



International
Labour
Organization



ДЕРЖ
ПРАЦІ



MOVING FORWARD
TOGETHER

With care for yourself

Methods of psychological recovery in war and post-war times

Information material for workers



Information toolkit on psychosocial support at the workplace in war and post-war times



About 10-15% of people will experience post-traumatic stress, fall into a depression or have problems with alcohol and drug consumption due to the war. However, an overwhelming part of the population will cope with psychological pain effectively.

► Listen to your thoughts, emotions and body! How are you?

From the psychological viewpoint, war is the time when many various emotions and feelings, constantly changing, manifest themselves. Mood swings from euphoria to despair, from anxiety to optimism, from aggression to acceptance of reality are a natural response of our psyche to the war's violent consequences. It is important to notice and accept your thoughts and emotions without fighting them, not condemning and "suppressing" them; it is important to afford feeling everything that is felt and realize that you react normally to an abnormal situation.

Pay attention to how your thoughts influence your mood, how you perceive yourself, how you communicate with your relatives, friends and colleagues, how you work and tackle everyday problems.

Care for mental health is important to support healthy relations with yourself. During the war and in post-war time, it will help think clearly, react and prevent development of problems. So, what does such care consist of, and what can we impact to stay resourceful?

► Keep a "psychological first-aid kit"

Stress and its manifestations are the most common consequence of war. Stress is our organism's protective response and a danger signal for our psyche. Without any stress, we would be vulnerable and unable to stand against difficulties. Stress can be of different levels and have different forms. Care for mental health includes efficient stress management to prevent occurrence of distress ¹ (emotional exhaustion, stress disorders and behavioural problems). We cannot influence emergence of a stress response and negative thoughts but we can control them to adapt ourselves effectively. Below are some tips which will help you "hold on" and live productively amid the war.



¹ Distress (from Greek 'dys' — a prefix meaning disorder + English 'stress' — strain) means exhaustion, destructive stress affecting an organism during an extended period of time.



► Realize what's happening to your psyche and accept the new reality

There are three main situations at the psychological level which can cause some or other stress level during war – and all these situations are connected with fear.

Fear of death. It is the instinct of self-preservation and the need to protect oneself and one's near and dear ones. It is a natural feeling that we need both on the battlefield and when we hear a siren or explosions or watch negative news. In such situations, the fear of death becomes dangerous only when it takes on other forms such as panic, hysterics, stupor, or nervous tremor. These acute stress responses do not allow one to make decisions quickly and save oneself or adapt oneself effectively. To reduce the stress level, it is worth using respiratory exercises and the consciousness and focusing techniques (see below).

Fear of uncertainty/fear of the unknown. Our psyche needs to have at least some control over the situation, therefore a multitude of various questions arise: When will the war end? Why do they kill us? Will there be a nuclear explosion? What is in store for me tomorrow? etc. No answers exist, therefore anxiety arises. To reduce the level of this stress and prevent development of psychological disorders, it is necessary to realize WHAT you can control and WHAT

you cannot. To mitigate the fear of the unknown you need to decide what you can do right here and now. A clear plan of actions both at home and at work as well as being informed and some useful routine activity are necessary. It is important to define what and how you can do during the war and to find rationale for your actions.

Fear of change. In the war situation, it is a need to understand how to live with all that, how to accept the new reality. Changes can be accompanied by a feeling of guilt. It is a useful and necessary feeling in the war situation because it pushes to personal identification and helps being useful for a common goal. Problems occur only when the feeling of guilt takes on a morbid form, that is begins to allegedly "eat up" a person from inside and permanent compulsive negative thoughts about oneself appear. If they are not stopped and no action is taken, the person loses strength, apathy emerges, a wish to hide arises, and difficulty sleeping, annoyance, headache, etc. can appear. It is important to notice the signals of the psyche and body timely and use methods which mitigate the process of adaptation to changes. Specialized assistance should be requested in time as appropriate.

► If watching news affects you adversely, go on an "information diet"

During wartime, the information "consumption" practice can take on a form of obsessive scrolling of news when you get stuck in them for a whole day, expecting something with apprehension. It can have negative consequences for mental and physical health. We need news for security to react and make decisions timely, therefore the "information diet" is not rejection of news at all but an opportunity of making their "consumption" process safe for our own health. Hence, the "information diet" includes:

- revision of your news "menu" – what and how much you "consume";
- a day for work, and pauses for news;
- something pleasant for yourself before bedtime.



