

HOW TO SURVIVE THE GRIEF OF WAR



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The book “How to deal with losing a loved one” by Valentyna Bondarovska, Ella Lamakh, and Lidiia Kozub was published in 2015 in Kyiv. With the permissions of authors, it was prepared for re-publication after the Russian troops invaded Ukraine. Based on new challenges, the authors updated the text of the book, compiling a psychological support guide for those affected by the Russian military aggression “How to survive the grief of war”, published by NGO “FeminismUA” within the framework of the project “*Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights*” (UAF).

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Feeling of loss after losing a loved one

Loss of a loved one is deep and intense suffering, a real grief.

Living through such grief takes a lot of courage and a long time.

No human can accept the message of loss of a loved one as a reality from get-go; no one can initially really believe that this person is dead.

This grief will not pass fast. It takes many years for people to get used to the thought that their loved one will never come back.

*Look into your soul, find power there.
Identify the things to continue living for.
Do not close your heart, good hopes can heal it.
Hope gives us strength to live.*

Live through your grief in your own way. Each situation of our life is a unique one. If the tears want to come out – allow yourself to cry. Your tears of love will bring you some relief and help you heal. Some people can feel shame for showing weakness.

Keep in mind that pent-up feelings can considerably damage your health, and this can affect your well-being in the future.

One should not wallow in one's grief. Do not wall yourself off from people. People, by their presence, care and attention, with embraces and compassion, will alleviate your suffering. Even a silent walk with a person that understands how you feel can give you a great relief. Remember, everyone is sad together with you, and want to give you a new hope.

The message about the death of a loved one can shock you, cause stress or even mental trauma. After that, comes depression, fear, sorrow, hope, anger. Yet, these feelings pass.

One should find power to live on and to go about your daily business, do things useful for yourself and for others.

Loss of a loved one in your mind is heartache, sorrow, anguish, rage, anger, helplessness, feeling of guilt and despair, because anyone who loses a loved one lives through loss of important relations, change of lifestyle, of thinking, of attitude to yourself and to the world around you.

Deep grief can be exacerbated by a feeling of guilt. You can reprimand yourself for being too harsh to the deceased sometimes, that you quarreled over minor things, that you not always fulfilled his/her wishes or satisfied his/her needs, etc. Stop this line of thinking. Dwelling on regrets like this will not let you fully accept the situation and keep on living.

Accept the fact of loss, allow yourself to think that your loved one, regretfully, is no longer with you. This can be a hard thing to do, but if you do not attempt to tackle the situation, it can cause grave depression.

*Forgive yourself for anger and disappointment,
for inability to prevent the loss,
for all things you wanted to do but did not.*

If attempts of some people just make the pain worse, forgive them for their lack of understanding. Later, when you will be supporting someone else in similar situation, keep in mind the things that should not be said.

*Use the example of those who survived their losses.
They healed – it means you can do it, too.*

If you feel sadness and pain – this is a response to loss and sad events. Admit it.

Sometimes, a person feels better when they stay with people who survived similar grief. You could be able to understand them better, and to provide support to others.

Life goes on, and its meaning is never lost while you are alive.

Life tests people, and life provides power to survive the test. It starts with feeling sad, but with time, you will be able to part with this sadness in a loving and calm manner.

Do not feel like a traitor if you smile or feel joy. Accept it. Your loved one would want you to be happy, after all.

*Remind yourself about the reasons to keep living.
Do things that are important – it helps.*

Make first attempts to get your life in order without the person you lost. These attempts will be the seeds of hope that will grow and become a new full-fledged life.

Do not avoid memories and talks about the lost loved one. If your family has traditions related to that person, keep them going. Do not be afraid of the upcoming holidays, meet them with good memories.

*Emotions can manifest themselves involuntarily
(tears, uneven breathing, inability to speak a word).
Do not be ashamed of this.*

In this period, it is important not just to cry enough, but also to speak enough, even if the speaking comes along with tears. Do not be afraid to hug, and sometimes to cry hugging someone.

Even if people did not know your loved one who died or perished, do not be ashamed to tell them about your life before that person died.

Supporting words and embraces can cause you to cry and to gasp for air, you may feel as if you were “naked”, and everyone pities you.

One needs to learn to respond to emotions and feelings of other people, who sincerely want to express their compassion for your grief. Some do it with a look, others with a word or with an embrace, and you need to learn to accept this.

