

SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN TIMES OF CONFLICT AND UNCERTAINTY

A guide for school staff

South West London Children and
Young People's Wellbeing Service

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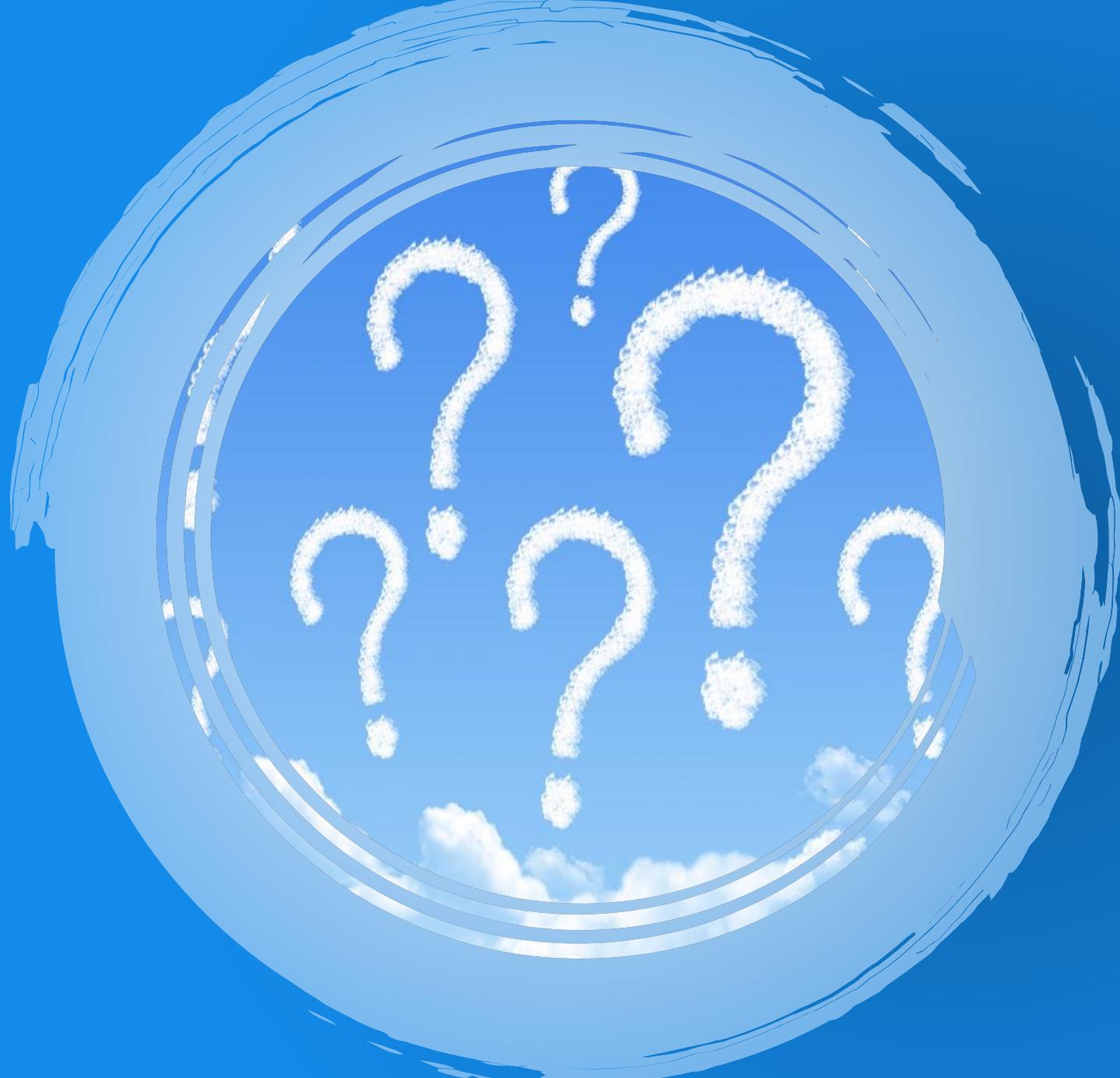
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Who will be affected?

We are ALL affected by the current situation. It is important to let CYP know this to normalize the fact that uncertainty can be anxiety-provoking and distressing. However, certain individuals or groups may be affected differently so it is important to be mindful of the specific concerns or realities that they may be facing...

CYP who have themselves been displaced by conflict may be faced with a range of difficult feelings. The sense of sanctuary the UK offered them at one time is suddenly threatened. The current situation may trigger traumatic memories.

CYP may be living in homes where parents or other family members are struggling to process the unfolding situation. They may be facing increased economic hardship as a result of the situation. They may have friends and loved ones directly impacted by the situation. Anxiety and stress levels may be particularly high at home.

It might be difficult to talk about this at home so it's even more important to create safe spaces for CYP to talk about the current situation in school.

Some CYP will have family and friends in Ukraine or Russia, who are directly affected by the situation. CYP and their families could be faced with bereavement, life-changing injuries, displacement, family separation and high levels of trauma.

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Supporting children with links to the Russian community

Naturally, the main focus of attention and support will be on Ukrainian CYP and families at the moment. However, the needs of CYP and families of Russian descent still need to be considered at this difficult time.

