



для кожної дитини



**A GUIDE FOR INSTRUCTORS ON WORKING
WITH PARENTS OF PRESCHOOL CHILDREN**

PSYCHOEDUCATIONAL SUPPORT FOR PARENTS AND CHILDREN IN AN EMERGENCY



Kyiv 2024

УДК 088.6

Published with the support of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
Office in Ukraine.

The views and opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors
and do not necessarily reflect the position of UNICEF Ukraine.

Compiled by:

Inna Horbenko, PhD

Oksana Korneeva, PhD

Olena Teslenko, practical psychologist

The publication contains session plans, information materials, and practical
exercises for instructors who have received appropriate training and will conduct
facilitated meetings with parents of preschoolers.

The publication will contribute to developing the educators' professional
competence in providing psychoeducational support to parents of preschoolers
and creating a safe learning environment in an emergency.

**We thank ISSA Dr. Mihaela Ionescu, Aljosa Rudas, Zorica Trikić –
A for providing materials
«PFA and trauma-informed practices with young children and their caregivers»
and training the trainers.**

© United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in Ukraine, 2024

© International Step by Step Association (ISSA), 2024

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or
by any means without the prior permission of UNICEF.

ISBN 978-618-7369-01-5



CONTENTS

Introduction	4
Some initial tips for facilitators	5
Topic 1. How war affects children and adults	8
Topic 2. Healing techniques for children and adults	13
Topic 3. Building resilience to stress: how to prevent burnout	20
Topic 4. What to do when a child behaves aggressively	23
Topic 5. Sensitive sleep and problems falling asleep in children	27
Topic 6. How to explain to a child what is happening, and is it appropriate to talk to children about the war	31
Topic 7. How to support a child in sorrow	36
Topic 8. The child became anxious and easily scared: What to do and how to support them	42
Topic 9. How do we listen to children so that they speak, and how do we talk so that they hear?	47
Topic 10. How do you support yourself and your child when forced to leave home?	52
Summing up the entire course of ten sessions	58
Useful resources	59

INTRODUCTION

This Manual was developed by the Ukrainian Step by Step Foundation as part of the project «Supporting teachers of preschool education institutions and accompanying children in an emergency» with the support of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in Ukraine. The Manual uses materials from ISSA, UNICEF Ukraine, and mental health experts.

The materials in the Manual are intended to help educators prepare and conduct parental sessions under the psychoeducational support program in an emergency associated with hostilities in Ukraine.

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 such situations. Working with children can be effective only when adults project confidence, composure, calmness, and trustworthiness.

Preschools can become a place of support for 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. The proposed sessions are aimed at developing the ability to balance one's own mental state and provide support to children. These materials will help parents expand their knowledge and skills in raising children and build confidence in communicating with them in various crises.

Program objectives:

To develop preschool teachers' general and professional competencies necessary to support parents and children in emergencies, particularly those related to the outbreak of hostilities in Ukraine.

Expected results:

- Participants have improved their theoretical and practical knowledge of providing psychoeducational support for children and parents in an emergency;
- Participants are able to choose effective forms, methods, and practices for supporting parents and developing their competencies to support their children in different mental states.

Structure of the sessions:

Number of participants in a group: up to 15

Session duration: 1–1.5 hours

Frequency: weekly sessions

Number of sessions for parents: 10

SOME INITIAL TIPS FOR FACILITATORS:

- Your role is to create a safe space where parents can come together and share their experiences, concerns, ideas, and challenges.
- Your role is also to encourage mutual support. It's essential to enable the parents to be experts, to share their ideas and wisdom with one another, and to feel safe sharing their doubts, concerns, and information about their strengths.
- You will teach participants specific techniques for relaxation and stress management. It is essential to learn these techniques yourself before teaching them to a group. This will allow you to explain the purpose of each technique and understand the participants' experience with the techniques, the difficulties they may encounter, and ways to overcome them.
- Some participants may feel uncomfortable doing certain relaxation or stress management exercises, especially in the beginning.

It may take them some time to get used to it. It is essential to be accepting and supportive and to encourage participation in any way that feels comfortable to them. One also has to remember that different exercises work for different people when it comes to relaxation. Encourage participants to try all the techniques and find those that work best for them.

- Participants will get more out of the training if they practice what they learn in the group at home. In each session, we will spend some time discussing the previous week's home practice (what went well and what was difficult). This includes examining the difficulties that people may have encountered during the practice and group discussion of ways to overcome these difficulties.
- You will also use certain activities where participants will share their experiences and life examples. To help people be open during such activities, it is important to maintain an attitude that builds openness and trust. In particular, it is key to be:
 1. Empathetic: put yourself in the other person's shoes. Try to understand their perspective, motives, and reasons for specific thoughts, feelings, and behaviours.
 2. Non-judgmental: do not express negative judgments, even if you disagree with someone. Your role is to explore the causes and look for solutions together. When people feel judged or shamed, they are much less likely

to feel comfortable sharing their personal experiences and may withdraw from the group or simply close their hearts and minds to the learning experience.

3. **Normalising:** All parents face challenges raising their children, especially when families live in difficult circumstances. It can be helpful for participants to normalise their experience, their difficulties, and problems. It does not mean accepting or approving of everything they say or do; it simply means letting them understand that what they feel is perfectly normal, that experiences such as losing their temper, feeling stressed or frustrated are normal in difficult situations. Our goal is to help people manage these reactions to make them less intense and stressful.
 4. **Supportive:** when people feel they are seen, heard, and supported, they are more engaged and willing to change. When they feel supported, their motivation increases.
 5. **Respectful:** fully acknowledge each participant, their presence, and contribution to the group.
- Gently encourage everyone to participate while respecting the different levels of participants' engagement in sharing personal experiences.
 - When someone talks about a challenging experience, do not delve too deep. What is needed in such cases is supportive listening.
 - Encourage group members to speak and respond to each other rather than addressing their comments only to the facilitators.
 - Be sensitive to signs that someone may be struggling or going through a tough time. It does not mean providing counselling, but some participants may need a few minutes of support after the class. If a person requires more help than you can provide, you need to know about any resources you can refer them to for additional support.

Session topics:

Topic 1. How war affects children and adults.

Topic 2. Healing techniques for children and adults.

Topic 3. Building resilience to stress: how to prevent burnout.

Topic 4. What to do when a child behaves aggressively.

Topic 5. Sensitive sleep and problems falling asleep in children.

Topic 6. How to explain to a child what is happening, and is it appropriate to talk to children about the war.

Topic 7. How to support a child in sorrow.

Topic 8. The child became anxious and easily scared: What to do and how to support them.

Topic 9. How do we listen to children so that they speak, and how do we talk so that they hear?

Topic 10. How do you support yourself and your child when forced to leave home?

The following symbols are used to represent different types of sessions



An introduction to the topic of the meeting, an activity that actualizes the experience of parents



Information messages



Practical exercises are provided for in the meeting plan



Conclusions, reflection



Physical and breathing exercises

TOPIC 1. HOW WAR AFFECTS CHILDREN AND ADULTS. WHY DO WE FEEL THE WAY WE DO?

Goal:

to familiarise parents with the concept of stress and how it affects the human body. To support the parents by normalising their condition and explaining the symptoms that may be observed in children.

How to proceed with the session



Introduction

Begin your meeting with parents with tea to create a relaxed and easy atmosphere. Invite them into a circle.



Team building

In a circle, do the Getting to Know You activity. Ask the parents to say their name, their child's name and two things they would like to say about their child (what they are like), taking turns in the circle



Introducing the programme of the session

Briefly introduce what will happen at the sessions and motivate the parents by emphasising that they will try many practical exercises and learn to support themselves and their children in different life circumstances.



Rules

Agree on simple rules (agreements) that will help you create an atmosphere of safety and trust together (e.g., take care of ourselves, respect opinions, be active, "stop" rule, confidentiality). Write them down on a flip chart and explain each rule

Introduction to the topic and objectives of the session

Announce the session topic and objectives:

- to understand what is happening to us and why we feel the way we do



- to learn to understand children's states better
- to be able to provide them with timely support

Facilitation in a circle

Make an opening statement that we all live in a state of war.

Ask the parents:

– Have you ever felt like hiding under a blanket so you wouldn't see or feel anything?

Say that children sometimes have the same desire. However, we must remember that for children, that «blanket» is us! This metaphor explains the main rule of today: to support your child, you need to take care of and provide timely support to yourself and know how to do it. And when you need therapist assistance, you need to know who you can turn to and not delay.



Brainstorming: What is safety for you?

Tell the parents that you will think together about what safety means.

