

Impact of war and forced displacement on children's mental health—multilevel, needs-oriented, and trauma-informed approaches

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“Children are both our reason to eliminate the worst aspects of armed conflict and our best hope of succeeding in that charge.”

Graça Machel

(1996)

Children's rights



Graphic: UNICEF (2019)
UN General Assembly (1989)

Children's rights in armed conflicts



part in war.

Children have the right to be protected during war. No child under 15 can join the army or take



and dignity.

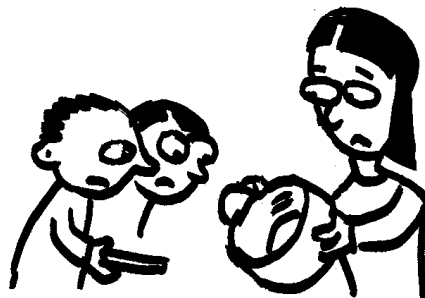
Children have the right to get help if they have been hurt, neglected, treated badly or affected by war, so they can get back their health

War a violation of children's rights!



The infliction of war and military aggression upon children can thus be considered a violation of children's basic human rights.

Children in war



Objectives of the scoping editorial review



Help guide mental health support for young victims of war:

- First, through an overview of the direct and indirect burden of war on child mental health.
 - Second, through an overview of multilevel, need-oriented, and trauma-informed approaches to regaining and sustaining outer and inner security in and after war.
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Immediate psychological stress reactions in children



When they are stressed, many people ...

