

# It's ok to be worried about war and conflict

## Resource pack



A resource pack for parents with children with Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) to help with talking about war and conflict

# Please feel free to print out pages

This pack was created by the Early Intervention team in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) in NHS Grampian



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## How this pack can help

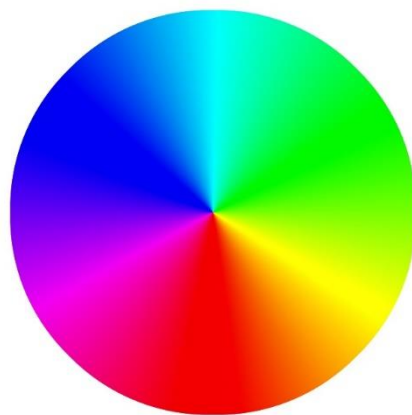
War and conflict is a scary and upsetting event for most individuals to learn about, especially when it feels close to home, for example, the current conflict in Ukraine. Although our country is not currently at war, our country is just coming recovering from a global pandemic and a period of great uncertainty and change. This is difficult for all of us to process, but can be especially difficult for children with Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC).

**The aim of this pack is to give ideas and suggestions for how to help your child with ASC explore their feelings surrounding war and conflict.**

Children with ASC are on a spectrum, which means not everything in this pack will be suitable for the specific needs of your child. Feel free to pick and choose what may support you and your child and adapt as necessary. If you already have strategies that are currently successful in supporting them during this time, keep using them.

**As a parent, YOU are the expert at knowing your child best**

Everyone has strengths and you know your child's. You can use these during this time to give your child a sense of achievement.



This pack uses the term Autism Spectrum Condition (shortened to ASC). This is a term that encompasses many different diagnoses – autism, high functioning autism/Asperger's syndrome, and other pervasive developmental disorders.

# What is War?

War can be understood as a state of armed conflict between different countries or different groups within a country.

There is currently lots of news and discussion about war and conflict. War is something that can provoke a lot of uneasy feelings and worry.

**Understandably lots of people are feeling more anxious than usual during these upsetting times. This is a perfectly normal response.**

# War and the media

Updates regarding war and conflict can often sound scary especially when they are broadcast multiple times a day. If you or your child are experiencing anxiety as result of the media coverage on war, it might not be helpful to keep watching live news, use social media, or to have news updates appearing on your devices. **Most importantly, make sure your child only has access to developmental stage appropriate information.**

Children with ASC can become fixated on topics. Limit your child's access to information about war and conflict to reduce them becoming anxious or obsessional. We've included how to reduce war/conflict related posts appearing on social media



## Muting unhelpful words on

Twitter has an option to mute certain words, phrases or hashtags to stop them from appearing on your news feed.

### IPHONE (APP)

1. Go to your Notifications tab
2. Tap the gear icon
3. Tap "Muted" words
4. Tap "+Add muted or phrase"
5. Type in the word or hashtag you'd like to mute (for example: #war)
6. Alternatively, long press the word as it appears on a tweet and press "Mute"

### ANDROID (APP)

1. Go to your Notifications tab
2. Tap the gear icon
3. Tap "Muted" words
4. Tap "+Add muted or phrase"
5. Type in the word or hashtag you'd like to mute

# War and the media continued...

## Muting unhelpful words on **facebook**

### IPHONE AND ANDROID (APP)

Unfortunately you can't mute certain words, but you can mute pages or people if they are sharing/posting content you don't want to see. To do this:

1. Click on the three dots at the top right of the post you do not wish to see
2. Press "Snooze for 30 days"
3. Alternatively you can "Hide all" or "Unfollow"

## Muting unhelpful words on **Instagram**

1. Go to your profile
2. Click on the hamburger (the three lines at the top right) of the screen
3. Click on 'Settings'
4. Click on 'Privacy'
5. Click on 'Comments'
6. Click on 'Manual filter'
7. The manual filter bar will turn from grey to blue, then in the space that says 'words separated by commas...' type in words and phrases that you do wish not to see, separating each word or phrase using a comma.

Unfortunately, Instagram does not allow you to block posts or comments left on other users' posts that contain words, phrases or hashtags that you wish to avoid. If you are experiencing distress as a result of content on Instagram it is advisable that you cut down on the time you spend on Instagram, choose social media sites that do allow you to filter out content you do not wish to see (such as Twitter) and avoid the 'explore' feature that recommends content to you

# Muting unhelpful words on

TikTok has an option to mute comments that other users leave on your posts that contain words and phrases that you do not wish to see. Follow the steps below and TikTok will automatically delete comments on your posts that contain them.

