

PSYCHOLOGY WORKS Fact Sheet: Coping with Geopolitical Crises

Geopolitical crises—such as armed conflicts, humanitarian emergencies, or international instability—can be distressing to hear about or to follow, even when they occur far from home. Ongoing exposure to unsettling news and uncertainty may affect emotional well-being, leading to increased stress, anxiety, sadness, or feelings of helplessness.

While it may not be possible to change global events, there are steps individuals can take to care for their mental health and cope more effectively during times of global uncertainty.

How Might Geopolitical Crises Affect Mental Health?

Geopolitical crises can affect people in different ways. Some individuals may feel anxious, overwhelmed, angry, or hopeless, while others may notice difficulty concentrating, changes in sleep, or emotional numbness. These reactions can occur even when a person is not directly involved in the events themselves.

Exposure to ongoing news coverage, graphic images, and uncertainty about the future can cause stress and contribute to emotional fatigue. People with personal, cultural, or family connections to affected regions may experience more intense emotional responses.

Recognizing these responses as normal is an important first step in coping and supporting others.

What are Some Ways to Cope with Geopolitical Crises?

Manage News and Media Exposure

While staying informed is important, constant exposure to news about geopolitical crises can increase stress, anxiety, and feelings of helplessness for both adults and children. Managing how and when news is consumed can help protect mental well-being. Some strategies include:

- **Setting limits on news intake:** Choose specific times of day to check news, and set time limits (e.g., 45 minutes per day), rather than monitoring continuously.
- **Selecting reliable sources:** Focus on trustworthy news outlets and avoid sensationalized coverage.
- **Determining your need to stay informed:** Consider the degree to which the events affect you or people who are important to you, and the amount of control you have over the situation, when deciding how informed you need to be. It may be beneficial to spend more time on news that is local, than on events happening elsewhere, over which you have no control.
- **Being mindful of social media:** Graphic images and posts can be particularly distressing. Consider muting or unfollowing accounts that increase stress.



- **Taking regular breaks:** Step away from screens, go for a walk, or engage in activities that provide calm and focus.
- **Balancing information with action:** Focus on things you can control, such as supporting community or advocacy efforts, rather than trying to follow every development.

By setting boundaries around media consumption, you can stay informed without overwhelming your emotional resources.

Practice Self-Care

Taking care of your body and mind can help reduce stress and improve resilience. Simple, everyday strategies can make a meaningful difference:

- **Maintain routines:** Regular sleep, meals, and physical activity help create stability.
- **Use grounding techniques:** Practices such as slow breathing, noticing your surroundings, or focusing on physical sensations can reduce stress in the moment.
- **Engage in calming activities:** Hobbies, creative work, or time in nature can help restore emotional balance.
- **Limit overexposure to distressing content:** Balance news with positive, restorative experiences.

These practices do not eliminate difficult emotions, but they can help you feel more in control and better able to cope.

Stay Connected

Social support is a key factor in coping with stress. Even during times of global uncertainty, maintaining connections can help protect your mental health:

- Talk with trusted friends or family about your feelings and concerns.
- Seek community, spiritual, or cultural connections, especially if crises affect regions that are important to your identity.
- Be mindful of conversations: Respect that people cope differently and avoid overwhelming yourself with others' distress.

How Can I Support Children and Youth?

Children and youth may be affected by geopolitical crises even if they do not fully understand the events. Supportive strategies include:

- Providing age-appropriate information and reassurance
- Encouraging questions and gently correcting misinformation
- Limiting exposure to distressing images and repeated news coverage
- Modeling calm behaviour and coping strategies
- Maintaining routines and a sense of normalcy

Children often take cues from adults, so your responses can help them feel safer and more secure.



When Should I Seek Additional Support?

Sometimes, stress from geopolitical events can become difficult to manage on your own. You should consider consulting with a regulated health care professional such as a psychologist, family physician, nurse practitioner, psychiatrist, or other mental health provider if you or someone you are supporting experiences:

- Persistent anxiety, sadness, or anger that interferes with daily life
- Trouble sleeping, concentrating, or completing routine tasks
- Feelings of hopelessness, panic, or emotional numbness
- Intense distress related to news or social media exposure

How Can Psychologists Help?

Psychologists are trained to support individuals, families, and communities affected by stress and uncertainty. They can help by:

- Teaching coping strategies for anxiety, fear, and uncertainty
- Providing practical tools for stress management and emotional regulation
- Offering guidance on supporting children and youth in age-appropriate ways
- Helping families and caregivers communicate effectively about difficult topics
- Providing a safe space to process emotions, including moral distress or feelings of helplessness

Psychologists work with individuals, groups, and communities to strengthen resilience, promote mental well-being, and help people feel more in control during challenging times.

You can consult with a registered psychologist to find out if psychological interventions might be of help to you. Provincial, territorial, and some municipal associations of psychology may make available a referral list of practicing psychologists that can be searched for appropriate services. For the names and coordinates of provincial and territorial associations of psychology, go to <https://cpa.ca/public/whatisapsychologist/PTassociations/>.

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Your opinion matters! Please contact us with any questions or comments about any of the **PSYCHOLOGY WORKS** Fact Sheets: factsheets@cpa.ca

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