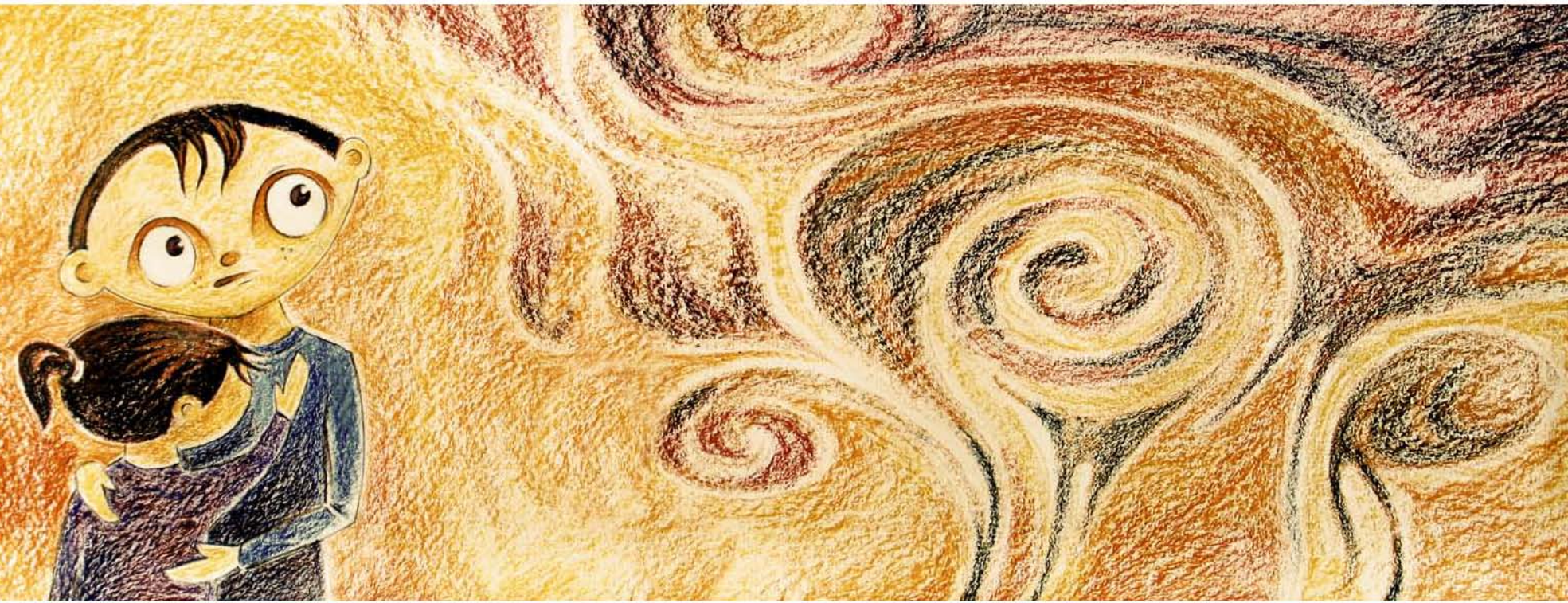


# My Personal Story about Living in Gaza



2009

# My Personal Story about Living in Gaza

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

I call My Book: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## A Guided Activity Workbook for Children & Families

*A simple guide to encourage resilience, learning and coping. Use it to help children, teenagers and families with chronic and acute stresses of life in Gaza, their fears, and difficult feelings.*

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#### Giving Children Psychological "Hands" to work within a Crisis

The value of active coping is well known. During times of severe stress, disaster or major hardships besetting a community, children do better when they are given "H.A.N.D.S.". The term "giving children Hands" is an abbreviated way of saying children must be helped to "Honestly communicate, Actively cope, and Network with peers and adults, in a Developmentally Specific manner."

This workbook has been designed by parents who are mental health professionals to help children develop control of their own emotions and continue learning in the face of crisis. Some of the authors have worked on other workbooks that have helped American children after a terrible hurricane called Katrina, and children in Sri Lanka after many thousands of people died in a huge Tsunami a few years ago, and children in China who lived through a terrible earthquake that killed many children in their school buildings. This workbook is a little different, though, because one of us is a Palestinian art therapist who knows what it is like to live under occupation and to worry about violence and hatred all the time. In this context, this book was developed with substantial input by Mercy Corps Psychosocial Team who lived the horrible experience of the war on Gaza.

