

The Modern Approach to Rapport Building with Children Affected by Crisis Events

Yanina OVSIANNIKOVA¹,
Svitlana LIEBIEDIEVA²,
Diana POKHILKO³,
Nataliia ONISHCHENKO⁴,
Liydmila GONTARENKO⁵,
Yurii SHYROBOKOV⁶

¹National University of Civil Defence of Ukraine,
ovsyanikova@nuczu.edu.ua

²National University of Civil Defence of Ukraine,
lebedeva@nuczu.edu.ua

³National University of Civil Defence of Ukraine,
pohilko@nuczu.edu.ua

⁴National University of Civil Defence of Ukraine,
onishchenko@nuczu.edu.ua

⁵National University of Civil Defence of Ukraine,
lgontarenko910@gmail.com

⁶Kharkiv National University of air Force Named
After Ivan Kozhedub, Ukraine,
shirobokovyuri@gmail.com

Abstract: *The article is dedicated to the problem of providing an opportune psychological aid to children who were affected by crisis events. Observation, surveys, conservation were used as the methods of the study. The article emphasizes that the rapport building with children and their parents is one of the first and basic steps to provide psychological help. In order to develop the effective psychological methods and techniques of working with children who were affected by crisis events, scientific works of Ukrainian and foreign scientists were analysed. Therefore, the positive regard, emergence of interest and topic of conservation were determined as essential aspects of any rapport establishing. As well as, the main goals of the rapport building are the abatement of emotional tension and mutual trust development. As a consequence of the study, two stages of the child-psychologist interaction were determined. The first is providing the sense of safety and the second is direct interaction with a child. Also, some rapport building techniques for children of different ages were proposed in the article. These techniques should be used only individually for each specific case. In addition, the rapport building is determined as an inalienable condition of any effective further treatment.*

Keywords: *psychological aid, rapport, psychotraumatic factors, crisis events, psychological trauma.*

How to cite: Ovsyanikova, Y., Liebedieva, S., Pokhilko, D., Onishchenko, N., Gontarenko, L., & Shyrobokov, Y. (2021). The Modern Approach to Rapport Building with Children Affected by Crisis Events. *BRAIN. Broad Research in Artificial Intelligence and Neuroscience*, 12(4), 532-542. <https://doi.org/10.18662/brain/12.4/263>

Introduction

Nowadays, the psychotraumatic events are an inherent part of our usual life, consequently, the issue of providing psychological and social aid to people, especially to children, is becoming a topic of current interest. The serious illnesses in children or relatives, death of relatives or pets, traffic collisions, a loss of a dwelling, terrorist acts can be considered as psychotraumatic events. However, according to our practical experience, we emphasize that children's traumas might be caused not only by direct influences, but also by situations of witnessing.

Generally, children cannot realize what has happened to them, since they aren't socialized individuals who can choose their behaviour conforming to a great number of social, religious norms and rules, own life experience etc. In addition, a child, who was affected, does not have an ability to evaluate those events (Onishchenko, 2014; Onishchenko et al., 2014). Usually, they memorize just situations with feelings, which are associated with those situations. For instance, they retain sounds of impacts, explosions, fire heat. It is important to notice that the reaction to psychotraumatic events takes various forms, sometimes, the intensity of feelings contributes to emotional vulnerability. As a consequence of the vulnerability, a child can feel helpless and unsafe. Therefore, crisis events have a great impact on children that makes them more sensitive to emergence of psychotrauma, as a result, their need for psychological aid is greater than one of adults.

For comprehensive examination the problems of opportune psychological aid to children who were affected by crisis events, we analysed scientific works of Ukrainian and foreign authors (Abramova, 2001; Alekseeva & Novoselskii, 2013; Chufarovskii, 1999; Dulov, 1975; Garmezy, 1986; Gubin & Chufarovskii, 2002; Kisarchuk et al., 2015a, 2015b; Onishchenko, 2014; Onishchenko et al., 2014; Porubov, 1998; Rogers, 1975). These studies are devoted to first psychological aid to affected population, psychological features of victims, methods of psychological aid to children affected by traumatic events, as well as psychological rehabilitation of children.

