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## Talking with Your Child about the Ukraine Invasion

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The Ukraine invasion can result in a variety of feelings for parents, especially concern about how to talk about it with their children. Feelings can include sadness, anxiety, anger, helplessness, and grief. All of these feelings are okay. Many parents have researched how to talk about this and/or have already discussed what is happening with their children. If you are a parent reading this, the extent of your conversation with your child would depend on their age, maturity level, access to news and social media, and their previous exposure to war and invasions. You know your child best and have most likely made the right decision as to how to discuss this tragic event with your child.

Students may come home from school with questions or feelings associated with the invasion after hearing about it from friends and/or teachers. Whether or not you have chosen to talk with your child about it, your child may have heard other students speak on some level about it at school. (Even young students may hear something from their friends whose parents chose to discuss this event with their child.) If your child does not mention the event, he/she may be thinking about it or reacting to it on some level. Here are some important tips that can be helpful to you as a parent:

**Encourage your child to ask questions:** Tell your child that it is safe to talk to you and that there are no "right" or "wrong" questions. For students in Elementary grades, parents can ask open-ended questions such as "did you hear about anything at school that bothered/upset/concerned you that you have questions about?" For Middle School and High School students, parents might want to be more direct by asking their child if they have heard talk about the Ukraine invasion and if they have any questions about it. Asking open-ended questions allows your child to let you know what they are wondering about and where they are at. For younger children, this can help guide you in recognizing how much information they are ready to hear. Some children may need time to process the information and may have questions and thoughts at a later time. Check in with your child periodically in case questions come up for them down the road.

**Let your child lead with questions:** Your child's questions can help guide you as to where they are at with the situation and what they need to know. For younger children, do not offer any information that they do not seem to be seeking. Answer questions with accurate facts - you can even look up the answers online if you need to. Answer your child's questions honestly while keeping in mind their intellectual and emotional developmental level. It is okay to tell your child if you don't know an answer and will get back to them. Honesty is important so that your child has an adequate understanding of the situation and it can help them to trust you with questions as they mature.

**Validate and normalize their feelings:** Tell them that all feelings are okay. Whether they feel sad, scared, angry, confused or nothing at all - there is no "wrong" feeling. It is okay to tell them when you feel the same way. Keep in mind that feelings may change and allow your child the safety of approaching you with any questions or thoughts for the upcoming days, weeks or even months ahead. If your child does not feel comfortable talking, they can write or draw their feelings or act them out through play. Be on the look-out for extreme changes in behavior and/or mood, which can sometimes occur after some time has passed.

**Remind your child of the ways that they are safe:** Some children might be worried about an invasion taking place in their own home, region or country. It is important to validate their feelings first and then talk with your child about the ways that they are safe and secure. Depending on the age of your child, it can also be helpful to write or draw how they are safe (examples are: having a police officer at their school; the U.S. military to help protect our country; a dog or alarm system in the home). It is also important to help your child to identify people they can talk to if they are worried or need reassurance.

**Limit media exposure:** News and online media have a lot of troubling pictures and information that can cause anxiety and sadness in adults as well as children. Even news that is not disturbing to us as parents can be confusing for children. Even if you think your child isn't looking, they could still be exposed to unwanted news information while playing something else nearby. Try to save your news-watching and listening for when children are out of earshot. For those with older children who may be exposed to news and social media, having honest and open dialogue can help prepare them for handling the exposure. Encourage them to turn off any information that makes them feel uncomfortable.

**Take care of yourself:** Check-in with yourself to see how you are coping with the latest troubling news. Our children can pick up on our emotions and body language. If you are struggling with your emotions, talk with someone you trust. Your partner, family member, friend, Clergy, or a therapist can be of assistance. Going for walks, engaging in relaxation activities, and writing in a journal can also help.