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# Helping with displaced Ukrainians' concerns or worries



# If you are wondering how you can help, this guide is for you.

This information has been produced to help those supporting people affected by the Ukraine crisis. The purpose of this document is to help you create a safe and welcoming environment for displaced Ukrainian people and avoid the potential for further harm. The information is based on the experiences of other groups of refugees.

Many displaced Ukrainians have suffered traumatic experiences and may be feeling loss and sadness about the past, and be fearful and anxious about the future.

Many will be deeply worried about other family members and friends who either haven't been able to leave Ukraine, or are displaced elsewhere. You may notice they are having difficulty sleeping or lack of appetite.

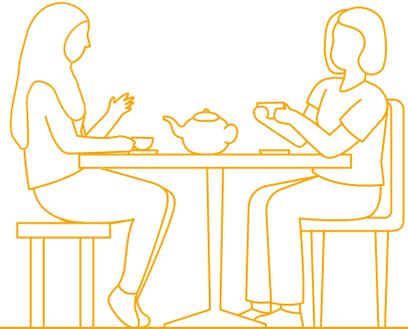
Feeling these things is normal, but we want you to know that help is available for whatever they are going through.

Here, we hope you will find different things you can do to help improve the wellbeing of those you are supporting. Alongside useful ways for those finding it hard to get support. The five ideas and tools, which are like exercises, can help individuals to stay grounded in the present moment and not get lost in worries.

You may also find London's digital wellbeing service, Good Thinking, helpful, both for yourself and for those you're supporting. You can explore more on their website, visit: [www.good-thinking.uk](http://www.good-thinking.uk).

# ONE

# Connect with others



It's natural during difficult times to want to be alone with your worries, however helping those you are supporting to stay connected with others is important as it can provide:

- **A chance to talk about past experiences and gain perspective on them**
- **Affirmation of our identity and helps share compassion for our struggles**
- **Emotional support and allow you to support others**

## **How to encourage staying connected:**

- Meeting members of your family, friends and others in the local community
- Supporting connection with others either by phone, text, or through email and social media
- Suggesting local organisations or groups in your area, for example a football club, a sewing club or playgroup

## TWO

# Be physically active

Being active reduces stress and helps us sleep better. If those who you are supporting feel comfortable to do so, then encourage them to get some fresh air or take time to exercise by going for a walk or a run. If getting out and moving around is not easy or possible, encourage moving about indoors as often or as much as they can.

Being physically active is not only great for physical health and fitness, it can also:

- **Reduce feelings of worry or stress**
- **Help us to feel more positive**
- **Lower the risk of long-term health conditions**

### **Ways to stay active:**

- Walking around the local area or parks
- Easy, low-impact exercise, like stretching
- Use the internet to explore the [NHS' Couch to 5K](#) or [10-minute workouts](#)

## THREE

# Learn something new

Continued learning through life improves self-esteem and encourages social interaction and a more active life. You can help those you're supporting to learn something new to help improve wellbeing.



Research also shows that learning new skills can improve wellbeing by:

- **Boosting self-confidence and reducing low mood**
- **Helping us to find a sense of purpose**
- **Keeping our minds busy**

### Ways to support learning:

- Reading books
- Learning a new language
- Learning more about the local area
- Cooking something new

## FOUR

# Be kind to others

Acts of kindness, however small, can improve our wellbeing and happiness.

If they are ready to do so, encouraging those you are supporting to offer their own small acts of kindness can be a helpful way to improve wellbeing and happiness.



### **You can support kindness by:**

- Encouraging those you are supporting to ask friends, family or colleagues how they are
- Demonstrating how to be a good listener, without interrupting
- Helping others to volunteer or participate in new activities in the local community

## FIVE

# Pay attention to the present moment

For some displaced Ukrainians, it may feel as though they have one foot here and one foot in their home country, and it can be difficult to connect to the present moment. It's important to take a break from the things that may be distressing, such as the news or social media.

We can all practice self-care by simply checking in with ourselves and listening to how we're feeling. Being a compassionate listener to yourself each day is really important.

### **Paying attention to the present moment can:**

- Improve sleep
- Reduce stress and worries
- Reduce chronic pain



# Simple do's and don'ts to support wellbeing

You have shown huge kindness by supporting a displaced family. These dos and don'ts are offered as guidance to help you create a safe and welcoming environment. Your kindness, patience, and empathy will be vital, and it will be the little things that matter most.

