

# Grief and Loss: How to Help Refugees in your Home to Recover

A RESOURCE FOR REFUGEE HOSTS



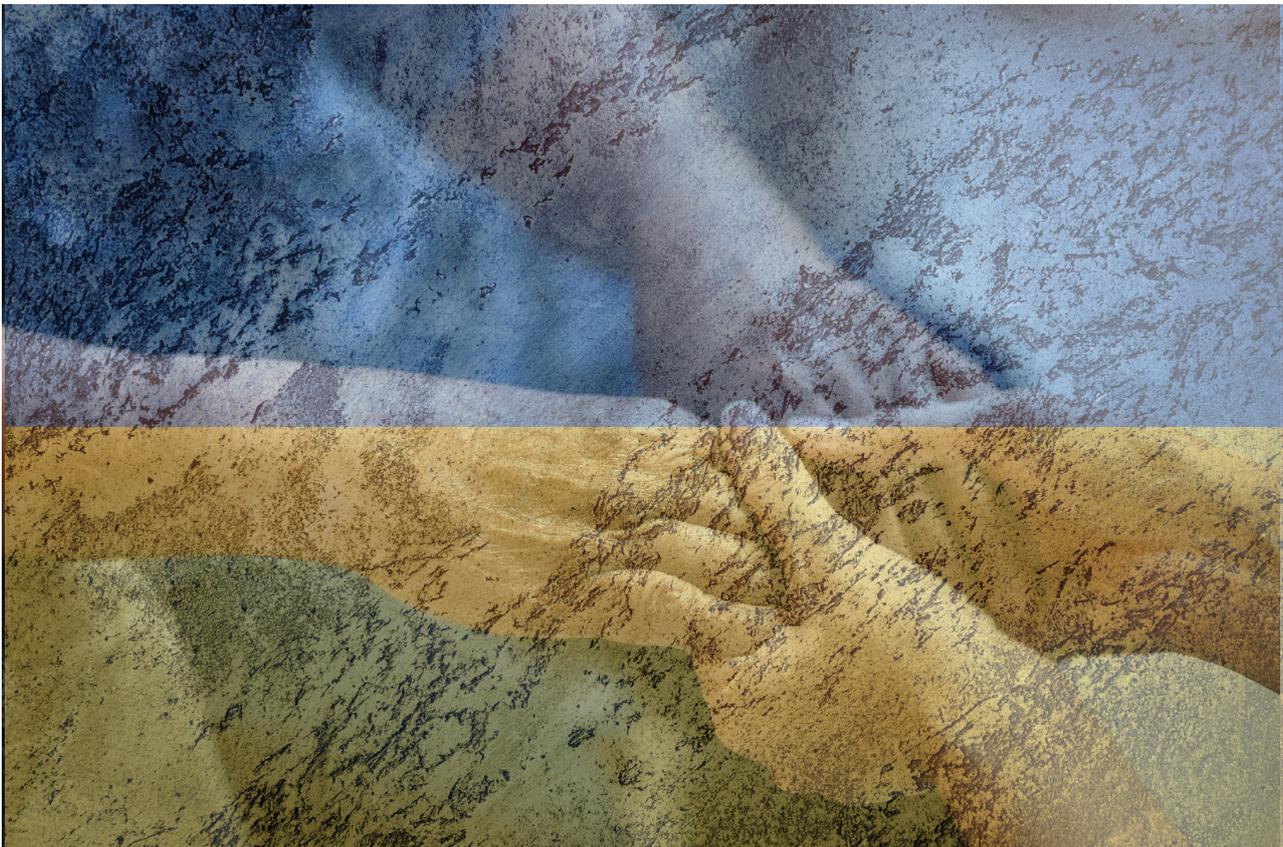
**GriefSpecialists.org**

## To the amazing people welcoming Ukrainians into your home

We have created a guide for you covering what you need to know to offer immediate emotional support.

Ukrainian refugees, mainly women and children, and elderly, will arrive in our country, possibly exhausted and distressed, frightened, and may not speak a word of English, or only a small amount. They will have lost their homes, their livelihoods and their communities, and probably will have been separated from their loved ones.

Your first aim is to provide a safe and supportive environment for them, both physically and emotionally.