...cannot focus



...get angry easily



...cannot sit still



...have difficulty sleeping



...feel sad or guilty



...worry



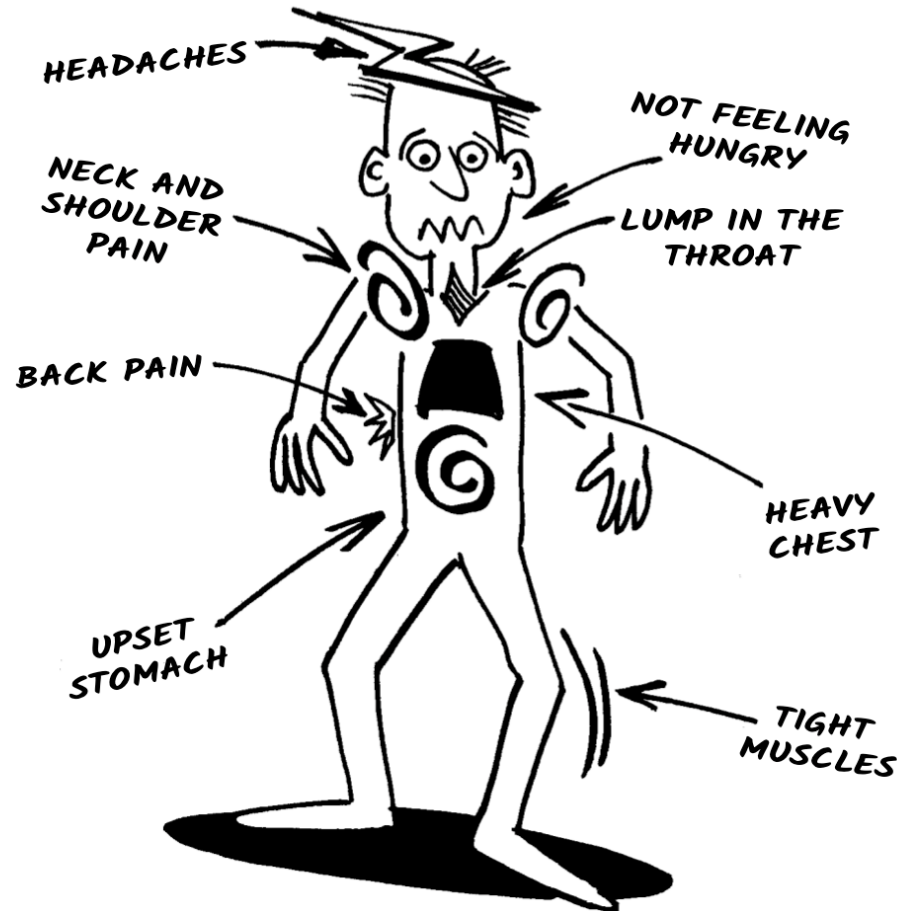
...cry



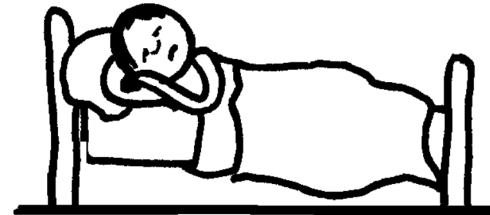
...feel very tired



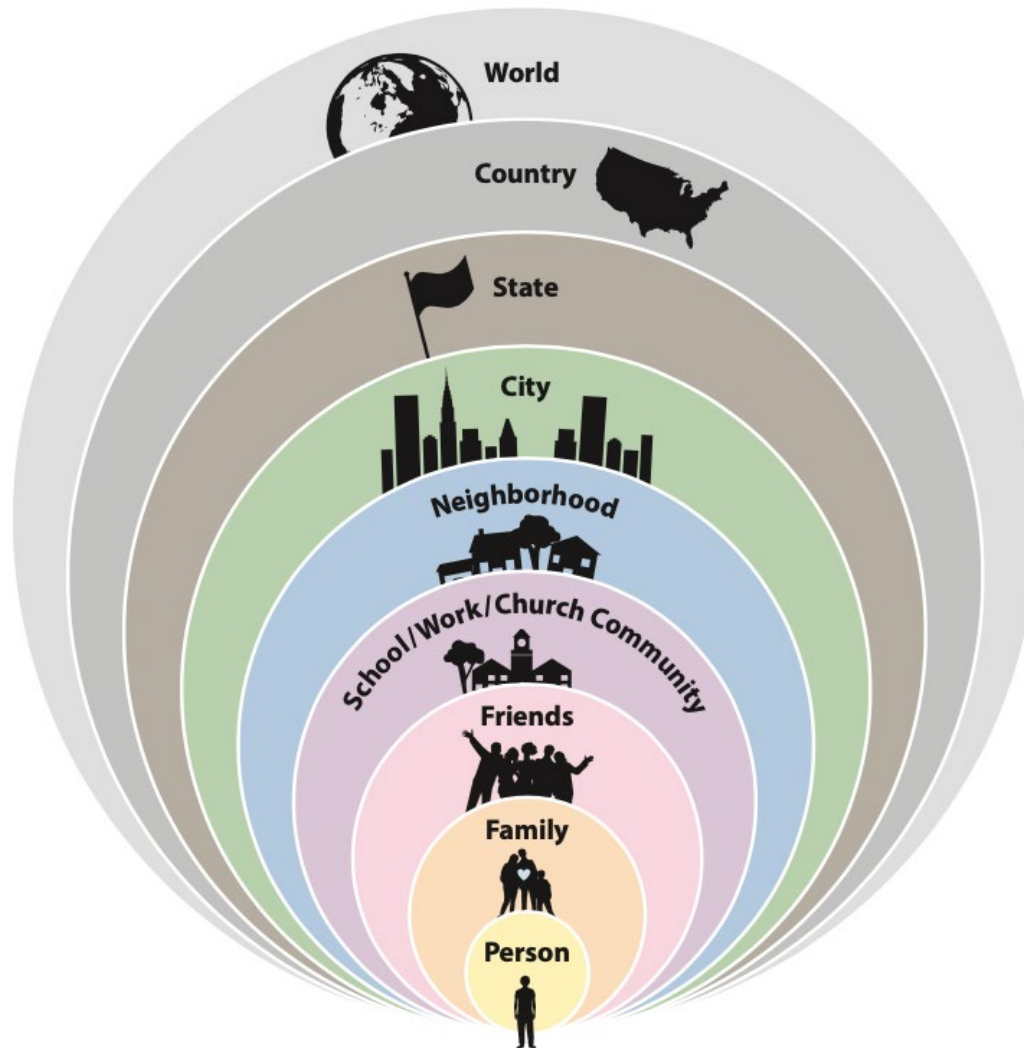
Immediate psychological stress reactions in children