Do not chase away the people who want to express their compassion, you need their support.

You seek things that remind you of the presence of the one dear to you. In your dreams, you can talk to that person, to take advice, to feel this person cares for you. But the dreams should not make you anxious. As long as humanity exists, many people dream about their relatives and friends that are no longer there.

Make a plan of things to do, and you might find that there are things in that plan that you never thought about before.

From time to time, “small joys of life” – a flower that bloomed in winter on your windowsill, a smile of your child, grandchildren, or lilac blooming outside, can make it a bit easier for your heart. This way, the feeling of joys of life will not be lost.

We become less vigilant when in distress, so you need to be more attentive about your money, documents, and other valuables, and it is preferable that someone you trust knows where you put these things.

Do not hurry to throw away or pass to anyone documents, or even papers with notes. Postpone this for several days, and

then get back to sorting out the papers and documents, already understanding what to do and knowing you need to be attentive about it. Be especially careful with money and valuable things, as you need to consider that your house will probably be visited by various people, some of them might be untrustworthy.

Even if you drive well, avoid driving for a while, as a person in distress usually has a hard time perceiving the situation correctly and overestimates his or her abilities.

If you have children or family members who require your attention and care, better request help from acquaintances or relatives, so that someone is able to help you for a certain period of time.

When in presence of friends and family who need your support themselves, and who also lost their loved ones, behave in an unobtrusive manner. They also want to be heard.

You need to try to have sufficient and timely meals, and rest. Keep in mind, if you do not eat enough, not just your physical and psychological condition deteriorates, it also can cause you to misjudge all kinds of situations. Also, it is advisable to drink enough water, uzvar, or tea.

As a rule, a person living through grief from loss of a loved one does not understand she or he is in need of help, and overestimates their abilities, underplays their physical and mental condition, and think they can get over the pain without support – but this is not the case.

Do not close doors for people who tell you they will come. You feel easier if there is someone at home with you. Do not be afraid to spend hours talking about the person you lost.

Take care of yourself – visit a doctor, or arrange a vacation for yourself. If necessary, get a medical examination and tell the doctor about the loss you are living through (you suffered

enough, so do not cause additional harm to yourself and people around you by neglecting your health).

A visit to a psychologist should not be seen as something scary, shameful or unusual. On the contrary, this is an important and needed thing to do. A psychologist can help you to deal with many problems, and, the main thing, with the grief caused by losing a loved one.

Ukrainian families all around the world do not buy wreathes for funerals, and try not to spend too much for flowers and for the burial itself. They donate saved funds for the needs of living people, and for charity. Possibly, such tradition can help you find people in need of your support. Facing the reality, you become more independent, and, as you live in the present, you distance yourself from the past.

*Postpone any spontaneous decisions you might make,
like selling a house or changing a job.*

Start doing new things and create new traditions linked to the past. Owing to them, you will be able to preserve the memory of your loved one even as your life transits to a new stage.

Give yourself a permission to be in a good mood, to work, to meet friends, as living a full life does not mean betraying the memory.

We know that a tree blooms in spring, gives fruits in summer, and sheds leaves in autumn, in winter the life inside it freezes, yet in spring it is alive again, striving for light and love.

No child is able to deal with the grief caused by death of a loved one without the support of adults. The child does need your sincere and well-considered support.

Remember that accepting death is a very lasting process, and one needs to discuss the things that happened with the child over and over again.

In some cases, the child in question shows no emotions, but this might be even worse, as no one can imagine what is happening in that child's soul.

Try to talk with the child more, answer all the child's questions. If the child does not receive answers, this only will make his or her trauma deeper, and this trauma will affect the child's mental state for long years in the future.

Do not fear to mention the person who died when the child can hear it, as the child needs to feel no one is hiding anything from him/her.

Children also feel a strong need to mention the person who died. It is a mistake to think that talks about death and the dead person can exacerbate the trauma, so it is better to never mention this topic and avoid it. The life goes on, and what happened also is the part of our life.

Recall, together with the child, every good memory from the time spent with the dear person who died, like some joyful events. You can also watch videos or photographs where you are all together, recall various life events, visit the grave. When recalling, the child will at the same time perceives the reality of what happened.

Do not hide your feelings from the child. Do not try to hide your tears. If the adults manifest their pain, the child will also have easier time opening up and showing his or her grief.

