



FAMILIES FOR RUSSIAN AND UKRAINIAN ADOPTION
Including Neighboring Countries
HOPE, HELP AND COMMUNITY FOR ADOPTIVE FAMILIES

FRUA INC Teachable Moment Guide: Crisis in Ukraine

BACKGROUND:

From time to time, world events occur that impact children, whether they live in their biological family or have been adopted. Children who were adopted can sometimes be impacted more than biological children by these events, because these things can raise questions in their minds about identity, fears about safety and be magnified by residual issues of early trauma and attachment problem.

The current crisis between the governments of Ukraine and Russia, involving action by the Russian government against Ukrainian sovereignty following its government's reorganization, could trigger concerns in our children. This is a teachable moment, when you can reassure children, while helping them understand big ideas about the world in which they are growing up.

QUESTIONS CHILDREN AND STUDENTS MIGHT ASK:

Q. I don't understand what is happening between Ukraine and Russia. Why did Russia invade Crimea/Ukraine?

A. Boris Gindis, Ph.D., FRUA INC Advisory Board member, Child Psychologist with the Center for Cognitive-Development Assessment and Remediation, suggests that our responses should depend upon the child's age, his/her association with a country (Russia or Ukraine), and the degree of personal significance of this issue.

For younger children (up to the age of 7) Dr. Gindis suggests that "it could be explained as a 'quarrel between two countries as it happens in a family sometimes'".

For pre-adolescents, he believes, "it depends on their degree of involvement; it could be a brief formal remark that it is all politics, and because of turmoil in Ukraine the Russian government took away some land from Ukraine. Try to convey that this was government, not people, who did this".

And with the older children – adolescents and young adults, "You have to share your own views on this situation and sincerely express your feelings and ask them about theirs".

Q. Are we going to war with Russia?

A. There has been absolutely no indication of war between the USA and Russia, and neither government has expressed any desire to go to war. The representatives of many countries are talking with one another and trying to find a peaceful way to settle these issues.

Even though this conflict is very scary to hear about, reassure your child that he/she is very safe and not apt to be affected by this conflict.

Q. Is the Russian government going to invade the area or country that I was born in too?

A. Karen Berman, past FRUA Chair, advises: “We don’t know if that would happen or what it would look like. Sometimes kids and adults have to sit with not knowing all the answers – there can be a conversation that ‘adults don’t always have the answers, that not knowing can be hard or even a bit scary. That being said, it is unlikely that this will happen. I can understand why you may be thinking about it. If it does happen, I am always here for you and we will talk and learn all about it.’”

Q. I don't understand...why doesn't Ukraine fight back?

A. Sometimes the best way to resolve things is not to fight. Sometimes the best thing is to try to talk about it, avoiding the harming of others or the taking of lives. Sometimes an enemy is too big to fight directly. Sometimes a country needs what are called “allies,” people or governments who are on your side who can help the world understand your concerns, or who can stand up to the governments who want to fight. Because of the other things going on in Ukraine related to its new government, the Ukrainian government does not want a war.

Q. Why did Crimea vote to become part of Russia again? If they want to be part of Russia, why can't they?

A. Certainly the majority of residents in Crimea share a long and complicated history with Russia and explaining this can be convoluted and confusing. Facts to cover might include:

- The Crimea & Eastern Ukraine have a long history that is intertwined with Russia’s whereas Western Ukraine’s culture & history is more aligned with the other countries of Eastern Europe.
- It is unknown how many voters felt able to freely vote their own convictions. The Crimean area was being occupied with armed Russian soldiers at the time the vote was taken. Many people are concerned that the Crimean people may have been too intimidated to vote their true feelings.
- The way the election was conducted was illegal according to the Ukrainian constitution and United Nations policies.

Q. Can I ever visit my birth country, Ukraine, again?

A. The territorial dispute remains complicated and what portions of Ukraine may become part of Russia is unknown. Yes, you should be able to visit both Ukraine and Russia, although this year might not be a good time to go to Crimea and eastern regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, as the Ukrainian and Russian governments are resolving their differences. Ukraine does not require visas for Americans who stay in country less than 90 days. Children adopted from Ukraine can visit the country and do not need to have Ukrainian passports; they can visit on their American ones. At this point children who were adopted from Ukraine can travel to Russia on their American passport. Your family should check the State Department website for alerts related to adoption and travel.

Q. I was born in a country close to Ukraine. Is it dangerous to visit my birth country at this time?

A. At this time there is no indication of any difficulties with other countries related to this problem between the Russian and Ukrainian governments. Again, your family should always check the State Department website for alerts related to adoption and travel.

