

Crisis in Ukraine: How Can School Counselors Help

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Opening Thoughts

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has given us even more to be worried about in today's world.

I have responded to many school crises in the last 40+ years but all those crises were contained and the outcome no matter how tragic was known. This crisis is different as it is enormous and there is much that is unknown.

Opening Thoughts

In the darkest times, school counselors must project a sense of hope for students and help them to carry out small acts of kindness!

Opening Thoughts

We must protect young children from the news coverage of the crisis. We must assure all children that adults are focusing on keeping them safe!

Opening Thoughts

School counselors must take care of themselves to be in the best position to help others.

Self-care has never been more important!

Stay C.A.L.M.

- C for **calmness** and **control** what you can which is your reaction. We all do best with routine and **consistency**!
- A for being **available** and being **alert** to the emotions and worries of family, friends, colleagues and students.
- L is for truly **listening** to others and **limiting** the news coverage especially for children.
- M is for your **modeling of coping**.

What can I do to help everyone cope?

- Take a deep breath and believe things will get better and say, “I can manage this, and I will model optimism and hope. I will get some exercise and seek out the people in my life who are positive, and I will be positive for others.”
- “I will model self-care for my family and my school and will provide others with support and encouragement for self-care.”
- “I will not worry about what has not happened yet.”
- “If I need to, I will set up a worry time but right now I will focus on what is in front of me and how to help others”.

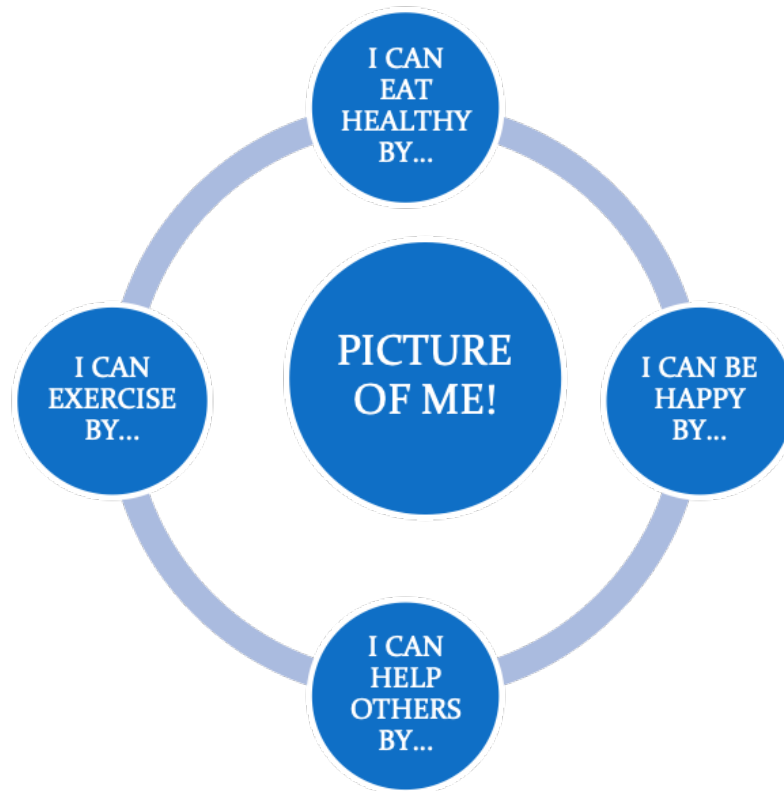
Parents and older children's self-care plan components:

- Physical self-care includes diet, exercise, and proper rest.
- Mental self-care includes attending to your emotional needs by talking to other adults and examining the problem objectively. Let go of self-criticism as everyone has made mistakes in the face of the pandemic. Express your thoughts and emotions through journaling, painting, drawing, gardening, and other creative avenues.

Parents and older children's self-care plan components:

- **Spiritual self-care** Active participation in places of worship is very helpful to many people and even those not active in a place of worship need to live by a set of values that includes compassion, empathy, friendliness, helpfulness, humor, and respectfulness.
- **Embrace nature** by spending time outdoors.
- **Model good values** by being that positive person for your family and others!
- **Engage in "I can statement"**; "I can relax myself by..., make myself happy by..., exercise by..., relieve stress by..., be a good friend by..., help others by..., eat healthy by..., and get proper rest by..."

