Fact Sheet Two:
Keeping Connected

Developing attachments and social groups

**To help support you as you settle into the UK, we have created a series of factsheets, designed to offer some support and strategies, whatever your situation, and are based on what we know about people’s responses to traumatic events and what can help.**

Being safe emotionally and physically is the basic need all humans have. It is often something we take for granted.

These series of factsheets do not claim to have all the answers and solutions to the difficulties you may have been experiencing. They aim to provide you with information to help you understand your bodies normal responses to the experiences you have recently endured. They will provide you with some strategies to understand you and your children’s emotional responses and using the evidence we have from what can help recover from traumatic experiences, so that it becomes something you lived through not something that defines you and your family’s life forever. As well as some information there are exercises and suggestions that will improve you and your family’s psychological safety.

Being safe emotionally and physically is the basic need all humans have. It is often something we take for granted. You have just experienced the unimaginable – all that was stable and consistent and safe in your life has been taken from you.

While you may now be physically safe, you and your children are having to come to terms with a new country, the loss of your home, maybe family, culture, possessions, pets, job, career, and numerous other personal losses.

You and your children may have witnessed sights beyond belief and been forced to make decisions never anticipated.

The aim of these factsheets is to give you some strategies to look after your children by looking after yourself. If you have ever flown on a plane, you may remember the air steward safety briefing – ‘in the event of loss of oxygen, a mask will drop down in front of you. **PUT YOUR OWN MASK ON** first before helping others’. In effect, if you don’t, you will pass out before you can help anyone else. It’s the same in this crisis, to help your children you need to be able to look after your own emotional health and safety first.

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We know that ‘being connected’ is really important for our mental health and wellbeing. Having close, positive relationships can give us a purpose and sense of belonging.

During this crisis many of the ways you have usually been connected to people, friends, family, work colleagues, school chums have been radically impacted beyond recognition.

It is impossible to predict what the future holds for your country and the losses you may be having to deal with.

What we do have opportunity to do is look at how we communicate and interact with those closest to you that are with you, particularly our children. This factsheet is about our connections and some simple suggestions to enhance them.

During this stressful time, it is important that we feel attached to our children, and they feel attached to us.

Activities to help promote attachment

**Play hide and seek**

**Paint each other’s faces** with paint, powder, make up or just pretend

**Play a memory game with a personal touch.** First have your child look you over very carefully. Then leave the room and return after you've made a change to yourself. See if he / she can figure out what is different

**Engage in an 'M&M' hockey match.** Use bendy straws and blow M&Ms across the table to the other person's goal. When one of you scores a goal, the opponent feeds that person an M&M

**Play catch!** Roll a ball back and forth to teach reciprocity. Throwing or batting a balloon back and forth may be easier than throwing a ball for little ones

**Use emojis to identify how we feel** and how we would like to feel and share things together about what contributes to these feelings

**Play board games / jigsaws**

**Eat at a table together without mobile phones**

**Piggy-Back Rides** can help to strengthen parent-child relationships and repair or enhance attachment because they involve fun and physical closeness

**Lotion Massage** - Using lotion to massage a child’s hands or feet can enhance attachment and strengthen a parent-child relationship. The massage can relax a person’s physical body by reducing tension and bringing the brain into a less defensive state

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**Brushing Hair** - Sometimes children can be fussy about getting their hair brushed, especially if they have experienced pain from well-meaning parents brushing their hair too hard. However, allowing a child to gently brush their parents’ hair and having a parent gently brush their hair can be an activity that can promote connection. This can be a calming activity that includes a sense of nurturing which connects to a person’s internal experience of attachment and bonding.

Protective factors

Protective factors are what helps us as adults and children develop the resilience or bounce back, we need when facing adversity, as you are following the distress you have witnessed and the uprooting of your life you have experienced.

One thing children need is for parents to be resilient and supportive to them at this time. One of the ways we can demonstrate this is to make time for them to talk about what is happening but also to shown that we can resolve difficulties – seeing that parents can problem solve is a protective factor in itself. It’s important to focus on solutions rather than problems. Focus on the difficulties you can manage rather than those you can’t. For example, you can’t know when the war in Ukraine will end but you can resolve how the house chores are divided up. While this may sound trivial this distraction from the unresolvable to simple things that can be managed will enable you and your children to feel more grounded, less distressed and provide a small sense of control in what otherwise feels very out of control. This is good for both you and your child/ren.

**Stick to routines as much as possible**; this can promote feeling of safety and increase trust in parents. Slipping from the routines some days and just watching TV together in your pajamas can be healing and bonding, but not getting dressed regularly will not be helpful.

Stay connected to friends where you can, social media can be good but try to limit this if it is too distressing. Yes, you need to stay in touch with what is happening in your home country but you need to try and monitor how much time you are spending doing this and make sure it is not raising your anxieties about what is happening. Set up ‘Facetime’ with relatives if you can or create ‘WhatsApp groups’.

For your children it’s also really important to understand what knowledge and information they can emotionally cope with and also consider their levels of tolerance to the daily news about Ukraine

If you find yourself constantly checking the news or radio or twitter etc. on the latest in Ukraine, it is worth thinking about limiting this to prevent increasing your or your family’s anxiety levels.

It’s also important to consider the age appropriateness of children listening to adult news programmes that might be alarming for them. Try and find age-appropriate stations like CBBC News round rather than expose them to information they are too young to understand and will only frighten them.

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Social Groups

Being in a strange county is daunting especially one where your first language is not spoken. Your sponsor family will help signposting you to agencies that can help with practical issues like finances, employment, and English lessons. But it is also important that you try and find activities that help you de-stress and have some fun.

If you had a certain hobby in Ukraine, see if you can find a local group to join, or even consider a new hobby. This may feel like an extremely hard thing to do and even selfish but remember what we say at the beginning of the factsheet – looking after yourself is the only way to look after others.

Staying in touch with others from Ukraine is also vital – maintaining a sense of your own culture and community is recognized as helpful in managing the impact of trauma. Music nights/food nights and general sharing time are all ways to celebrate your pride in your country.

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