

# How can I support my child during difficult times?



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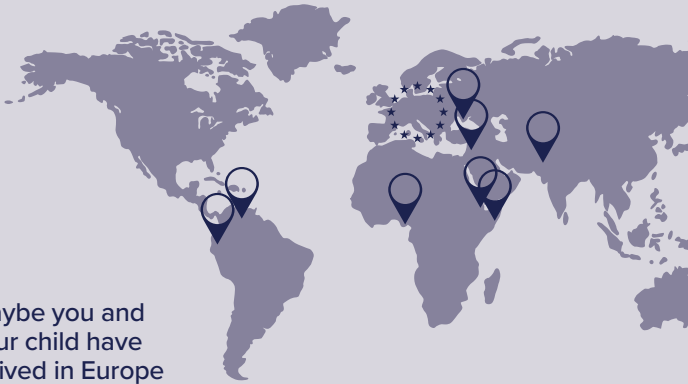
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Parents want their children to be well and happy.

Children are generally creative in handling all kinds of situations, but sometimes things are just too much for them to manage.

Parents worry when they notice such changes in their children.

**If you are concerned about the wellbeing of your child, here is some information to support you.**



Maybe you and your child have arrived in Europe after a difficult journey.

Maybe you have witnessed war, insecurity and poverty or have experienced violence.

Maybe you are still facing hardship here.



**This can affect how you and your child feel, act and relate to others.**

# Signs of distress in young children



Some children react to difficult situations by turning silent, while others have an urge to talk constantly about bad experiences.



They might become easily irritated and short-tempered. Some are unable to fall asleep or have nightmares that wake them up at night.

Some children refuse to eat or, on the contrary, overeat. They might complain about stomach aches more often. Others may find it hard to focus on school.

Children might become more emotional, worried, or angrier than usual. Some may stop playing, withdraw from those around them and keep quiet.

Crying constantly, particularly if they are very young, or starting to wet the bed again, can be further signs of distress.

# Children transitioning into adulthood

Being a teenager is not always easy and the transition from child to adult entails some changes in behaviour that are normal at this age.



**But parents might notice other changes signalling that their child is struggling and needs even more love, care, attention and understanding than usual.**

# Signs of distress in teenagers



While all teenagers spend time on their phone to connect with friends or family back home, some might do so to stop thinking about difficult situations. They might refuse to interact with others and pretend that all is fine, even though you sense it is not.



Generally, teenagers need more sleep. But if they mix up day and night and start spending their days in bed, this might be a sign that they need your attention.

Young people try to be more independent, which is normal. But when they spend most of their time away, sometimes with troublesome friends, this can be problematic.

Other signs that a teenager might need guidance and support is when they behave disrespectfully towards you and others, start smoking, drinking, stop going to school or cannot concentrate on tasks.




# What can I do?

Remember, some of the reactions you might notice in your child are normal after experiencing insecurity, violence and loss, or when faced with hardship.

These reactions can be managed with support and care.

If your child is not doing well, it is crucial that they know that you are there for them, no matter what.

An illustration of a woman with blonde hair, wearing a dark blue jacket over a white shirt, hugging a young child with blonde hair wearing blue overalls. They are standing in a snowy landscape with dark, stylized trees and houses in the background. The woman and child have sad expressions.

**Some of the following tips and reminders can help you and your child to better cope during difficult times.**



# One-to-one time

Try to make time for your child: play a game, listen to music, talk, go for a walk, eat together or maybe tell them a story.

It will help you and your child reconnect and learn more about the other.



**What you do is not so important. Spending time together is what really matters.**

# Make time to listen

Even when you are busy, try to make time to listen. You can learn a lot about how your child feels by just listening to them.

If your child is struggling to speak about their fears, worries, and hopes, drawings can help them to communicate with you.



**If they ask difficult questions, don't be afraid to answer, even if it means talking about painful topics.**

# Don't fear difficult topics

Your child might ask questions like:  
Why did we have to leave home?  
When are we going back home?  
Why is there war?

Even if you do not have all the answers, remember that for your child, it is better to hear 'I don't know' than receive no answer at all.

It is important that your child knows that they are not responsible for what has happened and that they can reach out to you.