Younger children... self-care plans...



Chat Activity

- Please put in the Chat Box what **you** are doing for self-care given the current traumatic events in the world?

Key Point

The school counselor's role is primarily to focus on the well-being of students. School counselors are exceptional people with training to help students in difficult times.

Thanks for Your Input

Many of you have provided input about your concerns as we all move forward to help students in very challenging times.

My Thoughts

It is important to review some of the basics of crisis intervention and how to support children either individually, in a small group or a classroom. You are the expert on your students and your school and have many great ideas about how to help them.

Crisis Intervention Basics

- Safety
- Security
- Ventilation
- Validation
- Prediction
- Preparation

Primary Concerns

Many questions were about how to help students of all ages with the many different reactions they are having about the invasion of the Ukraine.

Response to Questions

Many questions were about Russian students possibly being ostracized. Please emphasize that the Russian people at large and especially children are not to blame for the invasion of the Ukraine.

Key Point

There is no right or wrong way to feel about a crisis.

Students need opportunities to talk about it, write about it or to express themselves through artwork, music and projects.

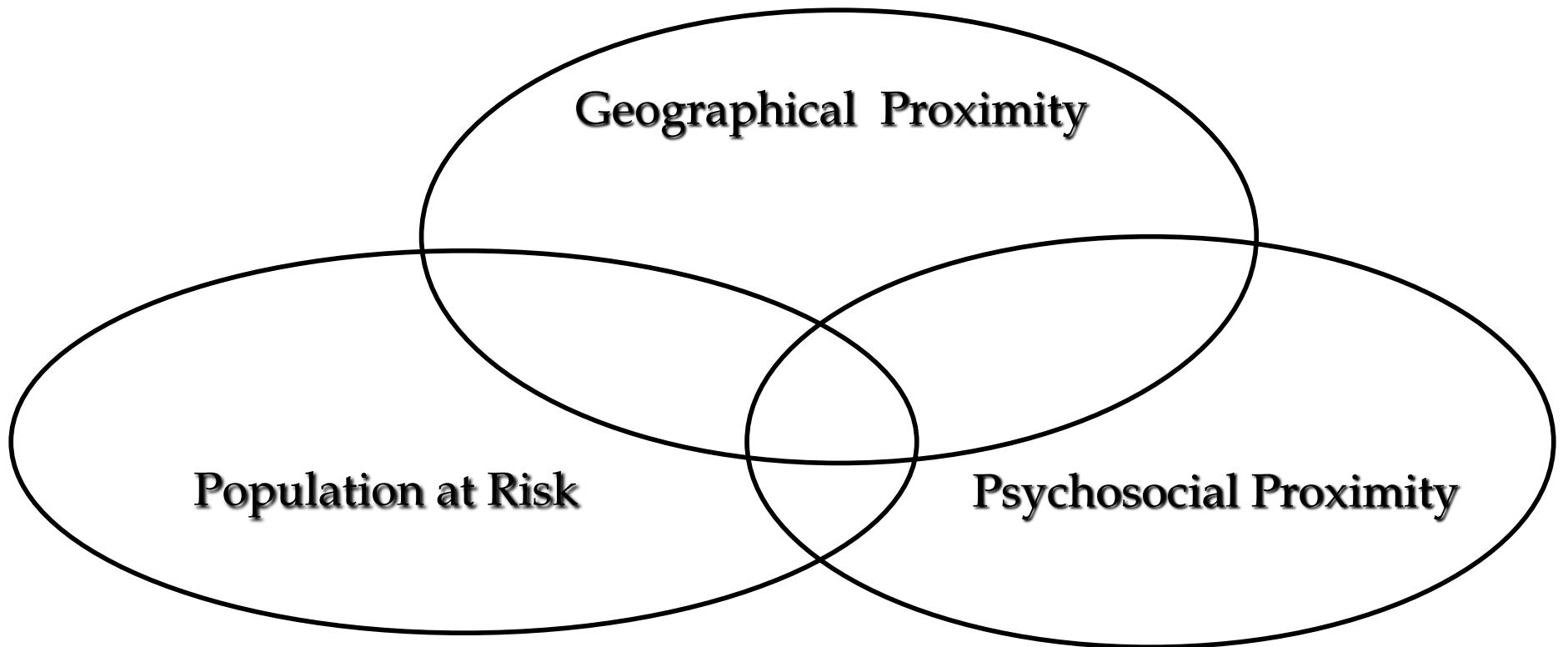
How Can Adults Help Children?