Also, the works of Enikeev (2010), Gubin & Chufarovskii (2002), Onishchenko et al. (2014) and Rogers (1975) were analysed in order to dig into the problem of rapport building between a psychologist and a client, because that process is one of the most significant moments of providing psychological aid.

The purpose of the research is to study the problem of rapport building with children who were affected by traumatic events.

Specialists of Laboratory of Crisis and Disaster Psychology, which is a department of National University of Civil Defence of Ukraine, conducted a large-scale research. One of the aims of that research was to develop some effective methods and techniques of rapport establishing with children who were influenced by traumatic events. The study was being held during 2014-2017 years, children from different Kharkiv's kindergartens, schools, boarding schools, gymnasiums were involved in the study. Children of preschool (3-6 years old), junior school ages (6-9 years old) were divided into two experimental groups according to their age. As methods of the study, observations, conversations and surveys were used.

Observation is one of the basic methods of visual psychodiagnostics (Abramova, 2001). This method was used during whole study and allowed us to identify the dynamics of children's psychological states, key features of their behaviour and personality while they performed different tasks. Peculiarities of the observation were:

- the method was used for individual and group examination;
- a specific scheme was used for the method (specific marks of states were tracked);
- the method was comprehensive and systematic.

Conversations were used for clarifying some information (thoughts, emotional statements and attitudes) within the considered issue (Abramova, 2001).

Surveys gave an opportunity to examine a great number of children according to the developed plan of the study (Abramova, 2001). We used two surveys which were created for this research. Each survey had 14 basic questions and 5 additional questions which were aimed at examination of the problem.

Approaches to Building the Rapport with Children

Analysis of scientific works by Kisarchuk et al. (2015b) and Garmezy (1986) has shown that providing psychological aid to children who have psychotraumatic experience should be particularly comprehensive and systematic. According to our experience, providing psychological aid to children who were affected by traumatic events always starts from rapport building between psychologists and children, as well as their parents. We need to notice that every detail is significant for rapport establishing with a child, affected by traumatic events, for instance, face expression, sight,

intonation, distance between a psychologist and a child etc. Moreover, such complexity makes the rapport building one of the most important stages of providing psychological aid which demands a great deal of the psychologist's attention. So, organisation of the interactions "psychologist-child" and "psychologist-parents" on this stage determines the result of psychological aid. Different aspects of the problem under study are covered in the works of many scholars – Ivanchenko (2020), Komogorova et al. (2021), Melnyk et al. (2019, 2021), Palamarchuk et al. (2020), Sheremet et al. (2019).

It is important to emphasize, the rapport building is an inalienable part of communication. To illustrate our words, let us refer to the publication by Onishchenko et al. (2014), which states that the rapport building was the first stage of communication.

Enikeev (2010) divided the concept of rapport into two different categories. One of those categories is the psychological rapport and the other - the communicative rapport.

Rogers (1975), one of the prominent psychologists, determined the main components and conditions of the rapport building. He considered such components as mutual openness, warmth, empathy and support.

Gubin & Chufarovskii (2002) discussed procedural aspects of rapport building. They noticed that the rapport building has three stages, each of those stages has own peculiar characteristics. The first stage of rapport building is a mutual evaluation, the second – a mutual interest, the last one – a dyad formation (Chufarovskii, 1999).

As we can see, there is a great number of different approaches to the rapport building and various definitions of that term. Consequently, we determined the rapport building as a complex system, which consists many elements. We believe that the main components of the rapport building are readiness to communication, mutual understanding and emotional trust. Additionally, the rapport building needs positive regard, mutual interest and also a topic for conversation. However, those elements are related to the rapport building with adults. The process of rapport building with children has some differences.

