



Guidance and background information on dealing with the Ukraine topic at school

The Government's general messages

- There is **no direct military threat to Estonia today**. Russia's activity is a military aggression against Ukraine, whereas Estonia supports Ukraine and the Ukrainian people.
- Russia's military aggression against Ukraine **will affect the entirety of Europe**, including Estonia. Estonia's **security is safeguarded by NATO**. NATO allies are united and ready to face all threats and challenges at this critical time for security.
- The Estonian government **regularly discusses the security situation** and the country has an action plan to cope with the impacts.
- It is important to **provide shelter and safe stay for Ukrainian war refugees** until they can return home. Should the war refugees need help longer than expected, Estonia will be able to address the problem in cooperation with other countries and the European Union.
- What is happening in Ukraine is of personal concern to many Estonians, their relatives and acquaintances. It is not surprising that the situation is causing anxiety and worries. Everyone in Estonia, regardless of nationality or language, should **remain calm and stick together**.



Prevention of conflicts at school

- It is the responsibility of school to **ensure a sense of security for both students and teachers**. No one should be bullied at school and any form of violence or incitement to racial hatred is unacceptable.
- We should show ourselves and teach our children to be friendly, kind and supportive to one another.
- Schools should provide a **balanced and reassuring reflection** of the news and attitudes expressed in the media and society, avoiding detailed war descriptions (e.g. damages, casualties and sanctions).
- Schools must **immediately notice and respond in the event of reported incitement to hatred or bullying associated with ethnicity and language**. Any kind of violence, either psychological or physical, must not be tolerated. Immediate intervention is necessary if

incitement to hatred is noticed in school community. The crisis helplines (5690 0353, 5690 0340) of the Ministry of Research and Education are also open for consultation.

In order to maintain a school environment that is safe both emotionally and physically, we recommend following these principles for communication with children:

- Many different nationalities live in Estonia and in order to communicate they usually speak Estonian, Russian and/or English.
- Language does not reflect people's attitudes towards the war. Estonians and Ukrainians often speak Russian to communicate with one another. Russian is also spoken by Armenians. There are also many Russians whose mother tongue is Russian in Ukraine.
- The war in Ukraine has nothing to do with Russian ethnicity, but rather with the people who initiated the war.
- We should say that they were not Russians who started the war, rather it was the Russian Head of State.
- The decision to start the war was the decision of the Russian Head of State whereas many Russian people are unhappy to see what is happening.



How to talk to students about the war

*School psychologist Karmen Maikalu advises parents and teachers **how to support students and how to explain the current events in the world appropriately. We suggest explaining the topic to students at school, to discuss issues together with a form teacher or in history class.***

- Students know and hear much more about the war than we believe. If we don't talk to them, they will be left alone with their thoughts and feelings.
- War issues are likely to arise every day, so do not avoid them. It is important that students can talk about their concerns, or they won't be able to focus on their studies.
- Students may be very anxious, some may joke about the serious topic, some may want to talk a lot, some may be withdrawn. Don't be judgemental, but explain to students that anxiety and confusion may be revealed in different ways.
- It is important to maintain a trustful relationship with students, to stay in contact with them and try to understand what is going on in their minds.
- Let students ask questions, including the difficult ones, and give age appropriate answers. Be honest and admit it if you do not know all the answers.

- Explain appropriately what is happening. You could draw comparisons between the conflict and their everyday lives, e.g. why some children pick fights with others and how to deal with it.
- Be honest when explaining and give facts, not speculation. Do not minimise the seriousness of the war, however, you should not discuss all the grim details with students.
- Older students could watch the news in class and then discuss the issues while the teacher could encourage them to express their feelings, opinions and concerns.
- Talking about war may evoke emotions. Ensure that the topic ends with a hopeful and positive tone. If necessary, do some relaxing exercises with students before moving on to other lessons.
- Be careful not to exaggerate with the war topic. It is natural to be affected by current events, however, as important is maintaining the daily routine and moving on with daily activities. As much as possible, maintain a daily routine at school and focus on pleasant activities and exercises. Routine offers security while positive experiences and physical activity provides relaxation and joy in anxious times.
- Particular attention should be paid to students whose behaviour has suddenly changed or who have become withdrawn. Talk to these students individually and find out how they are doing.
- Students need to be given a sense of security and hope. They should be reassured that there are many countries and many important statesmen who do their utmost on a daily basis to bring this war to a swift end, who support us and have promised to defend us. Insist that we stay together and help one another.
- It is important to teach students that there are many good and helpful people in the world. Tell students positive stories about how people are standing up to the war, offering help and support.
- It is necessary to explain to students that not all the Russians are in favour of the war in Ukraine. You can look at the photos, listen to the speeches and watch videos showing these Russian people expressing their support for Ukraine. You can speak about Russian culture or you can also watch funny Russian cartoons with the younger students. Particular attention should be paid to this topic when there are Russian students in class and it is important to ensure that no ethnic-based bullying occurs.
- The feelings of helplessness and anxiety can be reduced when students can do something themselves to support those at war. To support Ukraine you can draw pictures together, set up a photo exhibition, write support letters or poems, organise an event or explore different ways of donation.
- The current situation also causes anxiety among adults. It is important to be aware of it and deal with it. Teachers do not need to hide their worries from their students, however they can give hope and show how to cope with the anxiety. It is important for students to see that adults can cope.

