

Hugsy intervention

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14.10.26



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- Member of the Israeli **national council for suicide prevention**
- Chief psychologist, **schools for at risk youth**
- Chief psychologist, **Telem association- Israel's largest nonprofit mental Health organization**

Reaching out

The therapeutic window you can open for a child in their natural environment –
one who otherwise would not have received treatment

<https://youtu.be/olzegcJfLTk>

The Hugsi Intervention – Key Characteristics

1. Single-session, child-centered intervention
2. Simple, playful and non-threatening
3. scalable
4. Accessible and low-cost
5. Evidence-based
6. Culturally adaptable

Designed for children coping with:
mass-trauma events
everyday stress and anxiety



The intervention is based on a Special therapeutic doll

Characteristics of the Hugsy Doll:

- A sad face.
- Long arms that can hug.
- Human-like face.
- A soft, gentle touch with warm colors

These characteristics help the child connect and project their sadness and fears onto the doll.

The intervention is based on a simple, professional protocol.

The main phases of the intervention:

1. **Projection phase** – Introducing Hi to the child and asking: "How do you think Hugsy is feeling?" At this stage, the child projects their inner world onto the doll.
2. **Empathy and helping phase** – Asking the child: "How do you think we can help Hugsy feel better?" By taking care of Hugsy, the child is actually taking care of themselves.
3. **Caregiving responsibility phase.**



Hugsy Intervention Rational

1. A model of empowerment and provision of responsibility.

Providing responsibility for the care of others and encouraging active coping during stressful times empowers the individual and makes him/her less vulnerable to stress reactions
(Clarke, 2006; Zimmerman, 2003; Smith et al., 2006;)

2. Anxiety and psychopathology attention models

Anxiety disorders are related to attentional bias related to fear stimuli, and anxious people are prone to focus inwardly on their feelings and thought processes related to the fear, whereas attention exercises and a reduction of self awareness can lead to significant improvement

(Wells, 2002; Wells and Sembi, 2004; Wells et al., 1997)

3. Projection, identification and symbolic anxiety therapy

Children tend to project their emotions and fears on toys (particularly animals) in order to identify and control their emotions while caring for those toys (Axline, 1969; Bratton et al., 2005; Knell, 1998)

Research demonstrating Hugsy intervention's impressive effectiveness was published in the Pediatrics journal



ARTICLE

Young Children's Reactions to War-Related Stress: A Survey and Assessment of an Innovative Intervention

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The authors have indicated they have no financial relationships relevant to this article to disclose.

ABSTRACT

OBJECTIVE. The goal was to assess stress reactions in young children during and after war and the effects of a new brief intervention.

METHODS. Two separate studies were conducted. In study I, we assessed war exposure and stress reactions of 74 children (2–7 years of age) in a sheltered camp during the second Israel-Lebanon war (July to August 2006). Their exposure to war experiences and their stress reactions were assessed through parental reports during the last week of the war. In addition to standard care, 35 children received a brief intervention (Huggy-Puppy intervention) aimed at encouraging them to care for a needy Huggy-Puppy doll that was given to them as a gift. The effects of the Huggy-Puppy intervention were assessed in a follow-up interview 3 weeks after the war. Study II assessed the efficacy of group administration of the Huggy-Puppy intervention to 191 young children, compared with 101 control subjects. The effects of the intervention on stress-related symptoms after the war were assessed in telephone interviews with the parents.

RESULTS. Study I indicated that, during the war, most children had significant exposure to war-related experiences and had severe stress reactions. The Huggy-Puppy intervention was associated with significant reductions in stress reactions in the postwar assessment. A higher level of attachment and involvement with the doll was associated with better outcomes. The results of study II indicated that group administration of the Huggy-Puppy intervention was associated with significant reductions in stress reactions.

