



INTERNATIONAL
STEP by STEP
ASSOCIATION



TRAINING OF TRAINERS

Foundational training on psychological first aid and trauma-informed practices with young children and their caregivers

A TRAINING GUIDE

In Partnership with:



ISSA is a membership association, currently with close to 95 member organizations working in the early childhood field, stretching across 43 countries primarily from Europe and Central Asia. As an international learning community powered by leading early childhood experts, ISSA unites and supports professionals and partners to deliver high-quality early years services equitably. ISSA challenges existing knowledge and practice, and co-constructs new approaches and models.

Through its work ISSA advocates for and supports competent Early Childhood Systems for all children, especially the most vulnerable. It strives to increase awareness of the importance of Early Childhood Development and of a qualified workforce. As a leading early childhood network and learning community, ISSA promotes quality, equitable and integrated services for children, families, and practitioners.

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Table of Contents

1. Why a training on psychological first aid and trauma-informed practices for early childhood practitioners?.....	4
2. What is the main purpose of the training resource package?	4
3. How should the training resource package be approached by trainers?.....	5
4. Who is the main target group of this training package?	6
5. Trainer Guide: The objectives, structure and content of the training	6
6. Detailed training sessions.....	11
Building Block 1: Key concepts and guiding principles in providing psychological first aid to children and their caregivers.....	11
Building Block 2: Working with distressed young children and caregivers	17
Building Block 3: Managing stress in professionals.....	21



1. Why a training on psychological first aid and trauma-informed practices for early childhood practitioners?

The war in Ukraine poses serious threats to the safety, healthy development, and well-being of young children in Ukraine and those who have fled. The impact is enormous both in the short and long-term and will have a spill-over effect on the well-being of many other children in Europe learning about the events in Ukraine. The trauma of life-threatening situations, the precarious conditions of life in shelters, on the move or in cramped camps, as well as settling in a foreign place produces high levels of anxiety, stress, and insecurity for children, their parents, and caregivers. There is solid research evidence¹ indicating how damaging such life conditions are for a child's development and how imperative it is to counterbalance them as soon as possible through a range of measures, interventions, and services that address young children directly, but also their parents and/ or caregivers.

While many countries are eager to provide free access to all services for children and families who have fled Ukraine, the readiness of services (health, education, social protection) to cater to their very specific needs is not yet there. There is high demand for equipping the workforce and local partners with the necessary competences for approaching children and families, in order to enable a smooth and welcoming transition and integration process in the new country context, while at the same time policy arrangements for their integration are put in place. Rolling-up capacity building programs that focus on psycho-social support and trauma-informed interventions, and creating professional communities as platforms for exchanging practice, experience, and learnings at country and cross-country level are in high demand. Strengthening the capacity of the ECD communities across the countries will help them to provide an attuned response to the needs of incoming refugee children and families.

With complementary strengths and expertise in the areas of providing psychological first aid and psycho-social support in emergency and humanitarian contexts; early childhood development; quality and equitable early childhood services; supporting psycho-social wellbeing of refugees and displaced communities, and in empowering and supporting the early childhood workforce, the International Step by Step Association ([ISSA](#)), [Amna](#), and [War Child Holland](#) have joined forces to promptly respond to the high demand for capacity building among early childhood professionals.

2. What is the main purpose of the training resource package?

The training fills a critical knowledge and skills gap in the early childhood workforce capacity, which surfaced due to the current humanitarian crisis created by the war in Ukraine. Many questions need to be answered to ensure that the needs of young refugee children and their caregivers are met, and that early childhood practitioners are protected while providing this much-needed support.

The training resource package consists of:

- The Training Guide
- The slide decks
- Recordings of the original online Training of Trainers
- Additional readings and materials

The main questions addressed in the training are the following:

¹ <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/guide/a-guide-to-toxic-stress/>



- How to identify young children in distress and provide them with adequate support?
- How to protect, interact, communicate with, involve, and support young children and their families who have experienced traumatic situations without doing them any harm?
- What early childhood practitioners should (or should not do) to ensure that internally displaced or refugee children develop in a safe, nurturing, and inclusive environment where they can heal from harmful experiences, affirm their identity and childhood, and continue to play and learn alongside their peers?
- How can early childhood practitioners ensure that they are promoting respect for diversity and empathy?
- How early childhood practitioners can take care of personal and team well-being and mental health, to be able to serve children and families in the most efficient way?