Let the child see that you experience the same feelings as you do, that you also have it hard, and that he or she is not alone in his/her grief.

During such conversations with the child, one needs to control themselves – you may cry, but you should not weep uncontrollably. All your attention must be focused on the child.

In this time period, the child has especially acute fear of loneliness, or feels “unneeded”. Long separation periods can be extremely harmful for the child. If the child wants to stay with you before the sleep, let him/her do it.

A child can feel guilty for what happened. If you noticed something like that, you need to persuade the child that he or she is not at all to blame for what happened. Give many arguments, examples and analogies.

One needs to do everything possible to persuade the child they are innocent, as this will help to protect the child from the guilt complex.

Explain to the child that now everyone tries to help you, express their compassion, and one needs to be able to appropriately respond – and if they want to cry, tears should not be held back.

Yet not always the parents (or one parent) are able to cope with the consequences of stress, that the child experienced. In this case, support of a psychologist is necessary.

The stages of experiencing grief are approximately the same for a child and for an adult. Yet, there are some differences that should be taken into account when telling the child about the death of a loved one. Children are able to switch away from a sad event, which they were just informed about, to any positive event, and vice versa. A child might not realize what happened, and might not express their grief as the adults do – for example, a child might not interrupt their play, might not show any emotions.

When informing the child about the death of relatives, one must take into account the following:

- Children 5 to 7 years of age might not fully realize that death is irreversible. If children do not understand this, they can ask again and again when the dead person comes back. One needs to explain again and again that death is forever, it cannot be reversed.
- Initial reactions of a child to the news about the death can be unexpected.
- A child can get angry at the adult who brought the bad news. Often, children respond to such news with words like, “You are lying”, they can yell or become aggressive.

*The adult needs to show understanding and calmness.
Don't try to persuade the child to get a hold of him/ herself.
Because the grief that was not experienced in proper time,
can return later.*

Embrace, and hold your hands together. The message about the loss of a loved one must be clear, said in a very calm voice, using simple words understandable for a child, without going into the details of the death.

One should explain to the child that the feelings they have in this specific situation (fear, despair, aggression, or desire to play with toys) are quite normal, natural, and should not be condemned.

After giving the message, make a pause so that the child has time to realize what was said and to ask questions that they probably will have. At that, consider that often a child has a hard time finding the relevant words to describe their feelings.

Recall some cartoons or legends where a person who died flew to the stars, or became a star. The star that now gives light and protects the living, and now in the sky there is someone who protects us.

Children do share with other children about what happened. Other children might ask your child some questions. She or he needs to be prepared for this, you need to tell him or her how all people are different, and all of us have different responses to your grief.

When an opportunity arises, tell your child that his/her friends might ask some questions, or during the games, to recall about some friends or relatives, or tell stories about relatives who died.

It can happen, and we need to be prepared for this. In such situations, do not be afraid to say that yes, your loved one is no longer with you, and immediately recall something pleasant from your time together, even if you want to cry.

Recall some good memory from your life with your loved one (a pose, a smile, a story, etc.), tell or show it to the child. Let the child recall it and memorize this as well. After that, recall this smile or story with your child.

In times of need, this image will be recalled by the child, and she or he will be able to bring it up in his/her memory in times of need, and this memory could make them feel better, and smile.

Granny, grandfather, or other person who also lost loved ones, could share their experience of how they were dealing with grief, and how they built their life from there on. This can lead to a new connection with relatives, and new awareness about each other's lives.

A child can ask something like, «Why is it that it had to be my loved one who died?». Adults can respond to that in different ways, recalling various legends, stories of heroes who live in the hearts of entire nations.

Try to explain that you have a new life, where you are stronger, and your loved one will stay forever in your memory.

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My new life...
I have a veteran with disability in my family

A story of one woman:

“We were a great healthy family. The war started, my husband went to war, and returned without limbs. At work, they only enabled me to have a vacation for a month. Our child is 5. What to do next? How do I adapt with everything, what is he supposed to do to adapt? How to rebuild everyday life and life for the entire family?”

A story of one woman:

“My husband had 5 contusions. The doctor wrote prescriptions on what to do, and it included physical exercises, reading books aloud, in addition to all other treatment. My husband laughs, he got through the treatment, but he does not want to do all this extra stuff”

Not just these women encountered this very same problem. Many of us women are forced to rebuild our lives due to war.