CONCLUSION. These studies suggest that the Huggy-Puppy intervention may offer pediatricians and other child health care professionals a promising, cost-effective intervention for children during stressful times.

www.pediatrics.org/cgi/doi/10.1542/peds.2007-1348

doi:10.1542/peds.2007-1348

Key Words

stress, posttraumatic stress disorder, war, intervention, child

Abbreviations

PTSD—posttraumatic stress disorder

HPI—Huggy-Puppy intervention

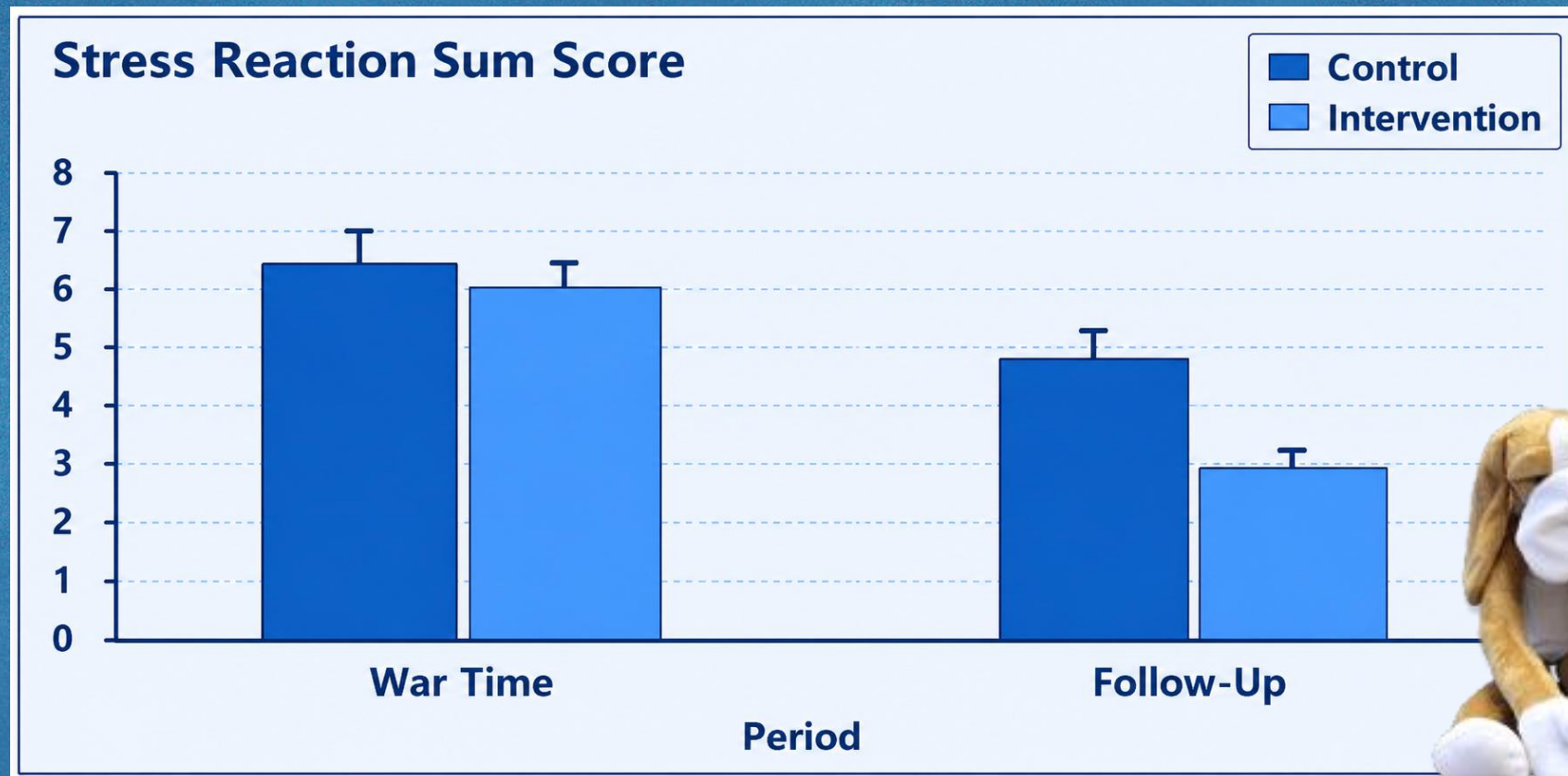
SRCL—stress reaction checklist

Accepted for publication June 25, 2007

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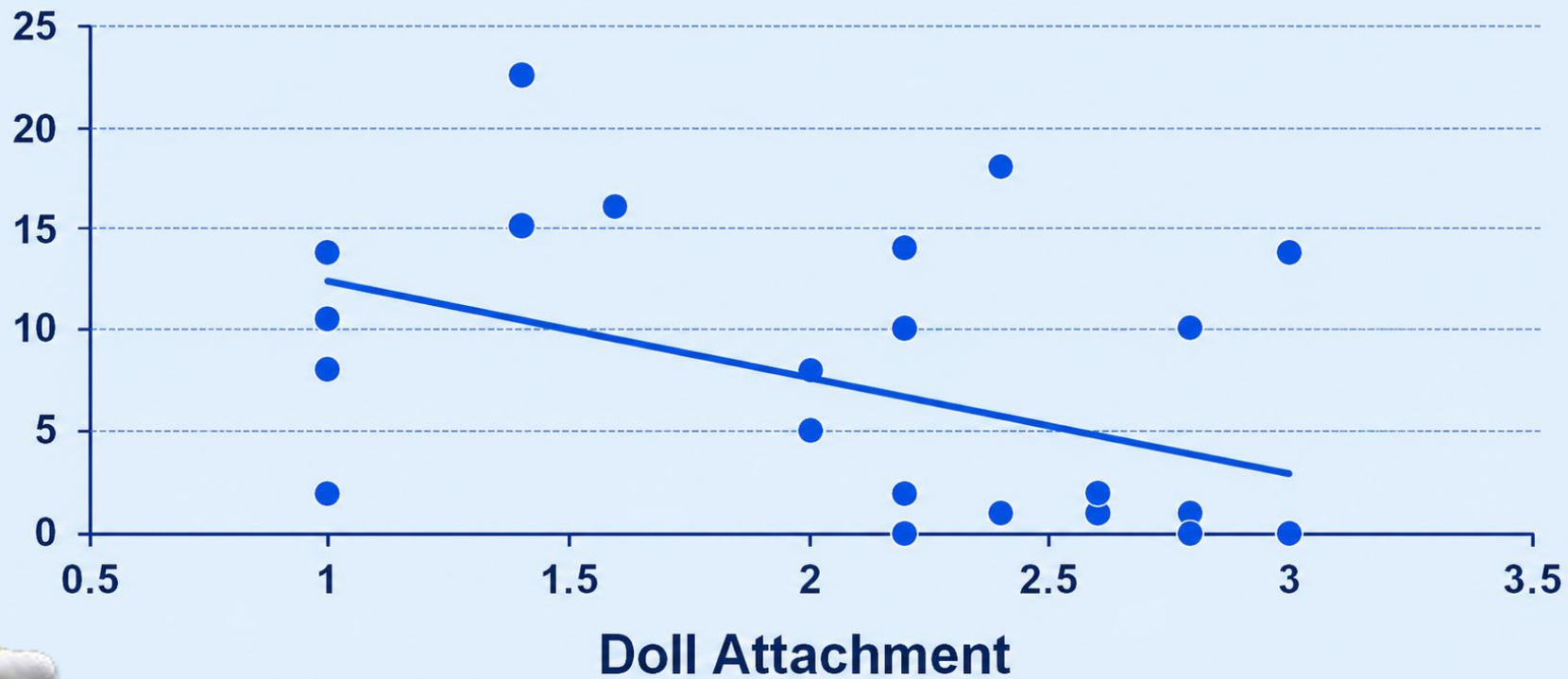
PEDIATRICS (ISSN Numbers: Print, 0031-4005; Online, 1096-4275). Copyright © 2008 by the American Academy of Pediatrics

Significant reduction in distress among children exposed to war six months after receiving Hugsy intervention compared to the control group



The influential factor:
The child's attachment to and care for Hugsy

Distress



Since its development, the Hugsy Intervention has reached more than 200,00 children worldwide

including children in **conflict zones** such as Ukraine and Israel, areas affected by **natural disasters** such as Japan, Türkiye, Haiti, and Venezuela, as well as **community treatment centers and hospitals**.