3. How should the training resource package be approached by trainers?

This training package provides the basis and core content for training practitioners working with children and their families. However, **the precise content, format, and duration of the training (or activities) may be changed, adapted, and tailored to the needs of specific target groups** by:

- enriching the content with additional knowledge resources (country-based or international),
- enriching the training with more practice-related activities or sessions containing real life situations and by bringing in practitioners' professional experience,
- dedicating more time to topics that are of high interest or relevance to practitioners,
- using different training delivery formats (online or in person).

The training in the resource package should not be treated as a ready-made training, but as a guide to help you inform content, structure and delivery of the training.

The training **combines theory with practice**, with an emphasis on:

- establishing a clear understanding of concepts, actions, and processes that strongly inform and guide the early childhood practice in emergency/humanitarian contexts.
- the importance of recognizing, understanding, and appropriately addressing signs of distress in young children and caregivers, and the risks of stress and burnout in professionals (especially in professionals who might have experienced first-hand trauma).
- empowering trainers to use and build on their existing experience as trainers in the early childhood field, and consequently empowering practitioners to use their practice-based expertise to adapt and tailor their current practices to properly address children's and families' signs of distress.
- Inspiring trainers to provide an optimal balance between theory, experiential learning, and reflection.



4. Who is the main target group of this training package?

This training resource package is intended for experienced trainers (min. 5 years) of early childhood practitioners working in formal or non-formal services for children under 6 years of age and their families, who are able:

- to adapt and tailor the training to specific groups of trainees
- to incorporate interactive methods and exercises, that are appropriate for the content and target group of the training and lead to increased effectiveness of the training,
- to provide support and guidance (coaching) to practitioners in tuning their practices to best respond to the needs of young children and their families who have been through traumatic experiences.

Since the training is generic and speaks to trainers of different experience and educational backgrounds from different countries, cultures, and preschool systems, it cannot address all potential and specific issues and problems. In addition, the training may need to be adapted for different training settings (in-service, in-person, online).

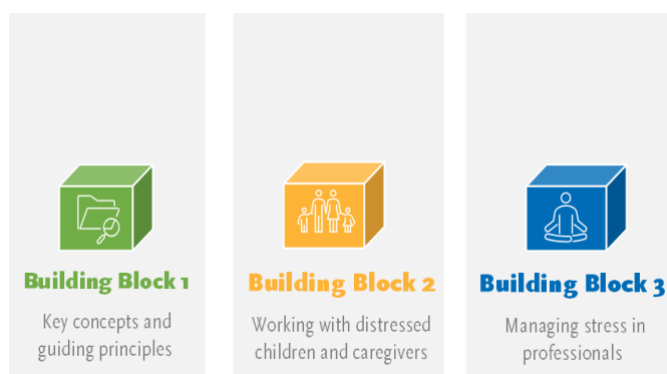
The guidelines for adaptation of the training should be based on the following principles and values:

- **Do no harm:** The whole training and approaches are based on this principle. Carefully choose additional activities to avoid potential hurt or re-stimulation of traumatic events among participants and ultimately children and caregivers.
- **This training is not psychotherapy:** Do not use activities or debriefing procedures that might look like psychotherapy e.g., interpretation of the answers or products (drawing) provided by participants, making diagnosis, etc.

To make the training more relevant to participants you may introduce local statistics, local resources (relevant websites, readings, training materials, etc.), real life situations as case studies and group exercises, video clips with local content, references to the national or local refugee support groups, professional and network.

You will also adapt the training if you decide to organize an in-person training. You will need to adapt the duration, provide more time for small group work and exchanges, introduce more icebreakers, etc.

5. Trainer Guide: The objectives, structure and content of the training



The Foundational Training on psychological first aid (PFA) and trauma-informed practices for young children and their caregivers is built around **three building blocks**.






1. Key concepts and guiding principles in providing psychological first aid
2. Working with distressed children and caregivers
3. Managing stress in professionals

The three building blocks provide the basic knowledge and skills for attuning practices when working with children and caregivers in distress.

The training activities for each building block include:

- a welcome session introducing the topics to be addressed and the objectives of the sessions
- a set of learning sessions
- a reflection session.

The following symbols represent the different types of sessions throughout the training.

	Welcome Session
	Learning Session
	Reflection Session





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