1. Hand out several stickers.
2. Ask the parents to consider what safety means to them or under what conditions they feel safe.
3. After they finish writing, ask volunteers to share. Allow time for parents to collect their thoughts. And ask only those who are willing to speak, encouraging the discussion.

Prepare four sheets of paper with the following headings written on them in advance and discuss the aspects of safety:

- **Physical safety** (How safe is the place we are in? How can we take care of our safety? Emphasise that air alarms should not be disregarded, and children should be taught accordingly).
- **Emotional safety** (Coping with our feelings and supporting children in various emotional states).

- **Predictability** (It is difficult to cope with the current circumstances because many things are beyond our control, and this causes the feeling of helplessness. However, it is crucial to focus on what we can have at least an indirect influence on. That is why it is important to tell children upfront about what you will do or what will happen).
- **Availability of support** (There are people around who can support you if necessary).

As you elaborate on each aspect, ask the parents to place their stickers on the appropriate sheet.



Information message

Tell the parents that you are going to talk about stress. Everyone experiences stress. It is our body's reaction to an external stimulus that exceeds our capabilities, a protective reaction of our body to the stimulus effect.

- Our response to danger is called the "stress response."
- Our heart beats faster.
- Chemicals flow through our bodies, preparing us to act quickly to end danger or avoid it and return to safety.
- As soon as we are safe again, our heart rate slows down.
- Our "stress chemicals" return to normal, and we continue our lives.

Imagine you are on the street, and an aggressive dog is charging at you. At this point, your body produces stress hormones that make you tense up in anticipation of a reaction.

Some would run away from the dog, some would prepare to fight back, and some would freeze – these are the **three reactions to stress – fight, flight, or freeze.**

The "fight" and "flight" reactions are hyper-arousal, characterised by tension, trembling, increased vigilance, an acute sense of danger, anger and rage, impulsivity, and obsessive, cyclical thoughts.

Children may seem irritable; they may behave more aggressively. The greater the fear, the stronger the aggression can be.

The “freeze” reaction is a hypo-arousal reaction, characterised by emotional numbness, detachment and withdrawal; passivity, inability to defend oneself; decreased cognitive function; and reduced physical activity.



Watching a video. Invite participants to watch a video about stress <https://bit.ly/3T8AYA1>



Get Off My Back bodily exercise

Stand with legs apart or sit with your knees relaxed and feet parallel to each other. Arms hang freely along the body. The jaw is relaxed, and breathing is normal. Then, raise your elbows to shoulder level and spread your arms to the sides. When in the position, move sharply backwards with your elbows and shout: “Get off my back!”



Children’s reactions to traumatic events

Brainstorm with the parents:

- Has anything changed in their children’s behaviour?
- What reactions do you observe in children?

Discuss with the parents the types of responses to traumatic events that children experience.

- **Physical:** headache, loss of appetite, difficulty sleeping, abdominal pain, vomiting, shortness of breath, tremors, sweating, dry lips, heart palpitations;
- **Emotional:** fear, tears, feelings of insecurity, anger, aggression, auto-aggression;
- **Behavioural:** behavioural regression, freezing, avoidance, clinging, fear of sounds, overexcitement, suspicion, reluctance to speak; aspects of trauma manifest in drawings and games;
- **Somatisation:** children get sick more often;

- **Cognitive (mental):** difficulty concentrating, confused thoughts, difficulty communicating and understanding, repetitive thoughts about events.

Sum up and discuss the importance of noticing symptoms in children, understanding their nature, and being able to provide support.



Flower and Candle relaxation activity

Introduce the parents to a breathing exercise they can do with their children. At the word “flower,” inhale the scent of an imaginary flower; at the word “candle,” blow out an imaginary candle. Inhale through the nose and exhale through a half-open mouth; exhalation is longer than inhalation.



Summing up

Invite the parents to answer the question, “What can I thank myself for today?”

Sum up the session by emphasising that we cannot forbid ourselves from feeling what we feel. All our reactions are natural and normal. They are our body’s response to abnormal life conditions during war. We have to deal with stress as experts: listen to our body and understand what is happening to it, and know how to stabilise our state of mind and emotions. This is what we will discuss at the next session. Emphasise that this knowledge will also help them better understand and support their children. Offer them to do the technique you have learned at home with their children.

TOPIC 2. HEALING TECHNIQUES FOR CHILDREN AND ADULTS

Goal:

to teach parents simple techniques to support themselves and their children.

How to proceed with the session



Introduction

Begin your meeting with parents with tea to create a relaxed and easy atmosphere. Invite them into a circle.

Activation exercise

Invite the parents to share, taking turns:

“What good did you do for yourself this morning?”

- Why do you think we started today’s session with this exercise?

Sum up by emphasising that in order to support their children, parents need to take care of themselves. It will help them maintain a balance between the effects of stress and their resources, which means being able to deal with children’s various emotions and behaviours. Highlight the importance of taking this rule seriously and not neglecting it, especially in the current circumstances.



Information message

Remind the parents that you discussed how stress affects the human body last time. Explain that stress reaction happens in the body and that it is, therefore, important to do bodily and breathing exercises to stabilise one’s state.

Remind the participants that in times of danger, our body activates the so-called “survival mode,” which is controlled by the limbic system. Automatic reactions of “fight,” “flight,” or “freeze” are turned on.

At this point, rational thinking is blocked, i.e. the limbic system does not allow our prefrontal cortex to help us focus, analyse, memorise, etc.



Grounding exercises, bodily and breathing techniques are helpful for our nervous system to stabilise and our body to cope with emotions. They can either become a daily ritual or be used as needed in stressful situations. Besides that, they will help with increased anxiety in children.

Practice

Choose a few exercises to practice (the ones that you like/work for you) and do them together with the parents. After each exercise, ask them to share their state and emotions.

Grounding

1. **Touch the Surface:** "Touch any surface and tell what it feels like: smooth, cold, rough, etc."
2. **5-4-3-2-1 exercise:** "Name five things you can see, four things you can touch, three things you can hear, two things you can smell, and one thing you can taste."
3. **"Touch the..." exercise:** "Touch the paper," "Touch the blue," "Touch the white," "Touch the wooden," etc.

These exercises help us ground ourselves and feel an external point of support. One can also do push-ups or "hammer in nails with your heels."

Breathing exercises

Emphasise that any breathing exercise begins with grounding: "Pay attention to your feet, feel the floor (pause). Note how the chair holds your body securely (pause)." When breathing, an exhalation should be longer than the inhalation.

Explain: When we are relaxed, we breathe more slowly. Taking a short time to slow down our breathing will help us relax. Focusing on the breath can also help us move away from thoughts concerning our worries or problems. In this manner, focusing on the breath can help us calm our minds. It doesn't always work and takes practice, but it can be a very helpful way to relax your body and mind. This is why we focus on breathing in some relaxation exercises.

Some people can feel anxious when focusing on their breathing. If this is the case for you, shift your attention to something else: the sensation of your body resting on a chair or floor, the sensation in your feet when you walk somewhere, or the sights or sounds around you. The point is to “exit” our thoughts and let our minds calm down. If you feel any discomfort during this exercise, just open your eyes and stop.

Relaxation

Step 1: Have everyone take a comfortable position sitting on a chair. Participants can close their eyes if it works for them. They can also keep their eyes open or open them at any time.

Step 2: Say to the group: “First, take a few slow, relaxing breaths. [pause, 3–4 breaths]. As you sit here, pay attention to how you sit and feel where your body touches the chair/floor. Just feel it [pause]. Now, feel how you inhale and exhale. You don’t have to change the way you breathe; just see if you can be aware of your breathing and follow your breath. Where can you feel it best? Perhaps in your abdomen, which moves up (when you inhale) and down (when you exhale). Or where the air goes in and out in your nose or mouth? Just notice where you feel the breath best and focus on that. [Pause] You can also put your hand on your stomach to feel it move slowly up and down as you breathe.”

Step 3: Give the participants some time to get accustomed to the process and then say to the group: “Once you have a good feel for the breath, see if you can breathe in through your nose, counting slowly 1–2–3, and then out through your mouth for a slightly longer time, counting slowly 1–2–3–4. Inhale through your nose, counting 1–2–3, and exhale again through your mouth, counting 1–2–3–4. Try it a few times. You can count silently, at your own pace. If you find it difficult to breathe through your nose (due to a cold or other reason), breathe through your mouth. Continue like this for a few minutes, feeling your breath and counting slowly. Imagine that you release tension in your muscles and body with each exhalation, and with each inhalation, you breathe in fresh, energised air. If the

counting makes you feel tense or anxious, stop counting and breathe naturally, keeping your attention on inhaling and exhaling.”

