



HEALING THROUGH PLAY

Using psychosocial support approaches and play to support children's social and emotional wellbeing in crisis contexts

A training guide

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About the LEGO Foundation

The LEGO Foundation aims to inspire and develop the builders of tomorrow; a mission that it shares with the LEGO Group. The LEGO Foundation is dedicated to building a future where learning through play empowers children to become creative, engaged, lifelong learners. Its work is about redefining play and re-imagining learning.

Learn more at www.learningthroughplay.com.

About the MHPSS Collaborative

The MHPSS Collaborative is a global hub for mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), research, innovation, learning and advocacy. We connect key academic and humanitarian actors with local civil society to give children, youth and families in fragile and humanitarian settings the possibility to thrive.

Learn more at www.mhpssc Collaborative.org

The LEGO Foundation



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Healing through Play: a training guide

Welcome to *Healing through Play*. We've created this training guide and called it *Healing through Play* because we believe in the power of play to help children heal from the effects of conflict and adversity.

We know that exposure to stress, violence and adversity can significantly affect children's healthy development and have a devastating impact on their lives, leading to psychological and physical difficulties for both children and their families.

Research tells us that there is a link between play and children's ability to understand and cope with the demands of their environment. When everyday life is disrupted, routines and opportunities that provide some sense of normality are crucial to shield children and families from the stressors around them.

Playing helps children to recognize and express their emotions and develop positive relationships with peers and family members. It helps them to deal with anxiety and build their ability to concentrate and focus on what's important to them. It helps them to recover their sense of normality and their hopes for a bright future.

Play-based techniques are therefore crucial in supporting children's social-emotional wellbeing, ability to cope and resilience in times of extreme adversity.

When we increase spaces and opportunities for safe play – at home, at school and in public areas – we provide children with ways to channel negative emotions and practise strategies to overcome stress.

This training guide is for volunteers who support children and families affected by adversity. It has three parts:

- How to conduct the *Healing through Play* training
- The training sessions
- PowerPoint slides linked to the training.



How to conduct the *Healing through Play* training

Before conducting a training using this guide, please familiarize yourself with all the resources.

Gather all the materials needed and make any adaptations to reflect your training context. This includes making changes to the training schedule (shown below) so that it is suitable for your specific training group and circumstances.

Participants

Healing through Play is a one-day training course aimed at volunteers providing community-based play activities for children (aged 3–12 years) affected by adversity and their families.

The training is aimed at participants with no previous experience in providing mental health and psychosocial support.

For in-person training, we recommend a maximum group size of 20 participants. For an online group, we recommend a maximum of eight to ten participants.

By the end of the training, participants will be able to:

- Understand the importance of play for children affected by crisis
- Understand the basics of when and how to provide psychosocial support, including limits in supporting children and families who may be in distress
- Identify activities and resources for social-emotional play activities with children affected by crisis.

Timing of the training

The training can be delivered in-person or online as a one-day workshop.

Here is a suggested programme.

Time	Session
10:00–10:30	Session 1: Introduction and expectations
10:30–12:00	Session 2: What we know about wellbeing and play
12:00–12:45	Lunch
12:45–16:30	Session 3: Basic psychosocial support Session 4: How to facilitate <i>Healing through Play</i> activities Session 5: Facilitators' wellbeing and role
16:30–17:00	Session 6: Reflections and close

We haven't shown timings for each session in the training notes below. Training facilitators can plan the details of the programme and provide time for breaks and refreshments that suit local circumstances.

We especially recommend that wellbeing breaks feature in the day as a way of modelling good self-care for participants and facilitators. There are PowerPoint slides that prompt a **wellbeing break** and a **mindfulness moment**.





Facilitators

We recommend having two facilitators for each training workshop. They should be experienced in:

- planning and providing safe play activities for children and families affected by adversity
- facilitating training and supporting volunteers in community-based settings.

Materials used in the training


Useful materials for volunteers attending the training include: paper, pens and markers, LEGO bricks (or other toys that can be used to create shapes), digital devices. Each session has a list of materials needed for the activities in that session, indicated by this icon: 

A set of PowerPoint slides accompanying these training notes can be used if needed. They can be presented at the points indicated by this icon: 

Adaptation

This training guide is meant to be as generic as possible. But all conflicts, countries, cultures and contexts are different. We strongly encourage facilitators to use examples and case studies that are relevant and appropriate to the context participants are working in.

Adapting the training for online delivery

Ideally the training should be delivered face to face. However, in a conflict or natural disaster, or if participants live far from each other, this may not be practical or safe. In such cases, the training – or parts of it – can be delivered online. Each module has tips on how to do this, indicated by this icon: 

There are several platforms that can be used for online training. We recommend using a platform the facilitator and participants are familiar with.

Many of the activities in the training require participants to work together in smaller groups and to interact in different ways.

For the best possible training experience, we recommend that the platform supports the following features:

- Chat function
- Breakout rooms
- Reactions (such as raising a hand to wait for one's turn, sending a "thumbs up" to indicate agreement, etc.)
- Video.

Many activities use a virtual board to share text and pictures, draw, and work collaboratively in real time. Not all platforms provide this option, or do so only in premium versions. If your platform doesn't support a virtual board, there are free options available, such as Google Jamboard.



