



Talking Together – Parents and Children

Objective: an intervention for children and parents (from young babies to 14) who went through acute trauma during the devastating terrorist attack October 7th 2023. The aim is to intervene as promptly after the trauma as possible so that the intervention will be as effective as possible in preventing PTSD.

Target Population: Children living on the border with Gaza who were attacked directly and were enclosed in security shelters or safe rooms (usually one of the rooms in the house) for long hours while terrorists were breaking into the house, shooting, looting, burning, and threatening to kill the family. The project is intended for families who stayed intact and didn't suffer a direct loss in the immediate family (meaning that the father, mother, and children are alive). These families survived but experienced direct danger to their lives and felt helplessness and terror. The families also suffered severe losses in the communities, ranging from the deaths of many community members to the physical destruction of homes and community resources. These families were then evacuated from their homes to hotels and are now living in hotels. The children are showing signs of acute trauma, including sleeping problems, problems concentrating and learning, tantrums, inconsolable crying, fear of separation, anger outbursts, and aggression towards parents and siblings. The parents in turn feel overwhelmed and in need of support to help their children. We are estimating that about 4000 families need intervention to alleviate these symptoms. It is important to note that families who suffered the death and/or kidnapping of family members need longer and more in-depth treatment).

Talking Together is based on the methods of Child-Parent Psychotherapy (CPP), an early childhood trauma treatment that enables children to talk with their parents about their emotional experience and repair the rupture in the attachment due to the horrifying experiences which the parents could not protect them from. CPP uses trauma science and attachment theory to restore protection and safety in the child-parent relationship. Based on the research-based effectiveness of this approach, we created a short and focused intervention to enable the processing of powerful emotional experiences through the parent-child relationship. We tested **Talking Together** with 50 families. From the feedback we received from parents, community coordinators, and professionals working with the families (medical personnel, teachers), we found that our intervention produces significant relief and better communication between parent and child and significantly reduces children's symptoms of trauma, anxiety, and depression and significantly reduces parents' anxiety around the child's wellbeing as well as feelings of guilt from their perceived failure to protect their children.

The intervention unit is the family. The therapist sees different configurations of family members in dyads or triads, with all the children in the family having a meeting with the parents.

The focus of the intervention is open and direct communication between parents and children, with the therapist helping them put in words the frightening events that the family and the child have undergone, find helpful ways of coping with the intense fear and conflicted feelings that naturally arise in such situations and may affect the relationship, identify sources of safety, comfort and joy, and promote hope in getting better and mending ruptures in the parent-child relationship.

Talking Together includes four elements: 1) A short introductory conversation with the parents to obtain background information, therapeutic alliance with the parents, enhancing parents efficacy to help their child and prepare the parents for the intervention; 2) Attachment-focused parent-child intervention in different family configurations of dyads or triads to process emotional responses to the traumatic events and emotions; 3) A summary and recommendations for the parent; and 4) A follow-up phone call a week after the intervention. According to the follow-up assessment there might be another meeting or referral to further therapy.

Therapists: Each such family intervention unit will be delivered by one therapist for two hours. The therapists are therapists from recognized professions in the Ministry of Health (psychologists, social workers, and expressive arts therapists) who are certified therapists of trauma in children, with training and experience in treating this population. Beyond basic training, the therapists participating in the project will undergo a brief specific training that prepares them to implement **Talking Together**.

We have 70 therapists working with us, and we have conducted over 300 therapy sessions.

The program is led by certified counselors and lecturers in the treatment of trauma in children:

Netta Ofer, an expert educational psychologist, certified trainer in the treatment of trauma in children on behalf of the Haruv Institute at the Hebrew University School of Social Work.

Naama Kroyzer, an expert rehabilitation psychologist and supervisor, certified trainer in the treatment of trauma in children on behalf of the Haruv Institute at the Hebrew University School of Social Work.

Einat Shaked, an expert clinical psychologist specializing in working with children and trauma.

For information: medabrimyahad@gmail.com

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