Post-traumatic stress, anxiety, and depressive disorders



Broad sequelae: loss of safety



Broad sequelae: separation from parents

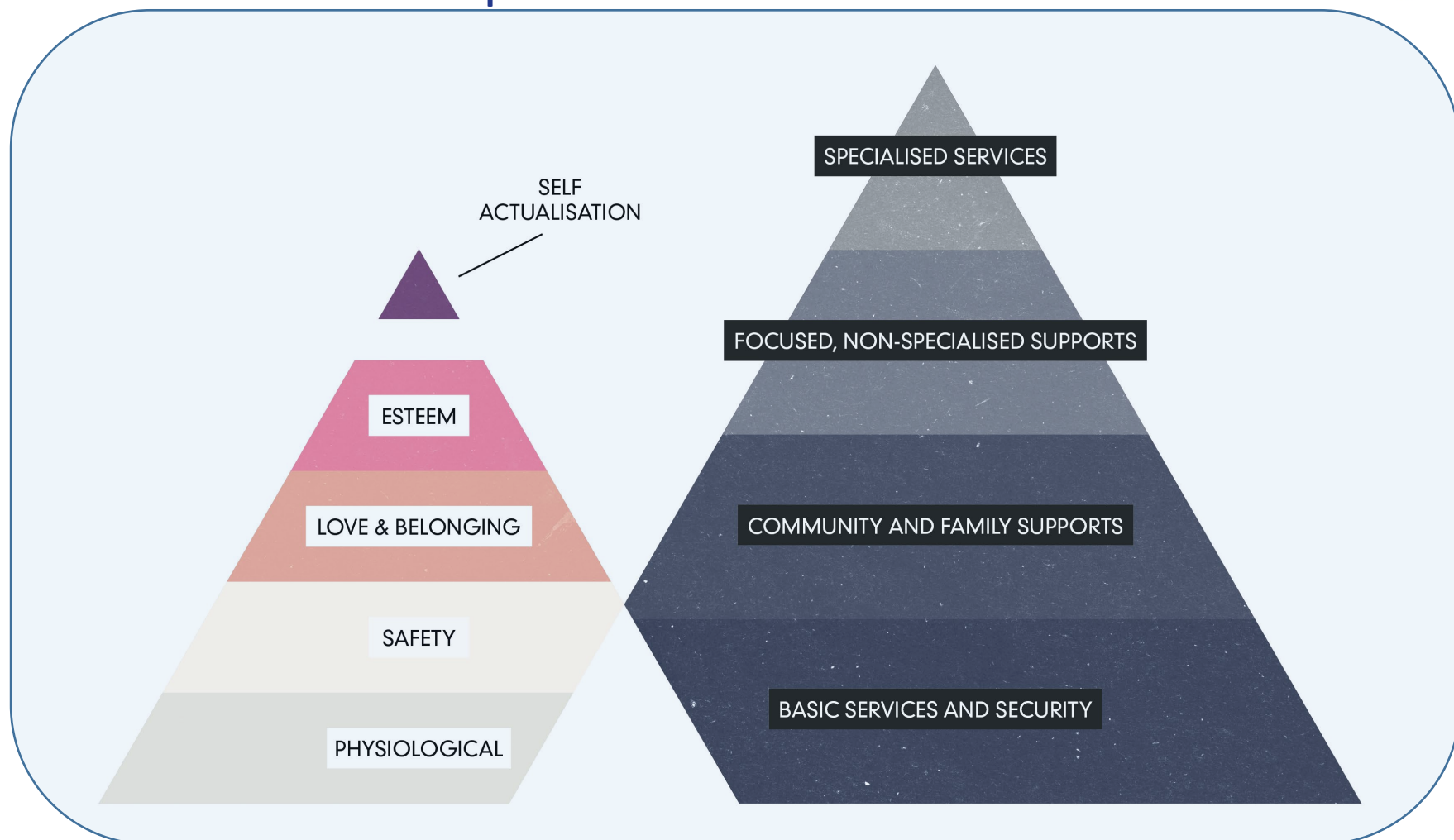




Multilevel, needs-oriented, and trauma-informed approaches



Principles of Trauma-Informed Care

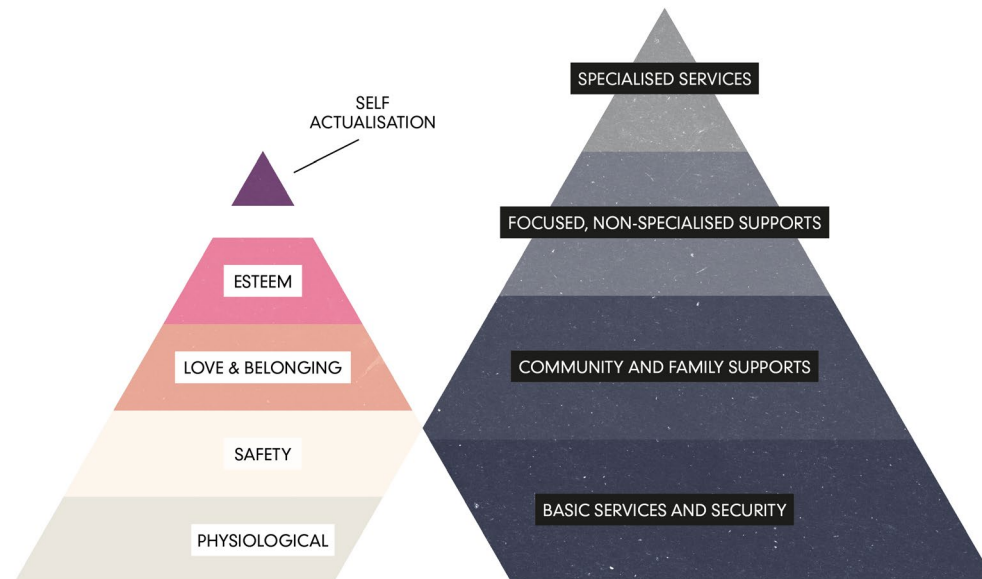


Maslow (1943) & Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) (2007).

(a) Provide immediate aid and intervention



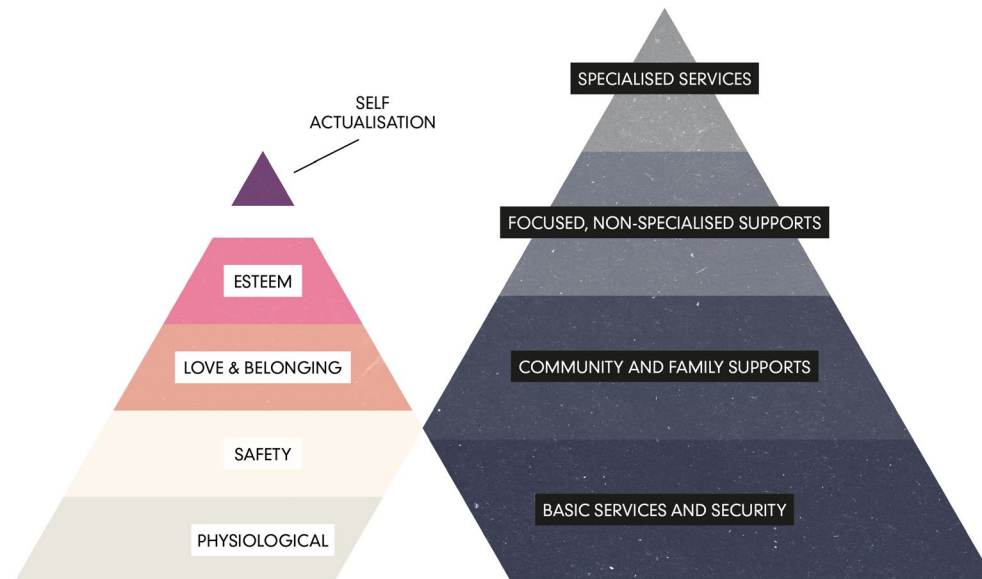