## AS A HOST, BEWARE:

- They might have witnessed unimaginable things.
- Their sleep might be disrupted.
- They might be in a high state of alert and frightened, they might be totally unresponsive to any communication, and they may find it hard to concentrate.
- They may find it hard to build trust.
- The language barrier will make it particularly hard for them to articulate their feelings.
- They have lost everything and left life as they know it behind.
- Younger children's mental health is more dependent on their parents' responses to situations.
- Children may be experiencing separation anxiety as a result of families being split up. This may cause them to behave differently than they normally would.
- Teenagers have more of an understanding of what's going on and are naturally processing, adapting and accepting their own egos. But too much change in their life means more difficulties to adapt to and accept.
- They are likely to have left loved ones behind and are likely to have been separated from friends and family.
- They may embrace the change and be happy to have left their home country behind.
- They are likely to experience conflicting feelings of being relieved to be safe but heartbroken to have lost everything.

## AS A HOST, BEWARE:

- Remember, their responses will all be unique and their reactions are normal responses to trauma and loss.
- They might not have access to things they'd usually be able to draw on in times of distress. They might find it hard that the food or activity they would normally turn to as a distraction behaviour simply isn't available in the UK.

## GUIDANCE FOR CONVERSATIONS

Being available to listen to them will be a great support, if and when they're ready to talk to you.

Use technology in your home, such as Alexa or Google Translate to help you and them communicate.

When we see someone suffering, we want to make things better. We come up with logical reasons why things happened the way they did, or we might share our own experience thinking it might help - but it doesn't. If they are in deep mourning, there is little you can say to alleviate their pain. However, you can listen without interruption, without trying to fix them, judgement, or comparing it to your personal experiences, or other people's.

# GUIDANCE FOR CONVERSATIONS

Conversations about feelings can be held at any time, as pain is in our emotions, not in our thinking. It could be while preparing a meal, or during a walk together, rather than sitting down and asking questions.

Try and keep your facial expressions in check, e.g., don't show how shocked you are about the things you are likely to hear.

Don't restrict them, by saying things like, "at least you are here now and safe", or "don't worry it will all be ok." Any sentence starting with "At least" can be really damaging, because it invalidates what you just heard. Although you might be right, it doesn't address all the losses the children have experienced.

Also making promises when we don't know the outcome are not really helpful. Again, although you might be right, it doesn't address their feelings of loss and confusion.

Practical support is essential, but when it spills over into advice like 'you've got to keep yourself busy' or 'you must be strong for...', it can become about making yourself feel more comfortable with the situation, rather than letting them feel their feelings.



## HERE ARE SOME INITIAL WORDS TO SAY:

Remember 'TED'.

- Tell me
- Explain
- Describe

These words will help open up conversations and will let them know you're ready to listen. Sometimes they won't feel like talking at that particular moment but by acknowledging what they're going through, you're signalling that you're there for them to share their feelings and stories.

## HERE ARE SOME MORE USEFUL WORDS:

- What happened?
- Can you tell me a little about it?
- I can only imagine how...  
painful/devastating/heartbreaking/traumatic that has been  
for you.

# COMMUNITY

Think about how you can help your guests to feel part of a community. Being a refugee in a foreign country, especially if they don't speak English can feel very isolating.

If you live in a town or city, this might be easier to achieve than living in the countryside but being prepared with information before they come and live with you will help. Places to visit or contact for information include:

- Places they can learn or improve on their English language skills, such as local colleges
- The local library is likely to have information about various community groups
- Local churches
- Association of Ukrainians in Great Britain (there are branches around the UK)



## FURTHER SUPPORT WITH LOSS

If you find your guest/s require more emotional support that you're not able to help with, please get in touch with us via email on [hello@griefspecialists.org](mailto:hello@griefspecialists.org) or via social media where we will be happy to help or signpost you.

And finally...

On behalf of the people you're about to help, a huge, heartfelt 'thank you' for opening your home to strangers in their time of need.

The Grief Specialists Team.

This guide has been created by Grief Specialists CIC, a not-for-profit organisation connecting anyone dealing with loss to professional support and resources.



**Grief Specialists**

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