1. If certain information was entrusted to you, never share it even with your friends and family.

2. Ask your husband/brother/father about the advice, recommendations and consultations provided to them, “What did the doctor say, what advice did she or he give you? What should you do?”. You yourself need to listen to all advice given by a doctor or a psychologist.

3. Don't forget about the state psychological rehabilitation program. The military, combatants, military retirees, who

directly participated in combat, must go through a free psychological and medical rehabilitation at the specialized centers. You can help the veteran understand the necessity of getting the primary examination. When identifying a psychological problem, you can support implementation of the personal psychological rehab plan with your actions. Do not reject the psychological support for your family members.

4. Do not be ashamed to visit a psychologist or psychiatrist for help. In a hospital, a rehabilitation center, where your husband/brother/sister or other relatives, who became a veteran with a disability, there are rehabilitation specialists and psychologists there, so visit the sessions together. Also, you can visit the sessions by yourself. In addition to rehabilitation centers for veterans, there are social service centers at the place where you live. These centers also must have specialists for work with disabilities. Come to that center, and state all issues that are of interest for you.

5. Let them get enough sleep and rest, but don't leave them for a whole day. People with various diseases get tired more, and they need more frequent switching from one type activity to another. Psychological problems, just in the same way, are manifested as tiredness, so switch your activities.

Keep in mind: Be attentive to any signs of suicidal intentions.

Those can be just talks about death, claims like "if I die, this will not be a loss to anyone, but, rather, a relief". Also, actions like suddenly returning all debts, giving out personal things as presents, methodical calls to all friends and acquaintances with apologies. In this case, the affected person will predominantly deal with emotions of prevailing sadness, anguish, sorrow, sometimes sharp mood swings.

In case of suicidal manifestations, speak about the issue directly, without avoiding it. Explain that you care and you

want to help. Use phrases like, “I am with you”, “Allow me to support you”. Encourage the person in question to consult a psychologist or therapist.

Learn carefully the so-called “war rules” developed by the veteran to survive: no emotions; stop in the chaos; instant response in danger; trust only the tested friends, and others.

Remember: Do not take the place of a disabled person in everyday life, do not attempt to do some work for the veteran. They will manage. Just agree that he asks for help if needed. Always speak about your emotions or thoughts truthfully, sincerely and openly. Meet each other half way. Ask him not to keep silent, either. Everything needs to be discussed and expressed.

Every one of you now has a new stage of life starting.

Yes, this happened to you, this happened in your life. You have a new life, new challenges, and you need to deal with them. There is no other way.

A story of one woman:

“First I had a shock: what to do? Poor him, poor child. How do I deal with him, with the child? With the job? Should I quit? My boss did not allow flexible work hours. You deal with it yourself, he said. I was standing near the hospital and cried. A nurse came up to me and starting comforting me. She said there are many guys like this here, and many wives come to visit them. Then she said, the main thing is he doesn’t get addicted to alcohol in this situation. Many of them do because of their despair. Go to an organization of the disabled, they have various methods to work with disabilities”.

1. One of the most complicated issues can be drug or alcohol abuse. Do not leave such symptoms unchecked. Try to get help from a therapist.

2. Address an organization of people with disabilities, there are centers like that all around Ukraine. They have many different methods and know the laws, they have lawyers. Also, veteran organizations have their centers and hotlines.

3. Do not show pity in actions or words. Do not directly ask things like, “How are you? Did you feel fear? What did you remember best, your impressions”, etc.

4. Make an agreement that you will learn to live anew together. I can do some things, you can do some things, but you do things differently, perhaps within a different time limit. Agree to learn new movements like a child who learns to walk or eat.

5. Try to suggest a schedule, or a list of assignments for everyone (for all family members). Divide the duties and the chores. Try to follow it, try to create things together.

6. Create new rules, traditions and customs together. Re-format. Do things you’ve never done before.

7. Address the utility services and ask to arrange handrails or a ramp. For this, you need to make relevant applications, and follow through with them.

8. Try to arrange the home in a way that makes it safe in new conditions.

9. Keep ironic attitude about problems and events. Seek similarities.

10. Don’t be afraid to recall. Make a rule of recalling pleasant moments from the past life. There were such moments, and there will be new ones. This passed, yet you need to keep it with you in your memories, which support you and bring you together.

A story of one woman:

“I never thought that I will be able to learn to become a psychologist. I decided to do it for myself, for my family. And now I already practice the profession, and get income from it”

Learn psychological self-help techniques.