Where adaptations are not provided, the table below provides some examples of adaptations for in-person vs. online training.

In person	Online
Use a flipchart or board	Share a slide on your screen
Divide participants into groups	Put participants in breakout rooms
Display something in the classroom	Display on the virtual classroom and in the background on your screen
Build something in the classroom	Instruct participants to build something at home, using the materials they have, then send a photo of it (or direct their camera to it)
Play a group game	Find a virtual/online game that achieves the same learning objectives, and get participants to play with one another virtually

Timing of breaks online

Participating in and facilitating training sessions online requires a different level of focus and concentration than face-to-face trainings. Therefore, when planning online sessions, make sure to allocate time for more frequent breaks. Depending on the flow of the session and the energy of the group, a short break every hour or hour-and-a-half is recommended.



Healing through Play training notes

Session

1

Introduction and expectations

Aims of the session

- To provide an overview of the day
- To check in with participants
- To align expectations



Pens and paper

Introduction



1

- ➔ Welcome participants, introduce yourselves and give a brief overview of the day's programme. Give practical information about the venue if it's an in-person training workshop.
- ➔ Explain that there are three components to this training:
 - Understanding stress and the importance of play
 - Learning how to facilitate *Healing through Play* activities
 - Highlighting the importance of facilitators' wellbeing and role.

- ➔ Explain that to prepare for the day ahead, you'll be doing three activities together.

How are you today?



2

- ➔ Invite participants to form small groups of two to four people.
 - Ask each participant to spend two minutes writing a poem about how they're feeling.
 - The poem must be 10 words maximum and include their name, at least one animal and one colour.
 - Next, take turns reading out the poem to group members.
 - Now ask them to work together to make the individual poems into one poem.
 - Finally, invite each small group to share their poem with the wider group.
- 🖥️ Instead of forming small groups, ask one or two participants to read their individual poems out loud. Ask the rest of the participants to share their poems in the chat.



Reflection

- ➔ Invite participants to share how they're feeling about participating in the training.
- ➔ Explain that checking in on how people feel is an important skill in providing psychosocial support.

Park it in your pocket



- ➔ This activity enables participants to process their thoughts and feelings before the training gets underway.
 - Say to participants, for example:

"In the last two activities we talked about how we're feeling. Maybe there are things popping up for you. You could be distracted. You could be energized and hopeful that you can make a difference. You may also be experiencing intense feelings that you're not sure what to do with. Let's take some time to acknowledge what we're feeling and process those feelings through an activity called Park it in your pocket."
 - Invite participants to write a big **P** at the top of a piece of paper or in a document on their computer and to:

"Think about what you were doing right before coming into this room. How were you feeling? What types of interaction did you have? What's still on your mind and in your heart right now?"

"Write or draw the things you're thinking and feeling, and that you may want to park and address later when you have time. These are just for you, we won't be sharing them out loud. Parking our thoughts can help us be more present, aware and focused on the task ahead."

"Once you're done, sit comfortably, close your eyes if that feels OK or soften your gaze. Focusing on your breathing, take five deep breaths. When you're done, slowly bring your attention back into the room, open your eyes if you're ready, wriggle your hands and move your shoulders. Now put your piece of paper in your pocket or fold it up next to you to pick up again later."



Ask the participants to save their thoughts on their computer.

Aims and expectations of the training

- ➔ Spend a few minutes explaining the aims and objectives of the training.
- ➔ Explain that volunteers are crucial in facilitating safe and nurturing spaces for children. This workshop therefore aims to strengthen the knowledge, agency and skills of volunteers, and to provide a range of tools to facilitate play-based activities that support the social-emotional wellbeing of children and families affected by crisis. It will also help volunteers to understand their role and its limitations, and to know where and when to reach out for help.
- ➔ Ask participants about the contexts in which they work. The training is based on the following assumptions:
 - Most play activities are carried out in person in community centres that have a child safeguarding framework in place.
 - The target age group of children is 3–12 years.
 - Caregivers are also likely to attend the play sessions.
 - Other local services such as more specialized mental health and psychosocial support have been mapped out and are available.



➔ Highlight the specific objectives of the workshop.
At the end of the training, participants will:



- Understand the importance of play for children affected by crisis
- Understand the basic principles of when and how to provide psychosocial support, including their role and limitations in supporting those who may be in distress
- Have access to activities and resources for social-emotional play activities with children affected by crisis
- Feel empowered to facilitate *Healing through Play* sessions
- Know how to recognize and respond appropriately when children and families need other types of support
- Be able to find support in a community of *Healing through Play* facilitators.

➔ Ask participants to share their expectations of the training. Some may have expectations outside its scope. Ensure that they understand what is and isn't realistic.



Ask participants to write their expectations in the chat.



Session 2

Understanding wellbeing and the importance of play

Aims of the session

- To introduce the concept of wellbeing
- To explain what protective factors are
- To enable participants to recognize signs of distress in children
- To enable participants to know when and how to refer for additional support
- To highlight the importance of play for children



- Pens and paper
- LEGO bricks or other building toys (if available)

- ➔ Explain that in this session we'll be answering the following questions:
- How do we describe wellbeing?
 - What is stress and what's the difference between everyday stress and more chronic stress that can affect our mental health and wellbeing over time?
 - What are some typical signs of distress in children?

