



# CHILD PLAY ACTIVITIES THROUGH MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT TOOLKIT

Malaysia

CASE STUDY

Photo description: Volunteer and children participating in Malaysia Red Crescent activities for children.  
Photo credit: Malaysia Red Crescent

[ifrc.org](https://ifrc.org)



Photo description: Children taking part in child friendly activities.  
Photo credit: Malaysia Red Crescent

## Background

The Malaysian Red Crescent (MRC) has developed a Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) toolkit, designed for disaster response to create safe, child-friendly spaces within temporary evacuation centers. First implemented during the 2022-2023 Disaster Response Emergency Fund (DREF) flood response, the toolkit enables rapid establishment of supportive environments where children and families can find relief, security, and a sense of normalcy during crises. Supported by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), this toolkit offers structured activities and resources to reduce stress and foster resilience, addressing both mental and emotional needs.

The toolkit's implementation is a joint effort between the MRC and IFRC, reflecting a strong partnership in disaster response. It incorporates Protection, Gender, and Inclusion (PGI) principles to ensure safe spaces that respect the dignity of all individuals and are accessible to diverse community members. By promoting inclusivity and sensitivity, the toolkit underscores the importance of a safe environment for everyone, children and adults, aiming to rebuild a sense of stability and belonging.

Culturally, this toolkit is essential in Malaysia's community-centered context, where the well-being of children and collective resilience hold deep significance. The establishment of these safe spaces serves as a culturally attuned response, restoring dignity and safeguarding mental health during displacement. Through this approach, the MRC fosters psychological well-being and resilience among affected populations, strengthening the community's capacity for recovery and building trust in emergency response efforts. These culturally sensitive, dignity-centered interventions reinforce both immediate relief and long-term community trust, preparing communities for future crises and fostering resilience at every level.

## Who was Supported and How

The MRC developed its MHPSS toolkit to support psychosocial needs across a broad age range, from children as young as three to the elderly, during disaster responses. With resources that foster emotional relief and mental stimulation, this toolkit offers safe spaces and moments of comfort for people in temporary evacuation centres.

For young children, the toolkit includes items such as Play-Doh, colouring materials, and simple games that promote creative play. These activities help children process the unfamiliar and distressing environment around them in a safe, structured way. By engaging with these familiar, comforting materials, children can express themselves, connect with others, and gain a sense of normalcy, which is vital for emotional stability and resilience.

For older children and teenagers, the toolkit includes advanced art supplies, board games, and collaborative activities that encourage self-expression and teamwork. These resources help them process their experiences through creativity and peer interaction. Activities like painting and team games provide constructive outlets for emotional expression and social connection, helping teenagers feel understood and engaged even in difficult circumstances.

Adults also benefit from this toolkit through games and group activities that promote relaxation, social interaction, and stress relief. Card games, board games, and puzzles help adults take a break from the pressures of evacuation, bringing them together in moments of connection and light-heartedness. These shared activities foster a sense of community, reducing isolation and enhancing resilience.

For elderly individuals, the toolkit offers age-appropriate options, such as gentle crafting materials, memory games, and simple art supplies. These activities stimulate cognitive engagement and offer a sense of comfort and purpose, essential for maintaining well-being during displacement. The opportunity to engage in familiar, soothing activities helps elderly individuals feel valued and grounded.

By offering a wide range of age-appropriate tools—from Play-Doh and colouring books to group games and art supplies—the MRC MHPSS toolkit provides inclusive support across all ages, reinforcing a sense of safety and belonging. It not only meets emotional needs but also strengthens community bonds, helping individuals feel supported and valued during challenging times.

## Successes

The MHPSS toolkit developed by the MRC has significantly impacted over 10,000 individuals affected by various crises, including floods, landslides, and dengue outbreaks.

By creating accessible, child-friendly spaces within evacuation centers, the toolkit has offered comfort and mental relief to displaced families, supporting both children and adults. This achievement is a testament to the toolkit's thoughtful design, which provides age-appropriate resources like Play-Doh, board games, and art supplies that meet the diverse emotional and social needs of those affected.

The toolkit's success lies in its versatility and ease of use, allowing MRC to respond to a wide range of emergencies effectively. Through this inclusive, supportive approach, the program has fostered resilience, created moments of calm, and restored dignity, ultimately enhancing MRC's capacity to deliver psychosocial support across disaster scenarios.

## Challenges and Difficulties

One of the main challenges encountered in implementing the MHPSS toolkit has been a lack of preparedness among volunteers, who occasionally find themselves unsure about how to engage affected populations, especially children. This gap can limit the effectiveness of child-friendly spaces if volunteers are not confident in facilitating activities that promote a sense of safety and normalcy for younger individuals.

To address this challenge, building volunteer capacity through targeted training on child-friendly spaces and age-appropriate activities is essential. By equipping volunteers with specific skills and knowledge, MRC can improve the quality of psychosocial support provided, ensuring that volunteers feel empowered and capable in delivering the toolkit's benefits. Expanding training initiatives will create a more skilled volunteer network that can adapt and respond quickly, enhancing the toolkit's reach and impact.

## Lessons Learned

The development and implementation of the MRC MHPSS toolkit have offered key insights into enhancing psychosocial support in disaster situations. A major lesson is the toolkit's capacity to provide inclusive support, catering to diverse age groups with resources that meet both immediate emotional and social needs. This versatility makes it adaptable to a range of crisis scenarios, from natural disasters like floods to health emergencies such as dengue outbreaks. The success of the toolkit emphasizes the importance of accessible, age-appropriate activities that bring comfort and stability to those affected by crisis.

However, challenges highlighted the need for continuous volunteer training, particularly in understanding how to engage children in supportive ways. Some volunteers initially felt unprepared to use the toolkit, especially in child-friendly spaces, which limited the effectiveness of these interventions. This experience has underscored the importance of capacity-building within the volunteer team. By providing specific training on child-centred activities and the setup of safe spaces, MRC can empower volunteers with the confidence and skills needed to facilitate the toolkit's full benefits.

Additionally, the program demonstrated the value of having flexible resources that can be adapted to various cultural and situational contexts. Creating safe, inclusive environments is essential, as it not only provides immediate psychosocial relief but also reinforces community trust and resilience. Overall, the MRC's experience with the MHPSS toolkit underscores the importance of a well-prepared volunteer base, adaptable resources, and a focus on inclusivity, all of which are critical for effective psychosocial support in times of disaster.