Japan
2011

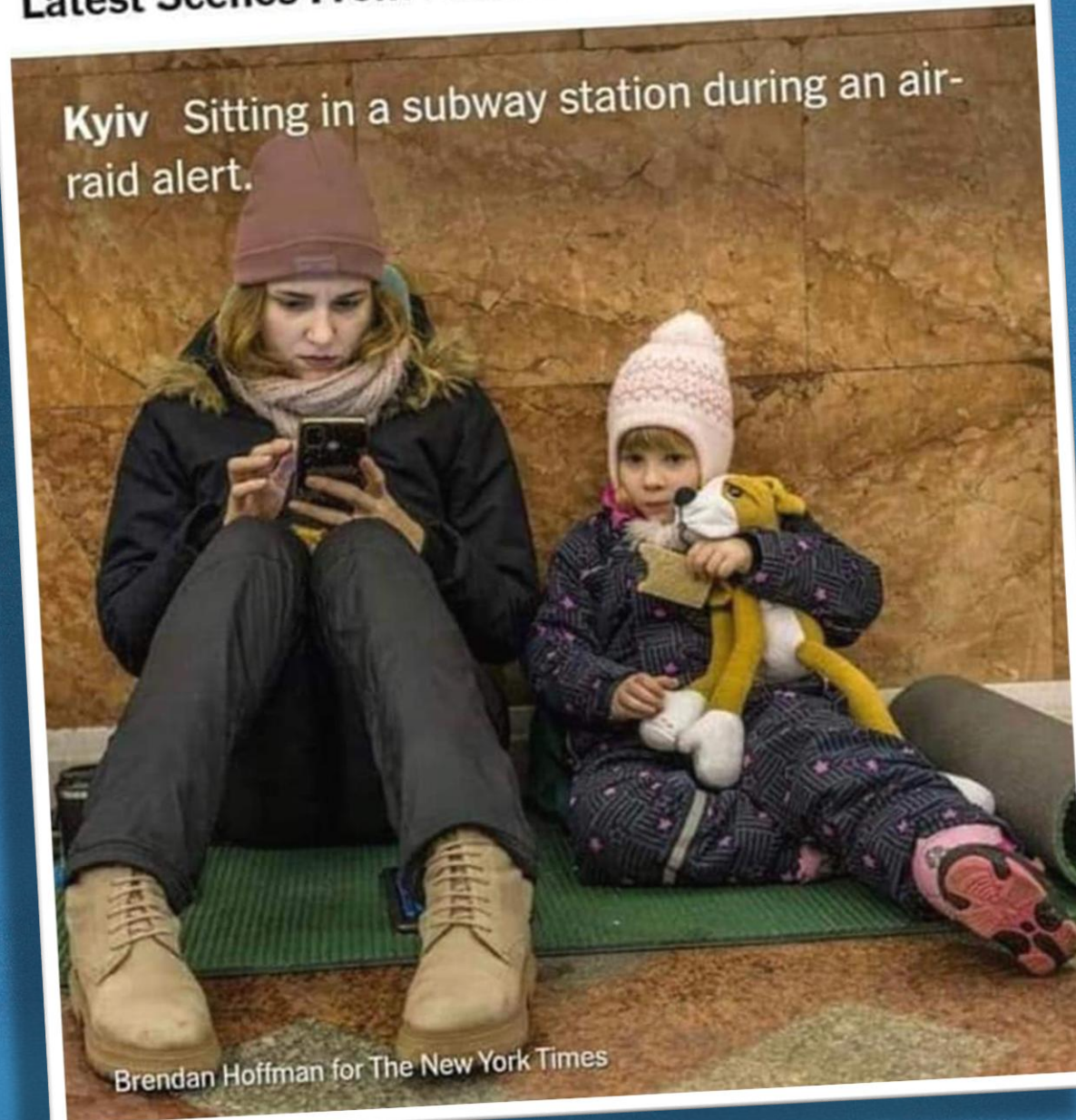
Ukraine

2022



Latest Scenes From Ukraine

Kyiv Sitting in a subway station during an air-raid alert.