► **If panic, fear and anxiety “grip” you, use the conscious breathing techniques and the psychological “grounding” method**

The practice of attentiveness and consciousness teaches us to accept all the emerging thoughts, emotions and feelings without condemnation and fighting, fixing them and focusing our attention on the “here and now” moment. Attentiveness to what you are doing right now, at this moment, can return the feeling of safety and reduce the level of anxiety.

When we are acutely stressed, we feel like losing ground. We cannot concentrate on decision-making. We need to “get grounded” to come to our senses. Here are some examples of mental and physical “grounding”:

- Pay attention to your feet – they must stand on the floor completely; feel solid ground under your feet.
- Say to yourself: “My name is I am here, I am alive, I am safe. This feeling will pass”.
- Choose an object in your space and examine it by using all senses.
- Sing, pray or read a poem.
- Recall a place of safety and quiet from your past and begin to imagine yourself there.
- Keep a “grounding” item in your pocket (stone, ring, coin, piece of fabric, beads, etc.) to touch it in moments of trouble.
- Breathe consciously, that is focus your attention on the flow of air that you breathe in and out, or concentrate your attention on the tip of your nose while breathing slowly.
- Breathe with your belly to send a signal to your nervous system to calm down, use square breathing (see an [instructional video](#)).



- ▶ **Take care of others**

Research shows that care for others – people, animals or plants – decreases not only the degree of anxiety, stress and depression but also the risk of disease-caused death. That reinforces resistance to consequences, even to severe stress after a traumatic experience
- ▶ **Afford joking, laughing, and being glad**

To be strong for communicating with relatives, for performing one's professional duties effectively, and for volunteering, it is important to let pleasant emotions and feelings manifest themselves, to be inspired by something so that they develop, and to charge other people with them, even in the most difficult moments of your life
- ▶ **Engage in a useful routine activity**

What things does your day consist of? Think of your goals for today and your plan for the future rather than waiting for the war to end. When we panic and put all our everyday activities on hold we are easier to be managed, subdued and seized. A useful routine and realistic goals are your support and source for recovery now and for psychological stability in the future.
- ▶ **Be inspired by creation and self-development**

Creative work is a natural individual and collective psychological protection for our psyche, necessary during the war. It is essential to all and everyone. It inspires, supports and motivates as well as helps cope with psychological pain. Get energized by creation from others, support yourself through self-expression and self-development.
- ▶ **Do exercises**

Fearing, worrying and panicking is easier when lying on a sofa and much more difficult when you are pottering around a garden, working the pedals, beating a punch bag, squatting, jumping on a trampoline, or simply walking in the open air. Go for a walk to reduce muscular strain and saturate your brain with oxygen.
- ▶ **Practice gratitude**

Research shows that gratitude is closely associated with the state of health and mood. Such emotions help you overcome anxiety, concentrating your mind on what is really treasured in your life and on what you are able to control. The practice of gratitude builds psychological resilience. When we start losing hope and motivation because of the things happening in the country, gratitude keeps us focused and distracts our mind from negativity. Hence, think now of whom and what for you are grateful, starting with yourself.
- ▶ **Maintain positive relations and accept support**

It is important to stay in touch not only with yourself but also with other people. Nothing settles our nervous system better than a one-on-one talk with a good listener. Talk about your fears with someone you trust. You can not only improve your well-being and feel safe again but also make right decisions, addressing others or accepting support from others.
- ▶ **If you don't cope ask a professional**

Most of those who have survived a traumatic experience overcome their emotional and behavioural problems by themselves. However, if such manifestations are protracted and intense and affect one's personal and professional life, it is worth seeking professional help.



► Signals prompting that you need professional help

- Constant feeling of anxiety that affects quality of life.
- Prolonged feeling of fatigue and exhaustion.
- Presence of physical stress responses (difficulty sleeping, strain, fatigue, tachycardia, body pain, gastrointestinal system disorders, etc.).
- Out-of-control aggressive behaviour.
- Excessive vigilance (suspiciousness).
- Frequent mood swings, not seen before.
- Attention focusing problems.
- Problematic consumption of alcohol, drugs or medicines.
- Productivity decrease.
- Conflicts at work and in the family.
- Constant feeling of fear, shame or guilt.
- Losing interest in everything, avoiding social contacts.
- Suicidal thoughts.
- Experience of physical and sexual violence.

If the enterprise or company you work at has a psychosocial support policy and programme, you can approach a commissioner for these matters or a manager to receive support and contact information about professional help. Psychological therapy is a safe and confidential conversation about psychological pain, mental health and a self-recovery action plan.

