

# Coping with the Emotional Impact of Global Conflicts



As we witness conflicts and wars occurring globally, we may experience a number of difficult emotions. These events can trigger waves of shock, fear, frustration and in some even anxiety and depression.

In Canada, many communities are home to individuals with connections to regions affected by conflict. You may have friends, coworkers, or neighbors with family in war zones, or you may even fear for the safety of your own loved ones. Disruptions in communication can heighten feelings of fear and anxiety.

Even if you're not directly affected by a particular war, you may worry about the broader implications of the conflict, be re-traumatized from your own experiences escaping conflict, or feel overwhelmed by having to cope with multiple challenges at once.

The purpose of this handout is to help you understand the reactions you may be experiencing as a result of ongoing

conflicts and provide you with suggestions on how to manage your reactions and cope through these difficult times.

## What are the possible reactions?

It's completely normal to experience the following reactions in response to ongoing conflict:

**Physical Reactions:** numbness, shock, headaches, loss of appetite, difficulty sleeping, persistent heart palpitations (racing heart), gastrointestinal difficulties (nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, constipation), muscle tension, and fatigue.

**Emotional Reactions:** fear, anxiety, anger, irritability, sadness, guilt, distrust, and mood swings.

**Need more information or assistance? All calls are completely confidential.**

1-800-663-1142 | TTY: 1-888-384-1152 | International (Call Collect): 604-689-1717

Numéro sans frais - en français : 1-866-398-9505

[HomewoodHealth.com](http://HomewoodHealth.com)

# Coping with the Emotional Impact of Global Conflicts

**Behavioral Reactions:** tearfulness, feeling disconnected, withdrawal or isolation, disengaging from normal life activities, increased tendency to blame or criticize others, increased consumption of alcohol or cannabis, increased or decreased food consumption.

**Cognitive Reactions:** difficulty concentrating, forgetfulness, indecisiveness, confusion, distressing dreams and memories, recurring intrusive images.

## What can I do to manage my reactions and cope?

While it's nearly impossible to avoid these types of stress reactions, and keep in mind that they are completely normal. The best approach to take is to acknowledge them and take care of yourself:

- Pay more attention to your reactions and feelings than to what's going on with the wars.
- Validate and normalize your emotions, they make sense, and they are normal.
- Try to reduce other stressors in your life by controlling the things that you can control.
- Talk about your reactions with someone close to you, such as a trusted friend, coworker, or family member. You may find that they're experiencing many of the same reactions that you are.
- If you start to worry, ask yourself what you feel. If watching the news or scrolling social media is causing you to worry excessively or feel anxious, switch to an activity that brings you connectedness and more positive emotions (meditate, make a meal for a friend, ask a friend to meet you for coffee or a walk).
- Get exercise every day – even if it's just a short walk around the block.
- Engage in different activities to avoid scrolling the news feeds if this is disturbing to you. Some people enjoy household chores, listening to music, having a bath, exercising, while others like to surround themselves with friends.

- Eat healthy, nutritious foods and try to maintain good sleep habits. Keep your phone or tablet out of your bedroom and don't watch the news before bed.
- If you're experiencing distressing images from your own previous experiences of war or violence, seek support from a counselor, trusted family member, or friend. Remind yourself that you are safe now and try to direct your attention to something else.

Some people deal with stressful news events by maintaining their normal daily routine of exercising, working, and spending time with family. Others cope by trying to learn as much about the situation as possible. Understanding what's happening can help but we want to avoid becoming too fixated on it. There's no end to information on the internet, and there will always be one more Tweet to read. Take a break from media by temporarily deleting social media apps from your phone or tablet and leave your radio and television turned off.

## What can I do if my reactions don't diminish?

If you find that your stress reactions are not diminishing, obtain professional counseling or seek help from your primary health care provider.

Warning signs that you may need help include:

- you feel like your emotions are out of control;
- your emotions are intense and persist for an extended period of time;
- you're having difficulty doing your daily activities (difficulty concentrating); and
- you notice a change in your sleep patterns.
- others have noticed a change in your mood or behaviour.

# Coping with the Emotional Impact of Global Conflicts

## Grief

Conflicts and wars often result in injuries and civilian casualties, in addition to military personnel losses. Receiving news of a death is always difficult; losing someone during a war can be even more painful and even traumatic. The news may trigger disbelief, shock, anger, and other intense emotional reactions.

You may experience different stages of grief (disbelief, sadness, anger, disorganization, acceptance, reorganization), during which your normal day-to-day functioning may be impacted, including your ability to focus at work. It's important to understand that grief is not linear, and you may move in and out of these stages at different times and experience numbness interspersed with intense waves of grief. You may also feel intense feelings of anger and question the meaning of life.

Everyone works through their grieving process in their own way and at their own pace and that's okay. Remember that emotions are just that—emotions. You are not defined by them. Give yourself the space to feel what you're feeling. Your emotions are a natural response to conflict and war.

## Coping with Your Grief

- Allow yourself to feel your emotions. Don't try to minimize them.
- Talk about your feelings with trusted family, friends, and colleagues.
- Stay active. Reach out to a close friend to go for a walk. You will receive mutual support and even 10-20 minutes of exercise can help ease your distress.

- If you are finding it difficult to concentrate at work, speak to your manager.

If you or a colleague continues to experience significant distress or difficulty coping, reach out for support through our counseling services. We're here to support you through this difficult time.



**Need more information or assistance? All calls are completely confidential.**

For more information, to book a counselling session, or to access any of your EFAP services our Client Services Representatives are ready to speak with you 24 hours a day, seven days a week, in English or French. All calls are completely confidential.

**1-800-663-1142 | TTY: 1-888-384-1152 | 1-866-398-9505** (Numéro sans frais - en français)  
**International (Call Collect): 604-689-1717**

**HomewoodHealth.com**

© 2024 Homewood Health™ | CMS\_HH\_CTA\_Emoional Impact of Global Conflicts\_EN\_Sept2024



**Homewood  
Health**