child to listen, and silently raise their hand when they can no longer hear the sound. After the ringing ends, ask the children to continue listening to any other sounds they can hear for the next minute. When the minute ends, go around the room asking everyone to tell you what sounds they heard.

Mindfulness Exercises for Children

Build a Stress Ball



If you're feeling brave, and are prepared to clean up a mess, provide the children with balloons, flour, and funnels to build their own stress balls (you may want to double-layer the balloons). Some other filling options include rice, small beads, or the leftover dots from punched paper. Once the kids have built their own stress balls, try using them with *The Feeling Exercise*.

The Body Squeezing Exercise



Have the children sit or lie down in a comfortable position, and ask them to squeeze and relax each of the muscles in their body one-by-one. They should hold each squeeze for about five seconds. After releasing the squeeze, ask the kids to pay attention to how it feels when they relax. Children understand this exercise better if you help them visualize how they can squeeze a particular muscle using imagery, such as the following:

1. Curl your toes tight like you are picking up a pencil with your feet.
2. Tense your legs by pretending like you are standing on your tippy-toes, trying to look over a fence.
3. Suck in your stomach as if you are trying to slide through a narrow opening.
4. Make fists with your hands and pretend like you are trying to squeeze all of the juice out of an orange.
5. Pretend like a bug landed on your nose, and you're trying to get it off without using your hands. Try to scrunch your face and move your jaw to make it fly away!

The Five Senses Exercise



Take the children outside if the weather is nice, and have them lie silently in the grass. Begin to call out each of the five senses in turn (sight, smell, sound, taste, touch), and ask the children to notice everything they can with that particular sense, until you call out the next one. This exercise can also work well on walks, and in a number of other situations.

Name:



Date:

HOW TO PROBLEM SOLVE

1. What is the problem?

2. How big is the problem?

(Fill the thermometer)



3. How does it make you feel and why? (Circle one or more)



4. What can help you to cool down or feel better? Here are some ideas.



Walk away



Do something else



Take 10 slow deep breaths



Drink water



Pay attention to my body



Say to myself...



Express my feelings



Talk to someone



Let it bother me



Draw or write your idea

Name:



Date:

HOW TO PROBLEM SOLVE

5. Understand your goal.

What do you want to achieve so is it no longer a problem?

There are three types of problem solving solutions:



Find help from
someone



Solve it myself



Solve it together



6. Considering the three types in mind,
brainstorm one or more possible solutions to solve the problem:

7. Which solution will you try?



HOW TO PROBLEM SOLVE

Facilitator Instructions:

Before you start

- Introduce the tool as a fun way to learn how to solve problems.
- Start with an example scenario problem to familiarize your child with the tool.
- Regardless of age, write in the answers while your child reflects and talks aloud.
- Remember, the tool is a guide on how to facilitate, the magic is when your child can assess and process their problem solving in the safety of supportive facilitation.

Question 1: "What is the problem?"

- Prepare an example scenario problem or have your child identify and describe what the problem is.
- Additional details can include: how did the problem happen? Who is involved? And why is this a problem?

Question 2: "How big is the problem?"

- Encourage your child to assess how big the problem is to them.

Question 3: "How does it make you feel and why?"

- Encourage your child to identify their own feelings related to the problem.
- Labels below are for your reference.



Question 4: "What can help you to cool down or feel better?"

- Read together or have your child read through the nine ideas. Define for them if needed.
- Encourage them to choose one or more ideas that will be helpful for them to cool down or feel better.

Question 5: "Understand your goal."

- Have your child understand what they want to achieve so it is no longer a problem.

Question 6: "Brainstorm one or more possible solutions to solve problem."

- The three solution types are reference guide of where to begin brainstorming solutions.
- Encourage your child to brainstorm solutions in relation to achieving their stated goal. Support their process, provide ideas and directions if needed.
- Weighing and comparing different solutions should be done through talking as writing may be too time consuming.

Question 7: "Which solution will you try?"

- Encourage your child to choose a solution and discuss how to apply it.

Strengths Exploration

Those who know their strengths and use them frequently tend to have more success in several areas. They feel happier, have better self-esteem, and are more likely to accomplish their goals.

To use your strengths effectively, it's important to have a clear idea of what they are, and how they can be used. Some of your greatest strengths might be easy to recognize, while others go unnoticed because they feel ordinary to you (even if they aren't).

In this worksheet you will identify your strengths and ways in which you are already using them. Additionally, you will explore *new* ways to use your strengths to your advantage.