- Provision of basic services and security to address basic needs
- Rebuild a sense of security and trust
- Psychological first aid



(b) Assess and screen for mental health burden and needs



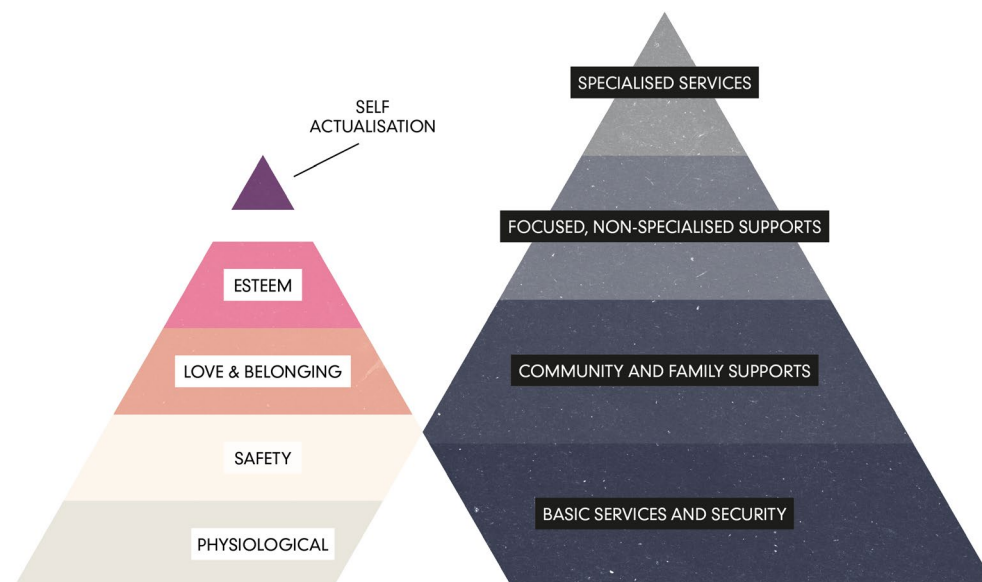
- A phased model of aid and intervention with a stepped care approach needs an assessment of children's burden and needs
- Use of validated and implemented instruments (e.g., PORTA)
- Precondition for indication of targeted intervention