## Do

- **Create a safe and trusting environment.** Safety is likely to be the most important physical need for displaced people arriving from Ukraine.
- **Treat people with dignity and respect.** Bear in mind that they may have different cultural and social norms. Be aware of and set aside your own biases and prejudice.
- **Give your guests space.** Offer help, but don't push, and they will start opening up when they're ready.
- **Be kind.** Guests are likely to be anxious if they feel they are imposing on you. Being kind to others may help mitigate those feelings.
- **Respect privacy.** Keep the person's story confidential if this is appropriate.
- **Behave appropriately to the person's culture, age, and gender.**
- **Respect people's right to make their own decisions.** Support them to make active choices, take control over their own lives and encourage informed decision-making.

Remember that all people have resources to cope, including those who are vulnerable, such as children and adolescents, parents and carers of young children and people with health conditions or disabilities. Help them use their own coping resources and strategies.

If people are distressed, do respond in a humane and supportive way. Active listening and compassionate communication are essential.

You can take The Zero Suicide Alliance training which is designed to help people to be able to identify warning signs and to feel comfortable having conversations

about suicide and mental health. It only takes 20 minutes, but it could make all the difference to someone in need. You can access this training for free via [www.zerosuicidealliance.com](http://www.zerosuicidealliance.com).

You may also find the principles of Psychological First Aid useful, visit [www.futurelearn.com/courses/psychological-first-aid-covid-19](http://www.futurelearn.com/courses/psychological-first-aid-covid-19) for an online course. You'll also find training specifically for supporting children and young people.

But remember, professional mental health support is available from the NHS. Visit [www.nhs.uk/mental-health](http://www.nhs.uk/mental-health) for more information about services.

## Don't

- Don't exploit your relationship as a helper
- Don't ask the person for any money or favour for helping them
- Don't make false promises or give false information
- Don't exaggerate your skills
- Don't force help on people, and don't be intrusive or pushy
- Don't pressure people to tell you their story
- Don't share the person's story with others
- Don't judge the person for their actions or feelings

# Helping people to feel calm

Grounding exercises are simple techniques which can help people to feel calm in their mind and body. Anyone who may be distressed can try these.



1

## Breathing exercise

- Find a quiet space. You can do this exercise sitting in a chair with your feet on the ground.
- Place one hand on your chest and one hand on your stomach.
- Breathe in for four seconds, feeling your stomach rise.
- Then breathe out for four seconds while pressing gently on your stomach.
- You can repeat this as many times as you wish.

2

## 5,4,3,2,1 Exercise

- Find a quiet space, you can do this exercise sitting or lying down
- Name five things you can see
- Name four things you can touch
- Name three things you can hear
- Name two things you can smell
- Name one thing you can taste
- You can repeat this exercise as many times as you wish.

# Engaging in conversations around mental health

Do take a compassionate and engaging approach if you are initiating a conversation around mental health.

**You may find Thrive LDN's conversation starter, SIGNSS, gives you a framework for connection:**

**S**

**Situation** - Try using a situation to find common ground. A recent, current or future event that means something to you both. It is important to remember to treat somebody as a human being first, and a refugee second. By taking the time to connect with the person, you will create an environment of warmth and engagement to encourage deeper conversation.

**I**

**Initiate** - Initiating a caring conversation is an act of kindness, good for your own wellbeing as well as for someone else. A direct question, asked gently, gets to the point and is an honest way to begin.

Speak about mental health in terms of general health and wellbeing, reframing and normalising their distress. Here are some good questions to ask to initiate a conversation around mental health:

- 'Are you having trouble sleeping?'
- 'Are you worried about anything? Family?'
- 'Are you having trouble remembering things?'
- 'How are you coping here?'
- 'Is there anything you are unable to do that you would like to?'

**G**

**Guide** - Being a good listener shows someone that you are genuinely interested in how they are doing. Use open-ended questions to guide them into talking more, without judgement or negative reactions to what they have to say.

**N**

**Nudge** - A nudge in the right direction can help people to search for their own resolution. Positive encouragement and practical suggestions can be a helpful prompt. One practical suggestion may be a simple grounding technique, such as breathing exercises (see page 10 for a suggested technique).

**SS**

**Support and Signpost** - It can be hard to know where to turn and what help is available. Help point someone in the right direction for support.

## Looking after yourself

### Finally, do look after your own wellbeing.

You may be affected by what you see or hear while helping displaced people. As someone providing support, it is important to pay extra attention to your own wellbeing. Take care of yourself, so you can best take care of others.

