

- When the child wakes up from a nightmare, wake him up gently and let him see you and reassure him/her that s/he is safe. You can put him/her in your arms in your bed and stroke his/her hair while singing a lullaby you know in a calm voice or read religious statements to help him fall asleep again. Massaging the child's body or asking him/her to count backwards from 100 may help him/her fall asleep again. Sitting with the children in the morning and talking about their dreams helps get rid of nightmares.
- Children may lose beloved ones in this war, do not hide your sadness and tears from the children, help them express their sadness and comfort them by saying, "He passed away (martyred) and I know that you are sad about his/her loss." It is important to help children understand the meaning of death, for example: by saying that the deceased is now in a better place because s/he died unjustly, and God is taking care of him/her. Encourage children to talk about the good memories of the deceased. You can also ask the children to read religious verses for his/her soul and pray for him/her. Visiting the grave of the deceased is very useful in alleviating sadness and grief in children and adults alike.
- Reduce family talk about the war and watching painful videos, especially before bed. It is preferable to focus the talks on enjoyable experiences as much as possible, even in these difficult times.
- Encourage your children to practice their interests and hobbies whatever they are as long as they have the necessary tools or materials for that, such as drawing or reading.
- Distribute roles among everyone so that each child has a role in performing daily family tasks.
- Continuously praise children when they show positive adaptive responses, such as helping family, playing, comforting siblings, etc.
- Since the war is still going on, you can use the above to build your own way to help the children that you can use whenever you need considering that you include activities from the three steps.
- Now, that you have more knowledge about how to help children, you can include other children in the displacement site with your children when you provide assistance, as well as teach other parents how to do this with their children.

We encourage both parents to read this brochure to ensure that they interact harmoniously with their children.

The suggested tips in this brochure can also be useful for teachers to use with the groups of children they teach.

When additional psychosocial support is needed, we encourage you to involve your children in the groups organized by community centers in your area.

Prepared by:

Safwat Diab (PhD) Specialist and Researcher in education and psychosocial health to children victims of war

In collaboration with:

Nora Sveaass, Clinical Psychologist, Professor Emeritus

Helen Christie, Clinical Child Psychologist

Beate Seibt, Professor of Social Psychology

Katrin Glatz Brubakk, Clinical Child Psychologist

Elisabeth Ng Langdal, Cand. Polit in Human Geography

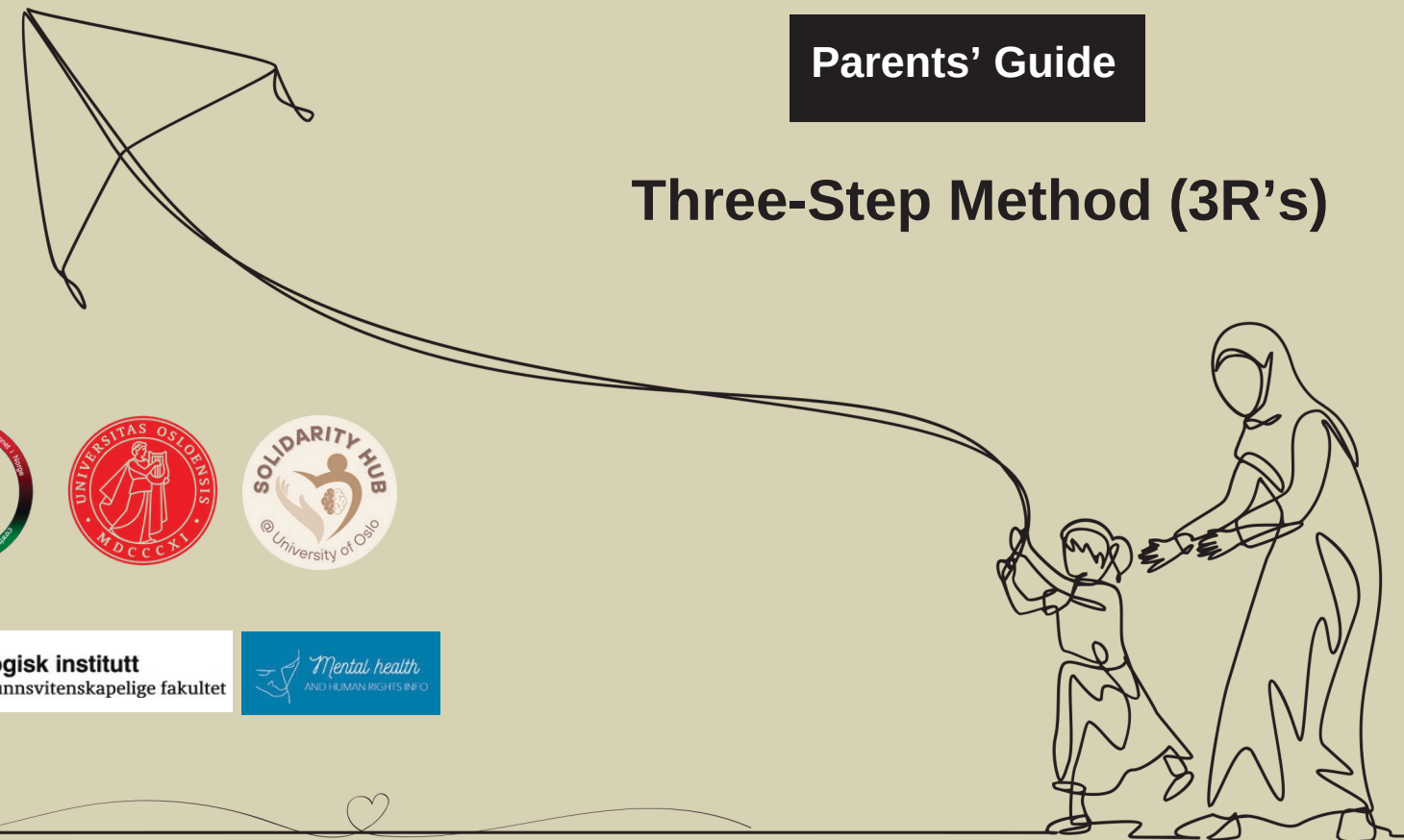
Eisha Mehtab, Master in Social and Cultural Psychology



