

# Supporting Others Who Have Experienced Trauma in War

It's not easy to be there for someone who has experienced the pain and atrocities of war. Here are some suggestions for supporting others, while also taking care of yourself:

**Simply being there can mean a lot.** You don't need to have answers, solutions, or be able to make someone's pain go away. Sometimes the greatest gift you can give someone is being with them, even if they're not open to talking about how they're doing.

**Recognize your own limits.** Support often needs to come from different directions. Recognize those areas in which you can help—for example, providing a listening ear, a hug, or helping with routine tasks—and those which may require other types of support.

**Understand the importance of psychological safety.** Although it's generally helpful for people to talk about their experiences, this is not always the case when it comes to trauma. Revisiting traumatic experiences can be re-traumatizing in the wrong context, and is best done with the guidance and support of a trained professional. Gently encourage the person to consult with a professional if what they need is outside the scope of your skill and expertise.

**Try to keep communication open.** The person you're supporting may be open to talking, or not. They may be shocked, scared, or confused. They may be overwhelmed with a variety of emotions. Try to keep lines of communication open without pressuring them to share more than they're comfortable with. Asking, "How are you doing right now?" or "Is there anything you need?" can go a long way while respecting where they're at.

**Help with practical needs.** War can turn someone's life and daily routines upside down. Ask the person what they need support with day-to-day. This might include childcare, access to food, water, or information about any available resources.

**Encourage a focus on self-care and realistic expectations.** During times of immense change, small daily routines can bring some sense of normality and predictability. Where possible, support the person in taking care of themselves, such as eating regularly, getting fresh air, and keeping a sleep schedule. At the same time, expect that these tasks may be difficult, and encourage them to be flexible and compassionate with themselves.

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