Should students or staff have fears or concerns about the war, a free and quick way to speak to a specialist is **the school psychologists' advice line** 1226 in Estonian (available from 16:00 to 20:00)

weekdays) and 1227 in Russian (available from 16:00 to 20:00 on Tuesdays). In order to get advice, support or help, children, their parents and school community members can also call the **24/7 child helpline** 11 6111 or write on the website lasteabi.ee or to info@lasteabi.ee.

Additional materials

[A video](#) where a child psychiatrist Anne Kleinberg explains how to talk about the war with younger and older children. [An infographic](#) by Social Insurance Board showing how to explain tragic events to a child. [Guidance portal for the youth](#) www.teeviit.ee



Landmark events of the Ukraine's recent history and the background to the war

- **Regardless of Ukraine's aspirations for democracy and towards the European Union, Russia has always considered Ukraine as a lost territory and wanted Ukraine to be under the influence of Russia.**
- **Russia has not welcomed Ukraine's accelerated progress towards democratic values and the European Union.** Moreover, Russian politicians have seen Ukraine's consolidation and rapprochement with the EU and NATO as a threat to Russia.
- **On the early morning of 24 February, Russia launched a military invasion of Ukraine.** The Western countries imposed sanctions on Russia and began supporting Ukraine with financial aid and arms.

Key facts from history for children of all ages:

- The last most devastating war in the world was World War II, which raged from 1939 to 1945.
- After the end of World War II, international organisations (the UN, NATO, the European Union, OECD, the Council of Europe) were set up with the aim of keeping peace.
- After the end of II World War, many countries remained under Soviet occupation – they were not independent states, but constituent republics of the USSR (e.g. Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Ukraine) or the countries within the sphere of influence of the Soviet Union as members of the Warsaw Treaty Organisation (e.g. Poland and the German Democratic Republic).
- Ukraine and Estonia regained their independence in 1991 after the break-up (dissolution) of the Soviet Union (Estonia on 20 August, Ukraine on 24 August). After regaining its independence, Estonia immediately started shifting to the West and became a member of the United Nations in 1991 and of the European Union and NATO in 2004.
- Ukraine's course has been more complicated. Although Ukraine was the first former Soviet republic to sign a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the European Union in 1994, Ukraine's progress towards the European Union and the West has not been as dynamic as in Estonia and many other countries. Many Soviet-era politicians remained in power in Ukraine. Ukraine's EU membership process has been hampered by corruption and the country's slow economic development.

- Ukraine's EU aspirations continued after the 2014 revolution, during which pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovich was ousted from Ukraine's presidency by the Verkhovna Rada. Yanukovich lost power and evacuated to Russia.

[More in-depth overview in Estonian, in Russian](#)



Where to get more information?

- **For educational institutions** we have created a [subpage](#) on the website of the Ministry of Education and Research where we constantly update the information concerning the **education for migrant children**.
- **Kriis.ee website** has a subpage [Security situation in Europe](#) in three different languages, where relevant information can be found.
- **The school psychologists' advice line** 1226 is available in Estonian from 16:00 to 20:00 on weekdays and 1227 is available in Russian from 16:00 to 20:00 on Tuesdays. You can also call the **24/7 child helpline** 11 6111 or write on website lasteabi.ee or to info@lasteabi.ee.
- If necessary, you can get help with questions about Ukraine by calling **state helpline** 1247.