



для кожної дитини



ANALYTICAL NOTE

ON THE RESULTS OF THE PROJECT SUPPORTING TEACHERS OF PRESCHOOL EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS AND ACCOMPANYING CHILDREN IN AN EMERGENCY

KYIV 2024





In the period from April 2023 until May 2024, the Ukrainian Step by Step Foundation (USSF), with the support of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in Ukraine, implemented the project "Supporting Teachers of Preschool Education Institutions and Accompanying Children in an Emergency." One of the project components was to deliver training for preschool educators and carry out subsequent awareness raising for parents on providing psychosocial support to children.

The **relevance** of this line of work is to ensure that a sufficient number of preschool educators possess general and professional competencies to create, maintain, and develop a safe, developmentally conducive, and inclusive learning environment and provide psychoeducational support to all participants in the educational process, including parents, in emergency contexts.

In times of war, the main goal of the educational process is not only to provide learning but also psychological support to children and parents. During the war, people face difficult circumstances, such as danger posed by military attacks, loss of family and friends, separation from loved ones, loss of income due to lack of work, and loss of their homes and property. At the same time, parents need to find the strength to raise their children, protect them, and provide support in dealing with various emotional states (fear, sadness, anger, grief). Being stressed themselves, parents often feel overwhelmed in emergency situations. Children of preschool age can read the emotional state of adults. If the psychological resources of an adult are low, it is difficult for them to support their children properly. Working with children can only be effective when adults project confidence, composure, calmness, and trustworthiness.

Preschools can become a place of support for parents and children, where caregivers can share their concerns and problems, receive support, and learn helpful stress-reducing methods employing specific techniques to stabilise their condition.

In the current situation, preschool teachers do their best to make communication with parents rich and effective, to achieve real collaboration between the kindergarten and the family. At the same time, teachers require new knowledge and skills for their own professional development in psychological competence. The practice has shown that in emergencies, adults working with children should have the knowledge and skills to provide crisis psychological assistance, know the signs of anxiety disorders in children, be able to control their own behaviour in crises, etc.

Geography of the project: 19 regions of Ukraine (Vinnytsia, Volyn, Zhytomyr, Zakarpattia, Zaporizhzhia, Dnipropetrovsk, Ivano-Frankivsk, Kyiv, Kirovohrad, Lviv, Mykolaiv, Poltava, Rivne, Sumy, Ternopil, Khmelnytskyi, Cherkasy, Chernivtsi, and Chernihiv).

Terms of participation in the project. Awareness-raising activities were held in the institutions offering in-person attendance for children and parents (**575** preschools were involved).

The training model for parent instructors was implemented in stages. At each stage, preschool educators acquired specific knowledge, skills, and competences to provide psychoeducational support to children and parents.

DESCRIPTION OF THE TRAINING MODEL FOR PARENT INSTRUCTORS

Stage 1. Training of educators under the program of “Psychoeducational Support for Children, Parents, and Teachers in Emergencies”

One of the conditions for participation in the project was that educators undergo preliminary training under the model upskilling program for preschool teaching staff on “Psychoeducational Support for Children, Parents, and Teachers in Emergencies” (developed by the Ukrainian Step by Step Foundation and approved by Order No. 461 of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine dated 21.04.2023).

The **goal** of the training was to develop preschool teachers’ general and professional competences necessary to create, maintain, and develop a healthy, safe, developmentally conducive, inclusive learning environment and provide psychoeducational support to participants in the educational process in emergencies, particularly those related to the outbreak of hostilities in Ukraine.

Key objectives:

- to deepen and expand theoretical and practical knowledge of providing psychoeducational support for children and parents in an emergency;
- to intensify the development of preschool educators’ professional qualities and skills for carrying out professional activities in emergencies, in particular, those related to the outbreak of hostilities on the territory of Ukraine;
- to improve the ability to choose effective forms, methods, and practices for creating, maintaining, and developing a healthy, safe, developmentally conducive, inclusive learning environment and providing psychoeducational support to participants in the educational process in times of war.

Proposed learning topics:

1. Understanding the impact of war on children and adults.
2. Basic approaches to providing psychological first aid in educators’ work.
3. Trauma-sensitive practices for identification of and safe response to trauma.
4. Building resilience to stress.
5. A safe environment and elements of gentle care.
6. Safe and restorative forms of working with children.
7. Supporting children with special educational needs during the war. What to consider.
8. New safety challenges or all that one needs to know about bomb shelters.

Learning outcomes

Learning under the programme, teachers gained the following knowledge and skills: how children and adults can react to traumatic events; how to respond and support children in experiencing various emotions; how adults can support themselves to be effective in supporting children; how to organise a safe learning environment better and plan a daily routine; how to act in case of surfacing traumatic experiences; how to ensure unity among adults in matters of child safety and more.

Stage 2. Training of parent instructors

The training of parent instructors was carried out under the program developed by the USSF trainers using a comprehensive manual (module). The module contains session plans, information materials, and practical exercises for instructors.

