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# HOW TO WELCOME CHILDREN FROM UKRAINE TO SCHOOL

A GUIDE FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

**THE GUIDE HAS BEEN PREPARED BY HUMANDOC FOUNDATION.**

**About us:** \_\_\_\_\_

*HumanDoc Foundation – Polish non-governmental organization, active in the area of development and humanitarian aid, running educational and social projects. We have implemented over 50 projects in dozens of countries around the world. Since 2015, we’ve been taking actions in Ukraine. After the outbreak of conflict in Eastern Ukraine in 2015, we’ve been running a Support and Integration Centre for the victims of the conflict in Kharkov. Dozens of thousands of people benefited from our help.*

*Since the beginning of Russian aggression against Ukraine in February 2022, HumanDoc Foundation has been organizing evacuation of people from affected areas, and at the same time it has been delivering humanitarian and medical aid to many cities and towns in Ukraine (Mariupol, Kiev, Donetsk, Zaporozhye) as well as ensuring comprehensive care for Ukrainian refugees in Poland.*

## A FEW STORIES

**MAKSIM, 8** – he came to Poland with his grandmother, his parents stayed in Ukraine. His father is fighting in the war, his mother is a doctor. He came to Poland from Eastern part of Ukraine, the journey took almost three days. They were shelled on the way. He is very worried about his parents, misses his home, his room. He is concerned about his grandmother, too. He can hear her crying at night. He wakes up often, thinking about his parents and he dreads, he will never see them again. Before the war, he liked playing Minecraft, he was the best in his class. Now, he doesn't have power to talk to anyone.

**ALONA, 7** – she came to Poland with her mother and two sisters. Three days earlier, she was hiding with her family in the basement of their big house. Alona is afraid of darkness and the basement was dark and wet. On the last day, they started running out of food and water. Alona has been in Warsaw for a few days, she sleeps with her mom and sisters in a big hall meant for a few thousand people. Once, they went for a walk to the park, but they heard a plane and got scared that it was yet another attack from the air. Even singing the favorite song from „Frozen” didn't help. She heard people say, she doesn't have to be afraid anymore, she is safe, but she cannot believe it yet.

**NASTIA, 6 and BOHDAN, 9** – when the war broke out, they were staying with their grandmother. Their mom was in the hospital, where a few days before she had given birth to a baby boy. They were not afraid at first. Things changed, when their grandma died. Brother and sister stayed by themselves, they couldn't find the hospital, where their mom was admitted, so they decided to head towards the border with Poland. They didn't know, how far it is or where to go exactly. They were looking for shelter in abandoned houses. After two days of walking, a car stopped next to them, driven by a woman, who was fleeing with her children to Poland. She didn't manage to get to the hospital, where Nastia's and Bohdan's mom was. She took the children with her to Poland. It turned out, Nastia has her mom's phone number sewn in her jacket. They managed to get in touch and the transport for her and her new baby was organized.

Welcoming Ukrainian refugees' children is a real possibility for many schools. It is also probable that these children will face lots of challenges in the process of integration. Recent pictures and stories made many people care about the families in danger. Lots of them had traumatic experiences, including violence, hunger, separation from their loved ones, even grief. In many cases we don't know, for how long the dramatic events were taking place.

Children of refugees are one of the most vulnerable groups in schools, and now there are so many challenges they need to face. For several reasons they might be prone to mental health problems.

Schools play a key role while taking care of the mental well-being of young refugees. Safe environment is vitally important while welcoming them in the classroom. Establish clear rules and routine, but leave some space for joy and spontaneity – this will help create safe atmosphere.

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**REMEMBER** *that most of the young refugees have traumatic events behind them, they might even display symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. They often have difficulties learning, as all they can think about is how to survive another minute. Help them regain the feeling of safety – this way, you will improve the atmosphere in the classroom, which will be beneficial for all students.*

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## HOW TO TALK TO CHILDREN OF REFUGEES?

In the case of children who do not speak Polish, communication often takes place based on non-verbal signs (it's recommended to start Polish language classes as soon as possible). Start by traditional phrases to say hello and goodbye, teach them words, which are used in these situations as well as gestures, such as shaking hands or giving a high-five. This will give them the feeling of being a part of the school community. Keep a positive tone of voice, so that they feel that the classroom is a friendly space.

Ways of talking to children, who experienced war are comparable to conversations with children, who saw or heard about the war from the media. We should remember to adjust information to the stage of development and cognitive capabilities of the child/teenager. Apart from that, remember:

**Stay calm while talking to a child.** First of all, prepare yourself – an adult – for such a conversation, offer support to the parents, if they are not able to conduct the conversation on their own.

**Accept what the child is saying.** This way, you will show them that you accept them. You will create the sense of safety.

**Give the child some space to process all emotions. Remember!** There are no wrong emotions! Be open to all experiences and feelings of the young person.

**Answer all the questions: be open, answer the questions without going ahead in the future. Remember!** A child can regulate by themselves what they need and want to find out.

**Be close and let the child hug and cuddle, offer support and let them process their emotions in private.** Children may go through stressful events in different ways – some of them may need conversation and affection, others prefer to be alone and cry.

**Direct the child's/teenager's attention to some activities that they might participate in, show them solutions and respond to current needs.** It's important not to impose anything on them.

Remember that home and own country are important parts of a person's identity, and the children of refugees lost the connection with their home for now. Making sure that teachers make them feel wanted and liked can help to create stability and safety, which in turn will let them develop in and outside the classroom.

## HOW CAN YOU HELP YOUR NEW CLASSMATE?

You may be wondering, what to do and how to behave if a new colleague/friend/another person who experienced such dramatic events like war appear in your close environment.

The most important and at the same time the best thing you can do is to:

- Notice a new friend;
- Smile;
- Ask if they need anything;
- Talk to them and hear them out, if they need it and you feel prepared for it;

- Act natural – you can talk about things other than war, e.g. common interests;
- If they express the need to talk to an adult about their situation, walk them to a teacher, psychologist or a school pedagogue.

## REMEMBER!

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*It's still a boy/girl your age, has similar interests as you and needs normal contact with their peers.*

*Don't fear a conversation with them. If your friend/colleague doesn't want to talk about their difficult situation, they will certainly let you know. It's good to show your understanding, then.*

## CONTACTS:

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## HOW CAN YOU HELP?