- What are protective factors?
- How does play support and build on children's and families' coping strategies and wellbeing?

The wellbeing flower¹

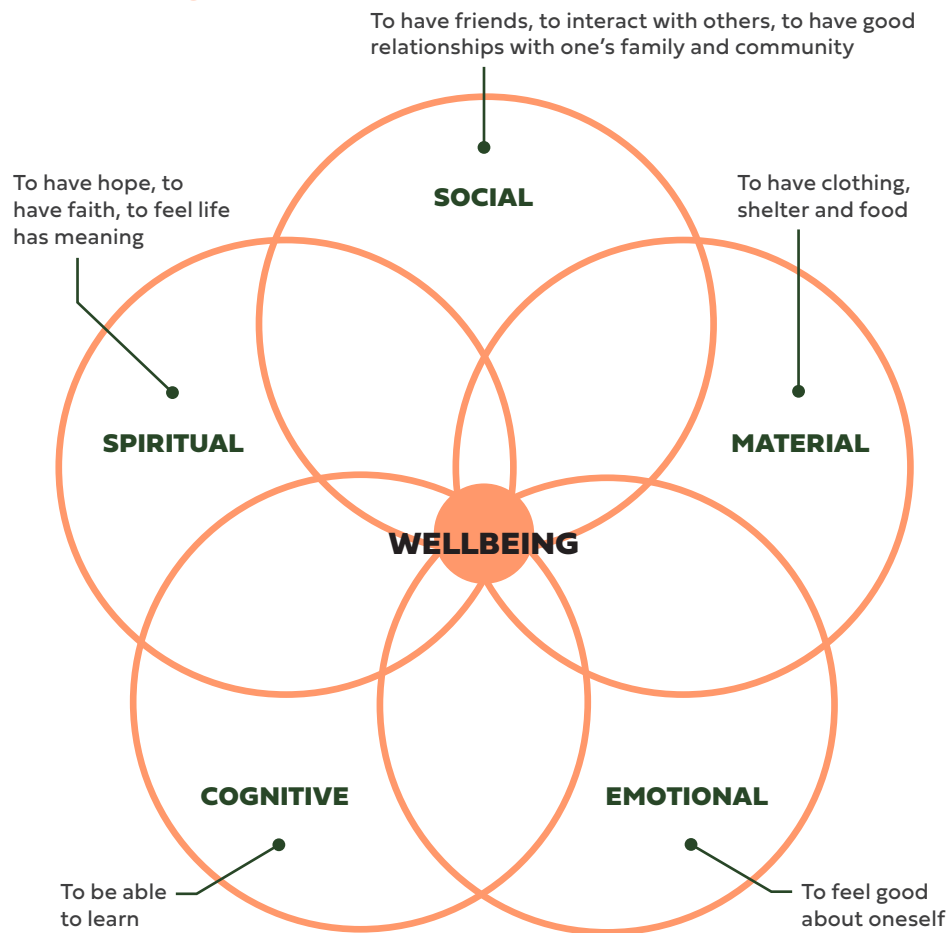
- ➔ The session begins with an opportunity to reflect individually on wellbeing.
- ➔ Show the PowerPoint slide "Nurturing the wellbeing flower" or draw the wellbeing flower on a large piece of paper (see illustration on next page). Explain that:
- Children's and young people's wellbeing means being safe from abuse, exploitation, neglect and violence, and being healthy or "well" in five areas: spiritual, social, material, emotional and cognitive.
 - Each circle in the wellbeing flower represents an aspect of human needs. We suffer when these needs aren't met, and wellbeing is particularly at risk in crisis contexts.
 - In thinking about what makes children "well", it's important to think beyond basic material needs and to also consider the social, emotional, spiritual and cognitive needs of children and young people.



¹ Developed by the International Rescue Committee to show the various aspects of wellbeing in children's and adults' lives. *The Well-being Guide: Reduce stress, recharge and build inner resilience*. 2022. Copenhagen: IFRC Reference Centre for Psychosocial Support.



The wellbeing flower



➔ Say, for example:

"The work you're doing as volunteers with children and their families relates directly to this wellbeing flower. You'll be doing a lot of work to support children's social and emotional wellbeing needs. In this training we'll be basing our responses to these needs on psychological first aid. Of course, there are other needs and we'll talk about how to get support related to those other aspects of the wellbeing flower."

Activity: How do we describe wellbeing?



➔ Invite participants to think about a time in their childhood when they felt supported by a teacher or other professional or volunteer and how that individual supported them. Ask them to:

- Try to remember the details about the support they got. What did the person do? What was the experience like? Who was involved?
- Draw it on a piece of paper or build it with LEGO or other toy bricks and tell the story.
- Give personal examples from their own experiences that relate specifically to the wellbeing flower.



Invite online participants to draw or build something reflecting their story for this activity. The process of creating a drawing or model is more important than showing it to the other participants. However, if they wish to do so, they can hold their creation up to the camera when sharing their experiences.



What is stress?

➔ Explain that stress is part of everyday life and that our bodies were built to handle normal levels of stress.

➔ Say, for example:

“Stress is a natural human response that enables us to cope with challenges and threats in our lives. A little bit of stress can be good and help us to perform daily activities.