We supposed that the main differences of rapport building with children, who were affected by traumatic events, are abatement of emotional tension and development of mutual emotional trust between a psychologist and a child. Such idea is based on our practical experience, because we noticed that *a child, first of all, needs a sense of safety and feeling of calm*. Those feelings and sensations can be provided by psychologist's actions. For instance, psychologist should be at the same level with a child in order to make an eye contact, as well as to track child's face expression; in addition,

psychologist should explain all her or his actions. If a child allows, psychologist should make a bodily contact, e.g. hugs, hold his or her hand etc. Also, psychologist should use simple and understandable phrases, especially, at the beginning.

In addition, there are some requirements to the place where a psychologist will provide psychological aid to children who were affected by traumatic events. Firstly, it should be a spacious room, secondly, in that room psychologist should have all stuff that can be useful for providing psychological aid to children (Alekseeva & Novoselskii, 2013). Thirdly, the room should be airy and warm and it is advisable to have soft lightning in there.

Important to mention, a psychologist who provides psychological aid to children affected by crisis events should be enduring, attentive and he or she should appreciate the needs of a child.

The next stage of the rapport building is the direct interaction with a child. Definitely, psychologist should take into account the uniqueness of each traumatic experience, as well as, emotional state and age specifics. In addition, they should draw attention to child's gender. For instance, a psychologist should understand that consciousness and self-awareness start from the age of 3. At the same stage of development, children want to become more independent. The major activity of that age period is a game, consequently, the rapport building should be based on different games with a child (Onishchenko, 2014; Onishchenko, et al., 2014).

According to our practical experience of work with preschool children, a stuffed toy can be the most effective to build a rapport between a child and a psychologist. Better to use toy gloves and finger puppets, because a child gets an opportunity to interact more openly and express their feelings through a game.

As we mentioned above, we conduct the research in order to develop effective methods of providing psychological aid to children who were affected by traumatic events.

The results of that research allow us to say that cat, dog, hare or rabbit, mouse, elephant, pig, sheep toys are more effective, as well as, sparrow, titmouse, dove or pigeon, woodpecker, goose, hen toys. To illustrate our words, we want to tell you about one method that we use in our practice. A psychologist takes a stuffed toy, for instance, a rabbit, and proposes a child to introduce himself or herself to the toy. The child takes a paw of the toy and says "Hi, rabbit, my name is...".

In addition, we determined some cartoon characters that can be useful for rapport building (Table 1), because they symbolize safety. Toys

and images of those characters are proposed to use in order to establish rapport with children.

Table 1. Rating of cartoons characters of preschool children

	Girls		Boys
1.	Doc McStuffins	1.	Shreck
2.	Luntic	2.	Characters of Robocar Poli cartoons
3.	Winx club characters	3.	Fixics
4.	Lego Ninjago	4.	Lego Ninjago
5.	Fixics	5.	Kung fu Panda
6.	Sofia the First	6.	Bogatyr
7.	Pinky Pie (My little pony)	7.	Chip 'n' Dale
8.	Chip 'n' Dale	8.	Characters of Paw Patrol
9.	Amber (Robocar Poli)	9.	Bayblade characters
10.	Alice (Alice knows what to do)	10.	Lego Nexo Knights

Source: authors' own design

It is important to notice, if a child gives or shows his or her own toys to anybody, it means that the child trusts this person. Therefore, child's toys can be very useful to indicate the level of trust and rapport.

Considering children 6-9 years old, a child of that age usually understands what happens. Children become more independent, the major activity changes (from game to education), as well as, style of thinking (becomes abstract-logical). Onishchenko (2014) noticed that children of that age can express their feelings without difficulties. We also recommend psychologists to use cartoon characters in order to build rapport. As well as, fairy tales characters, special cards and small toys.