- Remain calm and reassuring
- Reach out don't preach
- Acknowledge normalize and validate their feelings
- Provide opportunities for children to express their emotions
- Promote positive coping and problem-solving skills
- Emphasize resiliency
- Strengthen children's family, friendship and peer support

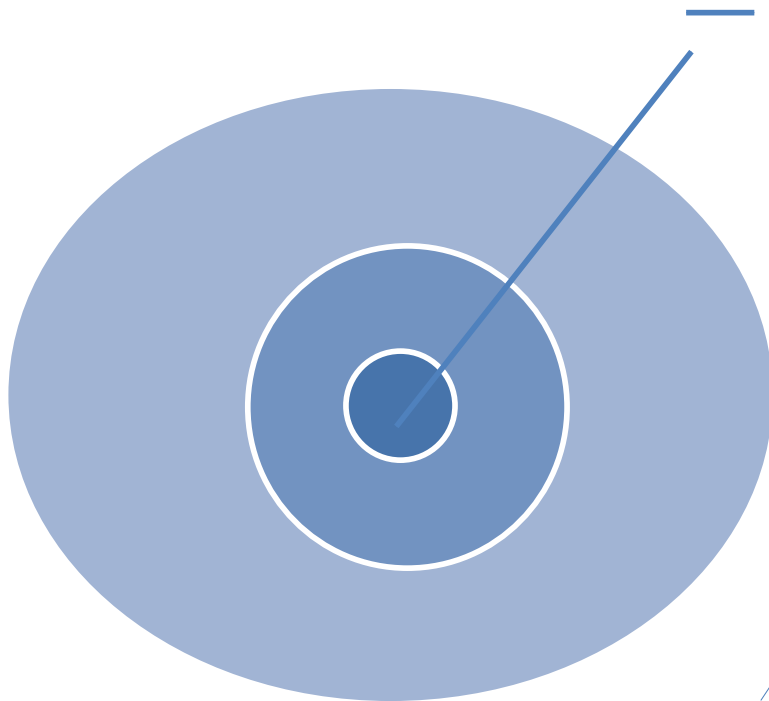
Key Question

Who is likely to be the most affected by the crisis?

Circles of Vulnerability



Most Vulnerable Children



Had family members killed, injured, or missing in the crisis.

Originally came from or have family still living in the Ukraine.

Have a strong sense of religious or cultural identity with the Ukraine.

Live in counties near the Ukraine.

Have family in the military.

Are survivors of other trauma.

Suffer from anxiety, depression, or other mental health disorders.

Early Intervention Reduces Trauma

- Vital that effective interventions be provided quickly, and no one should feel alone, and normal recovery should be the expectation.
- Interventions reduce distress, PTSD, anxiety and depression.
- Early interventions should be voluntary and include follow-up.
- Ideally interventions should be in a classroom size group or even smaller.
- The importance of family, cultural and religious beliefs cannot be overemphasized.
- Schools are the logical place to help children affected by trauma.

Parkland Parents: Key Points

- Importance of listening and to reach out and not to preach to your child.
- Know the typical trauma responses of children and the keys to resiliency and that resilient parents have resilient children.
- Children who live in a stable home with unconditional love can overcome almost anything!
- The healthier relationships a child has with others the better they will be able to cope with trauma.

Typical Crisis Reactions of Children

- Worry and fear of the future.
- Sleeping problems and nightmares.
- Regression academically.
- Regression behaviorally.
- Adolescents are more talkative about the crisis but may have acting out and risky behaviors.
- Adolescents and are often looking for a prevention project or a “gift of hope.”

Recommendations

Verify details with the school administration and determine what information is to be shared with students.

Tell students the truth in developmentally appropriate language.

Classroom interventions work best with desks placed in a circle and the counselor sits down and leads a discussion.

Contact the parents of the students you are the most worried about.

