

OHEL DISTRIBUTES 4,000 CARE KITS FOR DISPLACED ISRAELIS WITH PRESCHOOL CHILDREN RETURNING TO HOMES NEAR GAZA

Drawing upon its experience supporting people through trauma, Ohel Children's Home and Family Services is providing vital guidance to 4,000 displaced families with preschool children returning to their homes in the Gaza-area communities invaded last October 7.

The guidance consists of written materials to help parents identify some of their young children's responses to the trauma of the Hamas terrorist attack and to ease their adjustment back home. It also contains resources developed by Ohel Kestenbaum International Children's Services to help children express their emotions and feelings and to help parents in supporting them.

In this initiative, Ohel, a New York-based Jewish organization, is partnering with the Israel Trauma Coalition (ITC) and Mahut Israel. Since 1969, Ohel has provided the Jewish and wider communities with mental-health support.

Largely unknown in the wider world during the ongoing war, is the plight of displaced Israelis who were relocated and

scattered across the country. Thousands of them have been returning home after staying up to six months in hotels, sometimes far from their homes. Some of the kibbutzim were decimated in the attacks.

A recent study conducted by the Israeli Pediatric Association found that 84 percent of Israeli children who were evacuated suffer from emotional distress since October 7; 93 percent of the children who survived the attacks are having emotional difficulties, 69 percent of them suffer from anxiety. Ninety percent of children living in areas where many incoming-missile sirens sounded are having emotional difficulties.

According to top Ohel officials, addressing children's emotional needs tied to October 7 is especially important for these families now. Knowing what to expect, and where to turn for help, is critical in helping them to adjust to distressing feelings that may emerge.

"When people are under attack, are evacuated, and then are placed in temporary and unfamiliar surroundings,



it is normal to have delayed reactions to trauma. Their immediate and basic needs for shelter and safety are so acute, they don't have the luxury of thinking about their feelings. But that is not good for children, especially," said David Mandel, Ohel's chief executive officer. "Responses to trauma can be deferred until weeks and months later. Upon returning home, some people may experience intense feelings they may not be prepared for, and they may be especially vulnerable to mental-health challenges."

"Returning home is bittersweet for so many of these families, especially children, said Jay Kestenbaum, co-president of Ohel's Board of Directors. The longing for home is finally realized, yet many of these families will be returning to a home and community that looks and feels very different than the one they left behind in October. This can trigger many feelings that may have been suppressed until now. We at Ohel acknowledge the difficulty, and are providing them with tips and tools, drawn from our expertise, to help them cope with the adjustment to returning home."

The kit comes in a canvas bag that includes:

1. A tip sheet on helping adults after a return from relocation
2. A tip sheet on helping children after a return from relocation

3. Ohel's preschool book, *I Feel That Way and That's Okay*, to help children express their emotions after a traumatic experience

4. Two companion coloring books
5. Markers

The authors of Ohel's preschool book are Tziviv Reiter, L.C.S.W., the organization's director of children's and national trauma services, and Dr. Naomi Baum, Ph.D. from Israel.

The kits are being distributed to families in ITC trauma centers in Sha'ar Hanegev, Sderot, the Hof Ashkelon Regional Council, the Eshkol Regional Council and the Sdot Negev Regional Council. Ohel will distribute more kits in the coming weeks and months as needed.

About Ohel Children's Home and Family Services:

Ohel is a not-for-profit Jewish social service agency that cares for thousands of individuals through a broad range of programs including mental health services and counseling, crisis intervention, housing and programs for people with developmental and psychiatric disabilities, older adult services, safe dwellings for domestic violence victims, and outpatient substance use disorder treatment and prevention. Ohel Kestenbaum Family International Children's Services provides resilience-building programs to children and schools in New York, across the United States, in Israel, and around the world.

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