For successful interaction with children of junior school age, according to our results, the following cartoon characters can be effective:

Table 2. Rating of cartoon characters of junior school children

	Girls		Boys
1.	Harry Potter	1.	Transformers
2.	Monster High characters	2.	Spiderman
3.	Winx club characters	3.	Fixics
4.	Lego Ninjago	4.	Lego Ninjago
5.	Fixics	5.	Kung fu Panda

6.	Rapunzel	6.	Bogatyr
7.	Alice (Alice knows what to do)	7.	Harry Potter
8.	Ivan the rescuer	8.	Characters of Paw Patrol
9.	Toothless (How to train your dragon)	9.	Bayblade characters
		10.	Lego Nexo Knights
		11.	Zack Storm

All mentioned above can be considered as a resource in order to overcome children's traumatic experience, because they have strong positive attitude towards those characters. As a result, the use of such attitude causes significant decrease in psychologists' efforts and time.

Building the Rapport with Adolescents

Also, as an instrument for rapport building can be used the method "magic tricks". Usually, that method is useful if we want to shift child's attention, as well as, make interaction more interesting for children. According to our experience, the question "Do you want to see magic tricks" produces great interest among children.

For "magic tricks", a psychologist does not need a lot of time. Moreover, this method needs only a few minutes at the beginning of the session. Especially, the method can be useful for children who do not draw a large number of attention to interaction with psychologist, after magic tricks becomes more attentive to their environment and events that happen around them. Among children with high level of anxiety, usually, the technique decreases that level, as well as, increases the level of openness.

Therefore, "magic tricks" method is very useful for children involvement to common activity and deepens an interaction between psychologists and children. Moreover, according to our practical experience, positive and active attitudes towards psychological aid helps children to alleviate from negative psychotraumatic effects.

Due to the fact that the 10-years-old children orientate more towards referent groups, the rapport building with this group of children has some peculiarities. For instance, their need to reach adulthood makes them more sensitive, especially, to sense of guilt. It happens because they might think that there can be responsible for traumatic events (Onishchenko, 2014).

After analysing our practical experience, we can notice that the process of rapport building with 10-years-old children can be very tense, moreover, that process, usually, is very arduous. The reason of those difficulties is that children try to overcome psychotrauma by themselves, without any help of psychologists. Usually, children's parents or relatives ask

for help and the first meeting with psychologist is very gruelling. For instance, a child can resist psychologist's efforts. They usually say that they do not understand why they are here, that they are not insane, and moreover, psychological aid can be refused, because they want to hide their psychological problems.

In that case, psychologists can use the technique "Small person" at the beginning of interaction. For that technique, a psychologist draw a human figure, then the psychologist proposes a child to describe that person (Kisarchuk et al., 2015a). For instance, the psychologist can say: "Look! It is your peer, his name is ... Now, we will discuss some of his problems, but I do not know a lot about those problems and I think that you can help me. So, tell me about him and his problems". After that, the psychologist and the child create a small tale about imagined person, during this procedure, child's tension decreases. Usually, a child understands all symbolism of that technique, but a conversation becomes more open. In addition, during the conversation, a child realizes that his problems are not unique and that his peers have the same problems, as a result, his or her anxiety decreases.

One of the negative moments is initial total refuse from interaction. Often, a child defends himself against adults, so he or she also defends against psychologist. He or she usually says that they do not want to answer psychologist's question and propose to ask the same question to his or her mother and/or father, because they have brought him to psychologist. Sometimes, they can give one answer to all questions, for instance, they can say that they do not know anything. As usual, the reason of such behaviour is the wish to avoid a conversation.

If psychologist observes such behaviour, he or she can use the technique "Reflection". In order to use this technique, psychologist should tell a child a story about a peer of this child whose situation is very similar to child's problems. Importantly, the gender, age, traits of the character should cause the feeling of affinity, as well as, psychologist should use actual information that relates to the child's problems. The story should provoke a child to participate in storytelling. Furthermore, he or she should add some information to the story, some information should be declined by a child etc. This technique can help a child to realize what he or she feels, to alienate his or her problem.