The **goal** was to train instructors from among the preschool teaching staff who have completed the first stage of the training in the project and would apply the acquired knowledge, skills, and abilities in organising practical interaction with parents of learners and model interaction with parents based on andragogical principles.

Objectives:

- to refine teachers' theoretical and practical knowledge of providing psychoeducational support for children and parents in an emergency;
- to teach the participants to choose effective forms, methods, and practices for supporting parents and developing their competences to support their children in different mental states;
- to develop facilitation skills to interact with parents and manage group dynamics effectively.

The instructors were trained in a blended in-person/remote format once a week, with the duration of sessions from 1 hour 15 minutes to 1 hour 30 minutes.

The training program for instructors was focused on practical application.

Learning outcomes

Throughout the project, the USSF trainers trained **592** parent instructors. They mainly held the positions of teachers, practical psychologists, teaching methodologists, and head teachers of preschool institutions.

The educators learned relaxation and stress management techniques and practised effective forms, methods, and techniques of supporting parents and children in various mental states. Through various exercises and activities, the participants had the opportunity to consolidate the acquired knowledge in practice.

The participants strengthened their facilitation skills, which helped to ensure effective group interaction in the community of parents. They learned methods of conducting facilitated meetings with parents, including circles, brainstorming sessions, and open-space discussion techniques. Using facilitation skills, instructors can create a positive communication space in meetings with parents based on fairness, trust, and respect.

Stage 3. Instructor-led meetings with parents accompanied by USSF trainers

Goal: to create a safe space for parents to receive psychosocial support, exchange thoughts and ideas, and practice various techniques for their healing and supporting their children.

Objectives:

- to organise instructor-led meetings with the parents, creating a shared safe space;
- to increase the resilience of parents to the effects of stress in emergencies, in particular those related to the outbreak of hostilities in Ukraine;
- to teach parents to support their children in complex crises, to choose adequate support and care methods and techniques;
- to provide advisory and methodological support for parent instructors.

This stage consisted of 2 dimensions:

1. instructor-led sessions with parents;
2. advisory and methodological support for instructors by USSF trainers.

The first dimension. An awareness-raising campaign for parents consisted of 10 scheduled sessions. The sessions were held once a week, in a safe space, at a convenient time for parents and instructors, and lasted up to 50 minutes.

Parents are invited to the meeting in a safe and comfortable environment, with pleasant conversation, tea, and a cosy atmosphere. An instructor does not take a lecturer stance but becomes an equal participant in the meeting, providing support as a facilitator. The role of an instructor is not only to provide certain information but also to encourage parents to be experts and to share their experiences, concerns, ideas, and challenges. The instructor encourages everyone to participate, while respecting the different levels of engagement as participants share their personal experiences.

Session topics:

Topic 1. How war affects children and adults. Why do we feel the way we do? The objective is to normalise the parents' condition in order to calm them down; to normalise children's emotions and behaviour; to convey the idea that each of us should deal with stress as an expert knowing what is happening to us, why, and how we can cope with our feelings. By doing so, we get hold of our behaviour's "control panel."

Topic 2. Healing techniques for children and adults. The objective is to teach parents simple techniques to support themselves and to familiarise them with the techniques for children and the peculiarities of their use with children.

Topic 3. Building resilience to stress: how to prevent burnout. The objective is to familiarise parents with ways to support themselves and exercises that help develop their resilience.

Topic 4. What to do when a child behaves aggressively. The objective is to convey the idea that there are no good and bad emotions, that every emotion is valid, including anger and rage, and to equip the parents with an algorithm for supporting a child and familiarising them with anger response exercises.

Topic 5. Sensitive sleep and problems falling asleep in children. The objective is to familiarise parents with the concept of “sleep ecology” and discuss bedtime rituals that can be useful for their child. How to react when a child has a nightmare, cries, or screams in his/her sleep.

Topic 6. How can we explain to a child what is happening and whether talking to children about the war is appropriate? The objective is to tell parents about the consequences of hiding their feelings and avoiding discussing the issues that trouble them with their children, as well as to discuss recommendations on how to talk to young children.

Topic 7. How to support a child in sorrow. The objective is to tell parents about the main causes of children’s sadness and how to support a sorrowful child.

Topic 8. The child became anxious and easily scared: What to do and how to support them. The objective is to familiarise parents with the peculiarities of the preschool age, normalise the feeling of fear, and give recommendations and exercises to help children cope with anxiety.

Topic 9. How do we listen to children so that they speak, and how do we talk so that they hear? The objective is to teach parents simple listening techniques and effective interaction with their children.

Topic 10. How do you support yourself and your child when forced to leave home? A new home and a new community is a challenge not only for a child but also for an adult. The objective is to help parents adapt to a new place and give recommendations to help their child adapt faster.

The second dimension. Awareness-raising meetings with parents are held in parallel with the training of instructors (after mastering a topic in the training, they facilitate a meeting with the parents on the same topic the same week). Such a group supervisory format allows providing timely professional advice and methodological support from experienced trainers. Parent instructors have the opportunity to receive mentoring support, consolidate and strengthen their practical skills.

