

Helping through Understanding Part 2

The Trauma Booklets as Counseling tools

Ideas to use my trauma booklets for children after war and flight
in kindergarten, schools and accommodation

by Susanne Stein

The two booklets are available for free download on www.susannestein.de

Hamburg, November 2023

Preliminary remark

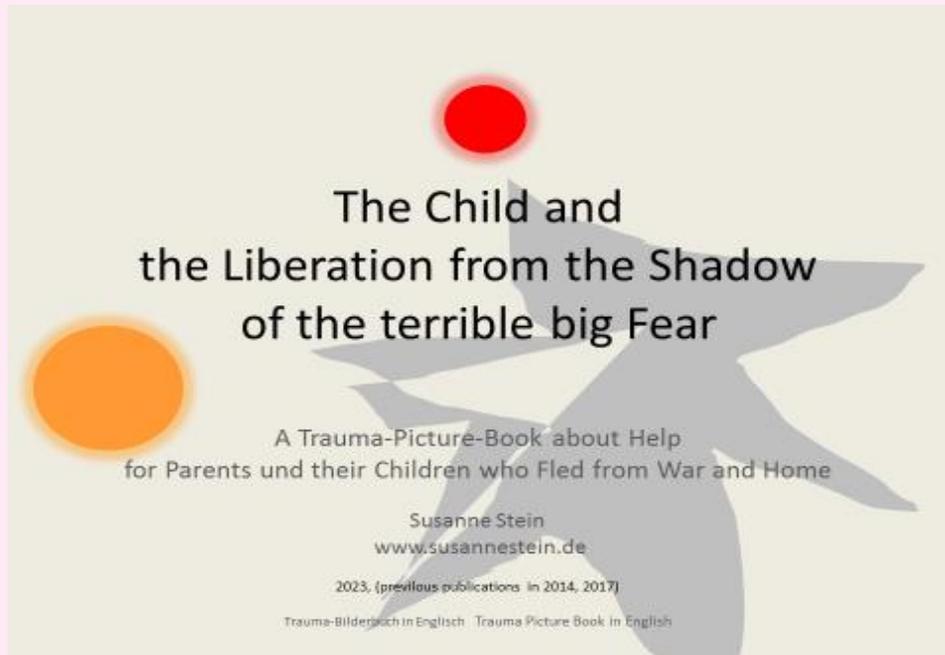
- ▶ Since 2013 I have supported refugee families privately and on a voluntary basis. I met loving parents who were sometimes helpless and often very unhappy about the consequences of their children's trauma.
- ▶ Since 2014, I have published trauma booklets for these children and their parents, which are intended to explain simply but accurately what traumatic experiences can do to the children's souls and how we, all of us “caregivers,” can help them before they can achieve therapy.
- ▶ This impulse gave rise to a larger project. The two booklets are currently published in 16 and 13 editions on the Internet and have been printed some thousands of times. The numerous hits on the website are a sad testimony to the great need.
- ▶ This project was only possible with the help of therapists, translators, my internet graphic artists and large donations.
- ▶ The two papers on the topic of “Helping through Understanding” come from my seminars. They are hereby made available to a wider public.



2018, meeting the Federal President at an event to honor the project

The two Trauma-Booklets

- ▶ The Trauma Picture Book for Children and their Parents is available in 16 Languages



- ▶ The Trauma Picture Sheet for parents is available in 13 Languages



What and who are the booklets for?

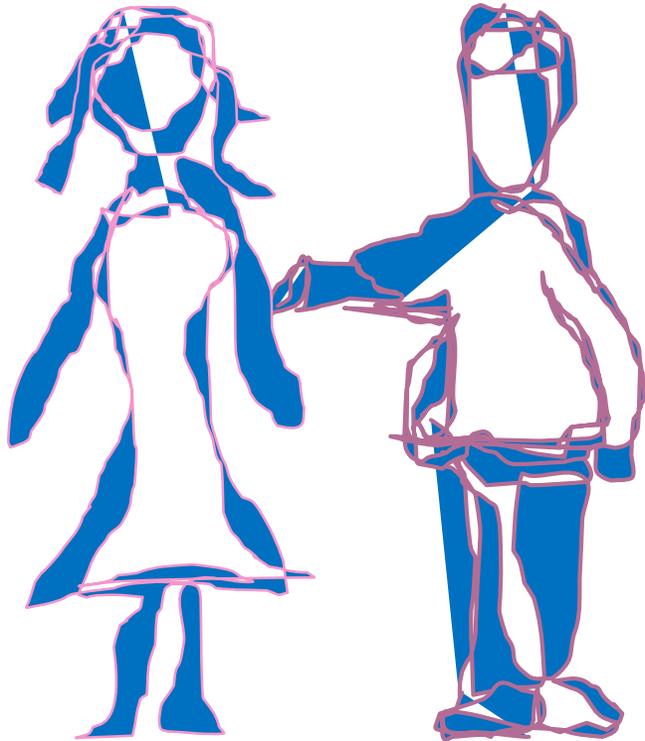
Objectives of use

- ▶ The first goal of the trauma booklets is always to relieve the burden on children and parents and to strengthen the fundamental parent-child relationship. This suffers when the shadow of fear that hangs over the child is not understood by the parents.
- ▶ Supporters of traumatized children have stated that their empathy has been strengthened by the booklets and that they see them as a useful counseling tool.