Step 4: After a few minutes, say to the group: “You may notice that your mind is distracted, that you are thinking about something, perhaps worrying about something in the future or remembering something from the past. This is normal. Whenever you notice this, pay attention to what you are thinking about and then gently bring your attention back to your breath.”

This can happen several times. This is absolutely normal. Whenever you notice your mind wandering, gently return to your breath.”

Step 5: Allow another 1–2 minutes, and then ask the group to open their eyes and return to the discussion. Ask the participants to share their experiences with the exercise:

- How was it for you?
- What did you notice?
- How did your body react?

Next, choose a few exercises for children and do them with the parents.

4. A Flower and a Candle: At the word “flower,” breathe in the scent of an imaginary flower; at the word “candle,” blow out an imaginary candle.

5. Balloon: “Breathe the air in and imagine that you are blowing up a balloon – breathe out.” Children spread their arms wide apart and inhale deeply through their noses. Exhaling air into an imaginary balloon through the mouth, they say: “Whooooo!”

6. Belly Breathing: Have children pick a small toy and lie on their backs. Ask them to place the toy on their stomach. “Take a breath in and feel as the air seems to go down into your belly while the toy rises – breathe out.”

7. The King of the Winds: “Once upon a time, winds from all over the world gathered and argued over who was the strongest. So, they organised a competition to determine which wind was blowing the strongest

among them. Now, try to blow me away from my spot.”

8. **Little Owl:** The children sit in a semicircle. “On the cue, “Day!” slowly turn your head right and left. At the cue “Night!” look forward and wave your hands as “wings.” Lowering them down, we say a long, relaxed “hoo.” The game is repeated 2–4 times.
9. **Exhale a Cloud:** “Imagine that you have inhaled a cloud and exhale it with a sound. You can do it with thunder and lightning if you want” (spread your arms showing how big the cloud is, and as you exhale, make a sound and bring your hands together “reducing” the size of the cloud; palms join together at the end of the exhalation, like a clap. We may accompany the exhalation by stomping our feet).

Important notes on **breathing exercises**:

1. Some people tend to “over-focus,” getting more stressed or dizzy when focusing on their breathing.

What to do:

Make sure they don’t worry too much about “doing it right.” Explain that many people worry about “doing it right” when they start this type of exercise. This is normal. Over time, people will get used to it and do it more naturally and in their own way. The key is to devote a little time and practice to it.

Have them focus on exhaling, long and slow.

2. Some people get confused about raising/lowering the abdomen while inhaling/exhaling.

What to do:

Show how the abdomen rises when you inhale and falls when you exhale.

Ask them to put their hand on their stomach to feel it better.

Use the image of a balloon in the stomach that fills with air and deflates as you exhale.

3. Some people feel the movement of the chest, not the abdomen.

What to do:

Ask them to put their hand on their stomach and/or chest to feel where their breath is happening. Have them try both (chest and abdominal) types of breathing and then focus more on the abdominal one.

Reassure the participants that they can take their time to figure it out and that many people get confused the first time they do it but benefit greatly when they practice it several times.

For people who have experienced a traumatic event or are overly anxious, focusing on their breath can, in fact, increase their anxiety or allow traumatic memories to surface. It's important to observe people as they go through all the relaxation and stress reduction exercises and pay attention to those who seem to be having a hard time.

It's okay for people to focus on something other than breathing. A dot on the wall, a physical sensation of sitting, standing, or walking, anything they can focus on as an anchor for their attention.

Bodily exercises

1. **The Mat:** "Tap yourself, your whole body, like a mat."
2. **Towel or Doggie after Bathing:** "Try to relax your muscles and then shake off the imaginary droplets with your whole body."



"Australian Rain" activity: Ask parents to stand in a circle and do the activity together.

The wind is blowing in Australia (the facilitator rubs his/her palms together).

- It starts raining (click your fingers).
- The rain is getting heavier (clap your hands alternately).
- And then comes hail – a real storm (stomp your feet).
- But what is it? The storm subsides (clap your lap).
- The rain dies away (clap your hands).

- Fewer drops fall to the ground (click your fingers).
- The soft rustle of the wind (rub your palms together).
- It is sunny. (Hands in the air. Smile).

Ask the parents to share their experiences with the exercises. Ask them to listen to their own state and rate it on a scale from 1 to 10, where 10 is the most comfortable state. Conclude by emphasising that by doing at least one exercise every day, one can see positive changes in their condition over time.

It is okay to exercise for just a few minutes every day initially. Remind the group that they will really benefit from relaxation exercises only if they practice them regularly. This way, it can become a routine for participants, like eating or sleeping.



Closing the session

Invite the parents to reflect and answer the following question, taking turns in a circle: "What insight from today do I take with me into tomorrow?"

TOPIC 3. BUILDING RESILIENCE TO STRESS: HOW TO PREVENT BURNOUT

Goal:

to familiarise the parents with ways of supporting themselves to prevent burnout and exercises that help develop their resilience.

How to proceed with the session



Introduction

Begin your meeting with parents with tea to create a relaxed and easy atmosphere. Invite them into a circle.

Activation exercise

Invite the parents to share, taking turns, by continuing the sentence “My superpower is...” naming three things that help them cope with all the challenges of today. You can start with yourself.

Sum up by saying that we may be in different states right now (feeling despair, helplessness, etc.), but in times like these, it is important to focus on what makes us stronger. Do something that helps you and gives you strength!



Discussion in the circle

Introduce the session topic and offer a discussion:

- What, in your opinion, is this state of “emotional exhaustion or burnout”?
 - Have you ever experienced it?
 - What happened to you? How did you feel it?
- (write down the symptoms on a flip chart)

Summarise the participants’ responses, highlighting that emotional burnout syndrome is a condition when a person feels exhausted morally, mentally, and physically. It’s getting harder and harder to wake up in the morning and start working. It becomes increasingly difficult to focus on your duties and fulfil them in a timely manner.

Invite the participants to do the following activity.



The Jug technique

Inform them that this is an individual work they do for themselves, and they will not share what they have written. Let them know that after the exercise, you will ask them to share their feelings and thoughts.

- Invite the participants to draw a jug and imagine it as their energy reservoir, which exists inside each person;
- Have them think about what they spend their energy on during the day and draw the arrows (from the jug) to indicate what they spend their energy on;
- Have them think about where they get their strength (energy) and draw the arrows pointing into the jug. These can be places, actions, people;
- Ask who would like to share.

Sum up.

Ask how the participants felt during the exercise.

What thoughts did you have? What conclusions did they come to?

What are the benefits of the exercise?



Information message

Discuss with the participants that mothers' emotional resources are being used up all the time:

- on constantly maintaining a connection with a child or children, talking, explaining, listening, empathising, admiring, providing emotional support and praise;
- on containing children's (and not only children's) emotions;
- on withstanding children's resistance (against studying, eating, sleeping, washing hands, putting away toys, turning off the computer, etc.);
- on processing their own emotions, which change dozens of times during the day;
- the child is literally in the hands of the mother for a long time. Mother protects them from eating

household chemicals, choking on small objects, falling dangerously, or getting burned; takes care to feed the child on time and with the right food (persuading them to eat it);

- on generating ideas. Going for a walk is also an idea. Inviting guests and coming up with interesting activities for the evening, thinking of a craft to make and what to give to grandma for her birthday – all this is what a mother is constantly busy with.

Explain that if one does not support him/herself, this daily strain often results in exhaustion.

Emotional burnout syndrome is a “defeat, exhaustion, or wear that happens to a person as a result of overly excessive demands on their resources and strengths.”

Emotional burnout syndrome develops on the background of chronic stress and leads to general exhaustion of the human body.

Tell the participants that you will do an exercise that might help them with this.



The Pie of Happiness Exercise

1. Ask the participants to draw a circle and divide it into eight sections.
2. Each section symbolically depicts what fills them, giving them a feeling of happiness, joy, and peace.
3. Ask them to share how they feel after the exercise.

Invite the participants to hang this picture in a prominent place at home as a reminder to “take a bite” out of this pie daily.



Conclusion

Ask the participants what they would advise their best friend after today’s session and invite them to share one by one.

TOPIC 4. WHAT TO DO WHEN A CHILD BEHAVES AGGRESSIVELY

Goal:

to make parents understand that there are no good and bad emotions and that every emotion is valid, including anger and rage. To provide an algorithm for supporting a child and familiarise them with anger response exercises

How to proceed with the session



Introduction

Begin your meeting with parents with tea to create a relaxed and easy atmosphere. Invite them into a circle.