Find a range of support online at

[www.thriveldn.co.uk/help-yourself-and-others/](http://www.thriveldn.co.uk/help-yourself-and-others/)

# Ways to get professional support

Lots of people will experience feelings of worry at some point in their life and others may experience signs such as

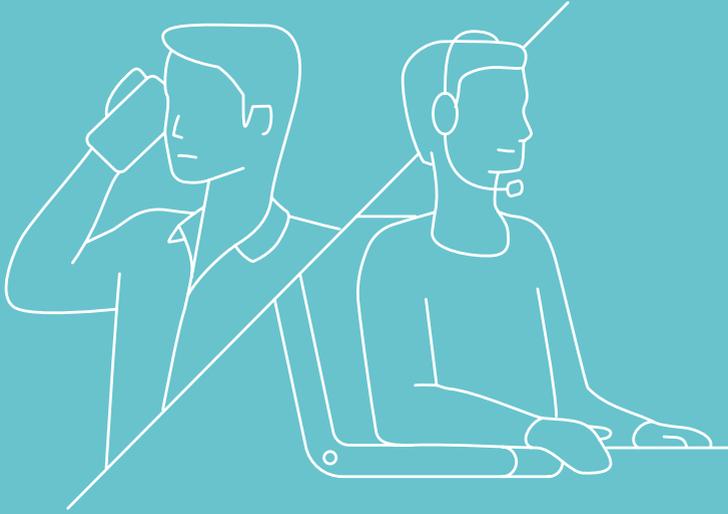
- Low mood
- Problems sleeping
- Stomach pain
- Headaches
- Feeling tired most of the time
- Changes in appetite
- Negative thoughts and feelings
- Feeling pain without any known reason

Reaching out to someone we trust is one of the most important things we can do to keep well, but there is also professional help available. A GP or family doctor is there as someone to talk to and support without judgement.

**Everyone in England has the right to register with a GP**

- You do not need a fixed address to do so
- You do not need identification
- Your immigration status does not matter
- GP registration is free of charge
- You can request a male or female doctor, nurse or interpreter
- The GP must use a professional interpreter if you cannot understand or speak English

It may be helpful to explain that displaced Ukrainians can register with a doctors' surgery and make an appointment to see a GP.



Nurses and doctors at your local surgery can give examinations, advice and treatment. You can reassure those you are supporting that this will be done in a confidential way. This means everything they tell the doctor will be kept private, including personal details, medical history and records.

It is possible that the GP may ask for some documents, but if the person you're supporting does not have them the doctors' surgery cannot say no to registering them. [Doctors of the World](#) can help displaced people find a GP near where you live: 0808 1647 686 (freephone, Monday to Friday 10am to 12 midday).

If there are any issues registering or seeing a doctor, the local [HealthWatch](#) can offer advice on: 0300 68 3000.

Further information and practical advice on accessing healthcare is available at: [www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/get-support/services/therapeutic-wellbeing-resources/](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/get-support/services/therapeutic-wellbeing-resources/)

If the issues that need discussing are urgent, they can call NHS 111.

You may find Good Thinking's '[Coping with Trauma](#)' workbook helpful. It provides techniques to help people who have experienced trauma and are out of danger now, and there are also accompanying short films.

# Other places to get support

There are lots of different types of support available. Below are just a few organisations who provide practical advice and support to refugees and asylum seekers in the UK, as well as more general wellbeing and mental health support.

You can also find up to date questions and answers on the Homes for Ukraine scheme on [the UK Government's website](#).

**The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)** have collated a range of [resources on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings](#), which has also been translated into Ukrainian.



**The Refugee Council** is a charity working with refugees and people seeking asylum in the UK. They provide crisis advice, mental health counselling and practical support to help people settle and integrate into their new community.

🖥️ [www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/get-support/services/](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/get-support/services/)

☎️ 0808 196 7272

**Every Mind Matters** provides expert advice and practical tips to help you look after your mental health and wellbeing. Including an interactive

quiz, the Your Mind Plan, to get top tips and advice relevant for you.

🖥️ [www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/](http://www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/)

## OPORA

**OPORA** is a charitable association operating in the UK and the Czech Republic aiming to provide both emergency and long-term support to displaced Ukrainians. You can explore a range of resources, including a community sourced guide for helping you prepare to welcome Ukrainian guests into your home.

🖥️ [www.opora.uk/links](http://www.opora.uk/links)

✉️ [help@opora.uk](mailto:help@opora.uk)

## Good Thinking

**Good Thinking** is supported by the NHS and London borough councils. They provide free, 24/7, digital support to anyone seeking mental health advice.

🖥️ [www.good-thinking.uk](http://www.good-thinking.uk)

# About this resource

This resource has been produced by Thrive LDN in partnership with the Refugee Council, the ESRC Centre for Society and Mental Health at King's College London, the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, and London Councils.

Our thanks also to colleagues at Healthy London Partnership, Good Thinking and the Greater London Authority.



Thrive LDN is a partnership between London's NHS, public services, the Mayor of London, councils, and charities to promote better mental health and wellbeing for everyone.



**For more information visit**  
[www.thriveldn.co.uk](http://www.thriveldn.co.uk)