Remember: there are many courses and online lessons, some of them are free. At online resources, there are always announcements about free courses and lessons on various topics, especially for civil society organization. Ask representatives of the civil society organizations of your city if you can take these courses from their organization.

To get psychological support, you can come for help:

- to a specialist indicated by a doctor in the referral;
- to a multidisciplinary team of a medical institution;
- to the specialist you can select from the Register of psychological support service providers.

Psychological rehabilitation support can be received either individually or in family/group format.

Keep in mind, veterans may become distant and avoid communications. Do not insist on proceeding with communication with phrases like, “You need to accompany me to this birthday or to a café”. Yet you should insist on visits to a doctor or psychologist. Please research the difference between psychiatrist, therapist, and psychologist, and how each of them can help.

A story of one woman:

“My husband kept saying – they died, and I am alive. They fight, I can no longer do it. He was irritated, he was yelling. I did not know where to hide from these constant accusations of all and everyone”

11. Keep in mind, most people feel guilty towards their brothers-in-arms. Especially about the wounded or dead ones. Repeating similar phrases like “This is not your fault” can provoke a fit of anger.

12. Be prepared to the following physical symptoms: sleep disorders, breath disorders; various types of pain, from headache to stomach ache or aching limbs; inability to relax, and, as a consequence, exhaustion and weakness; loss of appetite, or overeating.

13. Confidentiality. This is an obligatory condition for the specialists of medical, educational, psychological and social spheres. At the same time, you can tell the specialists that you are serious about confidentiality of information and of the visits.

14. Labor sphere. There can be different kinds of work. Discover new specialties. Do not be afraid to come to an unemployment center. There are many various types of courses online, for learning new professions. The main thing is not to say things like “I don’t want to do it, I cannot do it, nothing will come out of it, this is not my thing”. You can make it, and you can try anything.

15. Join the work of civil society organizations, or create your own civil society organization, help others. Civil society organizations can provide services to population or to some groups of people, and receive grants for these activities. Online, you will find a lot of information on this.

Intimate relationships and sex. In the intimate sphere, stay sensitive and tolerant. Do not stop having sex if your health allows it. Visit a sex shop together and buy some new things for new conditions and situations. This also helps to keep the relations between the spouses strong.

Remember: the best factor for suicide prevention is strong relations with the family. This is especially true for veterans with a disability.

No one will plan your further life better than you can. At the same time, there are many online groups for people in various circumstances. Try to ask questions and communicate in the relevant groups.

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***Everyone thinks that I am old,
but I know what I want and what I need***

A story of one woman:

“I am over 70 already, and my children mostly think that they need to take care about me, tell me what to do and how”.

A story of one woman:

“I waited for my children to find someone to accompany me to leave the occupied territory. They kept saying that it is dangerous, that people are afraid to accompany me. Then, I visited my neighbors, and we agreed that when they evacuate, they will pick me up, too. This way, we left the place”.

Advice for us, who are seen as too old to be able to do anything:

Don't be afraid to take risks, there is only one life and you should not get attached to what we already have: a new refrigerator, a house, pets you are not ready to leave behind. Yes, it is hard, yet you need to be safe. And where is safety?

Yes, our life was not like the life of young people now, who have a lot of choice about what to buy, and all things are so different, so many to choose from. We sometimes had to sleep at railroad stations in the cities we came to with the goal of finding our place, or in hospitals, we had to skip meals because we had no money, sometimes we did it to save money for some household items or for children. And now, we feel attached to everything we have, we don't want to leave it all behind.

YET...

Do we really need all these things at this point? When we started our lives, did we have it all? Do our children and grandchildren really need the things that we accumulated?

A story of one woman:

“I was buying things and did not use them, I thought it will be useful for my children and grandchildren, I wanted to buy everything for them so that they are never in need, like I was, but when they came to me they said they do not need those things, they are too old and old-fashioned, even the house is not properly built, money is needed to rebuild it properly, but they don’t want to live in the village, anyway. So who will now have it all?”.

The needed things:

Review all the things you value to the point it is hard for you to part with those things, and at the same time think this, “I want to share it all, the time has come to gift it to someone, to do a good thing”. Plan what and whom to gift. Some things can be locked in the house, some can be left as they are, some can be given to good people, some can be just thrown away. And you will see that you don’t need as many things as you thought you did.