- 1.** From your 'For You' feed, click on your profile button in the lower right-hand corner of your screen
- 2.** Go to profile settings by selecting the three dots on the top right-hand side of your screen
- 3.** Click on 'Privacy and Safety'
- 4.** Click 'Filter Comments'
- 5.** Activate the option 'Filter by Keywords'
- 6.** Now you can enter each keyword which you want to filter out as comments on your videos. These comments will be hidden
- 7.** Exit the menu by selecting the arrow on the top left-hand corner of your screen
- 8.** The feature is now active

Unfortunately, TikTok does not allow you to block posts or comments left on other users' posts that contain words, phrases or hashtags that you wish to avoid. If you are experiencing distress as a result of content on TikTok it is advisable that you cut down on the time you spend on TikTok. Choose social media sites that do allow you to filter out content you do not wish to see (such as Twitter) and avoid the 'explore' feature that recommends content to you.



# Should I talk to my child about War?

**Short answer: YES!** Children already know about war and conflict so we need to talk about it. If we do not talk about it with our children, it is likely they will come up with their own conclusions to the questions they have!

Remember that depending on the age of your child, they may have learned about World War I and II in school. Many children are worrying about the potential of World War III right now so it is important to explore these fears with your child, as much as they are able.

**It is important to be truthful but remember your child's stage of development. Give them factual information but adjust the amount of information and the level of detail you go into.**

**Top Tip:** Use concrete language and avoid using metaphors or abstract language. Children with ASC often take things literally.

Allow children to ask questions. **It is natural that children will have questions and worries about war and conflict.** Giving them the chance to ask these questions is a good way to ease their worries. It's ok if you don't have all the answers.

**However,** if your child **does not seem interested** regarding war and conflict, it may **not** be helpful to encourage their interest. In this case, just be willing to answer any questions they have if they come up in future.



I don't know but I am here to help you. Why don't we think about what we do know?

## What is within my control?

- During times of worry some children find it helpful to think about what they can and cannot control. Focussing on only what we can control can help minimise worry.
- Explaining to your child that unfortunately we have little control over what happens regarding war and conflict can help reduce feelings of responsibility. However, it can be comforting for some young people to think about small ways in which they might be able to help.
- For some children, drawing a picture of a country's flag and displaying it at home might help them feel like they are able to show support.
- Other children might want to think about charities or other organisations that you as a family can help support.

# Looking after yourself

Have you ever taken a plane journey and the cabin crew tells you to put on your own oxygen mask before helping others in an emergency? Supporting your child during uncertain times is exactly the same!

## **It is important to look after yourself so you can help others.**

You might find it helpful to reach out to others in your own support network or organisations such as the National Autistic Society. You might find you're not the only one facing challenges.

Try to do relaxing activities for yourself e.g. yoga or reading a book.

## **Take the pressure off yourself.**

It is important to model to your child that you don't always have to be perfect. You may be feeling difficult emotions and that's ok.

Parents of children with ASC often work really hard to maintain boundaries and routines. However, these are unusual times so don't worry if you need to relax your usual boundaries (e.g. extra screen time).

# Challenging behaviours

Children with ASC often have difficulty understanding their own emotions. Sometimes we see challenging or difficult behaviours when children are worried or frustrated. Acknowledge your child's feelings and support them to express and manage these.

**Remember the Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in a lot of talk of fear and uncertainty.** To hear about war and conflict on top of this may be difficult for children to understand. Change and disruption to routine can be really difficult for children with ASC to cope with and may evoke feelings of uncertainty and worry. These intense emotions may lead your child to present in a way that is perceived to be challenging. Creating a routine can make things more predictable for your child and help them to feel safe, reducing the risk of challenging behaviours.

# Social Stories

Social Stories explain social situations, they help children learn what to expect, what other people might be thinking and suggest ways to respond. Social Stories are a good way of explaining difficult situations to children with ASC. You or your child's school may be using Social Stories already.

## Social Stories can be used to:

- Develop self-care skills (e.g. how to clean teeth, wash hands or get dressed)
- Help children cope with changes to routine and unexpected or distressing events (e.g. schools closed or self-isolation)
- Provide positive feedback to a person about an area of strength or achievement in order to develop self-esteem
- Teach appropriate behaviours (e.g. what to do when they feel angry or how to manage obsessions)





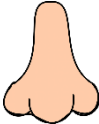



## During times of war and conflict Social Stories can help explain:

- What war is
- What and who it may involve
- That it is okay to worry about war

You could create your own Social Story using photos of your child or using special interests.