Brendan Hoffman for The New York Times

Turkey

2023

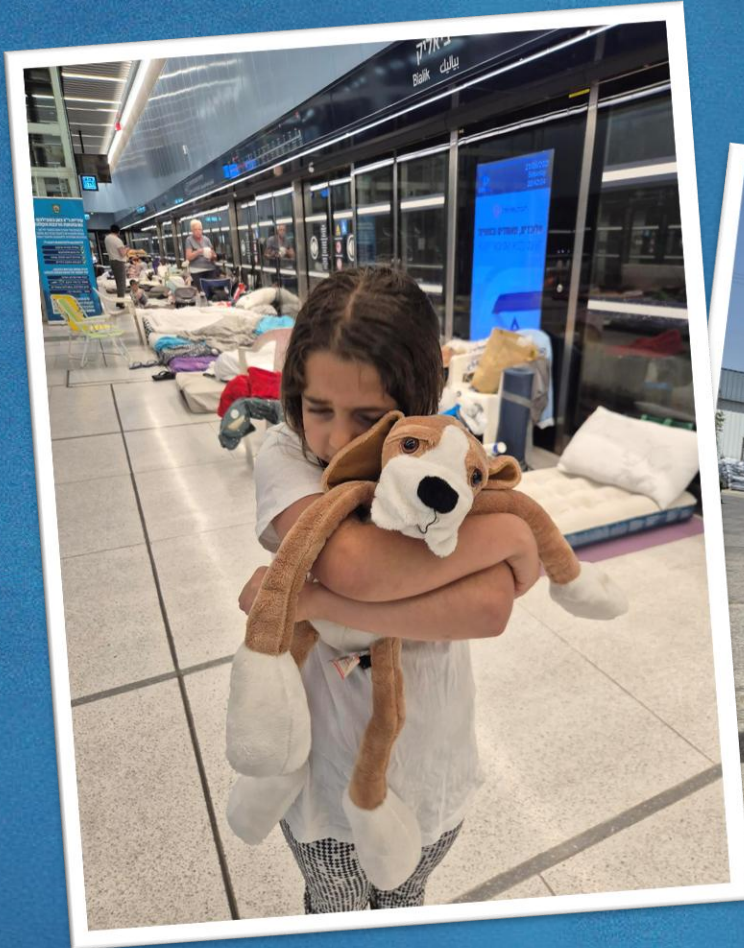


Venezuela

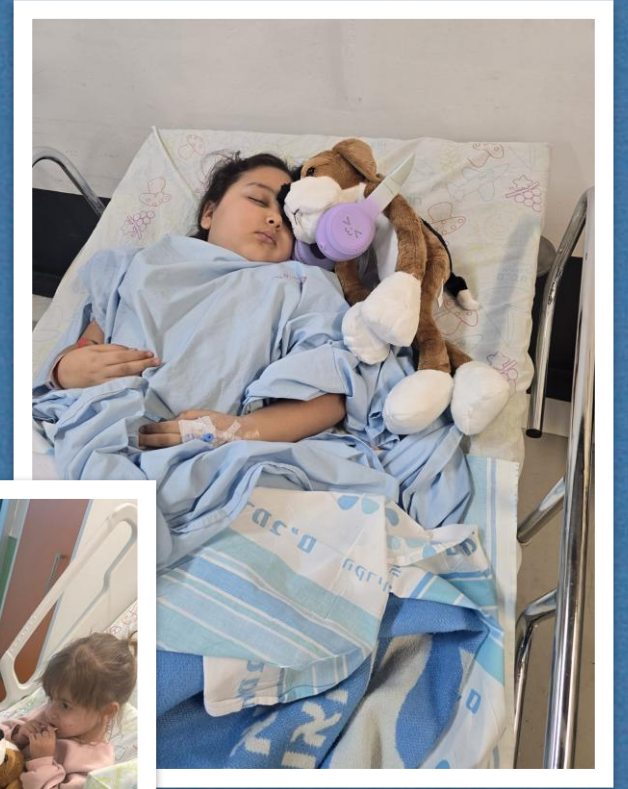
2026



Israel and the Middle East



Working in Hospitals



keynote presentation at a **United Nations conference**
on innovation in children mental health 2025



Thank you