Psychosocial Support for Children During War

Parents' Guide

Three-Step Method (3R's)



Dear parents and family members

- Events of war have a profound impact on everyone, especially children. They may show signs of distress such as: clinging to their parents, stomach aches, headaches, difficulty sleeping and nightmares, trembling, extreme sadness or anger, acting out and self-harm or apathy, or stopping playing or talking.
- Children easily notice their parents' fear, which in turn makes them feel scared and insecure too. So, you need to regain control quickly to prevent this. Deep breathing and drinking water can help you calm down and stay in control.
- These circumstances can make you more nervous and less patient with your children, and lead you to unintentionally act more aggressively. You need to be perceptive and control yourself so that this does not impact them. Use your own methods to calm down and regain control.
- Your children expect you to understand their suffering and anxiety and to give them a sense of security and protection, and to provide them with the support they need.
- The following is a suggestion of a three-step method based on natural daily parenting behaviors to help you provide care for your children in times of war to protect them from more severe problems.

First: Restoring a sense of security: (Follow the steps below in order)

- Hug your most fearful child and say reassuring phrases, "You are fine, I am with you and protecting you." Allow him/her to cry freely. When s/he calms down, say words like, "You are brave, you are strong." If there is a group of children, put them in the middle and hug them all with your partner or an older child while repeating reassuring phrases.
- After everyone has calmed down, you all can do a deep breathing exercise with interlocked hands, "Breathe in through your nose until your belly is full like a balloon, then slowly exhale through your mouth, repeat 5 times." Alternatively, you can practice other familiar rituals such as, reading religious statements, or singing a children's song.
- Allow and encourage the children to play with each other or with friends if they want to and if the situation is safe in the area.

Second: Responding to the child's thoughts: (Follow what you find appropriate from the activities)

- Allow the children to ask questions and talk about thoughts and feelings, and answer them frankly and simply, only with what you know, and without leaving any doubts about the event. After that, reassure them of their safety and tell them that you will always take care of them.
- Then, remind the children of a pleasant former experience and narrate it in detail as a story with a series of events and in a fun and entertaining way. Give them the opportunity to ask questions and answer them in depth. Alternatively, you can tell a story from your childhood or a fictional story with a happy ending. Or one of the children can tell a story.
- Organize a round to solve riddles. Present reasonably difficult riddles in a funny and attractive way. They can be about fruits, vegetables, birds, animals or anything that comes to mind. Also allow the children to tell their riddles to the group. You can also use jokes to make the child/children laugh.
- You can involve children in doing something practical as individuals or as a group, such as organizing the place, helping prepare food, taking care of their younger siblings, or any other task. If the children avoid doing things they used to do before, you have to accept that and change the activity to another one they can do.
- Encourage your children to play a group game that they know or a game that you know from your childhood, if the needed tools or materials are available. There are many games that do not require materials, or the materials can be made from simple things, you certainly know many of them.
- After dealing with the children's thoughts, encourage them to play with each other or with friends if they want to, and if the situation in the area is safe.



Third: Restoring hope for the future: (Follow the steps below in order)

- Reassure the children that this situation will end and that many people and countries are working on it and the situation will be safe soon.
- Remind the children of their life before the war, whether at home, school or the neighborhood, and encourage them to talk freely about it and to imagine that all of you will go back to doing the same things and enjoying life together again.
- It is preferable to give the children some information about the damage that has happened to the house or area without burdening them, so that they build realistic expectations for the future. However, you must tell them directly and in a cheerful and optimistic tone of voice that you will rebuild what was destroyed and arrange things again so that life can return to normal and enjoy it again.
- Encourage your children to build social relationships with other children in the area and participate in social and sports activities with them. This enhances the feeling of security and reduces the feeling of loneliness and loss of hope.

After completing the assistance procedures, observe the children's body language, facial expressions, tone of voice and breathing rhythm and notice if any of them are still tense. Bring this child closer to you and, with warm touches on his head with hugs and kisses, tell him/her that you understand his/her suffering and that you are by his/her side. This helps this child to stabilize and achieve balance.

Special issues and important considerations:

- Monitor your children's behavior throughout the day and notice signs of fear and anxiety in them. The best you can do is to bring this child closer to you and give him/her more of your time, warmth and love (listening, hugging, kissing) and increase the social interaction opportunities in the family, and set a time every day when the family gathers and talks or does group activities such as playing, singing or telling stories.