Circle your strengths from the choices below, or add your own at the bottom.			
Wisdom	Artistic Ability	Curiosity	Leadership
Empathy	Honesty	Open Mindedness	Persistence
Enthusiasm	Kindness	Love	Social Awareness
Fairness	Bravery	Cooperation	Forgiveness
Modesty	Common Sense	Self-Control	Patience
Gratitude	Love of Learning	Humor	Spirituality
Ambition	Creativity	Confidence	Intelligence
Athleticism	Discipline	Assertiveness	Logic
Optimism	Independence	Flexibility	Adventurousness

Three Good People

strengths-spotting exercise

People who know their strengths and use them every day tend to be happier, have better self-esteem, and are more likely to complete their goals. This exercise will help you enter the strength-spotting mindset.

Think about a fictional character.

Name an inspiring character from a book, movie, or TV show: _____

List their strengths: _____

Describe how they use their strengths to overcome challenges, or in everyday life: _____

Think about an inspiring person you know.

Name an inspiring person you know: _____

List their strengths: _____

Describe how they use their strengths to overcome challenges, or in everyday life: _____

Three Good People

strengths-spotting exercise

Think about yourself.

List your strengths: _____

Describe how you use your strengths in everyday life: _____

Describe how you have used your strengths to overcome a specific challenge: _____

Stress Exploration

Factors that Contribute to Stress

Describe your biggest stressors in each of the following categories and rate them on a scale of 1-10, where 1 is "a little stressful" and 10 is "extremely stressful."

Daily Hassles

Common annoyances or strains of daily life.

Examples: traffic, chores, work problems, lack of sleep, homework, limited free time, argument with partner

1	rating
2	
3	
4	

Major Life Changes

Important events, both positive and negative, that require significant adjustment.

Examples: birth of a child, separation or divorce, new job, death of a loved one, moving, major illness / injury

1	rating
2	
3	
4	

Life Circumstances

Permanent or long-term circumstances that make life more difficult.

Examples: poverty or financial problems, disability, chronic illness, conflictual relationships, values that conflict with culture, discrimination, job dissatisfaction, living somewhere unsafe

1	rating
2	
3	
4	

Stress Exploration

Factors that Protect Against Stress

Describe the things in your life that counteract stress.

Daily Uplifts

Positive experiences that make you happy.

Examples: eating a good meal, spending time with friends, leisure activities, spending time in nature

1
2
3
4

Healthy Coping Strategies

Positive actions that help to reduce or manage stress and other uncomfortable emotions.

Examples: exercise, talking about problems, self-care, journaling, relaxation techniques

1
2
3
4

Protective Factors

Individual characteristics or life circumstances that protect you from stress.

Examples: financial stability, good physical health, supportive family, motivation to succeed, education

1
2
3
4



Your happiness

Take a moment to think about what happiness means to you. Note down whatever comes in to your head.

What does happiness mean to you?

Example: *Feeling good about how things are going*

Now think about specific things that often make you happy. These could be activities, people, places or anything else that comes to mind.

What things make you happy?

Example: *A relaxing day at home with my family*

Three Good Things exercise

Write down three good things that happened to you today. They can be anything you feel good about or grateful for.

Use this sheet to keep a record of your Three Good Things each day over the course of a week. Try to include **why** you felt each of the things was really good.

Try to write down your three good things every day if possible – but if for some reason you miss a day then don't worry, just carry on the next day.

You could even talk to your family or friends about your three good things and ask them about theirs.

1	Day/date:
	<i>Good Thing 1</i>
	<i>Good Thing 2</i>
	<i>Good Thing 3</i>

2	Day/date:
	<i>Good Thing 1</i>
	<i>Good Thing 2</i>
	<i>Good Thing 3</i>

3	Day/date:
	<i>Good Thing 1</i>
	<i>Good Thing 2</i>
	<i>Good Thing 3</i>

Conclusion

We know that you are doing your absolute best as caregivers to show the children with whom you are connected your love and concern in this time of crisis. Realistically, we are in a difficult position with what we can offer these children from afar. However, non-judgmental support and validation can be extremely helpful for children who are experiencing disruptions in their lives leading them to feel scared, hopeless, or even out of control. Similarly, using your own personal supports for emotional stability may be a key to helping yourself staying grounded at this time.

In addition to managing your own feelings and holding a child's feelings for them, we have covered different ways to be present for the children in Ukraine with games, activities, meditations, or journal/talking prompts. If you are in touch with other families who are connected with Ukrainian orphans, it may be helpful to ask them what has worked in their communication and to share these resources with them as well.

As you navigate with your family the pause of adoption plans and support the children of Ukraine through their own fears and uncertainties, we encourage you to use the materials contained in this toolkit for support. Although the resources here may seem like temporary fixes for a situation that is traumatizing and overwhelming for everyone involved, they are tools that are suitable for navigating the challenges of our daily lives as well. Our hope is that you will be able to identify resources that "speak" to you and add them to your toolbox for this and other difficult times.