Activation exercise

Invite the parents to choose a pictogram (anger, sadness, calmness, joy) that corresponds to their mood and share one by one (What is your current mood? Why?)

Next, ask the parents to continue a sentence of their choice: "I am sad when...", "I am angry when...", "I am happy when...", "I am cheerful when...", "I am angry when...", "I am hurt when...", "I feel guilty when...", "I feel surprised when..."

Conclude that there are no good or bad emotions. Every emotion is useful, including anger. All emotions are needed. Children are not born with the ability to cope with their emotions. They learn this from their parents and other adults.



Brainstorming

Introduce the session topic. Ask: "What kind of behaviour do you think can be called aggressive?"

Write down all the answers on a flip chart.

Sum up by reading out everything you have written down.

Ask the parents to recall situations when they had difficulty coping with irritation or anger. "What happened to you?"



(Encourage dialogue. There are no wrong answers. All opinions are important).

It is essential that parents come to understand what emotions and behaviour are through their own experience.

Information message

Discuss the manifestations of behaviour and emotions with the parents and provide a clear algorithm for how to act when a child is angry.

Manifestations of behaviour:

- Yelling, swearing, throwing objects;
- Tense muscles (inability to move smoothly), tense facial muscles;
- Speech is harsh and contains many emotional components and signs of discontent that the child is unable to restrain;
- Aggression is not tied to a specific object; it can shift to anyone or anything;
- Hitting or kicking others, using various objects to increase the "destructive force."

Emotional manifestations:

- Anger
- Impatience
- Irritation

What can parents do?

- Sit to be on the child's eye level;
- Remain calm when speaking. Speak softly and clearly;
- Do not scold your child for their actions;
- Talk through the child's feelings: "I can see you are angry. I also get angry when...";

"What do you want now?"; "How can I help you?";

"Let's try it together";

The key is to stay in contact with your child! Say to your child: "You are angry now because...." (a child cannot always express this);

Using phrases and gestures, we teach the child how to act differently (without harming themselves or others). We teach them to agree.

IMPORTANT! Talk to your child about what they are feeling and be there to share their feelings with them. Stay close and talk about your love for your child.

What you need to know:

- Children react to war in various ways;
- It is much easier for children to go through difficult times if their parents are close, understand their emotions, support, and help them;
- There are no good or bad emotions. It is important to legitimise feelings and emotions: "Everything you are feeling now is normal." It's normal to feel angry, depressed, and swear.
- DO NOT say "men don't cry," "a good mother should not get irritated and angry";



Practical exercise

1. Ask the participants to recall a situation when they were very angry or frustrated. Tell them they do not have to share the situation.
2. Ask them to recall that state and measure it on a 10-point scale, where 10 is the maximum manifestation of anger (rage).
3. Tell them you will do exercises to help respond to anger.
4. Exercise 1: «Take a newspaper and tear it down with all your might. Put all your anger into this action.» It would be best if you did it together with the parents.
5. Exercise 2: «Doodling.» Provide A4 sheets and crayons. Ask them to draw all their anger out in doodles. «Listen to yourself and follow your hand! Keep drawing out until your hand wants to go on.» It would help if you did it together with the parents.

6. Ask the parents to think again about the situation that made them angry and to measure their state on a 10-point scale, where 10 is the maximum manifestation of anger (rage).
7. Sum up: it is normal to feel anger, but it is vital to learn how to respond to it, as this will help you stabilise and maintain relationships with your loved ones.



The Magic Rain game

Materials: you will need newspapers, colourful magazines, and two rubbish bags for this game

Instructions:

1. Split the parents into two teams (let them use a counting rhyme). Divide the room into two parts and draw a line in the middle with tape. Each team occupies its own half.
2. Invite everyone to take a newspaper or any other paper (you can use one they have already crumpled up) and make a ball out of it.
3. On your command, participants throw their balls to the opponents. The team with the fewest balls left in its territory wins.
4. Tell them the game stops on your command, after which they can no longer throw.
5. After the activity, ask each team to collect the balls, trying to do it faster than the other team.
6. Ask the parents to share their emotions and impressions.

Sum up by saying that there are games for children that help them express anger safely. Suggest games that they can play with their children.



Summing up

Ask the parents to continue one of the sentences and share one by one:

- Today, I learned that...
- It was interesting to learn about...
- I realised that...

TOPIC 5. SENSITIVE SLEEP AND PROBLEMS FALLING ASLEEP IN CHILDREN

Goal:

to familiarise parents with the concept of “sleep ecology” and discuss bedtime rituals that can be useful for their children. To explain how to react when a child has a nightmare, is crying or screaming in their sleep.

How to proceed with the session



Introduction

Begin your meeting with parents with tea to create a relaxed and easy atmosphere. Invite them into a circle.

Activation exercise

Offer one of the following exercises of your choice:

“I don’t want to brag, but I...” activity

Taking turns, participants say their name and then a phrase beginning with “I don’t want to brag, but I...” For example: “I don’t want to brag, but I am a good cook” (“... play a musical instrument,” “... am a great mum,” and so on).

Magic Mirror exercise (materials: a box, a mirror)

Participants pass a box around, looking inside and saying one good thing about the person whose photo they see inside, without revealing the secret of who it is to the group. When the participants look into the box, they see their reflection, so they must say something good to themselves.

Sum up by emphasising the importance of caring for and understanding yourself to support your children.



Brainstorming

Introduce the session’s topic and tell that you will discuss the concept of “sleep ecology,” provide helpful bedtime rituals for children, and teach the participants how to react when their children have nightmares.

Ask the parents to recall situations when they had a nightmare. What preceded it? How did they feel?

Take pauses. Let parents remember their condition. Give your example, as it helps the parents to relax and makes it easier for them to talk about their experiences.

IMPORTANT! If a child has nightmares, one must understand that this is normal in the abnormal circumstances of living during the war. Even if a child is in relative safety in the area where air raid sirens can be heard, they can get traumatised through conversations and sensations. Children are good at reading their parents' emotional states and bodily manifestations.



Information message

Tell the parents about the ecology of sleep.

- Create a calm atmosphere before putting a child to bed;
- Air the room before going to bed;
- Put away all gadgets;
- Don't watch cartoons;
- Do not play computer games, especially violent ones;
- Switch to a «quiet» and «slow» mode;
- Do not play lively, active games or tickle the child.

This way, the child's body will gradually prepare for sleep, slow down and relax.

Emphasise the importance of rituals. Night rituals help to set the child up for bedtime. Introduce and repeat every night simple actions that will calm your child.

- Wash their face;
- Change. If you do not have pyjamas, put on a small piece of clothing to bed, such as socks.
- Cuddle or do a massage;
- Read fairy tales or sing lullabies;
- Take their favourite stuffed toy to bed.



Our Bedtime Ritual exercise

Ask the parents if anyone would like to share.

If a child has a nightmare or screams in their sleep:

- Help your child fall back to sleep – offer something that will calm your child and help them get back to sleep: a favourite stuffed toy, blanket, pillow, nightlight, bedtime story or soft music, or discuss pleasant dreams your child would like to have;
- You can hug them, rock them gently, or sing a lullaby.
- Let's drive away all nightmares, clap your hands (once) and the dream will go to the land of dreams, push away or spray with a sprayer (even an imaginary one) against monsters, or we can blow (dreams can be dispelled by breathing like fog). We reassure them by saying: "You did it; look, you coped with them."
- At night, do not force a child to tell what they dreamt about if they don't want to. If they do tell, we can say: "It was a nightmare. It happened in a dream. Everything is over. You are safe."
- If a child says that they saw enemies or that they couldn't get out, or that there were artillery shells nearby, you can scatter the enemies into dust, imagine that the child got out. We need to resolve the vision.
- After waking up, help the child "defeat" those enemies or monsters who pursued them in the dream: disperse them with your hands, an imaginary sword or a "sprayer."
- Every time the air raid alarm is cleared, we must say: "The alarm is over. You did great. You helped me so much." It is always good to put a period to the events so that we do not return to their beginning and do not relive traumatic experiences in our dreams or thoughts.
- In times of stress and uncertainty, a child of any age needs to feel protected. Give them tactile contact. Kissing, hugging, massages, and touching will be appropriate. You can just hold the child's hand for a while.
- Key phrase: "I'm with you, I'm close."



Practical section

Invite the participants to create their own dream story (materials: paper, pen).

Focus on the critical elements of the story:

- Your story has a main character (think about whom they live with and where they live).
- What actions should the character take to solve their problem?
- What obstacles will they face (maybe a river to cross or (in the current situation) bombs, tanks, alarms)?
- Who will help the character to realise their plans?
- Happy ending and conclusions.
- However the story unfolds in the beginning, it is essential that the ending be positive.

