

## 4 Tips for Talking to Kids About Ukraine (and 4 Ways to Pray)

I woke up that morning to the alarm on my phone. I shuffled to the kitchen to pour a cup of coffee then turned on the news. My heart ached with every headline. But as I sat on the couch while my kids still slept in their warm beds, I couldn't help but feel the stark contrast between reading a headline and experiencing it firsthand.

Halfway around the world from me—roughly 5,700 miles—another mom woke under much different circumstances. Fleeing from her bed to the sounds of sirens and explosions. Her children yanked from their dreams and into a world torn apart.

I don't know the first thing about walking your kids through a war zone. And how do I explain something to my kids that I'm struggling to wrap my head around as well?

### Talking to your kids about Ukraine

I asked a few other parents how they were talking to their kids about the crisis. Answers varied on the spectrum from “Nothing at all” to “We binged CNN today.”

Kids will naturally have questions about events in the “adult” world. My children are 9 and 15. So while I've found my son wants basic, reassuring answers that keep him in the loop, my teen daughter comes armed with questions and opinions, ready to dive deep.

But overall, there are a few basic guidelines I've tried (and failed and repented and tried again) to go by.

#### 1. Speak truthfully but keep conversations age appropriate.

When your kids ask, be honest, but keep it age appropriate. For a school-age child, what she doesn't hear from you she might hear at school or elsewhere. So ask what she has already heard. Your conversations from there will depend on both the age of the child and their emotional maturity.

If your teens are on social media, they likely have quite a bit of information—both truth and rumors. Fear of the next world war is legitimate to them. So don't brush off their concerns, the past two years have already taught them life is filled with uncertainties. Do some extra research if you need to so you can give a thoughtful response, but also know you don't have to have all the answers. And remember, even older teens need a little reassurance. If you act fearful or stressed, they'll pick up on that in a heartbeat. Stay calm, parents.

My son asked if people were getting hurt. I explained that, yes, people get hurt during war. But I also reminded him there are a lot of people working together to get the hurting people help and others to safe places (see number three below). Reassure your younger kids that they are safe at home with you. Yes, life is full of negative possibilities, but younger kids (for the most part) can't process most of that yet.

If your kids are young enough not to notice what is going on, don't tell them. A toddler or preschooler is easily wrapped up in his own little world, and, for now, it is a safe and secure one. Don't unnecessarily burden a child with something they are not old enough to understand.

#### 2. Consider a media break when younger kids are around.

Images of war are all over the news and social media. These scenes are honestly hard for us to take in as adults.

Young kids have no need to see them. Even radio stations might be discussing topics your child isn't ready for. You can catch up on what's going on in the world when they aren't within view or earshot.

Instead, use the time to engage with your kids—play a board game, take a walk, share highs and lows of the day.

When life feels chaotic, remind them with your actions and words that some things (your love for them) will never change.

3. Remind them good still exists and encourage them to do good.

We've all heard the quote from Fred Rogers from *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood*: "When I was a boy and would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, 'Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.'"

Since hearing this, I've looked for the helpers (or heroes) with my kids. When she was young, my daughter was always quick to notice the first responders—the police, firemen, paramedics, etc.—who devote their lives to making people safe in unsafe conditions. Then there are the everyday people who lay down their lives for another, or the ones who give all their resources to help those who have lost so much.

Mr. Rogers' mother was right. There are always helpers.

In Romans 12:21, Paul said "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." Since this isn't a local event for most of us, it can be hard to know how to help.

*\*\*Watch for updates on how our LEFC church family is supporting these relief efforts and pray about your family joining that effort.\*\**

Attend a prayer vigil or start one in your community *or have a special family prayer with your Life Group each time you meet together and involve kids as appropriate.* Invite kids to do simple acts of kindness right now, whether it's taking cookies to their teacher or dropping dinner off at a neighbor's house for no reason at all. Spreading kindness helps "overcome evil with good."

4. Pray with them.

Let your children see you relying on the Prince of Peace. Model for them how to take your worries, your burdens and fears, your concerns and heartache over a deeply divided world, and give them to God through prayer. And lead your kids in praying for those even 5,700 miles away. As you're talking to your kids about Ukraine, here are four ways to pray.

1. **Pray for the safety of those impacted by the war.** Have your kids pray for kids just like them, that God would protect them from harm and fear. "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous man runs into it and is safe" (Proverbs 18:10).
2. **Pray for those who mourn.** Ask God to comfort those experiencing the loss of friends and family, their homes, and sense of security. "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Matthew 5:4).
3. **Pray that the people of Ukraine would not lose faith but maintain hope.** "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope" (Jeremiah 29:11).
4. **Pray for peace between these countries.** "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

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**Please note:** You may or may not agree with every part of this article. Take what is helpful and continue to ask for God's wisdom. It is meant to encourage you in your thinking as you walk alongside your children and family in helping them see God's heart for the world and responding to the events in our world today.