“But too much stress can cause physical and mental problems. When stress becomes overwhelming and continues over time, it can harm our health and wellbeing. Stressors (the things that cause stress) such as a lack of control, a feeling of uncertainty about the future and experiencing conflict or other adversity can lead to high levels of stress.

“In a child’s developing brain, prolonged exposure to severe stressors can cause changes to the way the brain functions or develops.

“When children experience a range of adverse childhood experiences over time, they can start to show signs of stress and distress.”

➔ Invite participants to talk about the signs of stress they may have seen in children in the context they’re currently working in or in their personal lives.

➔ Explain to those who give examples from their work that the children (or caregivers) MAY be in distress.



Ask participants to write examples in the chat or to raise their hand.

➔ Show the common signs of psychosocial distress in children (see next page and PowerPoint slide 7).








Emphasize that each child is unique, that they may handle high levels of stress in different ways and that younger and older children have different patterns of reaction.

➔ Explain that these are all possible signs of distress that may occur over time.

➔ It’s important to stress that these lists should not be used to diagnose distress. They’re a helpful guide for participants about the stress the children in their care may be experiencing.



Common signs of psychosocial distress in children

<h2>Physical reactions</h2> 	Age	Reaction
<p>People of any age may experience physical reactions to distress. Some may experience several reactions, some none or very few. The physical reactions could also be signs of physical illness. If a child's symptoms persist, become worse or in other ways are a cause for concern, the child should see a doctor.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Extreme tiredness ● Stomach ache ● Tight chest ● Dry mouth ● Muscle weakness ● Shortness of breath ● Dizziness ● Shaking ● Headaches ● General aches 	<p>0–3 years</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Clinging to their caregivers more than normal ● Regressing to former (younger) behaviours ● Changes in sleeping and eating patterns ● Higher irritability ● Increased hyperactivity ● More afraid of things ● More demanding ● More frequent crying
	<p>4–6 years</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Clinging to adults ● Regressing to former (younger) behaviours ● Changes in sleeping and eating patterns ● Higher irritability ● Poorer concentration ● Becoming more inactive or more hyperactive ● Stop playing ● Take on adult roles ● Stop talking ● More anxious or worried
	<p>7–12 years</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Becoming withdrawn ● Frequent concern about others affected ● Changes in sleeping and eating patterns ● Increasingly fearful ● Higher irritability ● Frequent aggression ● Restlessness ● Poor memory and concentration ● Physical symptoms/psychosomatic ● Frequently talks about the event or repetitive play ● Feels guilty or blames themselves
	<p>13–17 years (teens)</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Intense grief ● Shows excessive concern for others ● Feelings of guilt and shame ● Increasingly defiant of authority ● Increased risk taking ● Aggression ● Self-destructive ● Feeling hopeless

Adapted from: UNICEF. 2022. *Common signs of psychosocial distress in children.*



Protective factors and resilience



➔ Explain that when stress levels are high, there are positive elements in most children’s lives that can support and protect them and promote their wellbeing. These are called protective factors and include:

- a supportive relationship with a trusted adult
- a sense of normality (through education and play)
- positive social connections
- parental resilience.

Protective factors



- Providers of safe, nurturing play spaces can support and protect families and help to reduce the impact of stress on children and caregivers.
- Children are resilient. Through a combination of their own personality and protective factors in their environment, most have the inner strength and ability to recover from the stress and adversity that has affected their development.
- This inner resilience can be boosted when children’s basic needs, including their safety, are met, their rights upheld, and they:
 - Can learn and play in safe places
 - Have a range of nurturing and supportive relationships
 - Are given the opportunity to participate in play-based social-emotional activities.
- The above three ingredients are also key to alleviating the effects of stress and help to put children back on track in their holistic development.

➔ Ask each participant to reflect for a few minutes on the situation of the children they work with. Ask them what protective factors are in place and what they can do to strengthen the protective factors around them?

➔ Invite two or three participants to share their reflections.



Knowing when and how to refer for more support

- ➔ Emphasize that the participants should not diagnose stress or other mental health conditions.
 - If they recognize that a child may be showing signs of distress, especially over a prolonged period, they should seek additional support for the child and the family.
 - It's important to know how and when to make a referral to other services that can help.
 - All activity centres should have referral guidelines and a map of available services in their community.

What is play and why is it so important?



- ➔ This final part of Session 2 includes an overview of what play is and why it's important. It features two games for participants to experience the value of play and ends with reflection time.
- ➔ Explain that play is crucial to children's wellbeing and fulfils several important functions in children's lives. According to the LEGO Foundation:
 - **Play provides a supportive context to help children cope with stress.** Research shows a link between play and children's ability to understand and cope with the demands of their environment, respond to challenges with creative problem solving, and manage their anxiety in stressful situations. Increasing spaces and opportunities for safe play in children's

daily lives and contexts – at home, in school, and in public areas – provides them with ways to channel negative emotions and practice strategies to overcome stress.