It is crucial that you do it together with the parents.

Invite parents to share their story: "Who would like to share?"

Or you can offer to make a dream catcher out of sticks and coloured threads, like a spider's web. They can make it with their children at home and hang it near where the child sleeps to "catch" bad dreams and prevent them from reaching the child.



Reflection

- This session helped me realise...
- My takeaway from the session is...

TOPIC 6. HOW TO EXPLAIN TO A CHILD WHAT IS HAPPENING, AND IS IT APPROPRIATE TO TALK TO CHILDREN ABOUT THE WAR

Goal: to teach parents how to cope with the challenges of explaining the war to their children and provide an algorithm for such conversations. To tell parents about the consequences of avoiding children's questions and hiding their emotions.

How to proceed with the session



Introduction

Invite the participants to tea, set an example of relaxed conversation and discuss the past week since the last meeting.

Actualisation of experience and setting up for further work

1. Name the topic of the session and briefly describe what will happen. Emphasise the importance of the objectives: to understand the child's anxiety when something is not clear to them, to learn not to re-traumatise children, and to be able to support a child in a state of anxiety.
2. Remind them of the agreements that will help you create an atmosphere of safety and trust together (taking care of ourselves, respecting opinions, being active, stopping).
3. Conduct the Magnet activating exercise with the participants. Recall together the properties of a magnet and offer to try an imaginary magnetic attraction between your palms and between your neighbours' palms and yours. Next, take turns naming objects, phenomena, colours, or anything that attracts things like magnets. Let all participants "gravitate" to the objects you name (chair, table, window).



Facilitation in a circle

Make an introduction that all our sessions contribute to communication with children in one way or another and that the war, which has become part of everyday life, cannot be excluded from the range of topics that families talk about. This topic should also be clear to children.

Ask the parents:

- Did their children ask them about the war?
- What were those questions?
- Were there situations when they did not know what to say to the children?

Sum up together that children need our explanations to understand what is happening around them. Openness and readiness for such a conversation create a safe environment where a child feels understood and accepted. Children need to know they can talk to us about anything that bothers them.



Conversation Builder practical exercise

1. Prepare and distribute two sets of the following sentences (print out in advance), which can be used to create a conversation sequence.
 - Talk about it when your child asks.
 - Ask your child what they know about the war and what their understanding of what is happening is.
 - Listen carefully to the child's answer.
 - Tell what you think, and share your experiences. Do not expand the range of questions.
 - Calmly say that the times are hard, but we know what to do, where to go, and how to act.
 - The war will end soon, and everything will be fine. Ignore it.
2. Ask the parents which steps could go first, which would come later, and which ones are not needed in a conversation with a child about the war.
3. Give an example of a conversation with a child: "It's good that you asked, Jacky." Sit next to me. I'll tell you about what makes you anxious. I am with you. There is a war in our country. The enemies started the war because they wanted to take our land from us. But we, Ukrainians, are a brave people. Our army is brave, and the truth is on our side, and all the forces of good are with us so that we will win for sure. All people stood together to defend Ukraine and do everything possible



to defeat the enemy. You can help, too... We don't know when the war will end, but we are ready to endure all the trials to win eventually... Well, we have discussed the war and the victory, and now it's time to do what we need to do because Ukraine needs help!"

Information message

Tell the parents that children get through difficult times much easier if they have parents who understand their child's emotions, support, and help them.

When communicating with a child, it is crucial not only to answer their questions but also to share their feelings. Just like adults, children experience very different feelings, including sadness and grief over the loss of social ties (for example, the family left, but some of their relatives remained in the occupied territory; the child and their mother are in a safe place, while the father is fighting at the front; they moved to another place, and the child misses their friends).

We could sit next to the child and say: "I can see how sad you are. I am sad, too, because my father (or grandmother) is not with us now. (Or "I'm sad too because I don't have the opportunity to see my friends"). But I do know that the time will come when we are together again. And now we can..." (offer some activity to your child).

For example: "We can draw a picture for our dad or grandma, and when it's done, we can give it to them; we can write a letter together or record a short video greeting. We can go for a walk and take photos of something nice that we see around us to show them. We can learn more about the town we are in (read about it or visit a museum) and write to our loved ones about it." In other words, the mechanism remains the same: we give hope and do some activity that brings us back to the "here and now."



Animated video

You can invite participants to watch an animated video <https://bit.ly/3T8kulu>, or you can share it with them to watch at their convenience.



The Creative Pairs exercise

Prepare the following materials: paper, colours, and felt-tip pens.

Pair up the parents. One person in the pair plays the role of a child, and the other the role of an adult.

Have the pairs apply a colour stain to one side of the paper and then fold the paper in half.

It should make a chimerical, non-existent figure.

Let each pair look at the picture carefully, discuss what it could be, and draw additional elements to help turn the image into a recognisable object.

Ask the pairs to present their paintings and share their emotions and impressions.

Conclude that parents can do such exercises with their children.



Discussing the recommendations

What not to do when talking to a child about the war?

Ask the parents to consider what actions and words are inappropriate when discussing the war with children.

Discuss the answers and make the following suggestions:

1. Don't tell your child too much. Answer only the questions they ask directly. If necessary, provide critical information but in an accessible form.

2. It is crucial to demonstrate confidence and not panic. Children scan adults' reactions easily. The calm behaviour of the adults, even in an emergency, will help them stay focused. Project confidence and monitor your state of mind to remain psychologically supportive of your children.
3. Don't say that the situation is not so simple or straightforward. There is no room for halftones when it comes to a treacherous attack and the brutal destruction of cities. Typically, you would teach your children to see the ambiguity and nuances of a situation, but there are times when one needs to take a firm stand without hiding behind tolerance.



Summing up

Sum up everything discussed during the session, emphasising the importance of being close to the child and ready to answer any questions they may have.

Ask the parents to complete one of the following sentences going one by one around the circle:

- Today, I learned that...
- It was interesting to learn about...
- I realised that...

TOPIC 7. HOW TO SUPPORT A CHILD IN SORROW

Goal: to tell parents about the main causes of children's sadness and how to support a sorrowful child.

**How to
proceed with
the session**



Introduction

Begin your meeting with parents with tea to create a relaxed and easy atmosphere. Invite them into a circle.

Activation exercise

Ask the parents to answer the following three questions:

- Name three things that make you sad
- Name three things that add to your calmness and comfort
- Name three people you would like to thank today

Ask them to share what emotional state they have had when doing this exercise. Emphasise that every emotion is important. Like other emotions, there is a place for sadness and sorrow in our lives.

Only those who know how to be sad can teach that a child.



Brainstorming

Introduce the session topic.

Ask the parents to recall situations when they were sad. What did they want at that moment?

Take pauses. Let parents recollect their state of mind. Provide your own example, as it helps the parents to relax and makes it easier for them to talk about their experiences.

Emphasise that sadness is a healthy emotional response to pain or loss, which signals the need for care and compassion from oneself and others. Not letting a person be sad is like not letting them love those they love.



Information message

After summing up the participants' answers, move on to the following discussion:

Why is the ban on experiencing sadness or sorrow harmful?

The child "keeps" the tension from an un-lived emotion, which takes a lot of energy, making it difficult for the child to engage in other life processes, like directing their attention, participating in various activities, and feeling joy. Fatigue, overexertion, compulsive movements, and anxiety may develop...

What adults should remember:

- It is important and helpful to cry to someone rather than by yourself.
- When a child feels sad and is crying, it is critical for an adult to be silent (hugging and caressing if the child allows). Questions and conversations distract from the vital process, stop it, and hinder the child from completing the outpouring of sorrow.
- It is good when an adult names the child's feelings and the state they observe in the child (anguish, hurt...) and says words of support: "I'm here for you," "I'm with you." It is important to draw the child's attention to breathing: "You may cry; only don't forget to breathe." Help them "exhale" the sadness.
- Sadness, like any other feeling, has an ending. Sadness is not harmful.
- After the child has finished sorrowing, you can ask if they want to discuss anything. Is it important for them to tell something? It is better to listen to the child, to sympathise and empathise.

Remember that a child's emotional state depends on their surroundings, particularly the parents and closest relatives who surround them.

If the child misses their father, mother, or relatives

- It is crucial to show your child that you share their

feelings. Hug the child, tell them you also miss your family and friends and provide support.