As part of the methodological support, it was essential to practice teachers’ ability to provide feedback.

Instructor’s ability to provide feedback allows:

- to tell about their mood, expectations, and the results of their work;
- to make sure that they are heard and supported;
- to build self-confidence and enjoy the work they do.

For trainers, it gives an understanding of how to move forward, what to pay attention to, and what needs improvement and adjustment.

Results of the third stage:

Ten sessions were held with each group of parents (**575 groups**).
A total of **15 thousand 308 parents** were reached.

Parents:

- learned to stabilise their emotional state by practising calming and relaxation techniques;
- improved their ability to support their children in various situations of emotional strain, improving their interaction with children;
- expanded their knowledge and skills in raising children and built confidence in communicating with them in various crises.

Instructors:

- learned to effectively design interaction with the learner's parents with a view of teaching them essential life skills for effective communication with and caring for their children;
- received consultation and methodological support, and learned to cope with unforeseen situations when interacting with parents;
- improved their capacity to facilitate parent groups;
- boosted their confidence as group leaders for parents in the field of psychosocial support.

Instructors' impressions of the project:

"During the meetings, we discussed topics that are very important at this time, learned to work in a team, performed various bodily and breathing exercises, and overcame fears by playing. All participants had much fun, had tremendous impressions, and, most importantly, received very important recommendations on acting in emergencies. I am sure all project participants have learned where to get their strength from, how to be stress-resistant, and how to understand children better. I am grateful to the organisers of this project for the opportunity to learn and be useful to others. We are grateful to all the parents for being so active; it inspires us to keep working. We will be grateful for the opportunity to participate in new projects." (Volyn region)

"Sincere communication created an incredible space of growth for all of us. In this space, we were pleased to see creativity, keen interest, the ability to enjoy like a child, and an understanding of how effective the unusual communication model can be in the teacher-child-family system, where everyone is included, and there is no room for indifference. We realised that this approach brings tremendous results in child development. I wish everyone further self-development, professional growth, satisfaction from work and growth of their families." (Ivano-Frankivsk region)

"Our kindergarten is extremely grateful to the project's founders, organisers, and coordinators. We are sincerely grateful to the parents who responded and attended the meetings for their understanding and being so engaged, for their positive invaluable emotions, sincerity, fruitful cooperation, and warmth in such an important project for each of us." (Khmelnyskyi region)

Parents' impressions:

“I want to thank the organisers and everyone who participated in our meetings! It was incredibly instructive! It turns out that meetings where smart, nice people talk to each other calm you down and help you see things in a different light! Thank you again! I wish you new ideas and new projects! I will be happy to join them!” (Kyiv region)

“The sincerity of communication at our meetings created an incredible growth space for all of us. I want to express my sincere gratitude to the organisers of this project and our teachers for the interesting materials. Thanks to you, we learned where to draw strength for being stress-resistant and understand children better. Thank you for the remarkable experience and meaningful recommendations.” (Zakarpattia region)

“Our meetings allowed us to learn more about children’s emotional state. Using art therapy as the best means, we learned how to distract and calm the children, use breathing exercises to eliminate anxiety and fear, and manage stress. We received the necessary tools, resources, and guidance on communicating with children during this difficult time. Every one of the participants realised that “Family and kindergarten are two banks of the same river.” (Chernivtsi region)

“Most importantly, I learned how essential it is to maintain my own resources to help my family. Our warm meetings over tea help parents find or restore resources to become stable support for their child in such difficult times.” (Mykolaiv region)

“It was over so quickly. We enjoyed delicious tea, talked, and expressed our thoughts. We played fun games and gave each other gentle smiles. Thank you very much for the beautiful emotions and unforgettable experience. We are eagerly awaiting more meetings, and we will continue this tradition.” (Chernihiv region)

The successful implementation of this large-scale project is an illustrative example of how a family and a preschool are two social institutions that lay the foundation for a child’s future. This partnership must become highly effective in emergencies. An effective communication system between a preschool and parents allows them to join forces in caring for children’s health, safety, and comprehensive development during the war.

DIAGRAM OF THE IMPLEMENTED MODEL OF TRAINING PARENT INSTRUCTORS IN PRESCHOOL INSTITUTIONS OF UKRAINE

Goal:

- To prepare expert preschool educators for the provision of psychoeducational support to all participants in the learning process, including parents, in emergency contexts
- To create a safe space at preschools for supporting both parents and children, where caregivers can share their concerns and problems, receive support, and learn helpful stress-reducing methods employing specific techniques to stabilise their condition

STAGE I

Training of educators under the program of «Psychoeducational Support for Children, Parents, and Teachers in Emergencies»

11,155 preschool educators from **19** regions of Ukraine were trained.

STAGE II

Training of parent instructors

592 instructors were trained to work with parents.

STAGE III

Instructor-led meetings with parents accompanied by USSF trainers

10 meetings with parents were held at **575** preschools each. **15,308** parents participated.