Key Roles for Support Personnel

- Advise the administrator
- If possible, help the faculty first
- Provide opportunities for students to talk about the invasion.
- Give permission for a range of emotions
- No one should feel alone.
- Recognize everyone has an individual history with crisis and loss.

Possible Formats for Discussion

- You decide what format as you know your school and the developmental level of the students to facilitate either:
 - a **classroom** discussion
 - a **small counseling group** discussion
 - or **an individual** discussion with a student
- (The following questions are my recommendation based on 40+ years of school crisis response and having received training on several processing models. Remember as the facilitator you set the tone for confidentiality, caring, connections and hope).

Key Questions to Discuss with Students

- 1. What have been your thoughts since the Russian invasion of the Ukraine?
- 2. What would help you feel better and/or safer now?
- 3. What has helped you before when you had to deal with something traumatic?
- 4. How can your school and parents best support you?
- 5. Do you have any ideas about something you would like to do to help those affected directly by this crisis?

(Please feel free to modify these questions based on the developmental level of students)

Tips for Helping Students

Share information in developmentally appropriate ways.

No student should be lied to or misled about the circumstances. Recognize all the connections around the school and the world.

Students need to hear sad or tragic news from trusted adults and should be able to ask questions.

Turn off TVs and gather students in a circle and talk about the event and their thoughts and safety concerns.

Help everyone identify previous and current sources of support.

Administrators Role in a Crisis

- Seek input from crisis team members, especially the school counselor.
- Conduct a faculty meeting as soon as possible.
- Verify the facts and tell the truth.
- Be visible and available for staff and students.
- Don't be afraid to show your emotions.
- Emphasize the importance of self-care

Administrator Continued

- Contact the families that are most affected.
- Empower staff and students.
- Accept outside help when needed.
- Recognize the short- and long-term impact of the crisis.
- Keep everyone updated.
- Manage the media and protect staff and students from the media.

Administrator Continued

- Set aside other duties and focus on crisis.
- Help staff understand the crisis becomes the curriculum.
- Give permission for a range of religious beliefs.
- Recognize cultural differences.

Teachers' Role

- Provide activities for self-care.
- Provide accurate information and stop rumors.
- Model expression of emotions.
- Give permission for a range of emotions and religious beliefs.
- Know students well and their crisis history and identify students who need counseling help.
- Provide activities such as writing and drawing especially for younger students.

Follow Up Services

Identify and seek help for most affected students and staff. Schools and communities have underestimated the long-term impact of a crisis.

- Some will need more support due to past traumas and/or mental health issues.
- Some students will need to be referred for community based mental health services.

Psychological First Aid

8 Core Actions

1. Initiate contact and engagement
2. Ensure safety and comfort
3. Stabilization
4. Gather information on current needs and concerns
5. Provide practical assistance
6. Connect with social supports
7. Provide information on coping
8. Link with collaborative services



Source: National Child Traumatic Stress Network and National Center for PTSD, *Psychological First Aid: Field Operations Guide*, September, 2005

Chat Activity

- Please put in the Chat Box the questions you have about how to best manage this crisis at your school?

Keys to Resilience

- Caring and loving family and friends.
- Capacity to make realistic plans and carry them out.
- Positive view of self and skills in communication and problem solving.
- Capacity to manage strong feelings and emotions.
- Maintaining a positive view of the future.

What protects children?

- Good relationships with peers
- Seeks adult help when needed
- Access to mental health care
- Religious involvement
- School environment that encourages help seeking and promotes health
- Family cohesion and stability
- Coping and problem-solving skills
- Positive self worth and impulse control
- Positive connections to school and extracurricular participation

Recovery

Remember that meeting the safety, security and emotional needs of students will affect their long-term academic success.

Emphasize

- Self-care.
- Resiliency.
- Increasing the Circle of Care around students.

Final Thoughts

Life is a struggle right now, but we will get through it and there will be a future!

Let's respond to everyone with kindness, grace and compassion!

Keep everyone involved in the crisis in the Ukraine in your thoughts and prayers.

Questions

Dr. Scott Poland is the author or co-author of six books on school crisis and numerous Best Practice chapters and has partnered with ISCA on several projects.

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Resources

- ManageBac School Learning Platform
- National Association of School Psychologists
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network
- American Psychological Association
- American School Counselor Association
- International School Counselor Association