The events in Gaza are a long lasting psychological crisis for children, which can cause great stress, harming the psychological growth of many. But it can also stimulate important healing, learning, and growth in other children. Children need a community of parents, relatives, teachers, and other helpers to give them strength to struggle with issues of conflict, violence, and war.

This workbook is carefully designed to give psychological support to both you and the children you know, love and care for or teach. You are going through a great stress, just as your own children and families are all throughout Palestine. But if you can help your children to feel a little clearer minded, a little less frightened, angry, or confused, that will reduce your stress, even if violent circumstances continue.

#### The Youngest Children

You cannot expect children younger than three to say much while using this workbook. But even two and three year-olds can still color in picture sections with some help. Try to let babies and toddlers be present while older children work with you, unless you think the conversation is getting too frightening and confusing for toddlers.

A sense of family caring, thinking and working together on mental and emotional tasks is a help to babies and toddlers in stressful times. Please see the section on use of illustrations with young children for further guidance.

#### Preschool and Kindergarten Children

If your child or student is between ages 3 and 6, let him or her do a lot of coloring. You may want to read much of the book to your child. But you can substitute simpler words he or she would understand. Let the child choose some of the topics by reading the captions and asking which part he or she wants to work on first. Stop at the quiz, which is for older children with more understanding of the world.

You can help a preschool or kindergarten child do the drawings. Write down his or her answers to questions and sentences that end with a blank for the child to fill in. Try to draw your child's ideas and feelings while giving encouragement. Write exactly what he or she has to say without changing the grammar. Take your time. Don't insist on the child answering. It may be enough for him or her to know that you think the topic can be shared in words. That may make the child feel less afraid and less alone.

## Middle Childhood

If your child is between the ages of 6 and 11, try using most of the book. You may be surprised at how much of it your child can understand. Allow him or her to set the pace. Gently try to work through all of the sections over a period of several days or weeks, but let the child choose which sections to work on first. Even when obedience is very important, topics as emotionally difficult as war should be taken slowly when a child gets upset or says, "I don't know" or tries to avoid answering. That is normal, and to be expected at least some of the time. Don't insist on reading any sections a child of any age does not want to read. Encourage him or her to use only a few clipping from newspapers and magazines (pictures and articles - help him or her choose). Help him or her paste them in to make the workbook into a scrapbook, if you have the materials at hand to do that.

At the very least, ask the child to color in the illustrations while you offer support.

Some children may work on the book on and off over time as they feel more comfortable. Some of the children who are very close to a disaster or tragedy may take weeks and sometimes even months before they feel able to complete a difficult section only at a later date. That is fine and can be accepted. Your children will appreciate your sensitivity to their feelings and respect you for it.

Older children and even teenagers as well may cling to you more or even get angry or sullen if they have been over-stressed by traumatic events. Try to understand such behavior as reflecting great emotional pain in a person not yet mature enough to talk about it clearly. A few older children are quiet but not disrespectful, because they are thoughtful.

Most children over age 11 will want to work on the book on their own, but we recommend you participate and give your assistance at times. Find out about their well being by using the checklist. Some children might give adult-sounding suggestions about how to help the community. Be available to serve as a barrier against overwhelming fear, a sounding board and resource for your child or teenager, answering questions as best you can, and suggesting other people who might have more information.

## If You Were Bereaved, or If a Family Member was Injured

Your children may benefit from brief preventive consultation with an expert. Help is available through support groups and mental health services and practitioners.

## For You, the Adults and Older Teenagers

Even adults may find that using this book can help them understand better and cope better with their experiences. You can add your own questions as well as answering the questions asked of the children. You may also find that drawing or coloring the scenes may help you become calmer or help you to remember your experiences and master them. To do more, local and international relief efforts might be able to use your volunteer help, and that of your teenage children.

## For Use as a Family

One very helpful way of using the book involves parents, brothers and sisters working together. The sooner you begin to do this, the better.

Each child can individually work on the same questions (each from his own workbook or on a separate piece of blank paper). Add the pages all together in one family project "Our Book about Life in Gaza". When many children all work on one book, contributing their own reactions, each child should sign his or her own name to the entries. Engaging in a "shared remembering" with adult leadership can help your children feel safer as they work on a joint project under your direction. This can also help bring your family closer together.

