

Managing the Psychological Effects of Conflict

How does conflict effect people psychologically?

- Some people living through conflict may go into "survival mode" and may not experience the psychological effects of conflict until much later.
- Others may feel overwhelmed or traumatised in the moment, which can impact their ability to cope with situation as it unfolds.
- People not directly experiencing the conflict may also experience vicarious trauma because of reading or hearing about the experiences of those in the conflict area

What are the signs of overwhelm and trauma?

Overwhelm and trauma can take many forms:

- Feeling paralysed or unable to do anything
- Feeling as though you are on "high alert" for signs of danger
- Constantly thinking about the situation and worrying about what might happen
- Experiencing physical signs of anxiety or panic (racing heart, shortness of breath, sleeplessness)
- Having nightmares or flashbacks about the situation
- Shutting down and feeling "numb"

Managing the Psychological Effects of Conflict

What can I do to psychologically cope with conflict?

- Remember that it is very normal to feel scared, sad, helpless, and anxious in this situation. These feelings are not a sign of weakness.
- Express your feelings
- Try to distract yourself with a task if you are feeling overwhelmed
- As much as possible, maintain a normal routine
- Stay informed, but limit your exposure to images of conflict
- Practice slow breathing to reduce physical stress in your body

How can I help my child or others to cope?

- Be honest and keep your children informed about the situation
- Tell your children and loved ones what you are doing to cope, and ask them for ideas about how you can support each other
- Remind your children and loved ones that it is very normal to feel anxious or overwhelmed during this time
- For younger children, it may be soothing to have a familiar toy, blanket, or item of clothing with them

Grounding exercise - 1

When we are in a crisis, our nervous system might be in overdrive, causing us to frequently startle. As a result, we might become more anxious, tense, and struggle with processing new information. To preserve our energy and well-being, we practice grounding exercises using these five steps:



Name your experience.

1

For example, you heard a loud sound or your loved one didn't respond to your message right away. When you state your experience, it's important that we are literal and factual. For example, My loved one didn't respond to my message.

Notice how you feel it in the body.

2

Stressful situations can change how our body feels. For example, if your loved one didn't respond to your message, your heart rate might increase, you might feel tense in your shoulders, or shaky.

Notice how this situation is affecting your body and remain literal and factual. For example, "my chest is tight and my heart is beating fast" not "I feel like there's an elephant sitting on my chest!"

Grounding exercise - 2

Breathe for at least 1 minute into each part of the body where you feel discomfort.

3

If you have a timer on your watch or phone, set it for one minute. If you don't, count to 60 as you are breathing slowly and focusing on your breath. With each exhale, focus on imagining that the part of your body (for example, your chest) is expanding and relaxing more and more. Practice this exercise for 1 minute for each part of your body where you feel discomfort (e.g., one minute to unclench your shoulders, one minute to settle your chest, etc.).

Grounding

4

Once you have completed your breathing exercises, notice the sensations of your feet or hands. Notice the patterns in your environment. Notice where you are. Ask yourself, where am I right now? In this very second, am I safe? If the answer is no, focus on getting to safety first, such as a shelter and then restart this exercise.

5

What do you need to do this very moment?

Focus on doing something helpful for other people or staying productive. Focusing on helping other people can help us to better manage the situation.

If you are struggling and need to talk to somebody, please call or text the Ukrainian Crisis Support line: 7333. It is free and confidential <https://lifelineukraine.com/en>

Coping with empathic distress



When watching the news of terrible tragedies in Ukraine, when hearing of loved ones struggling, and even when learning about people we have never met who are struggling, we might feel highly distressed.

The distress that occurs when we learn about other people's suffering is called **empathic distress**.

Why do we feel empathic distress?

Human beings are born to care about one another. We are empathic because having empathy toward other people allows us to survive.

How can we manage empathic distress?

1. Place your hand on your heart
2. Take one minute to focus on your breathing
3. Now, focus on your inhale. Every time you inhale, imagine breathing in strength, resilience, and healing into your own body. Imagine healing your body with each inhale.
4. Now, focus on your exhale. With each exhale, imagine sending healing and protective energy to the people who are suffering, as if creating a protective energy around them with each of your exhales.
5. Now, focus on taking an inhale for yourself and exhaling for the people who are suffering. Breathing in strength, resilience, and healing for yourself, and then breathe out healing, resilience and protecting for others.

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Coping with overwhelm

When you are feeling overwhelmed and need short-term relief, it can help to focus your attention on an activity and away from your thoughts. Here are five suggestions:

Actions

Do something around the house: clean, cook, move furniture around, do a crossword or a drawing, take a shower, move your body with massage, yoga or exercise



Focus on helping others

Check in on your loved ones and see if there is practical support you can offer

Try to distract yourself

Watch TV (but avoid anything distressing), read a book, or listen to music



Engage your mind

Count backwards from 100 in 7s, name 10 colours or pieces of furniture in the room, think of 10 cities starting with the letter A

Use your senses

Name 5 things that you can see, hear, touch, smell and taste.



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