- **Play is a powerful experience for developing self-regulation, a central ability for children to cope with stress.** Play interactions and playful learning activities, such as sociodramatic play and storytelling/story-acting, increase positive feelings and promote the cognitive skills that are critical in managing emotional and behavioural responses integral to learning and managing stress².
- **Play supports children exposed to severe and prolonged adversity.** Playful experiences and interventions can be an effective way of addressing the needs of children who have experienced abuse, violence, poverty, illness and other forms of adversity. Creating the community infrastructure and designing culturally responsive play approaches to facilitate children's learning and development increases the chances of maintaining children's health and wellbeing when faced with adversity.³

- ➔ When combined with adult guidance, the benefits of play are particularly effective in supporting children experiencing adversity. Implementing play interventions that address both adults' and children's coping skills can make an important difference in promoting children's ability to withstand the effects of adversity and supporting caregivers in engaging in responsive interactions with children. This emphasizes the importance of preserving the ties between children and their significant caregivers and fostering human connections through facilitated playgroups, familial play therapies, and community-based play programmes.

2: Zosh, J.M., Hopkins, E.J., Jensen, H., Liu, C., Neale, D., Hirsh-Pasek, K., Solis, S.L., & Whitebread, D. (2017). Learning through play: A review of the evidence. LEGO Foundation.

3: LEGO Foundation: Learning to cope through play: Playful learning as an approach to support children's coping during times of heightened stress and adversity, www.learningthroughplay.com/explore-the-research/coping-through-play



Let's play "I Like Ice Cream!"



- ➔ Invite participants to play the game "I Like Ice Cream".
- ➔ Explain that the aim of the activity is to enable participants to experience how play can be helpful in connecting children with one another, supporting their emotional wellbeing and reducing stress.
- ➔ Explain that the game teaches children to listen and respond to one another. They do this by setting up a clapping rhythm and then doing a simple chant describing the foods they each like.
- ➔ Ask the participants to get ready to play the game.

Instructions for the game

1. Invite participants to sit in a circle.
2. Together, create a simple clapping rhythm, for example, clapping hands twice and then slapping thighs twice.
3. As they make the rhythm, lead the participants in a chant: "I like ice cream, yes I do. I like ice cream, how about you?"
4. Repeat the clapping and chant a few times until everyone is familiar with the words and movements. Now go around the circle and give each person a turn to say their favourite food. For example, "I like mangoes, how about you?"
5. Repeat until the chant has moved around the circle and each person has had a chance to share a food they like.
6. Invite participants to share their ideas about how the game could be changed in the next round.

Reflection

- ➔ Invite participants to use the wellbeing flower to reflect on how this game could support children's and families' social-emotional wellbeing. If there is time, share reflections together.

Take a 10-minute wellbeing break



- ➔ Invite participants to get up and move, stretch a little and get a refreshment. Remind them to be back on time, as 10 minutes go fast.



Basic psychosocial support skills

Aims of the session

- To introduce basic psychosocial support skills, including supportive communication and grounding techniques
- To provide time to practise grounding techniques



None

- ➔ Introduce the session by explaining that basic psychosocial skills can be used to help children and families who are in distress.
 - They are a way to help children and families feel grounded and support them to cope in a difficult situation.
 - Volunteers involved in facilitating play-based activities are likely to already be using some or all of these basic skills.
 - It's important to be trained and have access to supportive supervision when providing psychosocial support to children and families in distress.

Basic psychosocial support skills in action⁴



12

- ➔ Use PowerPoint slide 12 or write the nine steps on a large piece of paper.
- ➔ Explain that the nine steps are a guide to knowing what to do when responding to someone who is in distress. Look at each step with participants and ask them to suggest how they would put each step into practice in their contexts.
 1. **Safety first:** Scan your surroundings and make sure that you, the person you are seeking to help, and others are safe from harm. When doing activities with children, it's important to always have a co-facilitator with you to ensure that you can step away if needed.
 2. **Let them know who you are:** if you don't know the individual, introduce yourself clearly and respectfully – say your name and your role, and that you're there to help. Ask them their name so that you can call them by that name.
 3. **Keep calm:** Creating a calming presence is important as you can mirror calmness to help to support the individual.
 4. **Listen and use supportive communication:** Do not put pressure on the person to talk. Be patient and reassure them that you are there to help and to listen. Use the three steps of supportive communication – look, listen and care (see below for more details about this).

4: Inter-Agency Standing Committee. (2020). Basic Psychosocial Support: A Guide for COVID-19 Responders. License: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.



5. **Offer practical comfort and information:** If possible, offer the person a quiet place to talk, a drink of water or a blanket. These gestures will help them feel safe. Ask them what they need – don't assume that you know.
6. **Offer grounding exercises if needed:** If the person is anxious, support them to take some deep breaths and focus on their breathing to regain calm. If the person is out of touch with their surroundings, remind them where they are, the day of the week and who you are. Ask them to notice things in their immediate environment, e.g. "name one thing you see or hear". Help them to use their own coping strategies and to reach out to supportive people in their lives.
7. **Provide clear information:** Give reliable information to help the person understand the situation and what help is available. Make sure that you use words they can understand (not complicated words). Keep the message simple and repeat it or write it down if needed. Ask them if they understand or have any questions.
8. **Stay with the person:** Try not to leave the person alone. If you can't stay with them, find a safe person (a colleague, a friend) to be with them until you find help or they feel calmer.
9. **Refer if needed:** Do not go beyond the limits of what you know. Let others with more specialized skills, such as doctors, nurses, counsellors and mental health professionals, take over. Link the person directly with support, or make sure that they have contact information and clear instructions for getting further help.

