Fact Sheet Three:  
Understanding Resilience

Support in developing plans and goals for the future

**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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Factsheet Three is designed to provide you with some information on ‘resilience’. Resilience is individual and is something we may have developed since childhood. Sometimes those that have experienced the most adversity become the most resilient as they are constantly having to adapt, change and accept new situations. This current situation may be particularly difficult for people that have never faced any difficulties as they have never had to learn how to bounce back as life has always been pretty straightforward.

We also know from research that supporting refugees to develop plans and goals for the future is fundamental in enabling adjustment to traumatic experiences.

To do this, understanding how we can find strategies to capitalize on existing resilience and develop ways of developing our resilience is going to be helpful in coping with the trauma, you and your children have been through.

Why is resilience important?

The ability to recover from difficulties increases the likelihood that individuals will be able to reach their full potential. Jody McVittie, M.D., co-founder of Sound Discipline (an organisation in the USA that offers comprehensive programmes that help schools connect with young people and address the root causes of challenging behaviour), identifies two things that influence how able a child is to ‘bounce back’ when bad things happen:

1. How they are able to make meaning of their life experiences.

2. The network of ‘safe’ connected adults they have in their lives. People do their best thinking and learning in the context of safe relationships.

This indicates how important it is for us all to have an understanding of what is meant by resilience and how we can develop it.

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Building resilience in ourselves and our children

Have a think about the following factors and how you are affected:

**Sleep** – how is sleeping going? The tendency might be to over or under sleep – sometimes our ways of responding to the anxiety following trauma is to be over stimulated with the fight or flight, and so find it difficult to sleep or we shut down in more of a freeze response and therefore want to stay in bed and pull the duvet over our heads.

**Communication and connectedness** – we have looked in the previous factsheets about connection and suggested some ways to reinforce it. But you might find that you and your children need more cuddles and hugs, and smaller children may even be wanting to get into your bed at night to get reassurance.

**Emotions** − expressing them – try and encourage time for talking about how people in the family are feeling. This may not be something you are used to doing. If talking is difficult, you can use drawings or text emojis to keep each other connected about how you feel.

**Setting goals** –this can link nicely to ‘keeping to routines’ we talked about previously. Setting small daily or weekly goals around the house can really help make some sense of what is happening. It might be focused on schoolwork or relaxation time, e.g., setting a goal of reading one chapter a day of a book. Making easily achievable goal and setting plans can be very reassuring for everyone. While your ultimate goal may be to return home to Ukraine at the present time it is unlikely you can make plans for this. Making short term goals and plans will help you stay focused, reduce anxiety, and give you a sense of control over situations that otherwise may feel very out of your control.

**Self-time** – It’s really important for everyone in the family to have the space, if possible, for some self -time. This might be taking yourself off to your room to practice your grounding or relaxation or read or just enjoy time looking out the window.

Parental resilience

Using the following Handouts see if you can identify actions to fill in the boxes, identifying activities for both yourself and your children. All of these activities are ways we nurture our own and our children’s resilience.

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**Building resilience with your children**

Have a look at the list below and think about your relationship with your child/children. Tick either yes, no, or sometimes in answer to each statement.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Can you…?** | **Yes** | **No** | **Sometimes** |
| Tell your child you love them |  |  |  |
| Spend time with your child doing what they want |  |  |  |
| Sit with them and let them talk to you. Ask them how they are feeling |  |  |  |
| Allow them to be cross with you if you are wrong e.g., late to pick them up |  |  |  |
| Help them with their self-directed work without either doing it for them, or getting cross that they can’t do it |  |  |  |
| Tell them when they have done something good |  |  |  |
| Play a game they want to play |  |  |  |
| Feel supported in your relationship with your child |  |  |  |
| Keep track of their daily routines |  |  |  |
| Cook meals for them |  |  |  |
| Praise them for being them |  |  |  |

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**Building your own resilience**

Have a look at the list below and think about yourself. Tick either yes, no, or sometimes in answer to each statement.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Can you…?** | **Yes** | **No** | **Sometimes** |
| Acknowledge what you are good at |  |  |  |
| Spend time doing something for you |  |  |  |
| Take time to share how you feel with friends |  |  |  |
| Keep a mood diary |  |  |  |
| Keep boundaries that are safe for you |  |  |  |
| Allow yourself to feel cross with people who let you down |  |  |  |
| Allow yourself to make mistakes |  |  |  |
| Reward yourself when you have done something well |  |  |  |
| Play games, exercise, and have fun |  |  |  |
| Feel supported in your relationships and friendships |  |  |  |
| Keep daily routines |  |  |  |
| Cook meals for yourself (not just heat something up) |  |  |  |
| Give yourself treats/rewards just for being you |  |  |  |

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Relaxation

Finally, this week we have included instructions on a method of breathing 7/11 which you can practice helping you manage stressful moments and to help to manage the emotional regulation we have discussed. It can also, if done with family promote connectedness, be part of our goal setting, count as self-care and help with sleep - so all promoting and developing resilience.

**7/11 breathing techniques**

All forms of mental distress involve high emotional arousal states such as anger, anxiety, or depression

**Inhale to the count of 7 and exhale to the count of 11**

- 7/11 breathing is an instant relaxation system

- 7/11 has an immediate beneficial effect on both your physical and psychological well- being

- Exhaling the carbon dioxide stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system which is responsible for calming you down

- When relaxed you can’t be anxious because you cannot experience two contradictory states simultaneously

- 7/11 breathing restores a sense of control

- 7/11 breathing allows us to access our rational brain

- 7/11 breathing lowers blood pressure

- 7/11 breathing can be used anywhere, at any time

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