

INFORMATION FOR ADULTS LOOKING AFTER A CHILD OR CHILDREN THROUGH CONFLICT AND DISPLACEMENT

ABOUT YOU

What might you be experiencing?

- ❖ You may become more irritable than usual and your mood may change back and forth dramatically. You may be especially anxious or nervous or depressed.
- ❖ You may have repeated and vivid memories of your experiences. These flashbacks may lead to physical reactions such as rapid heartbeat or sweating.
- ❖ You may find it difficult to concentrate or make decisions, or become more easily confused. Your sleep and eating patterns may also be disrupted.

All of these things may affect how you get on with the child or children you are looking after.

What can you do to help yourself?

- ❖ Recognise that this is a challenging time but one that you can work to manage. You have tackled other hardships at other times in your life.
- ❖ Recognise that you are a unique person. Use the skills and resources that you have.
- ❖ Allow yourself and your children to mourn any losses you may have experienced.
- ❖ Try to be patient with changes in how you are feeling.
- ❖ Try and keep hopeful and a positive outlook. This will help your children have hope for the future.
- ❖ Support each other and take help from friends, relatives, community and religious leaders.
- ❖ Look after yourself as much as possible and try to rest when you can.
- ❖ As much as you can, try to establish or re-establish routines, such as regular bed times.
- ❖ Try to keep yourself occupied with regular chores or with work or activities with others around you.
- ❖ Maintain any religious activities you do.

ABOUT YOUR CHILD

What might your child be experiencing?

How children react to stressful experiences can vary depending on a variety of things, for example their age, but here are some common ways children react:

- ❖ Physical complaints such as headache, stomach ache, lack of appetite.
- ❖ Being fearful and anxious.
- ❖ Difficulty sleeping, nightmares, night terrors, shouting or screaming.
- ❖ Older children may go back to bedwetting, clinging to their parents, frequent crying, thumb-sucking, being afraid to be left alone.
- ❖ Becoming unusually active or aggressive or the opposite shy, quiet, withdrawn and sad.
- ❖ Difficulty concentrating.

It is important to remember that it is NORMAL for children to show stress reactions or problem behaviours after frightening and distressing experiences.

What can you do to help your child?

SAFETY

- ❖ Strive to keep your family together at all times.
- ❖ Try hard not to be separated from your children for long periods of time.
- ❖ Ensure your children know their name, and where you are staying and how to get help if they are separated from you.
- ❖ If you are going to a distribution site either keep your children close by at all times or leave them in the care of a responsible and trusted relative or adult.
- ❖ If your children do go along with you arrange in advance somewhere you can meet if you become separated. Ensure this is somewhere the child will know and feel comfortable.
- ❖ If it is safe for your child to go out to play tell them to let you know where they are going and when they will be back.

PROVIDING WARMTH AND SUPPORT

- ❖ Promise that you will do everything you can to care for and protect them.
- ❖ Try to be affectionate with your child by often giving them hugs or holding their hand.
- ❖ Try to tell them often that you love them. Being caring and telling your children that you love them will reassure them.

GIVING PRAISE

- ❖ Look for opportunities to praise your child when they have done something good, however small it may seem.
- ❖ Try to be patient with your child and not to criticise them for changes in their behaviour, such as clinging to you or frequently seeking reassurance.
- ❖ Encourage your child to help, and praise and thank them when they do. Children cope better and recover sooner when they help others.

SPENDING TIME TOGETHER AND TALKING

- ❖ Pay attention to your child. Spend a few moments with them whenever you can.
- ❖ Take time to listen to them and try to understand what they have experienced. Ask how they feel about their experiences and which experiences are most stressful and difficult to adjust to.
- ❖ Do not promise your children things you cannot provide.
- ❖ Be open and try to give children accurate information about what is happening.

ENCOURAGING PLAY

- ❖ Encourage your child to play with you, their siblings or other children. Play is important in helping children work through past and current stress and experiences and to prepare for the future. It helps maintain some normality in their lives.

MAINTAINING A ROUTINE

- ❖ Try to maintain everyday routines, such as bedtimes, as much as you can.
- ❖ Encourage children to do school work (reading, maths, writing), even if there are no schools.

This leaflet was initially developed in 2014 by Aala El-Khani, Rachel Calam and Kim Cartwright, The University of Manchester, UK, through discussions with Syrian refugee caregivers living in conflict zones, in camps and in Manchester.