

A resource by and for young people

Trauma from war and conflict: what's difficult and what helps?

What's difficult?

It can be really difficult for young people to leave their home because it wasn't safe to stay. They may have had to leave family and friends. They may have had a number of traumatic events and sometimes these can still affect them even after the danger has passed. Although these challenges are normal and understandable sometimes they can still be difficult to cope with.



Do you recognise any of these?

"My body hurts, I often get headaches or stomach aches even though I don't have a physical illness."

"In my mind the past is happening again right now."

"Sometimes I can't think for hours."

"Distressing memories come into my mind during the day or night."

"I feel guilty about what happened."

"I feel so sad and alone."

"It's difficult to feel motivated to do things."

"It's difficult to sleep, I often have bad dreams."

"I am anxious and have lots of worries about things."

"I don't want to talk about or think about the difficult things that happened in my past."

"I get angry or upset more easily."

"Is there something else you find difficult? Write it in here."

"I can't concentrate easily."

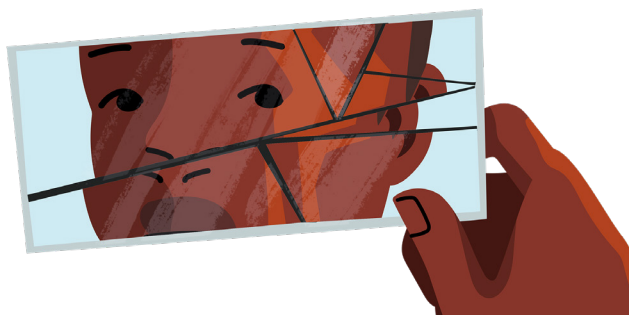
"Thinking about the future is difficult. I try to cope each day."

"Even though I know I'm probably safe, I keep watching out for something bad to happen."

"I am jumpy and nervous all the time."

"I stay away from things, people and places that remind me of what happened."

Having some of these difficulties is normal, in fact young people all over the world experience the same kind of reactions after traumatic events. But just because it's normal, it doesn't mean it's easy or that it has to be like this forever.





What helps?

In the present There are some things that can be helpful in the short term if your feelings are difficult to manage. Different people find different things useful. Try some of these things out and see which work for you:

In touch

Find things that feel nice to touch or hold. Maybe things that feel soothing and help bring you back to the here and now.

For example: playdough, lime, soft fabric, feathers, a squeeze ball, a smooth pebble.

Bubble breathing

Use a pot of bubbles. Breathe slowly and steadily to create large bubbles.

This can help make your breathing more steady and help your body feel calmer.

Mind travel

Build a picture in your mind of somewhere that feels calm and relaxing.

What can you see, hear, smell, touch and taste there? Who would be there with you? What would you be doing?

You could even draw a picture of your mind travel place to help you bring it to mind more easily.

Feelings Journal

Use a notepad to keep a journal of your thoughts and feelings.

Can you describe the feeling? If it had a colour, what colour would it be?

Where do you feel it? If it were a type of weather, what would it be?

You could write in your first language, in English or you might fill it with drawings.

Choose what to share and what to keep private.

Nature

Get outside to feel the sun, wind or rain.

Feel the air on your face or hands.

Mountains and valleys breathing

Calmly and slowly trace up and down each finger on your hand.

Breathe in as you trace up each finger.

Breathe out as you trace down each finger.

Music for my mind

Listen to a piece of music that feels calming or reminds you of a good memory.

You could make a playlist of the best tracks to help your emotions settle.

Tense and relax

Tense and relax different muscles in your body. Maybe start with your feet and move upwards. Hold the muscles tight in one part of your body for ten seconds and then breathe out slowly as you relax them.

5 4 3 2 1

Try finding:

5 things you can see
4 things you can touch
3 things you can hear
2 things you can smell
1 thing you can taste

Reset meditation

Sit down and be quiet and still. This might be at a time of prayer or following a short meditation, maybe using an app.

Cool it

Drink a cup of cool water slowly through a straw.

Move it

Do something physical that you enjoy.

For example: running, swimming, dancing, football, cricket

In the longer term Finding ways to manage your memories can really help. Try talking to someone you trust. You might prefer to write or draw about your memories – anything that helps you get them outside of your head. If your thoughts and feelings are making everyday life difficult, you might want some extra support. You could speak to a trained therapist. It's not always easy to ask for help, or to find the right help, but it can really make a difference.

Finding support

If you are struggling and looking for more help, you could contact:

Your school or college, your doctor, a local community group, or other professionals who support you: **a social worker, key worker, foster carer...**
