



HOW TO CARE ABOUT THE WORLD

Is inner
peace an
option when
there's a war
going on?

WHILE CARING FOR YOURSELF

BY EMILY LAURENCE



After a long day of school and studying, you grab your phone and scroll TikTok, more than ready for a mental break. As usual, videos of cute puppies, DIY room decor hacks and celeb parodies fill your FYP. But then an entirely different kind of video pops up: It's footage of a girl your age in front of a destroyed apartment building in Ukraine, describing the horrific aftermath of a recent bombing.

In the past few months since war broke out in Europe, tons of these types of videos have popped up on social media. Maybe you commented on the first one on your FYP because you wanted to show support for the Ukrainian people. A few days later, you watched a couple more so you could stay informed as the crisis deepened. Since then, because of how the algorithm works, videos showing the conflict have pretty much filled your feed.

We get it: It's overwhelming to think that, while you're worrying about acing your finals and anticipating summer break, teens on the other side of the world have become victims of an unprovoked attack and are now refugees with nowhere to live. "Social media content about the war—especially images of the atrocities in Ukraine—is definitely intense," says Bridget S., 16. "I have to take a break from my phone after seeing so many disturbing videos."

The Ukraine-Russia war may be the first global aggression playing out on TikTok, but it's not the first time hard-to-watch current events have been posted there (videos showing racial violence, climate disasters, political drama and news about school shootings have also found their way onto social feeds in recent years). That's why it's so important to learn how to scroll safely (especially when an algorithm decides what you see) while staying informed about what's happening in the world.

ON OVERLOAD

"Humans are absolutely not designed to consume emotionally charged information consistently, over multiple platforms, at any hour of the day or night," says clinical psychologist Dr. Lucie Hemmen, author of *The Teen Girl's Anxiety Survival Guide*.

Dr. Hemmen explains that if you're scrolling social media and go down a rabbit hole of anxiety-inducing videos (even a well-meaning rabbit hole to stay current on the conflict), it causes stress hormones to flood your brain. "This makes us feel awful and wears us down, eroding our mental and physical health," says Dr. Hemmen. "It's terrible for everyone, but especially terrible for teenagers, who are the most vulnerable due to their

lack of life experience coupled with the intensity of their emotions."

Therapist and *Mindfulness for Teen Anxiety* author Jamie Roberts adds that absorbing these traumatic images can send you on an emotional roller coaster: "If you're staying in that space of increased stress hormones, you're bouncing between anxiety, anger and depression. It's hard to find a place of calm." It's especially disorienting to scroll Instagram or TikTok watching funny videos, then suddenly be hit with something disturbing. "You go from one extreme to the other," notes Roberts.

Roberts' advice? Set boundaries—and be careful how you scroll. "If you know you just want to relax and look at cute puppies at that moment, search a puppies hashtag," she advises.

You can even use each app for a unique purpose: TikTok could be where you seek out what's going on in the world and how to make a change, while you use Instagram to focus on your fashion mood boards and keep up with friends.

NAVIGATE TOUGH TALKS

Setting limits around news consumption is important. But what happens when you and your friends set different boundaries?

Lindsey W., 16, recently experienced this divide: "I wanted to talk about the war with my friend because it's so devastating what's happening in Ukraine, but she told me she didn't want to watch the news or talk about it because it's too sad," Lindsey shares. "I got angry. I told her it was heartless of her to ignore it. We got into a huge fight about it."

So, which girl was "right"?

Both, says Roberts. "Different people have different tolerances to how much news they can engage with—and we should be respectful of other people's decisions when it comes to consuming content," she says. "Maybe someone is dealing with a lot of emotional stuff going on in their life, and they literally don't have the mental space for more. That's OK."

Dr. Hemmen agrees that it's important to respect friends' limits around how much news they can manage. "There is no ultimate right and wrong," she says.

HANDLE YOUR FEELS

There's no doubt that millions around the world have been deeply affected by the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine. So it's easy to understand why many teens are having trouble processing all the suffering and uncertainty they see on social media.

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DAD

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GET CLOSER. If your relationship is all work, speak up. Tell Dad you appreciate the life lessons, but all your together time doesn't need to revolve around a to-do list. Maybe you can swing by your fave ice cream spot for sundaes—or hit the mini-golf course for a friendly competition. Spending time with your dad in a new, laid-back environment just might reveal his softer side (and yours).

“I don't want her to miss a thing.”

“I skipped my senior prom and high school graduation. My buddies and I thought it was a cool thing to do, but later I realized we missed out on so much. I want my girls to know that it's important to live in the moment. These are days you'll remember for years to come.”—Gavin M., dad of Bria, 15, and Lindy, 17, Baltimore

GET CLOSER. The next time your dad starts another “back in my day...” lecture? Keep the eye-rolling to a minimum and start tuning in to his words. He's probably sharing these old-school stories because they apply to what you're going through right now. Learning to love the little things never goes out of style.