Have your evacuation bag or suitcase at hand. Stash there your documents and some things you value. Think carefully on what to take, as the bag should not be too heavy. Keys, IDs? Did you take your underwear, some warm clothes, at least a couple of them. Also, don’t forget the medications. Let them be there.

A story of one woman:

“I had no evacuation suitcase, I thought I would never leave, because if I do, what happens to my dogs and

cats? I simply will not go. But it did not happen like that. I had to leave immediately. I thought I was calm, but where did panic come from? I packed my suitcase and I ran. But later, when I arrived to a new place, I saw that I packed three kitchen towels, I took some of my documents, but not all. Only one pair of slippers. And one pair of socks. What did I think when I was packing?”

Take care about the animals before you leave, think whom you can give them to. Unleash them, open doors for them, let them be able to walk freely.

Remember, animals will be able to take care of themselves if they are free. Animals can be given to volunteers, to the military, to neighbors, or just let them walk. You will be able to have new pets in the future. And the ones you leave probably will be able to meet you again if you manage to return. Think in a positive manner, about yourself especially, talk to your pets that are far from you. I am sure they feel your love.

But the main thing now is your safety.

My health

At all centers for internally displaced people, at shelters, there are nurses, doctors, blood pressure measuring devices, and medications. Yet you need to have with you your medical record, or the list of medications you take. In the modern world, you can get medical help everywhere, so don't be afraid to move because of fear to lose medical care. For the elderly, in all cities and villages shelters were created, centers, or at least rooms/offices. There, there are medications and other means for medical care.

A story of one woman:

“Don’t scare us saying we are sick. I am generally a healthy person, I am elderly, but not unhealthy. Don’t ascribe to me any diseases. My neighbors are also healthy, well, maybe we move somewhat slowly. Some of us need medications for preventing blood pressure troubles. But I have those”

A story of one woman:

“Even if I have a disability, I can take care of myself. I will ask for support. I got used to the fact that people with disabilities have a kind of different life, we do things differently, we have different needs. Yet I will and I want to keep living”.

Money for life

We know that money provides us with everything necessary for life: housing, food, clothing. We often think that only money helps to fulfill the desires that we have. In fact, this is not always the case.

A story of one woman:

“I don’t have money to move. I told myself: I will not go, as I do not know where I can end up. Yet I had to leave in an emergency situation. And it happened so, that everywhere on the way I met volunteers, support centers and people who were coming and helping. They even made calls for me, were buying things for me, giving me things for free. And they helped me do the paperwork on pension and other documents. So what was I afraid for, why did I panic?”

Do not be scared to ask, to request help. Sometimes it happens that a person is ashamed of offering help, or giving

money, and just waits for your request for help. Some see it as something shameful. But consider, how are people supposed to find out about your needs if you don't voice them?

Learning new things is always interesting and useful: "I have never been a top student and I studied mediocre at school, but over the years I began to discover opportunities for self-development more and more, I use all the opportunities of the modern world for this".

A story of one woman:

"When the war started, my daughter-in-law urgently bought a new smartphone for me and, despite my reluctance, forced me to learn how to use it. Then she wrote detailed instructions in a notebook on how to use each app separately. It so happened that I was afraid to leave the occupied territory, but a new gadget in my 80s is an opportunity for me to communicate with my relatives, read the news and survive the occupation. If I can't do something, I go to a young neighbor, and she helps me. It seems to me that I myself am getting younger at the same time".

Do not be afraid to start learning – this improves our health and our memory, helps against some diseases. Learn the online technologies, even if you do not have the necessary devices of your own, read, write, learn the language. You can even pay for your utilities online now. Young people or other volunteers will help you.

Violence is possible:

Violence can be of different types: psychological, physical, sexual, economic. Yes, it happens. Yes, it is possible.

A story of one woman:

“I was not able to leave the occupied village. At first, I did not want to, later I could not. In our village, a 75-old woman was raped by the Russians, in her mouth. They were pouring sperm on her face, filming this, and then showing this video to other women in the village. If we do not obey them, they will do the same with us”.

Do not be afraid to tell your stories to the specially trained people. Those people can be your neighbor, a psychologist, a social worker, a police officer, a head of the community or a village elder.