## Mental Health Checklist

The Mental Health Checklist, starting on page 77, helps you know what kind of behavior to be concerned about in trauma-affected children, when a child will benefit from a consultation, and which children most need to be seen by a mental health practitioner.

## Use by Teachers

Teachers who receive training in the method and have professional consultation support from a mental health worker can use *My Book about Living in Gaza* in a classroom setting. They can have children working on the project individually or in small groups with the assistance of a parent, specially trained or supervised teacher, or religious leader. This could be a very effective way to encourage learning and to support group togetherness, something that has been shown to help children and adults cope with catastrophes. If you plan to use the book in order to help identify children who need additional assistance, use the Kliman Children's Mental Health Checklist at the end of the book.

## Use by Mental Health Professionals

Severe stressors are best healed by gaining skills and perspective, by going forward with life, even in the face of great loss and pain, and by putting the events in a context. Adults should never require children to engage in debriefings with endless review of their most painful memories. It is helpful for stressed children to see and remember their worlds broadly, including good and benevolent experiences. There is potential harm from constant dwelling only on traumatic memories.

Whether through local services or NGO relief workers, therapists can include much of *My Book about Living in Gaza* in individual, family or group sessions. It is useful as a supplement to treatment for children or adults with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Depression, or Adjustment Disorders due to personal traumas experienced as a result of experiences in Gaza. Training for mental health professionals and agencies in the distribution and use of this book is being planned by Mercy Corps.

## Use of Illustrations

The drawings throughout the book can be used by families, teenagers and children in a variety of ways to help strengthen normal coping.

Young children (ages 2-4), severely traumatized children and children with different kinds of learning difficulties (who may have a preference, for instance, for visual communication) can color in the illustrations with an adult to aid in nonverbally mastering their worries. The pictures can then be used as starting points for open-ended discussions about the events pictured. If they find talking easier, they can do that instead. Some children may prefer to use toys or other objects to "play" out their stories instead of writing, drawing, or talking about them.

Adults and children who are "overwhelmed" with sadness, flashbacks, memories, and anxiety, who startle easily, or have insomnia or nightmares may find the process of coloring images of the experience helpful. We suggest they start with the illustrations furthest from their own experience and gradually work up to those closest to their own experience.

Family members can work on a drawing together, each coloring a portion. This may allow all who are present to feel less distraught about the image before them, to take control together, and to feel calmer while they remember their feelings.

The illustrations can also be used as topics for discussion. This can be an aid in remembering and re-experiencing for those children who remain emotionally numb or have some trouble putting their fears into words. For example, a parent could ask about an illustration: "What is this child feeling?" or "What is happening?" Children often can respond by describing what someone else is feeling when they can't talk about themselves. The illustrations can also be used as a mastery-promoting activity by asking the child to draw a picture showing what the child or family can do, or what the scene would look like when there is peace again.

## **Being Strong in the Face of Violence, Conflict or War**

*(See the HERO section of this book.)*

*We already talked about some heroes who were very strong in the recent war. To be strong in the face of violence and fear of certain things can help. Usually, it helps children to think about the feelings and ideas they have about the news, war and peace. Violence happens when people can't solve their problems without conflict. It is helpful for children to deal with their fears and also to think about how people can cooperate better and talk instead of trying to frighten each other or resorting to violence instead of peaceful resolution. It is also important to think about how to live according to your religious and other values even if people around you are not following those values (for instance, if you believe in caring about people, but other people are killing).*

*There are a lot of questions to think about, but conquering fears and posttraumatic reactions are not quick or easy. Grownups and children must think hard about it and work hard for strength and hopefully for peace. That's the only way that our world will be a safer and happier place.*

## **For adults to help decide if a child is in need of mental health services.**

*Use this checklist the first week the child starts the workbook. For each 'yes' answer circle the score; you don't need to ask the question if you know the answer. Write all circled numbers in the pre- column. Add the values from all the questions. NOTE: YOU CAN ALSO USE THIS AFTER THE CHILD HAS FINISHED THE WORKBOOK TO SEE WHETHER HE OR SHE IS DOING ANY BETTER OR NEEDS MORE HELP. If you use the checklist again after the child has finished the workbook, record the numbers in the Follow-up ("Post-") column and give the date for that column.*