(c) Provide evidence-based interventions for groups and individuals



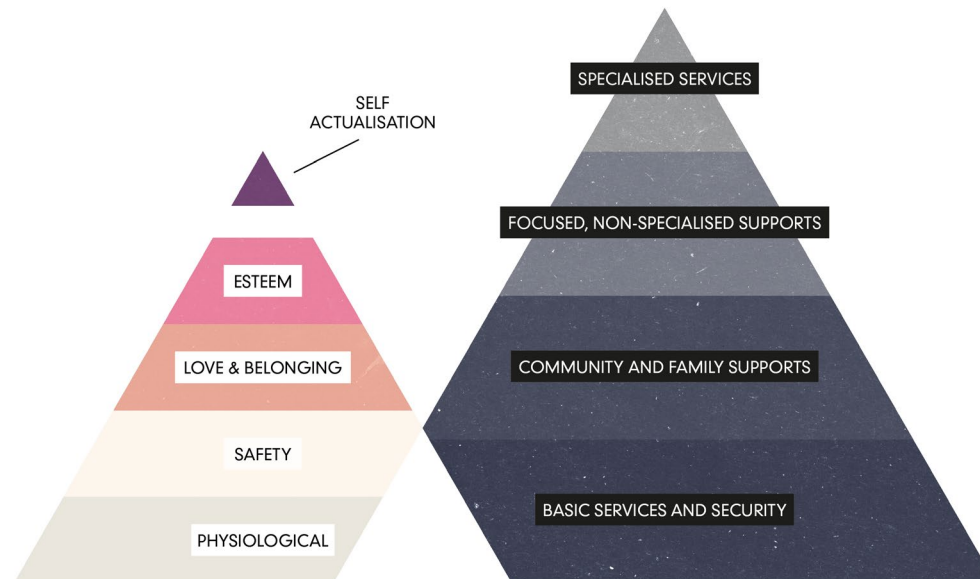
- Appropriate, effective, and efficacious evidence-based treatments should be made available when indicated
- Lower-threshold group-based towards individualized evidence-based psychotherapy, these have shared-practice elements.



(d) Provide appropriate post-migration infrastructures and social environments



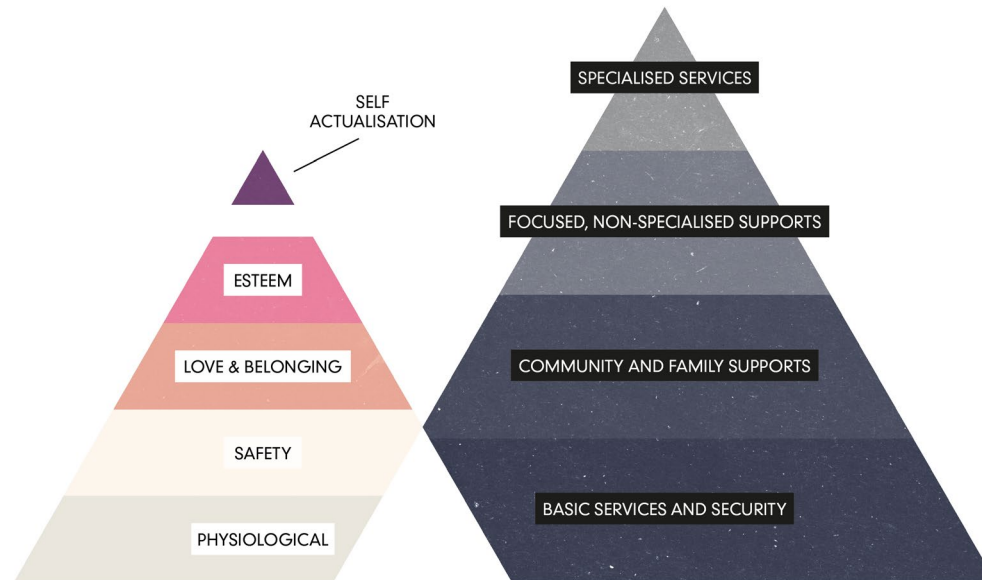
- Child and family appropriate structures and social environments that help to regain and sustain mental health.
- Social environments are needed that suits the ‘higher’ needs of children incl. social interaction, education, and strength promotion.