Even if you do not know them, trust them, as it is their job to help you, to listen to you. Even if you know them from the time they were kids, now they have certain official positions, and they have a duty to listen to you, and to help you. Do not be afraid of the publicity. Publicity can be different on different topics. But do not hold these things inside. The problem of violence can ruin us from within. Let them know. Everyone knows about everything. I am not afraid – yes, this happened in my life, and I need to accept it and to find a way to let my feelings out.

- I have friends all around the world. I know this for sure.
- Wherever I go, there are always people who listen to me, who are the same age I am, and there are those who need my help.
- We will find each other, unite, and will support each other.

A story of one woman:

“I was so afraid that no one would need me. Who will be at my side? I have some friends, and they are all

here. Why should I go somewhere? But it did not happen as planned. Now I have new friends, and we talk, tell each other stories, support each other, give and take advice. We even celebrate birthdays. It's not like before, but this also will become a memory. New stories in my life, so it happened. And why not?"

Friends are an important part of almost any person's life. A positive attitude, sincerity and openness to people are crucial for successful communication. Quite often, it is enough to make the first step toward, and you will make new friends. Don't be afraid to trust. Today, quite often communication goes into the "virtual" plane in various networks and by phone. Do not forget to devote time to in-person communication.

- I can take care of children.
- I know there is no such thing as no one's children.
- I can take care of them.
- I want to do it.
- And they need one more granny.

A story of one woman:

"I became a granny again. My grandchildren went their own separate ways, and here we have a girl and a boy, who spend all days in their phone, their parents are busy, there is no one to stay with them. I came up to them and started asking about the weather, about the sun, treated them with some biscuits that I had in my pocket. Then I asked them to teach me to play their games. So I spent that day like this. And then, they started visiting me, and their mother asked me to stay with them. I am so happy I can take care of children. I will teach them everything I know"

Set some time aside for the children, regardless of whether those are your children or not. There are many children who are neglected, or need some attention. They need to learn, to develop, and parents are busy, or gone. Take care of them and do not expect anything. Do it for yourself. Even an hour of helping children, or just staying with children, will change your life.

Level of responsibility:

“During my long life path, I had to solve a significant number of tasks. I am used to constantly taking care of solving problems at work, in my personal life, in helping children, grandchildren or great-grandchildren. Sometimes I'm worried, I can't sleep peacefully, thinking that I'm not helping my relatives enough”.

A story of one woman:

“While my husband was alive, we would constantly allocate a significant portion of our pensions for our grandson, who is studying at a University in Kyiv. And now my husband died, and I only have one pension, and I have to pay for electricity and gas. Now I can't help and will probably become an unnecessary burden. Because now my grandson calls me less often, although he repeats that he loves me very much”

Do not even think that you are a burden. Today, in times of war, young people are very vulnerable and have many problems with education, work, surviving shelling and personal relationships. Every year, your grandchildren and great-grandchildren grow up and no longer need excessive care. Do not take too much responsibility on yourself. You have done enough in your life, and your children and

grandchildren are grateful for it and will be comforted if you pay more attention to yourself personally. Because your well-being is important to them.

I am in occupation:

“I always remember that the occupiers’ behavior can be too unpredictable. Therefore, I leave the house only when absolutely necessary. I always move collectedly and calmly, without drawing attention to myself. In direct confrontation with the occupiers, I do not examine them closely, I do not argue. I remember that my main task is to survive”.

A story of one woman:

“I was calmly walking to the open-air market, when suddenly my phone rang. With a sharp movement, I pulled it out of my pocket, while passing by an occupant. And he hit me with the butt of a machine gun and knocked me to the ground”

Overestimating and underestimating the behavior of the occupiers is dangerous. Do not argue with them, follow their orders. Do not pay attention to their activity, do not ask them for anything and do not try to convince them in any way. In case of a direct attack, lie down without hesitation on the floor, pull your legs up to your chest, and protect your head with your hands. If you go with grandchildren, prepare them for contact. Teach them to answer briefly and concisely. Explain that we are playing war, and it has these rules. If you follow them, everything will most likely be fine.

