



AUGEO FOUNDATION

Window of Tolerance

You have received a link to this animation, because you and your child have been through a very stressful, dangerous and dramatic situation in Ukraine. Some children are traumatised by these experiences, but that doesn't have to be the case. It is true for all children that their sense of safety is affected by such events and that their stress reaction has changed. As a consequence, they can behave differently to how they would under normal circumstances.

The Window of Tolerance animation explains the impact such dramatic events can have on a child, so that you as a parent can better understand your child's behaviour. And you can help your child to feel safer and cope with their intense stress.

Here are some tips to help you with this.

1. **Be reliable and provide structure** – In order to learn how to feel safe again, structure and clarity are important for children. You can help as a parent by being predictable (do what you say, say what you are going to do), react calmly to your child and be positive. In addition, bringing structure to each day helps. You can do this by being clear, providing a routine and rules. For example, explain what is going to happen (as far as you are able to). This gives your child a feeling of safety. By staying calm yourself and offering boundaries your child can feel calmer and safer too, even though the situation is far from normal or calm.
2. **Be aware of the impact of stress** – All children react differently to stress. Some children show no signs – other children behave completely differently than normal?. A child can behave aggressively and hyperactive, for example, or surprisingly quiet and withdrawn because of stress or feeling unsafe. You might not immediately connect this behaviour with the stressful and dangerous situation that your child has experienced. However, this type of behaviour is usually a sign of increasing stress and feeling unsafe, making children feel helpless. This is completely normal, as you can see in the animation. Just understanding that stress is the cause of the behaviour helps. It is only when you see their inner pain, that you can help your child to feel safe again and help reduce their stress.
3. **Help to understand emotions and soothe them** – As a parent you can help your child by explaining emotions. You do this by naming the emotion you think you see and confirming that it is a perfectly normal reaction. A new environment, unknown people that speak a foreign language, missing family that have been left behind; all situations whereby children can feel intense emotions. As an example, you can say to your child: 'I can see that you are anxious because so much has changed and everything is new. Is that right? Maybe you are thinking: 'I can't do this. I want to leave'. It makes sense that you are anxious: everyone finds so many changes and new things frightening.' Consequently, you can help your child to calm down. You can do this by taking a couple of deep breaths in and out together, with your feet on the ground, shoulders relaxed. Talk calmly to your child and say 'You are safe here and now; I am with you and it is okay'. It is also important to realise that you as a parent are also in the same stressful situation. Your 'window' is also smaller because of your experiences, whereby you sometimes react differently and for instance, are less able to cope with your child. This is normal. Parents are sometimes worried that their own stress will affect their child. As a parent you can explain that you also feel scared or sad and these are normal emotions in this situation.



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However, you do need to be careful not to transfer your feelings to your child or that your child thinks they need to make you feel better. This is not your child's task.

4. **Don't send your child away** – As mentioned earlier, your child can start misbehaving because of stress and feeling unsafe. Make sure you don't reject or punish this behaviour. There is nothing your child can do about this behaviour and by rejecting or punishing you are only adding to their stress. In addition, don't ask your child why they are behaving the way they are: children often don't know why themselves. You won't get an answer and you will only confuse your child more. What can you do instead? Put limits on your child's behaviour in a calm manner. State clearly that you want a certain behaviour to stop and what the consequence is if it doesn't. Explain the behaviour you would like to see instead. If your child is jumping wildly around the room, you could say: 'I would like you to stop running around. I would like you to sit on your chair. If you aren't able to sit quietly, then come to me.' It is important that you don't send your child away from you, to another room for example, as this feels like a rejection. Your child needs to feel safe and secure.

We hope that the animation and the tips above can help you your child's 'window' expand once more, so that they can feel safer.