



BRIEF PSYCHOLOGICAL GUIDE IN A WAR SITUATION

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1. War (and its implications) is a practical problem with psychological dimensions, and its proper management requires psychological solutions.
2. As a result, in order to properly tackle the practical problem, we must first educate ourselves psychologically.
3. We need a rational mindset for psychological training, which is defined (according to the cognitive-behavioural approach of American psychologists Aaron T. Beck and Albert Ellis) by:
 - flexible thinking ('I strongly prefer'),
 - (b) non-catastrophic ('it is extremely bad, but not the worst thing imaginable'),
 - (c) frustration tolerance ('I don't like it and it is extremely difficult to tolerate, but I can go on') and
 - (d) nuanced judgements of persons and situations ('your behaviour is stupid' rather than 'you're stupid'). This mindset will produce negative but healthy emotions, such as worry but not panic or anxiety; dissatisfaction but not anger or aggressiveness; sadness but not depression, which will encourage us to properly address the practical problem. Furthermore, on this emotional backdrop, positive emotions (e.g., you can appreciate your child's accomplishment) and empathetic/sympathetic sentiments towards others might emerge, with the psychological attitude typically being one of realistic optimism.

An irrational mindset is defined by:

- inflexible/absolutist thinking ('must'),
- (b) catastrophizing ('it's horrible, the worst thing that could happen'),
- (c) low frustration tolerance ('I can't stand it') and
- (d) sweeping generalizations ('you're stupid'), we experience toxic negative emotions that block the best response to the practical problem. Furthermore, these emotions prevent the right expression of positive emotionality/emotions and empathetic/sympathetic engagement with others, resulting in a psychological attitude of non-constructive pessimism/realism.

There is, of course, a mindset of detachment ('I don't care') or unfounded optimism/positive illusions ('nothing can happen to me') that leads to demotivation and inefficiency in handling the practical problem.

4. In order to handle the practical problem as successfully as possible, psychological training must also involve self-care and maintaining a healthy lifestyle, such as through diet, sleep, sport, meditation, prayer, etc. Otherwise, we feel distressed (for example, due to a lack of sleep), which makes it difficult to tackle the practical problem adequately.



5. Once we have mentally prepared ourselves (3-4), we may pragmatically focus on the practical problem, and information should only be sought from official/reliable sources, such as authorities and/or quality media. We should not read such information from unofficial sources and/or social networks in implausible locations since it will psychologically contaminate us. Furthermore, we should not constantly focus on this information, but rather check it at pre-determined intervals (e.g., hourly) and/or at intervals prompted by particular events (e.g. special news).
6. It is critical to mentally safeguard our children (and other vulnerable individuals) as part of tackling the practical problem. We can talk to them about war without going into more detail than each child needs in order to satisfy their need for meaning/significance and predictability in relation to the questions they ask, as well as to ensure emotional regulation (by normalizing children's emotions, empathy, sympathy, confidence, security, regulation/self-regulation).
 - Because preschoolers' cognition operations are not yet fully formed, if they have questions about the war, the discussion is carried out using methods that they understand (e.g., concrete analogies with characters from stories/cartoons they know), and special attention is paid to their emotional regulation.
 - Middle childhood and young teens have the ability to apply mental operations, particularly on concrete things; hence, war may be introduced into conversation using concrete methods/examples comprehended by children, and with specific attention paid to their emotional regulation.
 - Teenagers have the cognition of adults but struggle with emotional-behavioural regulation; hence, war can be discussed as an adult, ensuring emotional regulation.

Children's reactions frequently mimic/imitate/learn from adults; hence, our psychological self-regulation will benefit children as well. Lastly, because children may mask their emotions, we must pay attention to the masked forms of their expression (e.g. changes in sleep patterns, eating behaviour, inhibition in social interactions, etc.).

7. War comes with uncertainty. That is why we need an antidote, such as stability, which may be obtained by a daily routine in which, in order to feel that we are living a true existence, we must exhibit (according to the positive psychology developed by the American psychologist Martin Seligman): (a) behaviours that are compatible with two-three core values that we expressly adopt (*meaningful life*); (b) behaviours that are consistent with three-five strengths we have as individuals (*good life*); and (c) behaviours that offer us joy/pleasure (*pleasant life*).
8. Let us mobilize our social support, whether it is more limited or more expansive, based on each individual's psychological type. Practical engagement is also vital in this situation. In the framework of empathy and compassion, in humanitarian efforts to assist refugees such as financial help, the establishment of support groups, the distribution of information materials, the provision of compensation, etc.



9. In life-threatening scenarios (and/or the lives of loved ones), it is critical to have a clear strategy for what we do, where we do it, and with whom we do it (e.g. I take shelter with my family at X). This plan might include information on first aid, emergency response, reducing risky behaviours, and so forth. All of this must be viewed in its educational and preventive approach in the context of Romania having the highest security guarantees in its history and being a part of the most democratic and powerful global structures (NATO, European Union, etc.)
10. Let us carry on as normal as much as possible, living an authentic life as much as possible while observing the war situation, engaging properly, and adjusting to it through a sensible mindset of realistic optimism!

References and resources

- David, D., (2012). *Tratat de psihoterapie cognitive și comportamentale*. Iași: Editura Polirom.
- <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2003/03/war-resilience>
- <https://www.apa.org/topics/resilience/teen-war>
- <https://www.apa.org/topics/resilience/homecoming-war>
- With some adjustments, the UBB (Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca) recommendations for psychological guidance during the pandemic can be used for psychological regulation in the event of war. (https://www.ubbcluj.ro/ro/infoubb/covid19/deciziiubb/Ghid_UBB.pdf). In this regard, we would like to remind you that the national helpline for psychological support during the pandemic - UBB-APCCR/ Ministry of Health/ Vodafone - is still operational and can provide psychological assistance at 021 9081 (Monday through Saturday, between 12.00-20.00).