I am being intimidated:

A story of one woman:

“I remember my parents' stories about intimidation during the communist terror. During the occupation,

you are deprived of the right to protection against their arbitrariness. Different methods can be used for intimidation, from conducting special information and psychological operations (IPSO) to physical abuse”

From the story of an elderly woman who is under occupation in the left-bank part of Khersonska oblast:

“My son was working in Poland at the time the war started. But he returned and joined the ranks of the Armed Forces to defend his native land from the enemy. Alas, the sun went out ... he died... I didn't even have a chance to say goodbye to my baby. In a moment of despair, I shared with my neighbor. In the morning, the occupiers came and started mocking me, saying that I had raised a fascist and that I would be shot as an “enemy element” I replied that I don't care now, but let them burn in hell... Having contact with a government employee in the controlled territory, I asked that my son be buried in Kherson and the procedure recorded on video. Now I know that I must survive the occupation and after liberation bring my son's body to his birth place”.

From the story of another mother:

“In my older years, the occupiers took me “to the basement” already twice, conducting a so-called “preventive conversation”. In fact, threats and intimidation. Once they took me to the sea to execute me, but fired their shots into the air. And all because they found out that my son works in the controlled territory in the military administration”.

While under occupation, do not share any information about your relatives, even with the people you trust. After all,

coercive measures may be applied to them, and they will have to tell. Instead, you can write everything you want to tell on paper and then burn it.

Be critical of all the information you hear. In order not to become a victim of intimidation, remember that often lies can be so big that it is difficult not to believe them. It is obvious that the lies are presented as if everyone knows it. In the information you hear from your neighbors, on TV, a small part may be true to inspire confidence, and a large part may be false. Propaganda often makes a mountain out of a molehill to divide residents into warring camps. Trust only official sources of information. Then you will be beyond the reach of any intimidation.

I want to go home:

“After leaving the occupation, I broke my established way of life, I don't know when (or if) I will be able to return to my native land. But I understand that I was deprived of it by force. I allow myself to experience these feelings”.

From women's stories:

“I left the South of Ukraine for the Western region. Everything is different here. Completely different customs, language, and traditions. I don't know why, but I often feel great fear, even though they don't shoot here”.

“My daughter took me with my husband and grandchildren to the controlled territory, and she herself returned to the occupation to keep the house. I feel guilty all the time that it was she who stayed, and not me”.

“I had my own house, my garden, vegetable garden, yard... now I live in a shelter. I am not alone here. We

prepare food one at a time. I can't afford the simple possibility of eating what I'm used to. And most importantly, I don't have a place where I can be peacefully by myself”.

“I am ashamed to go to humanitarian headquarters, stand in line for help, receive clothes from strangers. It was all my own. I have never asked anyone in my entire life”.

“I have been living abroad for more than a year. I lack communication. I don't know the language. You have to talk only with immigrants like me, but I have almost nothing in common with them. It is very difficult. I'll probably die here, in a foreign land”.

- Losing the land where you were born or lived most of your life is certainly a great tragedy. But you must realize that even after returning home, it will never be the same again. Therefore, try to look at the situation from a different point of view. Remain yourself, do not destroy the inner integrity. No one can take away who you are.
- While preserving your values, study the elements of another country's culture. Remember that it is not easy for them to accept you either. By applying your new knowledge, you will keep your spirit young and will be able to adapt to new conditions more easily.
- Having left your loved ones behind, or lost them during war, you may feel intense pain and guilt just because you survived or are in safety. Pain must be experienced like any other emotion and move on. Remember that you can always turn to a psychologist for help. This is not a manifestation of womanly weakness or helplessness.

A woman is always a woman:

“I know that a woman always remains a woman. That's why I pay attention to my appearance. I dye my hair on time, whenever possible I visit a beauty salon for the simplest procedures. I do a set of physical exercises every day, I find time for walks in the fresh air. But I like to buy at least small new things for myself”.

A story of one woman:

“I already forgot when I looked at myself in the mirror. Why to see the next wrinkles or dark circles under the eyes. Everything is already in the past. All the more so now during the war”.

For many people, life seems like an ordinary descent from charming youth to infirm old age. In fact, this is not the case at all. If in youth it was a fountain of energy, then in old age it is an ocean of wisdom. The beauty and attractiveness of each age is undeniable. After all, true beauty comes from a person's heart and does not depend on age at all. However, try to change established approaches and daily habits. Give preference to self-care, walks, physical exercises. Spend your free time enjoying visiting cultural sites. Ask yourself: “When was the last time I went to the theater, to a concert, or just to the library?”. Probably the last visits were only to events where your grandchildren, who have already traveled around the world, performed on stage.

Love yourself, you are beautiful!

All the best to us all in our beautiful old age.

Authors of the section:

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Additional sources:

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