



# HOW CAN PARENTS HELP ADOLESCENTS IN NEED



*We have found ourselves in challenging times that are rather difficult for everyone, including adolescents. There are certain factors that have changed our lives tremendously such as losing a home, coming into an unfamiliar environment, changing schools, uncertainty and rapid changes.*

*Supportive interpersonal relationships are an important factor in helping young people cope with stress. In this regard, parents can also play an important role, and by listening to their children's needs, they can help improve their well-being. They should be attuned to the needs and wishes of their adolescents and besides, having a frank and supportive conversation will be of great help as well.*

1

## LET'S FIND OUT HOW THEY ARE COPING WITH THE CURRENT SITUATION

Let's take some time to ask young people how they feel. We should bear in mind that they may try to hide their feelings and that they may not be willing to express all their fears, so it is important to be persistent but not intrusive. We should let them know that we are at their disposal and willing to talk to them whenever need be. Besides, we should also strive for opportunities that will make it possible for us to keep a conversation flowing.

We should reassure them that feelings of distress, anxiety, irritability, fear and uncertainty are normal and understandable in the current situation.

**When it comes to fears and distress, we should take more time to check and listen to what the biggest fears and hardships of adolescents are. Then try to make young people understand that there are some things we have no control over, but that there are also many things we can control and which we can do instead.**





## 2 TRY TO GIVE YOUNG PEOPLE AS CLEAR INFORMATION AS POSSIBLE

**Increased use of technology also makes it easier for people to access unverified, misleading or completely wrong data and information, so we should also warn our children of this danger. It is a good idea to suggest that we help to find them the information they are looking for by turning to more reliable and credible sources.**

It is also advisable to ask young people several times if they have any questions or doubts. In doing so, we should not shy away from topics that we may find uncomfortable to discuss, as they will otherwise make up for the lack of explanation on their own, perhaps in a less appropriate and productive way.

## 3

## PAY ATTENTION TO MAJOR CHANGES IN BEHAVIOUR AND EMOTIONS

Major or sudden changes in behaviour and emotions can be (in)directly linked to distress, anxiety or depression. Being attentive and attuned to the young person's needs is the first step towards recognising distress, and besides, familiarity with the typical signs of each condition can also be of great help.



*In general, any major or unusual change can represent a trigger for an open conversation.*



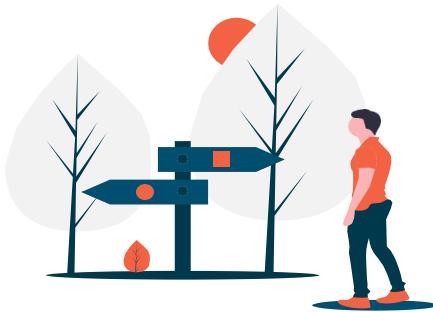
Adolescents may show signs of distress in the following ways:

- Mood swings that have previously not been detected - stronger or longer-lasting irritability, feelings of helplessness, anger.
- More frequent or intense conflicts with other people or withdrawal and cutting off contact with the others.
- Long-lasting decline in or complete lack of interest in activities that they previously wanted to do and could still do in the current situation if only they wanted to
- Sleep disorders - difficulty falling asleep, waking up, sleeping more often and napping during the day.
- Changes in appetite and eating patterns, sudden cravings for a particular type of food, changes in body weight.
- Problems with memory, thinking and concentration.
- A sudden reduction of effort to accomplish commitments.
- Major changes in appearance or hygiene habits.
- Increased risky behaviours such as drinking alcohol or abusing psychoactive substances.
- Thinking about self-harm, suicide.

In adolescents, most (not all) of the above observations may be a perfectly normal part of their development, so by no means every change is a sign of a deeper distress.



*“Problems arise when these signs and symptoms are so pronounced that they interfere with the adolescent's daily functioning. In case of major distress and difficulties, please do not hesitate to consult a doctor or other professional who is available to provide psychological assistance to people in need due to the current situation in Ukraine and worldwide.”*



## 4 LET'S TALK OPENLY ABOUT LOSSES

Many adolescents have experienced the loss of a loved one, family member or friend in the course of their current situation. It is important to offer them support and provide them with a safe environment during their time of grief. Some people may prefer more direct conversation and involvement in activities related to the grieving process, while others may need more time and space to express their feelings.

*“When addressing losses, we should pay attention to the age and needs of young people and bear in mind that grieving is a completely unique process that varies greatly between individuals.”*

In doing so, we should pay attention to the possible fears that may arise, as it is not unusual for adolescents to start questioning their own mortality. It is good to be prepared for this conversation and to be available for any questions they may have. Feelings of shame or guilt also arise quite frequently, and it is important to detect them quickly and to calm down an adolescent in an appropriate manner.

**We should try to be honest about how we feel and we should not hide any pain.**

**In case we find it difficult to discuss those issues, it is advisable to contact a professional who is qualified to provide psychological support to both you and your child.**





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## DON'T FORGET ABOUT YOUR OWN WELL-BEING

Try to take a few moments to breathe (perhaps using relaxation techniques) and you should also aim to include at least some physical activity into your daily routine. Sleep and a balanced diet also represent a valuable asset when taking care of our own well-being.





“ *We will be able to provide support and assistance to a young person only if we ourselves feel good and empowered.* ”

Due to the fact that we have changed our country of residence, we may have lost contact with some of our loved ones or we may keep in touch with them only remotely (by means of phone, computer, humanitarian organisations). Although no one can replace these relationships and the present situation makes us suffer, we must not forget about the people who are currently with us, giving us support and help. It is important that we turn to them for conversation and that we support each other. Making new contacts can also be rewarding, and sometimes it is even easier to talk to someone you don't know (well). If faced with more difficult hardships, do not hesitate to seek assistance from experts.



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