

From the Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports at UCLA*

The War in Iran: Update on Supporting Students (March 5, 2026)

The conflict has escalated rapidly over the past week, with the U.S. and Israel conducting extensive strikes throughout Iran and Iran responding across the region. This fast moving conflict continues to generate distress, uncertainty, and grief for many.

How Students May Be Affected

As with any major crisis, students' reactions will vary:

Some may follow events continuously through social media or family conversations. Others may have direct family ties to Iran, the Gulf states, Lebanon, Israel, or U.S. military personnel deployed in the region.

The high civilian death toll, including reports of students and children harmed in strikes, can intensify emotional responses.

Disruptions in communication with relatives due to infrastructure damage can heighten anxiety. Students may be exposed to graphic or misleading online content, increasing fear, confusion, or anger.

Should School Staff Talk With Students About the War?

Yes. Avoidance is neither realistic nor helpful. Difficult events create pervasive stress, and not acknowledging them can:

- Increase anxiety for students who are already worried.
- Send the message that indicating their distress is not appropriate or welcome.
- Miss opportunities to connect students with support.

Connection with caring, stable adults is essential – especially during crises.

At minimum, staff should:

- Recognize openly that the war may be affecting students and families in different ways.
- Emphasize that support is available and help seeking is encouraged.
- Promote calm, factual, developmentally appropriate discussions.

The Critical Role of Support Staff

School counselors, psychologists, social workers, nurses, and other support staff are vital in moments like these. They can:

- Check in proactively with students who show signs of distress.
- Create safe, culturally responsive spaces for discussion and reflection.
- Help identify needs for academic flexibility or temporary accommodations.
- Provide guidance to families about supporting children at home and recognizing when additional help is needed.

Given the rising casualty numbers and global attention, many students may feel fear, anger, grief, or confusion, and support staff can help them process these emotions constructively.

Using Psychological First Aid in Schools

If student distress escalates or if a school community is directly impacted, Psychological First Aid for Schools is a well established approach – see the *Schools Field Operations Guide & Handouts*

<https://www.nctsn.org/content/psychological-first-aid-schoolspfa>

(A quick summary about the Guide is at <https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/psychfirstaid.pdf>) These materials help school-based teams stabilize students emotionally, reduce traumatic stress, and connect them with ongoing support.

In sum:

- Stay informed using reliable, verified news sources – events are shifting rapidly.
- In discussions, stick to facts, provide historical context
- Offer balanced, factual explanations, and encourage students to engage in guiding discussions.
- Reach out early to students who may be affected. Don't wait for them to seek help.
- Affirm feelings and normalize stress reactions without delving into political debates.
- Partner with families, especially those with cultural, linguistic, or personal ties to the region.
- Use Psychological First Aid for Schools when distress is significant or widespread.
- Ensure your school's learning supports system is mobilized.

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