**How to manage war-related anxiety over Russia’s invasion of Ukraine**

The victims of the Russia-Ukraine war are having their lives torn apart, and in the UK we are watching in horror.

Not only is war a terrifying thing to read about let alone be caught up in, it’s also throwing many people back into an intense state of anxiety and sense of existential threat they have been experiencing since the pandemic began, even though they are of course entirely different situations.

It is possible to be grateful for any sense of safety the UK currently has, but to feel distressed for many different reasons.

Psychotherapist Noel McDermott, founder of Psychotherapy and Consultancy, suggests ways to help manage the anxiety and get on with ordinary life as much as possible, while in no way diminishing the reality of what’s going on.

**1. Embrace the mundane**

“List the anxious, unhelpful thoughts you’re having about and replace them with everyday domestic ones like “I’ve got to go shopping and do the washing”, or “I’ve got to deal with my kids”. It’s really about understanding that you can’t stop yourself feeling anxious about this, but you can have a list of things that are more pleasant, or more mundane or less stressful that you can bring to mind.”

**2. Avoid hunting for evidence to support your worst fears**

“You might find yourself looking for evidence to support your worst thoughts and feelings; the most dramatic news sources or the most harrowing images. Try to avoid going down those rabbit holes, remind yourself about the here and now.”

**3. Take breaks from reading about the conflict**

“Witnessing life-threatening events, even though you’re witnessing them second hand, can produce trauma responses,” says McDermott. “Try and monitor the level of images and stories that you’re allowing to come in, especially when children are in the house.”

**4. Maintain your sleep and exercise routines**

“Try to go to bed and wake up at a regular time. Avoid too much caffeine and alcohol, which will affect your sleep. Any exercise you can do is a really great way of managing your anxiety response, especially high-intensity training like kickboxing.”

**5. Eat properly and hydrate, even if you don’t feel like it**

“Your body signals get messed up when you’re anxious so you have to artificially take over and think about these routines. Eat at regular intervals whether you have an appetite or not, and if you don’t drink enough your body becomes distressed. Meet your basic needs, or things feel much worse.”

**6. Don’t rationalise your worry**

“There’s not much point saying to yourself “I shouldn’t panic” or telling yourself it’s unreasonable to feel this way, because that’ll make it worse. We don’t know how things are going to go in Ukraine and we can’t control that, and we can’t fool ourselves into thinking that we can. What we need to do is say “Oh, I am anxious, I need to respond to that particular feeling and try and manage it as best I can in the here and now.”

**7. Breath properly**

“I like mindful patience, which is a complicated word for simply focusing on the breathing. Breath in for four counts, breath out for four counts, and repeat. Any slow breathing technique like that has a massive impact in terms of slowing the heart rate down, calming the body and the mind.”

**8. Spend time in nature and with animals (if you like them)**

“Do things that make you feel good. Go for a walk in the park, and if you’ve got access to an animal, pet it. If you can, get a massage, go to a spa. Try to immerse yourself in something pleasant. It’s not about eliminating reality but it’s about enjoying moments that you can in the here and now.”

**9. See people you love**

“Focus on your love relationships rather than the disasters playing out and rolling through your mind. Plan things with the people you care about, have family meals, do something with friends, spend time with the children you may have in your life.”