**Try to take your child's thoughts, concerns and feelings seriously.**



# Ask questions

To make sure that your child knows that you are interested in them, ask questions such as: How was school? How was your day? Or ask them about anything you think can be relevant.



If you have noticed changes in their behaviour, mention that you are always there for them and ready to help.

**Show understanding and be open-minded when your child starts sharing their thoughts, concerns and feelings.**

# Accept silence and acknowledge difficulties



Sometimes the pain is deep and your child is not ready yet to talk about what hurts. Don't pressure them to talk. Give them the time they need and be patient.

When your child is ready to talk, listen and help them to find the words to explain feelings such as anger, sadness and worry.

**Despite the challenges, realising that you are there for them can help your child.**

# Show that you care

No matter the age of your child, find your own way to show them how important they are to you.



Comfort them when they feel hurt, hug them when appropriate, get them their favourite food, a small present or simply praise them when they do something well.



**It is important to show your child that you trust and care for them.**



# Allow yourself moments of joy



Having a joyful moment with your child or with new friends is good for you and for your child.

Children are very sensitive and can feel it when you feel well. This will also positively affect the way they feel and react towards you and others.

It can be helpful at times not to think about the past or the future, and just be in the present moment and enjoy.



**Do not feel guilty for having a happy moment.**

# Communicate clearly

It is important for children to know what kind of behaviour is acceptable and what is not, to live well and safely together as a family.

Maybe your child won't like all the rules. But by explaining them in a simple and clear way, and repeating them if needed, they will be able to follow them.



Explain to your child as well that some behaviours that were OK back home are not always fine now.

**In the new country you are living in, there may be a different way to go about things.**





# Set healthy and safe boundaries



You cannot expect your child to follow a certain behaviour if you don't. Remember to lead by example as much as possible! Your child looks up to you and will imitate you and your behaviour.

Praising your child and using rewards to encourage good behaviour can also help. Try your best to communicate calmly. Avoid yelling or punishing your child.

Where possible, make sure that your child sleeps enough, eats regularly and takes part in educational activities, daily routines and games.

**This will keep them physically and emotionally healthy and make your interactions with them easier.**



# Address difficult behaviour

If your child misbehaves, talk about it and try to address possible consequences. If they become violent or aggressive towards others, help them reflect on their behaviour and acknowledge their emotions.

To trigger a conversation about the consequences of bad behaviour, you can ask questions like:

How do you think others might react when you are violent or aggressive to them?



While being angry is normal at times, and it can feel good to let frustration out, being aggressive or violent towards others does not help.

**To help your child channel frustration into harmless actions, you can suggest them to:** take a deep breath, count to three and think before acting, go for a run or hit a pillow at home instead of beating someone or breaking something.

# Take your time to keep calm

Being a parent can be very hard and physically and emotionally exhausting.

Parents are human beings too, with their own emotions, and therefore can feel overwhelmed.

When you feel like this, take a moment for yourself. This will help you get your energy back and avoid reacting towards your child in a way that you might regret afterwards.

During a difficult discussion and before things get too heated, take a deep breath before continuing.

To calm down, you can also leave the room for a bit, or go for a walk.

**Remember, not all situations can or need to be resolved immediately. Be patient with your child and with yourself.**



# Point out your child's strengths

You and your child have gone through many difficult situations to get here and you might still face challenges.

Pointing out some of the milestones that you and your child have achieved can be comforting.



**This can be a good reminder for both of how strong and courageous you are, even though you might not always feel that way.**

# Be realistic and gentle with yourself

Normally parents try to stay strong for their children. Sometimes it works, but sometimes it doesn't. Remember that you are the most important person to provide care, love and safety for your child.

Be aware that children sense how you feel. Changes in their behaviour can be a reaction to what they see in you. For example, if they see you stressed, they might become stressed too, or maybe stay quiet and spend time away because they do not want to be an additional burden.

Give yourself and your child time and try to accept that your child might struggle with the new life, just like you. If you see that your child is not getting better and you don't have the energy or time to support, do not shy away from asking for help.

**Reach out to family, friends or professionals. This will benefit both your child and you.**



