

11 TIPS FOR TALKING WITH KIDS ABOUT

WAR AND REFUGEES

Stories in the news show children and families who've endured tragic loss, terrifying violence, or painful injury. Experts widely agree that parents should shield young children from violent and disturbing news.

But how can you explain the conflict in Ukraine in age-appropriate terms and help them become informed and empowered to help? You want to raise your kids to be caring, global citizens who are compassionate toward people in need. But how do you talk with your children about a subject as difficult as war and refugees?

Here at World Vision, our focus is on helping the most vulnerable children overcome poverty and conflict so they can experience fullness of life. Inspired by our Christian faith, we help children of all backgrounds, even in the most dangerous places. When disasters like this strike, we're on the ground quickly providing support—and we stay to help children, families, and communities rebuild.

While we're on the ground in Romania helping meet children and families' immediate needs as they flee conflict in Ukraine, we also want to help support the children in your life who may have hard questions or be overwhelmed with big feelings about what they're seeing and hearing. That's why we've created this resource guide, and we pray it will help you nurture your children through these difficult times.

Here are 11 tips to help you talk to your children about war and refugees.



01

Do a little research.

You don't have to have all the answers, but make sure you're informed. The better you understand the situation in Ukraine as well as other refugee situations around the world, the better you'll be able to explain issues in ways that are appropriate for your child. World Vision's staff around the world have great resources to help you learn about both the current crisis in Ukraine

as well as general information about refugees and other crises situations globally. Here are some links that can help you learn:

What is a refugee? Learn the difference between refugees, migrants, asylum-seekers, and internally displaced people with this [FAQ guide](#).

Are you interested in learning about other refugee crises? [This page](#) contains FAQ guides for many of the major crises happening around the world, including Ukraine, Syria, Bangladesh, and Venezuela.

02

Find out what your children know.

Start with a baseline by asking your kids an open-ended question to better understand what they already know. Something like: *"What do you know about the war that's happening in Ukraine?"* or *"What do you know about refugees?"* Then, follow up with something like:

"How did you learn about that?" so you can understand where they're getting their information from. Then you can ask something such as, *"Why do you think so many people have had to leave their homes?"*

Your kids might know more than you think, or they might have heard something inaccurate. If you have children that are further apart in age, consider having this conversation with them individually in case older children know more than younger children.

03

Don't force it.

Kids are all different. Some will be interested in the crisis, while others may not care. Some will clearly be passionate world-changers from day one while others may develop empathy and the confidence to take action later in life. Sometimes they'll feel really excited about helping others, and sometimes they will have days and moments where they just don't get it, or they act selfishly. That's okay! If your kids aren't showing interest right now, wait for an opportunity to engage with them about the topic. You can also look for small teaching moments where you can educate them and encourage them in their learning and understanding of global issues.

04

Explain the crisis in age-appropriate terms.

Use kid-friendly words and examples to explain what's going on. Crises like the war in Ukraine, the Rohingya refugee crisis, or the Syrian refugee crisis may be complicated to explain, so it's best to keep it simple. Here are some phrases you can try:

- *"Different people want to be in charge."*
- *"They believe very different things about how to lead people."*
- *"Some countries want to make their country bigger so they started fighting to take other countries' land."*
- *"It would be like if you had a cookie, but then I wanted your cookie too, even though I had several cookies, so I started hitting you to take your cookie."*
- *"It's not fair or kind."*
- *"Families are scared."*
- *"Fighting in their home country has destroyed homes, schools, and roads."*
- *"It's not safe for families to stay."*
- *"Mommies and kids are going to other countries to stay safe."*
- *"They can only take a backpack or small suitcase with them."*
- *"They have to leave most of their toys, books, and clothes behind."*
- *"They can't go to school anymore."*
- *"Trains and buses are very crowded with people leaving."*
- *"Many daddies are staying to fight in the war."*
- *"It's scary for the mommies and kids to be separated from the daddies."*
- *"It's hard for them to talk to each other."*
- *"The technology needed to make cell phone or computer calls gets damaged in the fighting."*
- *"Good people are trying to help them to stay safe, though."*

05

Understand their feelings.

If your child hasn't shared how they feel, ask how the war or refugee crisis makes them feel. They might feel worried about it, or they might feel fairly removed from the situation, but it's good to understand their feelings. When they share how they feel, gently ask follow-up questions like, *"Why do you feel that way?"* or *"What makes you feel like that?"* so you can better understand some of their thoughts, feelings, and potentially fears.

It may be good to hold them in your arms, so they feel comforted. If they cry, explain that it's okay to cry and that lots of people are crying because of the situation. You can even share that you have cried about it too if you have. Offer them a tissue or their favorite stuffed animal for comfort.

06 Help your kids feel safe.

It's best to discuss your own fears and thoughts with another adult, not with your child, so it doesn't further worry them. It's important to help your children know they're safe. For example, if they're concerned they might have to leave their home, explain how we don't have the same the problems that are causing the violence in places like Ukraine. This is a good time to talk about fear in general and ask them what other fears they may have. Explain how fear is natural, that it's okay to be afraid, and that even grown-ups get scared.

This is a good opportunity to have a larger conversation about your faith and how we can trust God with all of our fears, from big ones like war, to everyday ones like spiders or the dark. It's great to share how God comforts you when you're afraid. This is also a great time to pray together and share our fears with God, and ask for comfort and protection. You could also teach your child Psalm 23:4, *"Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me"* (NIV) or Psalm 56:3, *"When I am afraid, I put my trust in you"* (NIV).