“I'm just not ready to let you go.”

“It seems like just yesterday I was teaching my girl to ride her pink skateboard with that big, silly helmet. All of a sudden, I'm helping her pin a boutonniere on her prom date. While it's been a beautiful ride, I'm having trouble watching her grow into a woman, knowing I won't always be there to pick her up when she falls. And when she goes off to college? I hope she feels my presence and knows I'm always going to be there for her when she needs me the most.”—Steve W., dad to Brittany, 18, Goldsboro, N.C.

GET CLOSER. Even if you've got one foot out the door, keep Dad looped in on all of your major decisions. Whether it's discussing your dream college, having him review your application essay or asking him about his own career path, keeping Dad close will bolster your bond and make the transition slightly less painful for him... and remind you just how much he'll always love and care for you. 🧡

HOW TO CARE

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Maddy P., 15, says it's hard to move on when she finds herself upset about current events. “What's going on in Ukraine has definitely made me feel very detached from school,” she says. “It's hard to truly care about tests and parties and summer plans when you know that other people are going through something so tragic.”

First, Roberts says to know that it's totally natural to feel sad, angry, upset or helpless when you see others in emotional pain. But she says it's also OK to feel happy, not guilty, about the amazing things happening in your own life, like summer break or the end-of-year parties. “You can have immense sympathy for someone and also be excited for prom. Both things can be true,” Roberts says.

And if the situation in Ukraine is getting in the way of you living your normal life, like causing you to lose focus in school or have trouble sleeping, psychiatrist Dr. Michelle Riba says it's important to talk to a therapist about how you're feeling (your parents, teacher or guidance counselor can help connect you to someone who can provide a safe space to discuss your emotions).

TAKE ACTION

When tragic events unfold before our eyes, many of us are left feeling completely helpless (and, yes, sometimes even hopeless). This has been especially true with the situation in Ukraine.

Reagan A., 16, has been struggling with these emotions: “Sometimes during class, my mind flashes back to disturbing pictures or videos I saw on Instagram the day or night before,” she reveals. “I feel horrible—and powerless.”

The silver lining here is that you *aren't* powerless. There are many organizations raising money specifically to help the people (and animals) who were displaced and are now in need of shelter, food and medical attention. Donating dollars or volunteering your time is a great start to helping those in Ukraine who need so much (go to girlslife.com/iti for ideas).

As dramatic events in our world continue to unfold, know that protecting your own mental health is as important as caring about those affected. While you can't control the outcome of a global crisis, you *can* create space to cope in healthy ways. 🧡

STOMACHACHES

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a variety of symptoms from headaches to stomach pain to diarrhea, says Dr. Sherman.

TAME IT: The only way to find out what's causing the complication is to keep a food journal. Each night before bed, jot down everything you ate that day—and then make a quick note of your corresponding digestive symptoms. Any extra gas or bloating? Take note. After a few weeks of recordkeeping, you might start to see a pattern.

SEE A DOC IF... You're pretty sure certain foods are causing you to feel bad. A physician or dietitian can confirm the culinary culprits and give you ideas for subbing in friendlier foods so you don't miss out on important vitamins and minerals. (And if you do have an acute reaction after eating, like hives, rashes or swelling, see a doctor right away as it may be a sign of a food allergy).

TUMMY TERROR

POOR GUT HEALTH

You rely on a gut feeling when faced with a big decision (should you intern at that nonprofit or sign up for a soccer clinic?). But lately, you're feeling your gut in other ways: bloating and constipation. Ugh.

WHAT'S UP: Ready for a gross fact? Your belly is home to trillions of microbes (aka bacteria, viruses and fungi). The majority of them are good—and necessary for your body to process nutrients, regulate hormones and get rid of toxins. But if any of these microbes get thrown off (by poor nutrition, an illness, stress or certain meds), you can experience some pretty uncomfy stomach symptoms.

TAME IT: The first step to rebalancing your gut? Rebalancing your diet. “Treating your gut requires prioritizing whole foods like fruits, veggies and high-quality fats. It also requires limiting inflammatory items like refined carbs, sugary foods and artificial sweeteners,” says Andrea Benford, a nurse practitioner and certified functional medicine health coach.

Probiotics—found in supplements or in yogurt and fermented foods like kombucha and sourdough bread—can help bring balance back to your gut, too. Add them to your daily regimen for an extra boost (just be sure to talk to a professional first to find the formulation that's right for you).

SEE A DOC IF... You're noticing unexplained weight fluctuations or dealing with constant bowel troubles (such as diarrhea or constipation on the reg). An expert can evaluate your symptoms and check for chronic conditions like inflammatory bowel disease. 🧡