It is important to notice that psychologists should use neutral questions in order to build rapport with 10-years-old and elder children. E.g., psychologist can ask questions about new model of iPad, new games, movies etc (Alekseeva & Novoselskii, 2013). From the beginning psychologist should help children to understand their psychological equality.

As we can see, the process of rapport establishing is quite difficult and has some peculiarities.

Conclusions

Nowadays, when consequences of disasters and emergencies become more extensive and tragic, high professional level of psychologist who provides psychological aid to citizens is required. As experience shows, most psychologists do not pay enough attention to the rapport building with children who were affected by traumatic events. As well as, they often ignore children's world outlook and their traits and peculiarities. In order to overcome that phenomenon, the large-scale research was conducted. According to the results of this research, the modern approach to rapport building with children who were affected by traumatic events was proposed.

After analysis of the problem of rapport building with children, we came to some conclusions. The basic requirements to rapport building are positive regard, interest emergence and topic of conversation. However, providing psychological aid to children has some features, especially, rapport building.

The key moment of rapport building with a child is abatement of emotional tension, as well as, development of emotional trust between a psychologist and a child.

The rapport building has two stages, the first is to provide of feeling of safety and the second is direct interaction with a child.

Important to notice, psychologist should avoid fast shifting from the first stage to the second. A reason of such behaviour is that a child, who was affected by traumatic events, can refuse all psychologists' efforts.

The proposed techniques and methods should be used only individually for each specific case. Will be better if psychologist evaluates each technique or method before using it in order to provide psychological aid to children who were affected by traumatic events.

Moreover, psychologists should keep in mind that he or she should use all known techniques and methods to provide psychological aid to children. However, the main rule of providing aid is "Do no harm".

Considering everything, we can say that the rapport building is a condition for efficient results of treatment.

References

- Abramova, G. (2001). *Prakticheskaja psikhologija* [Practical psychology]. Akademicheskii Proekt.

- Alekseeva, I., & Novoselskii, I. (2013). *Reabilitatsionaiia rabota s detmi, perezhivshimi travmu* [Rehabilitation work with children who survived the trauma]. Natsionalnii Fond zashchity detei ot zhestokogo obrashcheniia.
- Chufarovskii, Y. V. (1999). *Yuridicheskaia psikhologiiia* [Legal psychology]. Novyi yurist.
- Dulov, A. V. (1975). *Sudebnaia psikhologiiia* [Psychology of trial judging]. Vysheishaia shkola. =
- Enikeev, M. (2010). *Obshchaia i sotsialnaia psikhologiiia* [General and social psychology]. Norma (INFRA-M).
- Garnezy, N. (1986). Stress-resistant children: the search for protective factors. *Journal of Psychology and Psychiatry*, 4, 213-233.
[https://www.scirp.org/\(S\(i43dyn45teexjx455qlt3d2q\)\)/reference/ReferencesPapers.aspx?ReferenceID=1581535](https://www.scirp.org/(S(i43dyn45teexjx455qlt3d2q))/reference/ReferencesPapers.aspx?ReferenceID=1581535)
- Gubin, A., & Chufarovskii, V. Y. (2002). *Obschenie v nashei zhizni* [Communication in our life]. Economica.
- Ivanchenko, A. (2020). Positive impact of recreational techniques for the self-healing of the body. *Estudos de Psicologia (Campinas)*, 37, 1-13: e190082). <https://doi.org/10.1590/1982-0275202037e190082>
- Kisarchuk, Z. G., Omelchenko, Y. M., Bila, I. M., & Lazos, H. P. (2015b). *Psykhologichna dopomoga ditiam u kryzovykh sytuatsiakh: metody i tekhniky* [Psychological help to children in crisis situations: methods and techniques]. Logos. http://psychology-naes-ua.institute/files/pdf/1_1447345103.pdf
- Kisarchuk, Z. G., Omelchenko, Y. M., Lazos, G. P., Lytvynenko, L. I., & Tsarenko, L. G. (2015a). *Psykhologichna dopomoga postrazhdalym vnaslidok kryzovykh travmatychnykh podii* [Psychological aid to victims of crisis traumatic events]. Logos.
- Komogorova, M., Maksymchuk, B., Bernatska, O., Lukianchuk, S., Gerasymova, I., Popova, O., Matviichuk, T., Solovyov, V., Kalashnik, N., Davydenko, H., Stoliarenko, O., Stoliarenko, O., & Maksymchuk, I. (2021). Pedagogical Consolidation of Pupil-Athletes' Knowledge of Humanities. *Revista Romaneasca Pentru Educatie Multidimensionala*, 13(1), 168-187.
<https://doi.org/10.18662/rrem/13.1/367>
- Melnyk, N., Bidyuk, N., Kalenskyi, A., Maksymchuk, B., Bakhmat, N., Matviienko, O., Matviichuk, T., Solovyov, V., Golub, N., & Maksymchuk, I. (2019). Modely y orhanyzatsyone osobyne profesyonalne obuke vaspytacha u pojedynym zemshama Evropske Unyje y u Ukrainy [Models and organizational characteristics of preschool teachers' professional training in some EU countries and Ukraine]. *Zbornik Instituta za pedagogska istrazivanja*, 51(1), 46-93. <https://doi.org/10.2298/ZIP1901046M>