Listening and supportive communication



This is related to Step 4 of the nine steps in providing psychosocial support (above).

- ➔ Explain that supportive communication has three components – **look, listen** and **care**. Listening is the most essential part of supportive communication. Rather than immediately offering advice, it's important to let people speak in their own time and for those responding to listen carefully so that they can truly understand the situation and needs, help the person to feel calm and be able to offer appropriate help that's useful.
- ➔ Look at each component in turn and discuss with participants what they mean in practice.

1. Look

- ➔ This means giving the person your undivided attention and scanning how they're doing. Do they need support to help ground them? Are there immediate needs you can support them with?

2. Listen

- ➔ This means truly hearing their concerns, including:
 - Keeping an open, relaxed posture
 - Using culturally appropriate eye contact to support the person to feel relaxed and heard
 - Not looking away or down at the floor or at your phone
 - Introducing yourself clearly – giving your name and role. Don't assume that the person knows who you are or what your role is.
 - Maintaining a calm and soft tone of voice with a moderate volume



- Not assuming that the person is comfortable speaking to you. If someone speaks a different language from you, try to access an interpreter (or trusted family member) and to reassure them.

3. Care

➔ This means showing respect and empathy, including:

- Using supportive phrases to show empathy (“I understand what you’re saying”) and acknowledging any losses or difficult feelings that the person shares (“I’m so sorry to hear that”, “That sounds like a tough situation”)
- Being sure to speak and behave in ways that are appropriate and respectful, according to the person’s culture, age, gender and religion. Do not put pressure on the person to speak if they don’t want to.
- Identifying and reflecting key points you’ve heard the person say, so that they know you’ve heard them and to be sure that you’ve understood them correctly.

Grounding

➔ Grounding is a useful technique to help a distressed person feel calmer. Explain that if a child is in distress, you can try to introduce grounding exercises. It can be something simple like asking what noises the child can hear, if appropriate. Encouraging deep breathing can help to calm down the central nervous system.

➔ They can practise taking deep breaths with the children, following the prompts below:

- Ask them to place one hand on their chest and the other hand on their stomach and to take a deep breath and notice which hand rises.

- Explain that we mostly breathe with our chest, but when we breathe to calm our bodies, we should try to breathe into our stomachs.
- Ask them to imagine they have a balloon in their stomach and that when they breathe in the balloon fills with air and their stomach gets big. When they breathe out, all the air escapes from the balloon and their stomachs, so they both shrink again.
- Suggest that they pretend to be a lion and to take a deep breath in and sigh it out like a lion would (with their tongue sticking out).

Role play to demonstrate the nine steps

➔ Two training facilitators are needed to do this role play – one plays a child aged eight and the other plays the volunteer facilitating a play session.

The scenario for the role play is as follows:

- During a play-based group activity for refugee children, a child starts to shake and withdraws from the activity. One of the play facilitators notices this and asks to talk to the child individually. The facilitator then uses the nine steps of basic psychosocial support to help the child.
- The person role playing the child says that their father stayed in their homeland. They haven’t spoken to him for a long time, and they’re very worried about him. The child says they’re having a hard time sleeping and have lost their appetite. They’ve never experienced this before, and it’s a very scary feeling.
- During the role play, ask the participants to pay attention to the skills being used and to notice how the facilitator uses playfulness even within a difficult situation. Spend a few minutes after the role play to discuss the skills used.



How to facilitate *Healing through Play* activities

Aims of the session

- To present resources for *Healing through Play* activities.
- To provide time for participants to do some of the *Healing through Play* activities.
- Paper, pencils/crayons
- Set of words or photographs for the Pictionary game (Choose words or photos that are relevant to your context.)
- Optional: Play dough, LEGO or other toy bricks
- Set of drawings or models for the Back to Back game

- ➔ Introduce the session by explaining that there are a range of play-based, social-emotional tools and resources for *Healing through Play* activities available on the Learning through Play website www.learningthroughplay.com/let-s-play. Give participants the website address.
- ➔ Explain that participants will play two activities from the website during the session. Be sure to spend time on reflection and relating the activities to the wellbeing flower after each activity.

Let's play Pictionary!



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- ➔ Explain that the object of the game is for the children to learn about the importance of verbal and non-verbal communication to achieve a goal.

What you need

Paper, pencils/crayons, OR the children can use play dough, a set of words or photographs for the game.

How to play


- Organize the participants into teams of three or four.
- One participant is given a piece of paper with a photograph or a word on it. This participant is not allowed to talk.
- This participant is tasked with drawing a picture of the item written on the paper.
- The other members of the team must guess what the participant has drawn.
- The team members can ask questions about the drawing, but the person who drew the picture cannot answer verbally.
- The round is over when the team has guessed what the drawing is.
- Each team member should have a turn to draw a picture.



- ➔ End the game by explaining to participants that it's important to conclude all *Healing through Play* activities with children with a short reflection. They should ask the children to reflect individually and for one or two to share their thoughts on the following questions:
 - What was easy or difficult about not being able to talk?
 - Did you feel like you wanted to talk? What stopped you?
 - Could you always understand the person who was drawing? What could you have done to make it easier?
 - What are you learning about how to communicate with people?
- ➔ Explain to participants how they could make the game more or less challenging. To scale up the activity and make it more challenging, they could use more challenging words or limit the number of times the children can guess what their teammate is drawing. To scale it down, the children could be given one or two clues if needed, or the game could feature easier words.