- If a child shares their feelings with you and says: "I miss daddy," "When will he come back?" name the emotion and give the child the right to it, and "legalise" the emotion. And after doing so, it is good to transform feelings into action. Here is how to do it:
- Staying at the child's eye level, we can respond like this: "I can see that you miss your dad. I miss him so much, too! He and other dads are defending our country. He loves you very much and is doing everything possible to be back with us. Let's make/draw something for him." Or: "You seem to really miss your dad. This is normal. Adults also miss each other. If we miss someone, it means that this person is significant to us. Let's call him!"



Lemonade Making exercise

Invite the parents to observe their state of mind and rate it on a 10-point scale, where ten is the most comfortable.

Offer them to do an exercise together.

Be standing.

Reach for the lemon tree and pick a lemon with each hand.

- Squeeze the lemons hard to extract all the juice – squeeze, squeeze, squeeze!
- Throw the lemons on the floor and relax your arms.
- Then repeat until you have enough juice for a glass of lemonade!
- After the last squeeze and throw, shake your hands to relax.

Invite the parents to observe their state of mind and rate it on a 10-point scale, where ten is the most comfortable. Tell them they can do this exercise every time they feel tense. It is an excellent exercise to do with children



Information message: how to support a homesick child

- If a child asks when you will return home, do not give an exact time frame. It is essential not to promise something you are not sure about. It is better to say that you do not know precisely when you will go back, but you hope that every day, you become one step closer to the day when you can return to your family.
- It is important to find an activity that the child will switch to. This will regulate children's emotions and experiences naturally.
- Help your child stabilise by engaging them in a familiar activity they like.
- Explain to your child why you can't be home right now: "There are no sirens/loud noises here; it's quiet."
- Invite them to draw a picture of their feelings or a picture for their dad/grandparents/brother, those who are not around. "You can draw a sad emoticon and draw or tell me what this emoticon would like to do to make it feel good or what would make it feel better."
- Provide an opportunity for the child to see their loved ones who stayed behind: show them photos/videos or have a video call.
- Invite the child to play a game that a loved one they are missing used to play with them.
- Allow them to grieve and cry, and say: "I understand you and why you feel sad. I am sad, too."

Try to stick to the daily routine and rituals that you did at home: morning routines, walks, bedtime stories, sleep, etc.

IMPORTANT! If you are worried about your child's condition and it does not change within three weeks, it is critical to seek help from a professional psychologist.



Practical section Circle of Worry activity

1. Invite the parents to do the following activity. Make an introduction saying that we can often cause undesirable states in ourselves even with our thoughts, and there are exercises that help us cope with such “harmful thoughts.”

Tell the parents they are drawing or writing for themselves and will not show or read out what they have done. It is essential to focus on oneself.

2. Ask them to draw a large circle. Inside is everything that worries you now (pause). Beyond the circle, there is everything that makes you fulfilled, gives you strength and energy, and makes you feel strong and capable (pause).
3. Ask them to outline the most worrying issue.
4. Then, ask them to draw three circles on a separate sheet of paper. “The first circle contains the problems that you can control; the second is for the problems that you cannot control but can influence their solution; and the third is the problems that you cannot influence.” Give the parents enough time and pause between steps of the exercise.
5. When they are done, invite them to share:

How did you feel during the exercise?

What thoughts did you have?

How do you feel now?

Sum up that when we focus on what we can influence, helplessness disappears! A feeling of helplessness is traumatic. By doing such exercises and reflecting, we expand our circle of influence.

If you constantly think, “Will we live tomorrow? When will the war be over...” it exhausts you, and you lose energy. Instead, it is crucial to focus on what I CAN do!



Summing up

Invite the parents to do the following activity. Think and write down in your notebooks:

- Three things that make me stronger;
- Names of three people I would like to say “thank you” to;
- Three things I will do right after the victory.

Ask how they feel after doing this exercise.

Sum up that it is normal to feel different emotions. The key is to know the techniques for stabilising your state of mind and exercises that heal and help us and use them as needed. We have just tried one such exercise.

TOPIC 8. THE CHILD BECAME ANXIOUS AND EASILY SCARED: WHAT TO DO AND HOW TO SUPPORT THEM

Goal: to familiarise parents with the peculiarities of the preschool age. To normalise the feeling of fear and give recommendations and exercises to help children cope with anxiety.

How to proceed with the session



Introduction

Begin your meeting with parents with tea to create a relaxed and easy atmosphere. Invite them into a circle.

Activation exercise

Offer the parents to do the Hello, Friend exercise.

Here is how to do it: greet each other in different ways and say something nice (a compliment) to the other person.

Introduce the session topic, emphasising the goal and offer the parents to do a Scare Ball exercise.



Scare Ball activity

Parents pass a ball to each other. The person who receives the ball names one of the children's fears, for example: "Children are afraid of being alone," and then passes the ball to the next person. That person says their phrase, for example: "Children are afraid to sleep alone," and passes the ball to the next person, going around the circle without repetitions.



Finish the Sentence exercise

Parents are asked to take turns finishing the sentences: "Adults are usually afraid of...", "Mothers are usually afraid of...", "Teachers are usually afraid of..."

Sum up by saying that we all experience anxiety, unrest, and fear from time to time. However, adults have experience and knowledge that often help them rationalise what is happening and reduce the intensity of emotions. In turn,

children lack understanding and experience everything much more intensively. Most children's fears, if noticed by adults in a timely manner and treated correctly, soon disappear without a trace.

Ask the parents to recall their childhood fear. What helped them overcome that fear?

Take pauses. Let the parents remember their condition. Provide your own example, as it helps the parents to relax and makes it easier for them to talk about their experiences.



Information message

After summing up the participants' answers, move on to the following discussion:

What are children afraid of?

Some fears are considered the norm in certain age periods.

- At one year, babies are afraid of their surroundings, strangers, and separation from their mum.
- Between 1 and 3 years, toddlers are afraid of darkness, scared to be alone; there can also be other fears.
- Between 3 and 5 years, some children fear loneliness, darkness, confined spaces, and fairy-tale characters (usually associated with real people at this age).
- Between 5 and 7, fears related to the elements prevail: fire, the deep, etc., fear of parental punishment, animals, fear of nightmares, fear of losing parents, fear of contracting a disease.

Discuss with the parents the following tips for preventing children's fears:

- Do not scare children with bogeymen, monsters, police, etc., trying to teach them obedience («If you don't sleep, I'll call the wolf»).
- Do not shame children for the fear they feel. Ridiculing children's timidity and fears is considered cruelty.
- Never leave a child alone in an unfamiliar environment

or a situation where something unexpected can happen.

- Control what cartoons they watch; try to ensure that children watch programs with positive characters, focused on goodness.
- Strive to create a calm, friendly atmosphere in the family, avoid quarrels and conflicts, especially in the presence of children.
- Give the child more encouragement, praise, approval, and moral support.
- If your child is afraid of thunderstorms, for example, try to think of a story (a scary one) from your childhood about how you were afraid of thunderstorms yourself and then stopped. Let your son or daughter laugh at you. Laugh at your fear together. After all, they are also laughing at their fear at the same time. The child needs to understand: «Mum or dad had the same fears, and then they passed, so my fear will pass, too.»



Practical section

- Invite the participants to think of a time when they were afraid. Let them know they will not have to share their memories.
- Ask them to recall that state and measure it on a 10-point scale, where 10 is the maximum manifestation of fear.
- Tell them you will do some exercises that help respond to fear.

Exercise 1. Draw your fear and then tear up the paper.

Exercise 2. Prepare a black-and-white drawing of an aggressive fairy tale character. Invite the parents to play the role of artists who can make this drawing good. They have to draw “good details”: a fluffy tail, a bright hat, beautiful toys, etc.

Ask the parents to think again about the situation that caused their fear and to measure their state on a 10-point scale, where 10 is the maximum manifestation of fear. Remember: everyone has fears, and you should not be scared of them.



“I will not fall” fear overcoming exercise

An adult lays out a thick rope on the floor in such a way as to create an intricate figure. A child takes off their shoes and stands on the end of the rope with both feet, the heel of one foot touching the toes of the other. They are blindfolded. An adult who supports the child gives commands to help him walk along the rope (“step forward,” “step left,” “step right,” etc.). The child needs to reach the end of the rope without stepping off.



Activities for children to help them cope with childhood fears

Offer the parents some other activities for children that they can do and have fun with their kids.

- Draw fear and everything your child is afraid of together. You can offer to destroy the drawing: tear it up or burn it.
- Do some role-play. Role-playing games are good because they let you model almost any situation that causes anxiety in a child and resolve it unobtrusively in a play, thus creating the experience of overcoming fear in the child’s mind.
- Playing with sand calms children and strengthens their nervous system.
- Toys. Play out the moment when your child encounters fear. Let them choose the toy most closely resembling their fear and play «for» it. In this way, the child will take on an unusual role, work through their fear, and overcome it.
- Finish the Drawing activity. Prepare unfinished black and white drawings of a scary character (e.g., a skeleton or a ghost), have the child finish the drawing, and tell stories about the characters.