07 Make it personal.

While some children may be worried about the crisis in Ukraine, for other kids, big issues like these seem like a distant concept, far removed from their reality.

Finding ways to bring the needs of others closer to your child's world, can help them connect with the issues personally and foster empathy and compassion.

Gauge the conversation, and if you feel like it won't unnecessarily scare them, ask some questions to help them think about what other children may be experiencing: *"If we had to leave home in five minutes, what would you grab to take with you, and why?"* Discuss the difference between wants

and needs. You could also ask, *"If we had to go somewhere that we knew nobody and didn't speak the same language, how would you feel?"*

Discuss the challenges of moving to a new country. You could try explaining it in a more entertaining way, such as *"What if we had to move to another planet?!"* *"What would you take with you to the new planet?"* *"What if we get to the space shuttle, and they tell us that we have to eliminate half the things we brought, what do you leave behind then?"* *"What if we're with people who all speak different languages than us?"* *"What would we do for food and water on the new planet?"* Some kids may respond more when they feel like it's an exercise in imagination.

08

Draw it out.

Kids process their thoughts in different ways. Some might just want to talk, but others might find it easier to draw. Children's counselors frequently use this technique, and we also use it in the Child-Friendly Spaces we set up after disasters. Offer them some blank paper and crayons. Ask them to draw what they're seeing or hearing in the news or from friends, or ask them to draw how the situation makes them feel.

When they're done, invite them to share about their drawing: *Who are the people in their piece, what objects did they draw, and what actions are taking place?* If there is an object that you're not sure what it is, you could ask them to share more about that particular part and why they drew that. Encourage them also to explain why they selected the colors they did. Perhaps they use their favorite color in places where they're hoping for comfort, peace or happiness. Maybe they incorporated their favorite toy into the drawing because they yearn to give their toys to children who have left theirs behind.

Explore the meaning behind their artwork. Thank them for sharing their feelings.

09

Pray for refugees together.

Prayer is a great way to teach your children how to intercede on behalf of those in need. Here's a general [prayer guide](#) and a sample to get you started:

Good Shepherd, no refugee is a stranger to You, and no one is ever far from Your loving care. Watch over children and families as they travel to camps or relocate within their country. Shelter their souls and their bodies. Heal the hearts of refugees who have endured unimaginable tragedy and trauma. Bring Your peace.

Remind them God wants us to keep praying and that even if it feels like He's not answering our prayers, He is always working. We should never feel like we're bugging God if we keep asking for something we really want. Explain it in terms they may better understand, such as, *"If you really want ice cream, you're going to ask me, right? And if I say not today, you'll probably ask me again tomorrow, right? Maybe I'll say no for several days, but one of these days, you'll ask, and I will say yes, and won't you feel that much more excited because it's something good that you've been requesting for so long and are finally receiving?"*

10

Help them see the hope.

Thinking about the world's problems can be confronting and even scary for kids.

On a popular U.S. children's television show, Mister Rogers is a friendly man who encourages children to be good neighbors and invites them into a world of make-believe and introduces them to people who are doing good in the world. On one episode, he told a story that when scary things came on the news, his mother would tell him to *"Look for the helpers. You can always find people helping."*

Explain what is being done to help the issue, and encourage kids to look for the people who are helping in difficult situations. This can help kids be reassured that there is hope. Explain how organizations like World Vision and good people are helping people as they enter neighboring countries. Share how organizations provide refugees with places to sleep and special places for children to play. For example, World Vision is greeting families at the border of Romania and Ukraine and has set up tents for families to stay in for a few nights while they prepare to travel on to other places to meet friends, family, or other people who will help them.

We have many partners we work with who have also set up beds in empty buildings to provide temporary housing. World Vision has also provided food, water, and first-aid care to those who need it. We have also set up play spaces for children with toys so they can have a few hours of respite to do normal kid activities in the middle of a scary situation.



11

Give them ways to take action.

Encourage your children that they can be helpers too. Encouraging kids to find ways to take action and be part of the solution can be powerful. See if your kids might like to do something to help children who've had to leave their homes.

One way to turn their concern into positive action is to **help them raise funds** for an organization that is helping the crisis. Encourage them to save up their allowance money to make a donation to an organization like World Vision that is helping others.

If there is a family in your community or church that is from another country, you could **set up dinner together to learn their story**, what brought them to your town, what has been hard, what they miss about home, and what they enjoy doing. It's a chance to help your children understand that even though people come from different places or even look different, that we enjoy doing the same things, value the same things, and are all valuable in God's eyes.

Encourage your child to pray each day for God to help the people fleeing, and explain how even though it may take a long time for God to answer our prayers, we should keep praying.

While we may feel powerless to change large-scale global crises like war, we can remind ourselves and encourage our children that they can still help other people in so many ways.

For more information, please visit
www.wvi.org

You can also use the current crisis as a way to get them **thinking about others in their own community** and how they can help people locally. For instance, if you live in an area that is welcoming people born in other countries, you and your child could volunteer on a welcome committee or as a language partner.

This is also a great opportunity to **encourage your child's faith** by attending or even organizing a prayer event at your church to specifically pray for refugees.

Ask them if there is a classmate at school that may often sit or play by themselves. See if they may be willing to leave their group of friends to go talk or play with them. Or encourage them to **invite that person into their circle of friends** so they feel welcomed. Explain how sometimes when people are moving some place new like the refugees are, that they may feel alone or on the outside too.