Reflection



- ➔ Now invite the participants to use the wellbeing flower to reflect on the following question:
 - How could this activity support children's and families' social-emotional wellbeing?
-  Divide participants into break-out rooms. Send the word or picture to the person who will be drawing via a private message. Use a virtual board to draw on. You can randomize the distribution of words/pictures by assigning each a number and ask the teams in turn to choose a number.

Let's play *Back to Back!*



- ➔ This activity helps children to build their social, emotional and flexible thinking skills as they have to make their friends succeed by thinking from another person's perspective.

What you need

Pen and paper or identical sets of three or more building blocks in different colours, a set of drawings or models for use in the game

How to play

- The children sit or stand in pairs back to back with a piece of paper and a pen (or building blocks). One child is A and the other is B. Child A has a piece of paper and a pen or building blocks.
- Child B has a drawing or model which they will describe to child A. Child A cannot see the drawing or model because they're sitting back to back.
- The game begins by child B beginning to describe the drawing or model they're holding to child A. Child A then draws or builds their version without looking or asking questions.
- Give the children up to five minutes to play. Ask the pairs to compare the drawing or model that child B had with the drawing or model that child A did and how it went. Then invite them to swap roles and repeat the activity.
- End the game as before by explaining to the training participants that it's important to conclude all *Healing through Play* activities with a short reflection with the children. Here are some suggestions for the reflection for this activity:
 - How did you explain how to draw or build the model?
 - What instructions were clear and helpful?



- ➔ Ask the participants to reflect individually on the questions and ask one or two to share their thoughts.
- ➔ Explain to participants that the difficulty level of the game can be adjusted by using easier or more complex drawings or models. The game could also let the drawer ask questions throughout the whole activity or just at the end. For example, they could ask three questions at the end just before the person describing reveals their drawing or model. The person explaining can only answer with “yes” or “no”.

Reflection



- ➔ Now invite the participants to use the wellbeing flower to reflect on the following question:
 - How could this activity support children’s and families’ social-emotional wellbeing?



Divide the participants into pairs and create breakout rooms for them.

Adaptation for group activity: No talking, just building with LEGO or other toy building blocks



- ➔ Explain that this activity can be done in groups using LEGO or other toy building blocks. Doing the activity as a group makes it more complex, as group dynamics will also play a role.
- ➔ Because this activity is more challenging, it’s better suited to older children.
- ➔ If there’s time, facilitators may choose to give participants the opportunity to play this game too.

What you need

A box of LEGO or other toy bricks. Each group should have two identical sets of bricks in different colours (the more bricks, the more complex and difficult the activity will be).

How to play

- Divide the children into groups of four to six.
 - Without providing any further instructions, ask the group to build something with the bricks and tell them they have five minutes to do so. They can build anything they want, but they shouldn’t talk while doing it.
- ➔ When the time is up, ask the small groups to stay together and reflect on the following questions:
 - Who took the lead in building the model?
 - Who decided along the way what happened and what shape or form the model should be?
 - Who finished it? (Who put the finishing touches to it or who decided it was finished, maybe ahead of time?)
 - How did you work as a team?
 - What did each group member contribute to the team effort and how did they do it?
 - Is there anything you would like to change about the way you did this activity?
 - Is everyone happy with the result?
 - ➔ End the activity by summarizing the small groups’ reflections with the whole group.



Reflection



➔ Now invite the participants to use the wellbeing flower to reflect on the following question:

- How could this activity support children's and families' social-emotional wellbeing?



Divide the participants into pairs and create breakout rooms for them.



Healing through Play facilitators' wellbeing and role

Aims of the session

- To practise mindfulness
 - To highlight ways to take care of one's own wellbeing and to reduce stress
 - To be clear about the role of a play facilitator
- Paper, pencils/crayons
 - Optional: Play dough, LEGO or other toy bricks

- ➔ Introduce the session and explain that it's about the wellbeing of play facilitators and ways of reducing stress. It also includes a discussion about the role of play facilitators and the limits to that role. Remind participants that when the needs of children or caregivers are beyond the scope of the volunteer play facilitator's role, facilitators should know how to refer children or their caregivers for further support.
- ➔ Explain that working with children and adults in distress can be stressful. Play facilitators themselves may start to feel signs of stress in their own bodies. When this happens, there are a range of relaxation techniques that can help in reducing stress. These techniques support wellbeing, including social, emotional and physical wellbeing. Explain that there will be links to lots of resources in Session 6.

