



**School Social Work
Association of America**

SSWAA Response to the Crisis In Ukraine

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The violence and chaos of events occurring in Ukraine this past week adds to the ongoing uncertainty, anxiety and angst already being felt by students of all ages, our staff, families, and communities we serve. As our students continue to endure the trauma and complexities of the pandemic, perpetual social injustices as well as racialized violence, Russia's invasion into Ukraine on February 24, 2022, intensifies the already existing mental health challenges within school communities. As school social workers, our expertise is needed more than ever to be a bridge in navigating the profound effects of the multitude of needs arising from these colliding crises.

The vicarious trauma that can result from the images of destruction, devastation, pain and suffering flooding our media outlets perpetuates past and current experiences of trauma, grief and loss. Our schools continue to play a pivotal role in providing valuable resources and support during times of crisis. School social workers are extensively trained in crisis response and intervention support which is vital to administrators and school personnel in times of chaos and confusion. Utilizing our unique skill sets and leadership skills, school social workers can develop a plan to help school staff and administrators adequately respond to what is happening in Ukraine. For children and families in school communities across the nation with cultural connections to Ukraine and Russia, this will be essential. At the same time, these events may also be reopening wounds for other immigrant and refugee families who were forced to make the decision to flee their homelands to escape war, violence, or civil unrest. Students from military families may also benefit from receiving direct support to address their concerns and fears as to what this may mean for their families as the crisis unfolds.

Furthermore, an international conflict of this magnitude may have far reaching economic consequences. According to a recent statement by the International Federation of Social Workers, "a conflict of this proportion will also result in driving higher prices of key commodities throughout the world contributing to the increasing levels of poverty and exacerbating the climate change agenda." (IFSW, 2022). As a result, everyone is impacted to some degree globally by Russia's military attacks on Ukraine.

As school social workers continue to confront the myriad of challenges facing our students, staff, families and communities, SSWAA would like to offer the following tips and resources to meet the current needs resulting from this additional crisis:

1. Make sure to check in with yourself - notice any feelings you are experiencing and utilize your colleagues, friends, family, self-care practices to help you find grounding.

SSWAA Statement: Response to Crisis in Ukraine

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2. Intentionally create a safe and supportive space to listen to the thoughts and feelings of your students, families, and staff. Be mindful that the responses of adults may differ from the responses of your students. Share the facts and speak the truth.
3. Encourage and connect students and families to social connections, resources and supports within the school and their community.
4. Help school staff recognize the importance of modeling calm and optimistic behavior that instills hope in the face of adversity.
5. Provide tools and training to teach healthy coping skills in the wake of a crisis.
6. Provide teachers with tools for facilitating critical conversations with students such as [Fostering Civil Discourse: A Guide for Classroom Conversations](#) and a resource from the [San Diego County Office of Education for Educators and Families](#).
7. Educate parents/guardians on the impact of media exposure and encourage families to limit the amount of information their child views as well as offer strategies for how to communicate what is happening in a developmentally appropriate way. [Talking to Children about Tragedies and other News Events](#) by healthychildren.org is one useful resource. Another resource is [How to Talk to Kids When the News is Scary](#).

Additional Resources:

For ideas on how to help the Ukrainian people, NPR compiled a list of organizations that are asking for assistance. [Want to Support the People of Ukraine? Here is how you can help.](#)

International Federation of Social Workers. (2022). *Military Aggression in Ukraine*. Retrieved from: <https://www.ifsw.org/military-aggression-in-ukraine/>.

American Psychological Association. (2011). *Resilience in a time of war: Tips for parents and teachers of elementary school children*. Retrieved from: <https://www.apa.org/topics/resilience/kids-war>.

U.S. Department of Defense created an [Educator's Guide to the Military Child During Deployment](#) to create understanding of the impact of deployment and strategies on how to support a child who is from a Military family.

[Sesame Street for Military Families](#) offers an array of age appropriate resources to support elementary age students.

Guiding efforts to heal our communities is fundamental to our practice not only through the direct services provided, but also through advocacy efforts. Despite these unprecedented challenges facing our nation, school social workers' knowledge and expertise are integral to the health and well-being of the individuals and communities we serve. SSWAA is proud to offer a network of professionals and tools to support your practice. Continue to access the SSWAA website, SSWAA professional development opportunities and SSWAA Board to meet your needs. Watch for webinars, tools, and other resources on our SSWAA website and in the EBells sent to members to enhance your practice. Finally, do not hesitate to reach out to your Regional Representatives or any SSWAA Board Member.