Q. I was adopted from Ukraine and I am a young man over the age of 16. If I visit my birth country will I be drafted into the military to fight Russia? If I was adopted from Russia and I want to visit my birth country will I be drafted into the military there to fight Ukraine?

A. The latest information that we have gathered is that young men who were adopted from Ukraine and live in another country cannot serve in the Ukrainian army because they became permanent residents of another country as minors. The rule in Russia has heretofore been that Russian citizens who are residents of another country are not “entitled” to serve in the Russian military either. However, several Russian advisors have expressed the opinion that young men between the ages of 18 to 27, who were adopted from Russia, do have some risk of being conscripted when they travel to Russia because the rules can change suddenly.

Q. Some of the kids in my class, who know I'm Russian, are calling me names. I haven't done anything wrong and I don't understand why they are being so mean. Are Russians bad?

A. Your ethnic heritage, and your birth country is a part of you, but it does not make you who you are. People of any specific heritage are never “bad” because of their ancestry or heritage. The decisions that any country’s government makes, good or bad, do not in any way reflect the character of the people who claim heritage from that country.

You are an American citizen who happens to have been born in Russia. Like hundreds of thousands of Americans, who were born somewhere else, what you make of yourself is up to you. The people who call themselves United States citizens, and you are one, have come from every country of the world over the course of over 230 years of existence, and before that as well. Every American’s family history came from somewhere else too, even the Native Americans. You are just a more recent immigrant. You may wish to ask your parents or your teacher for help. You could also turn the question around and ask your classmates if they know from what countries their families originally came. In fact, this could be a good class assignment, to help students understand the diversity that has made our country what it is.

Q. Will something happen to my birth family? What about my friends?

A. Not knowing is very scary. The take-over appears to have been a tense time, but Ukrainians have shown a remarkable restraint in not engaging Russian citizens or forces. War is not good for children, or for anyone else for that matter. Many families are moving to areas far away from the conflict to stay safe. For the people who cannot leave there are several charities involved in bringing them food and supplies and trying to keep them safe.

Q. What will happen to the “Social Homes” (orphanages) in the Crimea area?

A. At the start of the conflict there were reportedly 22 Social Homes with 3600 children living in them in Crimea. It has been difficult to get specific information about what is happening in each Social Home, but several organizations are involved in keeping the children safe. The Crimean Emergencies Ministry has reached out to Ukrainian and Russian organizations to continue support and over 80 tons of food has been sent to Crimean children’s homes and orphanages by Russia’s North Caucasus Republic of Ingushetia. Most of the children have now been removed from the area of conflict. The Ukrainian Education Minister, Serhiy Kvit, has arranged for the remaining children to be safely transported to summer camps in the mountains. After camp is over the charities will help the Ukrainian government find spaces for the children away from the conflict.

Q. I thought I was from the country of Ukraine, but now Russia runs the part of Crimea where I was born. So now, I don't know who I am or where I'm from. It makes me angry and I don't know what to do.

A. Feelings of confusion, anger and sadness are emotions that we all experience from time to time. It would be helpful for you to share these feelings with your parents. Many adoptees have questions and confusion related to their own identity, especially as it relates to their birth heritage. This situation between Russia and Ukraine can stir up these feelings. It may also be helpful to discuss these issues with your family therapist, spiritual advisor, or school counselor. Being able to talk freely about how you feel can help you to work through the issues, see things clearly and grow. It is important for you to feel understood and supported,

Your ethnic heritage, and your birth country is a part of you, but it does not account for all of who you are. History tells us that the names and the borders of countries change greatly over decades, or centuries, or over hundreds of years. Our current era is no exception, and the fact that you are an American citizen is a direct result of the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991.

This may be a good time to learn more about geography. Ask to see an Atlas. This is where you can learn about maps & about why the borders of countries change. See if you can see why some countries are invaded, which have natural protections, which countries have started wars, which have been conquered time after time, & why this might be so. Geography is closely related to the world's history.

Q. Why do so many Ukrainians speak Russian? Why did I understand Russian and not Ukrainian when you met me? Am I really Ukrainian if I spoke Russian?

A. The Ukrainian language is a Slavic language somewhat related to Russian and uses the Cyrillic alphabet. The history of Ukraine and Russia is intertwined over thousands of years, and so the Russian language has always competed with the Ukrainian language in the land of Ukraine.

During the 70 years of Soviet rule, the Ukrainian language was the official language in the Ukrainian SSR. However the attitude of the Soviet leadership was often discouraging towards the speaking of Ukrainian. The Soviet Union maintained that the Russian language was the “all-Union state language”. Throughout all of the Soviet republics and bloc countries Russian was spoken as “a language of inter-ethnic communication”.