Mindfulness activity



- ➔ Lead the participants in a mindfulness activity.
 - Find a comfortable seated position or lie down on the floor on your backs if there's enough space.
 - Now we'll take a few minutes to sit silently. If you'd like to, feel free to close your eyes.
 - Begin by focusing on your breath. Put one hand on your belly and one hand on your chest. Breathe into your belly. Inhale (smell the flower) – 2 – 3 – 4. Exhale (blow out the candle) – 2 – 3 – 4.
 - Continue to breathe slowly and fully, feeling as your hand on your belly rises with each inhale and falls with each exhale.
 - Let your back grow longer and taller, reaching your head to the sky (if you're sitting). Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth, feeling your breath relax your body.
 - Imagine that you can see a light in front of your eyes. Bring that light up to your forehead. Allow the light into your head, filling your entire head with bright, warm light. Where this bright light exists, there's only room for happy thoughts. There can be no darkness.
 - Feel as the light pushes out any bad thoughts. Only good thoughts are left in your mind. See the light moving down to your ears, so you can only hear good things. See the light moving into your jaw and mouth. Let yourself speak only good words. Let the light travel down your neck and shoulders to



your heart. Let your heart be filled with the light, so you can feel only good feelings. Feel as the light shines out from your heart and you're showering everyone and everything around you with love and good feelings. Feel as your whole body is filled with the light, so you're aglow with good thoughts and feelings. Think, "The light is in me, I am the light. I shine light on everyone and everything around me."

- (Pause for up to one minute of silence, or as long as seems comfortable for the group.)
- Begin to bring yourself back to the present. Focus on your breathing – in and out slowly. Wiggle your fingers and toes. When you're ready, open your eyes if you closed them.
- (Wait a few seconds until everyone opens their eyes and seems ready to talk.)

Reflection



- ➔ After the mindfulness activity, lead a discussion:
 - How did you feel before the activity and after it?
 - How and when could you use mindfulness in your own life?
 - Use the wellbeing flower to reflect on how mindfulness helps to promote wellbeing.
- ➔ Explain that mindfulness can help to improve their stress levels, as well as their social-emotional competence. Although it doesn't address the broader factors that contribute to wellbeing, it helps to increase a sense of individual wellbeing.



Invite participants to participate in the mindfulness activity and leave their cameras on. Share your screen with a mindfulness activity from one of the suggested resources or another vetted mindfulness video or lead an activity with your camera on.

Looking after yourself

- ➔ Mindfulness is one way to reduce stress levels, but there are many other strategies that can help.
 - ➔ Ask participants to share different ways in which they take care of themselves in their own lives.
 - ➔ Use the PowerPoint slide or read out the tips from the list below, pointing out strategies that weren't mentioned by participants.⁵
- Take breaks when needed
 - Take care of your basic needs
 - Do something that brings you joy and something that's meaningful to you
 - Take at least five minutes a day to speak to someone you care about
 - Talk to your manager or other colleagues at work about wellbeing
 - Establish and stick to daily routines
 - Minimize unhealthy habits



⁵ From: Inter-Agency Standing Committee: *Basic Psychosocial Skills – A guide for COVID 19 Responders*, www.interagencystandingcommittee.org



- Regularly write down things that you're grateful for
- Think about what you can and can't control
- Try relaxation activities throughout the day

➡ Invite participants to talk about the tips. Which tips look most helpful? Why? Which tips might be difficult to follow? Why?

Your role as a volunteer play facilitator and its limits

➡ It's important that participants understand what their role is as a volunteer play facilitator and what the limits to that role are.

➡ Lead a discussion about the role of the volunteer in providing psychosocial support during the play-based activities they facilitate and how they understand the limits of their role.

➡ Refer to your organization's guidelines and policies for volunteer roles, wellbeing and support.

➡ Give participants a few minutes to reflect on the following two questions:



- How do you personally know when you've reached your limits within your support role?
- Do you know where to seek further support for children or caregivers who might be in distress?



Ask the participants to write their answers in the chat and then follow up with the discussion.



Reflections and close

We've come to the end of the day, and it's time to wrap up.

- ➔ Ask participants if they have any questions that they didn't get to ask during the training.

Resources



- ➔ Tell participants that this training has been a short introduction to play-based social-emotional wellbeing activities and psychosocial support skills.
- ➔ There are many good online resources where they can learn more about play-based activities and psychosocial support.

These include the selection listed on the next page. The list can be printed and shared with participants. Web links are provided for your own use and the QR codes can be used by participants to access the resources.

What are you taking home?



- ➔ Explain that the training will end in much the same way as it started, with writing a poem.
 - Ask each participant to spend two minutes writing a poem about what they're taking away with them after today's training.
 - The poem must be ten words maximum and include the name of someone in the room, at least one concept discussed during the training and one colour.
- ➔ Ask if any participants want to share their poem.

Thank you and goodbye!



- ➔ Thank the participants for their participation and provide any necessary practical information about evaluation, follow-up, reimbursement of expenses, etc.



Useful resources

- The LEGO Foundation's [Learning through Play site](#) includes the Let's Play activity bank and a wealth of resources about the importance of play for learning, healing and wellbeing.
- [Learning to Cope through Play](#) by the LEGO Foundation provides a simple introduction to the theory and evidence behind *Healing through Play*.
- [The P.O.W.E.R. Game Bank](#) is a collection of 100 gender-responsive play-based learning activities.
- [Doing what matters in times of stress](#) is a great, illustrated guide about stress developed by the World Health Organization.
- UCLA Health offers [free guided meditations in a variety of languages](#). They are available as sound and text from the website or through an app.
- The International Rescue Committee's [Healing Classrooms programme](#) offers a range of guided mindfulness activities on their YouTube channel in English and Arabic.