(e) Support parents during and after war



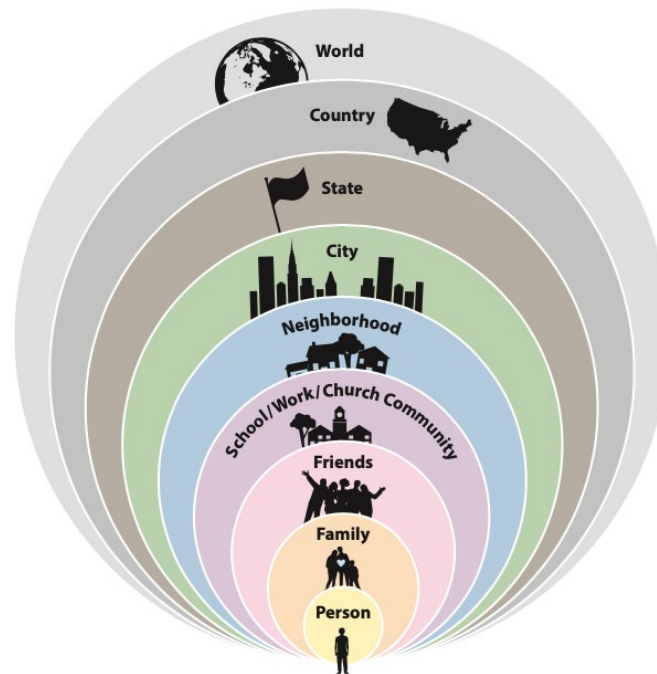
- To support parents and enable them to care for their children
- Protective nature of parental support on mental health
- Helping parents to maintain warm interactions despite war atrocities, limiting harshness
- A plea to reunite families!



(f) Support indirectly affected children



- Media bringing the pictures of war into family homes
- A loss of sense of security and enhanced anxiety in children
- Double jeopardy: pandemic-related burden on families and war within Europe



(f) How can parents talk to their children?



Implications for (European) Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health Services



- Support our colleagues in Ukraine and in neighboring countries where people are finding refuge.
 - Continue to advocate for and help to address the mental health burden and needs of children.
 - Advocate for new funds and resources to address the mental health crises of children and for large-scale programs to counteract this double jeopardy.
 - Be aware of the continuum of crises within Europe, at its borders, and worldwide. There is more to be done on that end!
 - To foster sustainability of help efforts and support to build the structures in which these efforts can be implemented over time – thus we need to care for those who provide care.
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Invest in the future of the world's children



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(1996)

**Thank
you.**



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EDITORIAL



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References



Please find all the scientific literature included in this presentation within our scoping policy editorial:

- Bürgin, D., Anagnostopoulos, D., the Board and Policy Division of ECAP, Vitiello, B., Sukale, T., Schmid, M., & Fegert, J. M. (2022). Impact of war and forced displacement on children's mental health—multilevel, needs-oriented, and trauma-informed approaches. *European child & adolescent psychiatry*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00787-022-01974-z>

Illustrations used within this presentation are derived from the following sources:

- Slavich GM (2020) Social safety theory: a biologically based evolutionary perspective on life stress, health, and behavior. *Annu Rev Clin Psychol* 16(1):265–295. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-clinpsy-032816-045159>
 - UNICEF (2019) The United Nations convention on the rights of the child—the children's version. <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/united-nations-convention-rights-child-child-rens-version/>
 - World Health Organization (2020) Doing what matters in times of stress: an illustrated guide. Geneva.. <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331901/9789240003910-eng.pdf>
 - Illustration of separation from parents (slide 11) and the two pyramids of needs-oriented and multilevel help were designed by Valentin von Uslar-Gleichen.
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