Remember: When a child says they are scared, their biggest fear is not being accepted or being laughed at. If we tell them there is nothing to fear, they will not stop being scared. Instead, they will be left alone with their fear.

Remember: You should learn to accept your child with all their anxieties. After all, if a child has confident parents by their side, overcoming fear is only a matter of time.

What you can say to support your child:

- Instead of saying, «Come on, you are a big boy/girl, there's nothing to be afraid of» (these words are rational; they sound like devaluation), it is better to say: «You look scared,» or «I can see that you are scared.»
- Closeness is crucial. «I'm with you» can be said with words, by a hug, by taking the child in your arms, or by holding their hand.
- «What scared you? Whom or what are you afraid of?» Our goal is to help the child shift from the general «I'm scared» to a specific «I'm scared of the dark,» «I'm scared of being attacked by monsters,» «I'm scared of getting lost.» When we know what scares the child, we can find a way to transform their fear.
- It is crucial to normalise their state: «You know, I was afraid when I was your age, and even now, I'm afraid sometimes. What is happening now is terrifying. I know for sure that we will manage. What we can do with you is...»

Sum up. This algorithm will help the parents support their children when they are scared.



Summing up

Invite the parents to share, taking turns, by continuing the sentence:

It was a revelation for me in this session that....

Exercises, techniques, tips that I already use...

What I plan to do is...

Thank the parents for their involvement and the time you have spent together, and invite them to the next session.

TOPIC 9. HOW DO WE LISTEN TO CHILDREN SO THAT THEY SPEAK, AND HOW DO WE TALK SO THAT THEY HEAR?

Goal: to teach parents simple listening techniques and effective interaction with their child.

How to proceed with the session



Introduction

Begin your meeting with parents with tea to create a relaxed and easy atmosphere. Invite them into a circle.

Activation of experience

Invite the parents to discuss what they have tried with their children or what techniques they used from previous sessions. Do they see any effects? Encourage the discussion by asking open-ended questions (Can you talk more about... How did you achieve this... What do you think made the difference...).



Elephant Catchers activating game

Play the Elephant Catchers game in a circle with the parents.

The task for the participants is to catch the word “elephant” as soon as they hear it. Practice with the participants how to catch the “elephant” with a clap of their hands. Then say the words for different animals, including the word “elephant”: bunny, crocodile, bear, elephant, fox, crocodile, hedgehog, kangaroo, elephant, wolf, hippo, wild boar, elephant, goat, bunny, antelope, camel, elephant, squirrel.

Alternatively, if the participants are ready to play the game on their own, you can ask someone to lead.

Ask how the participants felt during the activity. What it teaches and what it develops.

Sum up that the Elephant Catchers game teaches you to listen to your interlocutor in order not to miss the “elephant,” the subject of conversation and interesting



information. Think together about what “elephants” you should not miss and be sure to catch in a conversation with your child.

Information message

Tell the parents about the importance of understanding the child’s needs, their «love language,» and the support point in building communication. Give examples of hidden messages and talk about what it is that the child requires when they ask. In particular:

The child requires attention because they feel lonely. (Will you play with me?)

The child needs reassurance because they are scared (Did my mum go to the hospital last night?)

The child needs answers and information because there are things they do not know (What is it?)

The child requires help because they cannot solve a problem. (They don’t let me play with them!)

The child requires an activity because they are bored or sleepy. (I don’t know what to do)

A «Tuning In» technique can help train the skill of listening to a child and understanding their needs. It consists in paying attention to the child’s words and feelings. When tuning in, we show respect for the child’s views and offer assistance if necessary.

Thus, when a child says something, think:

- what do they feel now?
- what are they asking for?

When we understand the feelings and needs of a child, it is easier for us to find words that will comfort and calm them.

Emphasise that any activity requires certain conditions. Communication is no exception. Tuning in, regularity, habitualness, and creating conditions play a significant role in communicating with children.



- Set aside time every day, at least a few minutes, to talk with your children.
- Say that you love your child.
- Manifest your loving.
- Ask how they are feeling. Ask what they want.
- Sometimes, simply listen to your children.

Attentive Ear exercise

Show the large paper «ear» that you have prepared in advance to the participants and ask them: «What do children most often want to talk about?» Invite the parents to take turns naming what their children most often want to talk about or what they last talked about with their child.

An adult who is attentive to what a child wants to talk about and who really listens to children sends them a message that they are very important and interesting. Sometimes, adults who are always busy do not pay attention to a child who is saying something, pretending that they do listen. When we communicate with children, we show respect for them and show that they are valuable to us. This is how a child learns to respect others.

Give the parents some recommendations:

- Remind the child that they may always share their thoughts and feelings with you;
- Discuss any issues with your children;
- Speak calmly and sincerely;
- Encourage the child to ask questions and ask clarification questions to make sure the child understood what you said;
- Discuss thoughts and feelings together;
- Maintain constant contact with your child. Sincere conversations and the opportunity to express themselves help them overcome their fears;
- Find ways to distract from the situation that has occurred through activities like drawing, journaling, a new hobby, etc.;
- Speak clearly for the child. Do not rush.



Snowflake practical exercise

Invite participants to experience how tone and speech rate affect children's understanding of what an adult is saying. Hand out paper napkins and scissors and begin to quickly give commands on what to do with these materials (this could be instructions on how to cut out a snowflake). Speak quickly, don't explain, don't answer clarifying questions.

Afterwards, ask them to look at each other's snowflakes and discuss why they are so different. Ask how the participants felt about your instructions and how they would like you to give them instructions.

Guide the participants to the conclusion that quick and unclear instructions are difficult to understand (especially for children). The clarity of instructions includes not only the sequence of actions but also how fast they are given, explanations, and feedback when something is unclear. Emphasise to the participants that the rate of adult speech should depend on the age of children. The younger the children, the slower you talk to them.



Recommendations for when the parents are unable to respond to a child's request immediately

When an adult cannot pay full attention to a child and listen to them, it is better not to pretend that you are listening. We must devote our full attention to the child, especially if the topic of conversation seems particularly important to them. But, of course, sometimes adults can't listen. In such a case, we should admit that we have other things to do now, but we acknowledge that the child has an essential need to express themselves.

Give an example of how to respond in such a situation: "A mother is cooking dinner when little Maryna runs up to you and wants to talk about her drawing. Instead of insincerely listening to the child, it is better to recognise the child's needs, sit down to their height, look into their eyes and say: "Maryna, I have to prepare dinner now because our family will be hungry very soon. When I'm done, we'll look at your drawing together." Important reminder: if you promise to fulfil your child's request later, be sure to do what you have promised. This is how trust is built.



Magic Words exercise

Have the parents listen to phrases that can be useful in communicating with children and adults. The task for parents is to suggest situations in which such phrases can be "magical" and help the child feel supported by an adult. Participants can predict how the child will react to the following words: "I'm always here for you," "You're not alone," "I know how you are feeling," "Carry on," "Let's do it together...", "Don't be shy to ask for help," "Remember what you did that time, and it worked out well."



Summing up

Invite the parents to share their thoughts about the meeting in a circle. "What do I take away from today's session?"

TOPIC 10. HOW DO YOU SUPPORT YOURSELF AND YOUR CHILD WHEN FORCED TO LEAVE HOME?

Goal: to help parents adapt to a new place and give recommendations that will help the child adapt faster.

How to proceed with the session



Introduction

Begin your meeting with parents with tea to create a relaxed and easy atmosphere. Invite them into a circle.

Actualisation of experience

Welcome the parents and ask them to share their experience of using the recommendations they received during the sessions. Encourage sharing experiences by supporting parents with phrases like “Thank you for sharing” and “This is truly valuable and important.” Ask about the difficulties they may have encountered.

Ask the parents what they feel when changes occur: when they come on holiday, start a new job, or have any other changes. Conclude that even positive life changes can cause discomfort in the early days, requiring adaptation and effort..



Activation exercise

Invite the participants in a circle to play the Good Health to You game. Explain to the parents that on your “New Day” cue, they should move around freely within the circle and greet the participants they meet. Clarify that they can do this in various ways: hugging, handshaking, nodding, etc. The requirement is to say, “Good health to you.”

On the leader’s command, “I wish good health to you all,” the game ends. You can play 2 or 3 rounds of this game. Participants will feel they have already made friends and become one community.