- Melnyk, N., Maksymchuk, B., Gurevych, R., Kalenskyi, A., Dovbnaya, S., Groshovenko, O., & Filonenko, L. (2021). The Establishment and Development of Professional Training for Preschool Teachers in Western European Countries. *Revista Romaneasca Pentru Educatie Multidimensionala*, 13(1), 208-233. <https://doi.org/10.18662/rrem/13.1/369>
- Onishchenko, N. (2014). *Ekstrena psykholoqichna dopomoga postrazhdalym v umovakh nadzvychnoi situatsii: teoretychni ta prykladni aspekty* [First psychological aid to victims in emergencies: theoretical and appliance aspects].
- Onishchenko, N., Timchenko, O. V., & Tsitsey, R. M. (2014). *Osoblyvosti vstanovlennia psykholoqichnogo kontaktu psykologa dsns ukrainy z postrazhdalymy v umovakh nadzvychnoi situatsii* [Peculiarities of rapport establishing between psychologists of emergency services of ukraine and victims affected by emergency situations]. Miska Drukarnia.
- Palamarchuk, O., Gurevych, R., Maksymchuk, B., Gerasymova, I., Fushtey, O., Logutina, N., Kalashnik, N., Kylyvnyk, A., Haba, I., Matviichuk, T., Solovyov, V., & Maksymchuk, I. (2020). Studying Innovation as the Factor in Professional Self-Development of Specialists in Physical Education and Sport. *Revista Romaneasca Pentru Educatie Multidimensionala*, 12(4), 118-136. <https://doi.org/10.18662/rrem/12.4/337>
- Porubov, N. I. (1998). *Taktika doprosa na predvaritelnom sledstvii* [The tactics of interrogation during the preliminary investigation]. BEK.
- Rogers, C. (1975). Empathy: an unappreciated way of being. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 5(2-10), 1-16. http://www.sageofasheville.com/pub_downloads/EMPATHIC_AN_UNAPPRECIATED_WAY_OF_BEING.pdf
- Sheremet, M., Leniv, Z., Loboda, V., & Maksymchuk, B. (2019). The development level of smart information criterion for specialists' readiness for inclusion implementation in education. *Information Technologies and Learning Tools*, 72(4), 273-285. <https://journal.iitta.gov.ua/index.php/itlt/article/view/2561>