Russian is now a recognized regional language in Ukraine, and there are even other people who live in Ukraine who speak neither Russian nor Ukrainian. The language that you spoke when you lived there does not preclude the fact that your heritage is Ukrainian.

Q. Can I still call myself Ukrainian even if Russia has invaded the area of Ukraine that I am from? Will I lose my Ukrainian citizenship?

A. You were born in Ukraine. When you left the country you were Ukrainian. Although you are now an American citizen, you have dual citizenship. The Ukrainian official records will continue to list you as a Ukrainian citizen. This does not change, no matter what changes occur in the country after you leave.

Q. How can we help the children in the orphanages? Will people try to hurt them or take their food? Can we protect them?

A. There are several organizations, private and governmental, looking out for the welfare of the children who live/lived in Crimean and Eastern Ukraine “Social Homes” (orphanages). They are closely monitoring the safety, and the provision of food and supplies needed by the institutions. They are attempting to assure that these needs are being met.

It has been suggested by some parents who have been involved with orphan/orphanage support in Ukraine that the following charities might be able to provide suggestions on the best way for families to help Crimean and Ukrainian “Social Homes”. Please note that these are not FRUA *INC* related organizations, nor does this list constitute a recommendation of these organizations. This information is provided purely as a starting point for families to gather information.

- Alliance for Ukraine Without Orphans, <http://www.ukrainewithoutorphans.org/>
- River of Joy – Crimea, <http://www.riverofjoy-crimea.org/>
- Life2Orphans - <http://www.life2orphans.org/>
- Help Us Help The Children - <http://www.chornobyl.ca/Projects-Help-Us-Help-The-Children.html>

Q. How do we begin the conversation?

A. Deborah D. Gray, MSW, FRUA INC Advisory Board member, Nurturing Attachments Therapist, and author of Attaching Through Love, Hugs and Play; Simple Strategies to Help Build Connections with Your Child, Attaching in Adoption: Practical Tools for Today’s Parents and Nurturing Adoptions: Creating Resilience After Neglect and Trauma, suggests a guided discussion with kids along these lines:

“What do you do if you have two friends, from two different soccer teams, who are arguing? Suppose they are arguing over one of the fields. One of the teams is signed up, but the other team gets on the field and will not leave.

Do you have to take sides? Suppose you and the rest of your friends used to play on one team or the other, but are on a new team now. Should you split your team up, taking sides, depending on the team you used to play on? Or, would it be better to keep your team strong?

This is a little bit like the current problem between Russia and the Ukraine. Some of the kids from FRUA are from the Ukraine, some from Russia. Do you have to take sides? Or, would it be better to enjoy being of the US/FRUA team and keep a good relationship with everybody?

There are many points of view over the Crimea Region. Maybe you would like to study the situation, forming an opinion. But no matter what opinion you form, you can still respect the culture of both countries and enjoy your friends in FRUA”

QUESTIONS PARENTS OR TEACHERS MIGHT ASK:

Q. What signs should I look for that this is bothering my child/student?

A. Look for behavior that is outside of his or her normal range. A child may exhibit greater than normal signs of anxiety, an inability to settle down to sleep, or to lessons, or suddenly not be able to play calmly with friends. The child's eating habits might change, she/he might become more withdrawn, or a normally calm child may suddenly become more agitated, pick fights with others, or exhibit self-harming behavior.

Be on the look-out for signs that a child might be being teased or bullied by other students about their ethnicity, or being either Russian or Ukrainian. These can come up even if your child is from Bulgaria! A child might not even realize that he/she should tell someone about this.

Older children are going to be exposed to information about the conflict between Ukraine and Russia on the Internet or television. Developmental specialists suggest that adults sit down and watch the news with these children so that they can then discuss what is happening and what it means.

Q. What kinds of questions might my child/student ask?

A. Depending upon the age of your child, many questions may enter her mind, which she/he may become anxious about, but may not voice. These unasked questions may relate to identity, to safety for her/himself and others he/she vaguely remembers, or include the broad question of why people or countries fight.

Whether or not your child ever knew her birth family, and depending upon the age of your child, he/she may worry for the safety of people he/she has only heard about as a part of her life story.

Q. How do I talk about this with my child/student?

A. You may not want to wait until the child asks a question, because some children worry, without being able to ask or talk about it. Depending upon the behavior you observe, you might be the one to raise the topic. Your questions of them, and your answers, should be age-appropriate. A six-year-old doesn't need a long explanation about sovereign borders; he might only need to be reassured that America will not be invaded, or that his birth family is safe.