## Kliman's Children's Mental Health Checklist

PART ONE: GENERAL QUESTIONS	PART ONE: GENERAL QUESTIONS	A. SCORE NOW IS	B. FOLLOW UP SCORE ON DATE:
Was the child living in Gaza before December 2008?	5		
Has the child had more than one major stress within a year before December 2008, such as a death in the family, a divorce, or did s/he have a major physical injury or illness?	10		
Does the child have a network of supportive, caring persons who have continued to relate to him/her daily since December 2008 until he or she started using this book?	-10		
Did the child have a family which has witnessed bombings, rocketfire, shootings, and other forms of violence close up before December 2008?	5		
Was the child him/herself at or near scenes of violence before December 2008?	10		
Was the child showing increasingly severe disobedience, delinquency or in your opinion a developmental delay, psychological disturbance or mental illness before December 2008?	10		
<b>TOTAL SCORE BEFORE DECEMBER 2008</b>			



<b>Persistent rituals (not ones required by religion) or compulsions, that is behaviors the child believes he or she must do repeatedly, to avoid some kind of danger, when no one else thinks it is necessary?</b>	<b>If the Item Is Present, Write the Score in the next column</b>	<b>SCORE NOW</b>	<b>FOLLOW UP SCORE ON DATE:</b>
<i>Having states of terror (frightened when nothing dangerous is really happening in the moment)?</i>	5		
<i>Waking from dreams confused, frightened, or in a sweat?</i>	5		
<i>Having difficulty concentrating?</i>	5		
<i>Showing extreme irritability or being easily startled by noises?</i>	5		
<i>Acting younger than before in his or her toilet training or speech?</i>	5		
<i>Stuttering or lisping when his speech was previously developing normally?</i>	5		
<i>Persistent severe anxiety or phobias (extreme fear of safe things)?</i>	5		
<i>Obstinacy or frequent disobedience?</i>	5		
<i>Constant thinking only about the dangers in Gaza?</i>	5		
<i>Persistent rituals (not ones required by religion) or compulsions (behaviors the child believes he or she must do repeatedly to avoid some kind of danger when no one else thinks it is necessary)?</i>	5		
<i>Severe and unusual clinging to adults for comfort?</i>	5		
<i>Persistent inability to fall asleep or stay asleep?</i>	5		
<i>Being startled at any reminder of the war and violence?</i>	5		
<i>Persistent loss of ambition or hope for the future?</i>	5		

Persistent rituals (not ones required by religion) or compulsions, that is behaviors the child believes he or she must do repeatedly, to avoid some kind of danger, when no one else thinks it is necessary?	If the Item Is Present, Write the Score in the next column	SCORE NOW	FOLLOW UP SCORE ON DATE:
Persistent loss of pleasure in usual activities?	5		
Persistent loss of curiosity	5		
Persistent sadness or crying?	5		
Persistent headaches or stomach aches?	5		
Believing he or she is sick when nothing is physically wrong?	5		
Has anyone in the child's immediate family been killed, injured or is missing since December 2008?	5		
Since December 2008, has the child been severely scarred or injured or had to have major surgery like amputation after being injured?	10		
Since December 2008, has the child's immediate or extended family lost their home or had it become unlivable because of the attacks on Gaza?	10		
Has the child withdrawn from other people since December 2008?	5		
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>N/A</b>		

**How to Score and Use the Kliiman's Children's Mental Health Checklist**

Add the pluses and minuses for all Part One and Part Two questions that apply to the child. If the child scores more than 75 we suggest consultation from one of the mental health counselors available through one of the resources listed in the back of the book. Take this book with you to the consultation. If you are dealing as an administrator with a large number of Gazan children, we recommend consultation for the top 10% scoring children.

**Important Child Safety Note:** A child who becomes preoccupied about the possible future death of himself or herself or of a family member, or who is unusually accident prone, physically aggressive, or who makes self-harming or suicidal threats or threatens to hurt other people, should be taken for immediate consultation.

**Prevention of Later Effects:** We recommend that any child who has recently lost a parent, sibling or caregiver by death or has been severely maimed or has severe scarring from war related injuries be referred to a mental health expert for preventive consultation even though s/he does not appear in emotional distress.