In times of international conflict, it is common for people's views to become even more polarized than usual. Certainly, it becomes more acceptable to *express* more polarised views, as can be seen in media reports where one particular group is othered and demonised in a way that wouldn't be acceptable under normal circumstances. There was a significant increase in verbal and physical attacks against British Muslim school children following the Paris attacks of 2015*.

In our diverse school communities, it is important to remember that children may internalise some of the negativity they are exposed to in the media, at home and on social media and that, as a result, members of certain groups are at increased risk of bullying and exclusion during times of conflict.

Encourage open, age-appropriate conversations about how hate can flourish, if left unchecked, in times of conflict and uncertainty. Ask CYP what they are hearing and how that makes them feel. Invite CYP to problem-solve together about how to increase feelings of cohesion, community and collaboration.

*As reported by Tell MAMA – Measuring Anti Muslim Attacks, 2015

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Relating the current situation to the curriculum ...

Encourage CYP to think critically about what they see/hear about the current situation.

This includes both social media (SM) and mainstream media reporting. Most CYP have a firm concept of SM reality not being the most reliable source in terms what goes on in real life (irl).



You may find it helpful to use the concept of selfie filters to demonstrate how easy it is to present a version of reality that fits with what we are trying to achieve. Most CYP can relate to this and it gives them a framework for thinking critically about what is presented to them as 'news' or 'facts'.

Be mindful of the impact of previous learning about conflict on CYP.

When you have spent time learning about how awful the Second World War was and how this related not just to soldiers and leaders but to the lives of ordinary individuals and families, the idea of conflict is not so abstract. All of a sudden, something you have studied as 'history', is being presented as a possibility, not just in your lifetime but around the corner.

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HOW TO COMMUNICATE WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ABOUT FRIGHTENING WORLD EVENTS



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KEY ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION WITH CYP IN TIMES OF UNCERTAINTY

SPACE

VALIDATION

INFORMATION

HONESTY

NORMALISATION

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SPACE

Make space *and* time to talk about what is happening. By doing so, you are making it clear that their worries, questions and feelings are important to you.

Ask open questions that show you want to hear more, like... “How does this make you feel?” or “What do you want to know about this?”



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VALIDATION

Let them know that what they are feeling is ok, even if it doesn't make sense to you. Avoid comments like, "don't be silly" or "you shouldn't worry about things like that".

Instead, let them know that you can understand why they would feel sad, anxious, angry, etc.



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INFORMATION

Be prepared for questions. If necessary, do some research yourself. You don't need to rush out and do a history degree but it's reassuring for CYP when the people they look to for reassurance have SOME idea of what's going on.

Share information about positive steps being taken to keep them safe and about acts of heroism and compassion.

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HONESTY

Don't make false promises or guarantees.

It's better to be honest about the fact that we don't always have the answers and to demonstrate that uncertainty is OKAY.



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NORMALISATION

Make sure that children and young people see that the difficult feelings they experience as a response to this situation are normal reactions to difficult circumstances.

It's okay to feel scared, worried and sad. These feelings aren't very pleasant but it's okay to feel them and to talk about them.



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MODELLING

Even if you are nervous yourself about the situation, it's important not to transmit this to children and young people around you.

Try to maintain a calm tone when talking about the situation. Young people look to us for cues as to how worried they should be. There's no point **telling** children that there's nothing to worry about if you are **showing** them the opposite.



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LIMIT EXPOSURE TO SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE NEWS. AS WELL AS THE POSSIBILITY OF CYP BEING AFFECTED BY MISINFORMATION, THE LANGUAGE USED IN NEWS REPORTING IS OFTEN QUITE SENSATIONAL, WHICH CAN BE FRIGHTENING AND CONFUSING FOR CYP.

CONSIDER THE LANGUAGE YOU USE IN FRONT OF YOUR CHILDREN WHEN DISCUSSING THE SITUATION WITH OTHERS

NOT EVERYONE LIKES TO TALK. OFFER OTHER WAYS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE TO EXPRESS THEIR FEELINGS.



**HOW
ELSE
CAN WE
HELP?**

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LOOK OUT FOR LESS OBVIOUS SIGNS THAT A CHILD MIGHT BE AFFECTED BY THE SITUATION, SUCH AS CHANGES IN APPETITE, BEHAVIOUR AND SLEEP PATTERNS.

LOOK INTO WAYS YOUR SCHOOL COULD HELP, SUCH AS DONATING TO RELEVANT CHARITIES. AS WELL AS FEELING ANXIOUS, MANY CYP WILL FEEL SADDENED BY THE PLIGHT OF OTHERS. THEY MAY ALSO FEEL IMPOTENT.

AS FAR AS POSSIBLE, MAINTAIN A SENSE OF NORMALITY AND ROUTINE.



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OTHER SOURCES OF SUPPORT/INFORMATION

[ADVICE IF YOU'RE UPSET BY THE NEWS -
CBC NEWSROUND](#)

[HTTPS://WWW.MENTALHEALTH.ORG.UK/P
UBLICATIONS/TALKING-TO-YOUR-
CHILDREN-SCARY-WORLD-NEWS](https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/talking-to-your-children-scary-world-news)

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