Whenever possible it seems to work best to listen to your child before talking to him/her. An open-ended question allows the child to take the lead and address the areas that worry her/him the most, such as "What do you think about what has been going on in Ukraine?" There are also many children's books that may be a good way to start off a conversation.

Q. If my under-age child is from somewhere in Crimea and I want to take him back for a visit, what document do I ask for...he has a Ukrainian passport, but now Crimea is part of Russia. What do I do?

A. These kinds of questions should be referred to the U.S. Department of State's Office of Children's Issues and the Department of Immigration, as they are in the best position to determine these answers.

Q. My child is from an orphanage in Crimea that was Ukrainian, but is now part of Russia. To whom and how do I file my post-placement reports?

A. That answer is not known at this time, but FRUA *INC* is attempting to get an answer. You may check on <http://www.frua.org> (if we get the answer, we will include this in the Resources - Post Placement Reports tab) or go to the related website of the U.S. Dept. of State's Office of Children's issues, as they are in the best position to determine these answers: adoption.state.gov/ukraine



From Wikipedia: map of the 2014 pro-Russian protests and unrest in Ukraine, by oblast. Severity of the unrest, at its peak, is indicated by the colouring. 'RSA' indicates 'Regional State Administration', the name for the governments of the oblasts (regions) of Ukraine.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR DISCUSSIONS (WIKIPEDIA):
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2014_pro-Russian_unrest_in_Ukraine

Date	23 February 2014–ongoing
Location	Eastern Ukraine Southern Ukraine Crimea
Causes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opposition to the Euromaidan, 2014 Ukrainian revolution, and the composition of the transitional government
Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Union with Russia • Transforming Ukraine into a federal state • Referendums on status for Eastern Ukraine and Southern Ukraine • Establishing Russian as a second official language in Ukraine
Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protests • Armed insurgency • Occupation of administrative buildings
Status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation • Insurgents take control of parts of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts • Government counteroffensive, initiating the war in the Donbass region.

Parties to the civil conflict	
<p>Ukrainian Government</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Security Service of Ukraine • Ministry of Internal Affairs • Armed Forces of Ukraine <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ukrainian Ground Forces • National Guard of Ukraine • Euromaidan activists • Right Sector • Territorial defence battalions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aidar Battalion • Azov Battalion • Dnipro Battalion • Donbas Battalion • Kharkiv Battalion 	<p>Pro-Russian activists</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Novorossiya <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donetsk People's Republic • Luhansk People's Republic • Donbass People's Militia • Vostok Battalion • Russian Orthodox Army • Army of the Southeast • Oplot Battalion • Zarya Battalion • Kalmius Battalion • Ukrainian police and military defectors • Union of Mine Workers <p>Russian activists</p> <p>Russian Federation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Armed Forces of Russia(in Crimea and Donbass) • Chechen and Russian paramilitaries
Number	
~30,000	~10,000 to ~20,000

MORE ONLINE INFORMATION CAN BE FOUND AT:

- “Behind the Headlines: History and Geography Help Explain Ukraine Crisis”; National Geographic for Kids: <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/02/140224-ukraine-protests-president-ousted-history-geography-background/>
- “Crisis in Ukraine”; Scholastic News: <http://magazines.scholastic.com/news/2014/03/Crisis-in-Ukraine>
- “Five Simple Things That Help Explain What’s Happening in Ukraine”; Boston.com: http://www.boston.com/news/source/2014/03/5_simple_things_that_explain_whats_happening_in_ukraine.html
- “Kiev in Chaos; Teaching About the Crisis in Ukraine”; New York Times: http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/02/25/kyiv-in-chaos-teaching-about-the-crisis-in-ukraine/?_php=true&_type=blogs&_r=0
- “Renewed Violence in Ukraine”; Teaching Kids News: <http://teachingkidsnews.com/2014/02/19/1-renewed-violence-ukraine/>
- “Trouble In Ukraine”; Time for Kids”: <http://www.timeforkids.com/news/trouble-ukraine/149886>
- “The Ukraine Conflict Explained to Children”; Miss Tyler-Smith’s Montessori 9-12 Class Blog: <http://m9-12.blogspot.com/2014/03/the-ukraine-conflict-explained-to.html>
- “Ukraine Conflict in Maps”; Australian Broadcasting Company: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/interactives/ukraine-conflict-in-maps/>
- “2014 – Pro-Russian unrest in Ukraine”; Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2014_pro-Russian_unrest_in_Ukraine