*Resources, Relief and Mental Health Services*

## **Emergency Numbers**

<i>Police Department</i>	<i>100</i>
<i>Ambulances</i>	<i>101</i>
<i>Fire Department</i>	<i>102</i>
<i>Gaza Community Mental Health Programme</i>	<i>18002223</i>

## Optional Quiz

### 1. What can I expect to feel when I am in a situation of war or frequent violence?

1. What can I expect to feel when I am in a situation of war or frequent violence?
  - a. Fear for my life and other people's lives.
  - b. Remembering fearful scenes when I don't want to.
  - c. Trouble sleeping.
  - d. Grouchiness.
  - e. Loss of confidence in the future.
  - f. Worry about it happening again.
  - g. Bad dreams.
  - h. Trouble concentrating.
  - i. Temporary babyishness.
  - j. A strong desire to be helpful to other people.
  - k. A strong curiosity about how to reduce the damage, or a belief that it's impossible to reduce it.
  - l. Anger, desire for revenge.
  - m. Any, all, or none of the above.

### 2. Some ways to feel a little stronger and able to cope with ongoing violence include:

- a. Talking about your feelings to someone who you can count on to listen.
- b. Helping others.
- c. Thinking of ways to make your home and community safer and write them down.
- d. Trying to remember what happened and write it down or draw pictures.
- e. Thinking about how you would like to make things better in your society when you grow up.
- f. Writing letters to people outside of Gaza to tell them what is going on in your community, so they know and care about you and about the people of Gaza.
- g. All of the above.

## Who Wrote This Book?

*The authors are parents as well as unusually experienced in disaster response. Some of the authors have experienced traumatic personal losses of loved persons.*

*The Children's Psychological Health Center, Inc. is based in San Francisco, California. For more information see [www.cphc-sf.org](http://www.cphc-sf.org). Our other guided activity publications include My Fire Story, My Tornado Story, My Earthquake Story, My Flood Story, My Book about the War, My Book about the Tsunami, My Personal Story about Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, My Sichuan Earthquake Experience, a series of trauma-related, guided-activity workbooks for children, families and teachers coping with severe stress.*

*Gilbert Kliman, M.D. is Medical Director of The Children's Psychological Health Center. He is a Board Certified Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist who has done extensive service and research with profoundly traumatized children. See some of his work on [www.childrenpsychological.org](http://www.childrenpsychological.org)*

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*Harriet Wolfe, M.D., worked on the original disaster workbook, called MY EARTHQUAKE STORY, and advised on the current workbook. Associate Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at the University of California, San Francisco, she is a psychoanalyst in private practice, and formerly President of the San Francisco Psychoanalytic Institute and Society.*

*Yousef AlAjarma, MA is a Palestinian psychotherapist who is currently doing his Ph.D. at Lesley University, Cambridge, MA, USA in Expressive Arts Therapies. He has his masters from the European Graduate School in Switzerland in Expressive Arts Therapies. Yousef has got his undergraduate in Social Work and Psychology from Bethlehem University. Currently Yousef is an adjunct faculty at Lesley University.*

**Jodie Kliman, Ph.D.**, is on the core faculty of the Massachusetts School of Professional Psychology in Boston, USA, where she teaches family therapy, narrative therapy, supervision, and helping refugees with emotional difficulties from war and oppression. She is a co-author of *My Story about Hurricanes Katrina and Rita* and is the editor of *Working in War Zones, Near and Far: Oscillations of Despair and Hope*.

**Jasem Humeid, BSN, MSc. – CHHM**, Jasem is the Psychosocial Support Programmes manager at Mercy Corps/ Gaza. Jasem has his Masters degree in Community Health and Health Management from the University of Heidelberg in Germany, and got his undergraduate degree in Nursing from the Baptist Nursing School in Gaza and the Islamic University of Gaza. Recently, Jasem has joined a doctoral programme in the University of Health and Life Sciences in Tirol/ Austria. Jasem has been involved in developing materials and tools relevant to Mercy Corps' psychosocial support programming, monitoring, and evaluation.

**Mohammed Rozzy, BA Occupational Therapy**: Mohammed is a Psychosocial Programme Coordinator at Mercy Corps/ Gaza. Mohammed has his undergraduate degree in occupational therapy from the Bethlehem University in West Bank. Mohammed has contributed to developing materials and tools relevant to Mercy Corps' psychosocial support programming, monitoring, and evaluation.

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