# Sensory items

Sensory items are a good way to create a relaxing, calm environment for children with ASC. You may wish to try some of the sensory items that are listed below to help sooth your child.

|                                   |   |  |
|-----------------------------------|---|--|
| Visual                            |    | lava lamp light<br>bubble tubes<br>cloud gazing                              |
| Auditory                          |    | music<br>musical instruments<br>nature sounds (e.g. bird chirping)           |
| Taste                             |    | spicy foods<br>strong foods (e.g. mustard)<br>favourite tastes               |
| Tactile/Touch                     |   | slime<br>soft blanket or cuddly toy<br>smooth or rough stones                |
| Smell                             |  | nature smells (e.g. wood)<br>scented lotions/soap/bubble bath<br>food smells |
| Interoception (internal senses)   |  | hot or cold drinks<br>deep breathing<br>mindfulness                          |
| Vestibular (balance and movement) |  | dancing<br>standing on one leg<br>jumping                                    |
| Proprioception (body positions)   |  | walking<br>chewing gum<br>stretching   |

This is not an exhaustive list and many of these will activate more than one sense!

You could try creating your own sensory items. See pages 11-12 for some ideas

## Make your own sensory items

### Lava lamp

Fill a jar or bottle 2/3 with oil, 1/3 with water and some drops of food colouring.

Drop in an Alka-Seltzer tablet and watch!

The same mix can be used again and again, so put a lid on for another day of lava lamp fun.



### Rain stick

Seal up one end of an old kitchen paper roll with paper or card.

Scrunch up a long snake of tin foil to go inside the length of the tube. The more kinks and bends the better!

Use dry ingredients such as rice, dried beans or popcorn kernels and pour into the tube until 1/4 – 1/3 full.

Seal the other end of the tube, and decorate!



### Slime

Add food colour to 100ml PVA glue and mix.

Mix 1 tsp baking soda and stir until smooth.

Add 2 tbsp saline solution (e.g. contact lens cleaner) stirring slowly until a ball forms.

Knead by hand, working in 1/2 tbsp. of the saline solution if required.



### Moon sand

Mix together 8 cups of flour and 1 cup of baby or coconut oil.

Add food colouring to make different colours.



# Things to help relax me...

## Take 5 breathing

How do you feel now?  
Are you calm or would you like to take another 5 breaths?

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1. Stretch your hand out like a star.
  2. Get the pointer finger of your other hand ready to trace your fingers up and down.
  3. Slide up each finger slowly ~ slide down the other side.
  4. Breathe in through your nose ~ out through your mouth.
  5. Put it together and breathe in as you slide up and breathe out as you slide down.
- Keep going until you have finished tracing your hand.

## 7 minute animal workout

Set an interval timer and complete each animal movement for 45 seconds, with 15 seconds of rest in between. Do as many as you can!



### FROG JUMPS

Hop, hop, back and forth like a frog



### BEAR WALK

Hands & feet on the floor, hips high - walk left and right



### GORILLA SHUFFLE

Sink into a low sumo squat, with hands on the floor, shuffle around the room.



### STARFISH JUMPS

Jumping jacks as fast as you can, with arms and legs spread wide.



### CHEETAH RUN

Run in place, as FAST as you can! Just like the fastest animal in the Sahara.



### CRAB CRAWL

Sit and place your palms flat on the floor behind you near your hips. Lift up off the ground and crawl.



### ELEPHANT STOMPS

March in place lifting your knees as high as you can and stomping the ground as hard as you can!

RAISING AN EXTRAORDINARY PERSON  
[HTTPS://HES-EXTRAORDINARY.COM](https://hes-extraordinary.com)



## Further resources and websites

### NHS Grampian CAMHS

NHS Grampian CAMHS have developed other resource packs for helping children and young people manage anxious feelings about war and troubling international relations.

If you feel you or your child's worries are getting bigger, you can contact:

Samaritans: 116 123  
[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

Breathing Space: 0800 83 85 87  
<https://breathingspace.scot/>

NHS 24: 111  
<https://www.nhs24.scot/>

Your local GP



*Please note this booklet was written in March 2022 during the ongoing conflict between Ukraine and Russia, however, the information provided can be useful to explore feelings regarding any war or conflict.*