Information message

Return to the topic of changes in their lives.

- Ask the participants how they felt on the first day of the change.
- What helped them personally to adapt?
- What part of that experience can be borrowed for their current circumstances? What would help you now?

Proceed by saying that changes in children's lives also require adaptation. With the outbreak of the full-scale war, many families with children had to leave their homes. It is a difficult decision for the parents, and it is also a difficult decision for the child. Children experience many emotions in a new place. The main factor causing negative emotions is a longing for home, for family, for a toy, for the familiar space around.

Tell the parents it is crucial to understand how to adapt to new conditions and help their child do it, as well as to see signs of disadaptation in time. Adaptation is a critical process that results in adjustment. An individual becomes capable of acting relatively confidently in a new environment, consciously existing in new places of residence. In addition, a person gains experience of behaving in a situation with new behavioural stereotypes.



The Adaptation exercise

Ask the parents to put together the word "adaptation" using large letters. Participants need to come up with words for each letter of the word ADAPTATION and say why this word is critical. For example: A – Acceptance, D – Dialogue, A – Awareness, P – Play, T – Transition, A – Affirmation, T – Trust, I – Inclusion, O – Optimism, N – Nurturing. Discuss with the parents that understanding the adaptation processes is vital for both children and adults. If children are aware of what is happening and what changes are coming, they will be more confident in overcoming all the challenges of adaptation.



Information message

Give some recommendations to the parents on how to explain to their child what evacuation is and why the family needs to leave their home. "We are doing everything we can to keep you safe. We will be safe. Now you and me need to move to another city. We will be with you all the time. There will be kind people who will help us. Do you see how many good people are around? Much more than bad ones." Emphasise that the adult's voice should sound steady and confident when saying that.

Give participants some tips on how to deal with a child's violent reactions during the evacuation. Explain that one needs to be prepared to that a child will not want to leave their home, toys, and friends. An adult in this situation should support the child: "I am also very sad; I am sorry that you have to go through this. If I could, I would do everything I could to end the war. We need your help now, and soon we will be safe. First, we will have a temporary home, and then we will understand the situation and make decisions. I love you very much, and I am sure we will make it together."

In a difficult adaptation, it is important for a child to feel an adult, to feel support that is conveyed not only through words but also through touch, looks, attention, and praise.

Do not hasten the adaptation process, do not get ahead of events and prepare yourself for living "here and now." "Don't expect quick changes and a return home. Let it happen as soon as possible, but don't just sit around waiting for it. Make yourself comfortable in a new place. The effort spent creating comfort in a rented house will not be in vain. You will feel more confident here and now. Living in the "here and now" can set you up for systematic work with planning your life in the short term. Do not plan for more than 48 hours ahead."

It is good to explain to the parents that the child should be allowed to ask any questions and know about anything that interests and worries them. Questions most often asked by children: "Are we leaving forever?" (Answer: I

don't know how long we are going away for, but I know that if it is safe and if it is possible, we will return), "Where will we live?" (Answer: We will have a temporary home, maybe we will live with other people, there may be other children there), "Won't I see my friends?" (Answer: I am sure that we will be able to keep in touch, call and write to them).



The Good News game

Invite the parents to play a game focused on a positive perception of the world around them. In a circle, let the parents take turns telling good news from their child's life, or their own life, or any news they consider good. To activate all participants, pass the newspaper around the circle. The one who gets the newspaper tells the good news. Explain that in any situation, it is important to focus on the good and look for the good news, even among the bad ones.



Information message: "How to treat a child in a new place"

What to say to a child in a new place? When a family arrives at the destination, tell your child: "We are safe. I am grateful that we were able to do this together. I love you! I am sure we will do well wherever we are." Set up a new home together in a new place. Find possibilities to create comfort around you. A beautiful, bright box can sometimes set the mood better than a luxury wardrobe. For example, you can buy the same houseplants that you have at home or put photos of loved ones by your bedside. This will help make the new place "yours."

Tell the parents how to treat their child at a new place. It is vital to arrange a place for your children to play; even a minimal space, like a separate rug in the room, can become the child's "own" place where toys, books and other items will appear later. Of course, the rug can also turn into a shack or just be a rug on the lawn near the house. So, accept the magical role of the rug and use it actively to arrange a temporary space. Over time, you will have opportunities for a more appropriate arrangement, but a start must be made.

It is crucial to establish rules of behaviour and explain them to the child: "Now you must help us with everything. Please do what we ask you to do. Stay close, don't run away. Don't go with strangers. Try not to be naughty. It will not always be easy for us on the road, but we will manage! Okay? Thank you."



Favourite Things to Do pantomime game

Invite the participants to play the Favourite Things to Do pantomime game. Let the parents remember what kind of activity brings them pleasure and joy. Parents take turns silently showing their favourite things to do without any comments. Participants have to guess and name these things. Be the first to show.

After the game, say that knowing what you like to do and keeping your favourite things in your daily schedule is a very effective way to adapt to new conditions. This will help you partially regain control over your life. It's important to get back to your usual regular tasks and favourite activities and also to know what the children's favourite activities are! If you must leave your home, establish a new routine, familiar rituals, and daily activities in a new place.



Information message

Tell the parents that exploring the new place with your child is essential for adaptation. A new home is not only a new flat or house but also another city, region, or

even country. Explore the new locality with your child. Knowledge about the world around will make you feel safer and more comfortable. Explore unfamiliar streets, squares, shops, and shopping malls. Start a tradition of walking at a particular time in a park or public garden.

To adapt to a new place, it is essential to maintain communication. Be sure to keep in touch with your loved ones who stayed home or evacuated to other cities/countries. Arrange calls between your child and their family. Talking over the phone or having a video call is best, as one can hear and feel people's emotions. Share the impressions of your new place, tell the good news, or even share your night dreams. Talk to people around you. Ask your housemates about their hobbies and preferences. Get to know your neighbours, locals, and other displaced people. Meet with them, discuss plans for after the victory, and help those in need together. In such a difficult time, communication is the best way to unite people and help them feel needed.



Summing up

Invite each participant to think about what they learned from the session and what they want to focus on in the future.

SUMMING UP THE ENTIRE COURSE OF TEN SESSIONS

Congratulate the participants on completing the last session and recall together what topics were discussed during the course. Try to formulate plans for the future together using the knowledge gained during the sessions.

Give the floor to anyone who wants to speak, and then invite the participants to draw rose bushes on large sheets of paper. In doing so, attach meaning to these pictures by writing them down and explaining the meanings implied to the participants. The branches of the bush are the course topics that turned out to be the most useful. Rose flowers on the bush are knowledge that is useful now, advice that helped and supported parents. Buds are knowledge and topics that still need to be processed and may bring results in the future. Thorns are what can hinder you from experiencing the use and beauty of the rose bush. Water for roses is what can nourish and keep the rose bush blooming.

Allow some time for the participants, and then ask the groups to exchange their thoughts and talk about their rosebushes.

USEFUL RESOURCES

1. **When the world is on the verge of change: strategies for adaptation**
www.bit.ly/4e4dXWH
1. **UNICEF. Support for parents and children during war**
www.bit.ly/4e3pRR6
2. **A child's right to play: why it is important for the harmonious development of preschoolers**
www.bit.ly/4e6z0Zi
3. **Svitlana Roiz. Stress-resistant child studies**
www.bit.ly/3Z93be6
4. **Family Circle Health and Development Centre. Information resources on psychological aid during the war**
www.bit.ly/3ZoeM2
5. **How can art therapy help you cope with stress? Useful exercises for children and adults**
www.bit.ly/4dKVTSa
6. **UNICEF. How to talk to children about war: tips from psychologists. Some tips on how to approach a conversation with a child about the war**
www.bit.ly/3X1cvOc
7. **Caring Counselor. Circles of trust**
www.bit.ly/4dJIL0x

PROJECT “SUPPORTING TEACHERS OF PRESCHOOL EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS AND ACCOMPANYING CHILDREN IN AN EMERGENCY”



Analytical note on the results of the project
“Supporting teachers of preschool education
institutions and accompanying children
in an emergency”

www.bit.ly/4hrMvoA



Psychoeducational support for parents and children
in an emergency a guide for instructors on working
with parents of preschool children

<https://bit.ly/3C00t0K>



Psychoeducational support for parents and children
in an emergency a guide for trainers

<https://bit.ly/40jE4pt>



Published with the support of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) Office in Ukraine.

The views and opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position of UNICEF Ukraine.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any means without the prior permission of UNICEF.

ISBN 978-618-7369-01-5

Kyiv 2024