Tree target groups

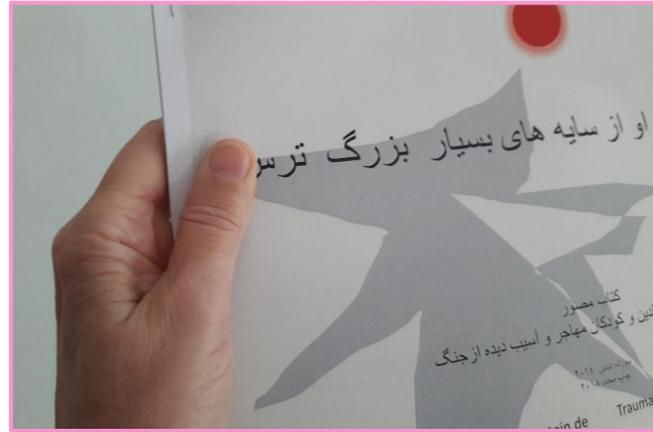
- ▶ The trauma picture book is intended specifically for children and secondarily for parents. The trauma picture sheet is primarily a guide for parents. Individual pages can be used for both target groups.
- ▶ Over the course of the project, both booklets were used more and more in training events for teachers, educators and volunteers

What should the booklets do in parental advice?



- ▶ Helping parents to better understand their children and their symptoms: “Bad experiences can have long-lasting effects. My child needs a lot of protection!”
- ▶ Relieve the parents' emotional burden: “My child is not stupid, not crazy, not rebellious... He carries a legacy. She is in distress. And they are survivors. Many children suffer from such trauma. We are not alone.”
- ▶ Strengthen the parents: They learn how they can specifically stabilize their children and activate their resources. If necessary, make arrangements with the parents regarding: rest, help, sleep, exercise, cuddling...
- ▶ Encourage to expand protection at home: no TV news, no physical punishment, if possible not to expose children to the suffering of their parents...
- ▶ Inform parents about therapeutic options.

Overview of possible uses with parents



Hand over the book as part of the welcome and offer a conversation



The parents first look at the book at home alone, then perhaps with the child, perhaps online



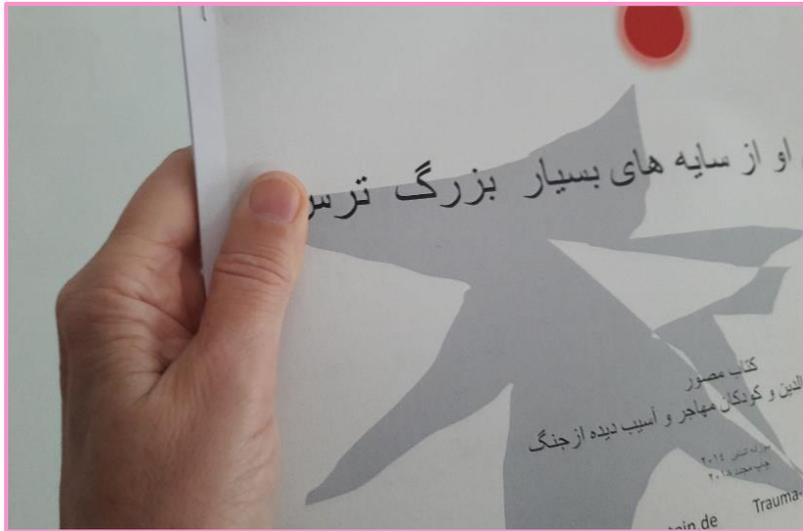
Based on certain behavior of the child, read the book or the picture sheet together with the parents, perhaps in two languages next to each other



Possible use in initial discussions:

The book is handed over as an aid when the drama of the background experience is already known, addressed or becomes noticeable.*

Advantages and disadvantages



- ▶ Relief: Parents receive a book in their language quickly and easily, in which they can recognize their child's problems and learn about possible solutions.
- ▶ Appreciation: The decision about usefulness is handed over to the parents. They are seen in their competence.
- ▶ Effort: It takes a lot of printouts. If necessary, just pass on the link.
- ▶ Defense: The parents may avoid the topic even though the child needs psychological support.

* Social support for families is elementary and often urgent. Here I limit myself to the psychological aspects of the child

Possible use for parents: A conversation with their child at home



Advantages and Disadvantages

- ▶ Learning and sharing together: Parents and children experience a tool together to talk directly or indirectly about their experiences. The booklets also enable distance.
- ▶ Relief: We are not alone with the problems.
- ▶ Risk: The parents are overwhelmed by their own memories and decide to keep a cloak of silence on the topic.



Possible use for parental advice: Read a booklet together with the parents depending on the occasion, perhaps in two languages side by side

Advantages and Disadvantages

- ▶ Clarity: The materials can be used to convey the child's observed problems to the parents.
- ▶ Relief: Parents learn that they are not alone with the problem; there is even a book about it.
- ▶ Hope: There are many ways to help the child. We, the educators, teachers, carers..., want to do this together with you.
- ▶ Effort: The colleague providing advice must have dealt with the topic and make time available for advice.



When do we, the supporters, think about advising parents with the booklets?

- ▶ We observe that certain difficulties of the child stagnate or increase. Or the child spoke about bad memories on his own initiative or hinted at them.
- ▶ Our previous assistance didn't really lead to any improvements.
- ▶ We think of a trauma-related problem because other causes - such as physical problems, children being overwhelmed by intercultural challenges/living in two (language) worlds, parents' social insecurity - are not recognizable or have insufficient explanatory power.
- ▶ We like the picture book and/or the picture sheet. We only ever use media and materials that we like.

Overview of possible uses with the child



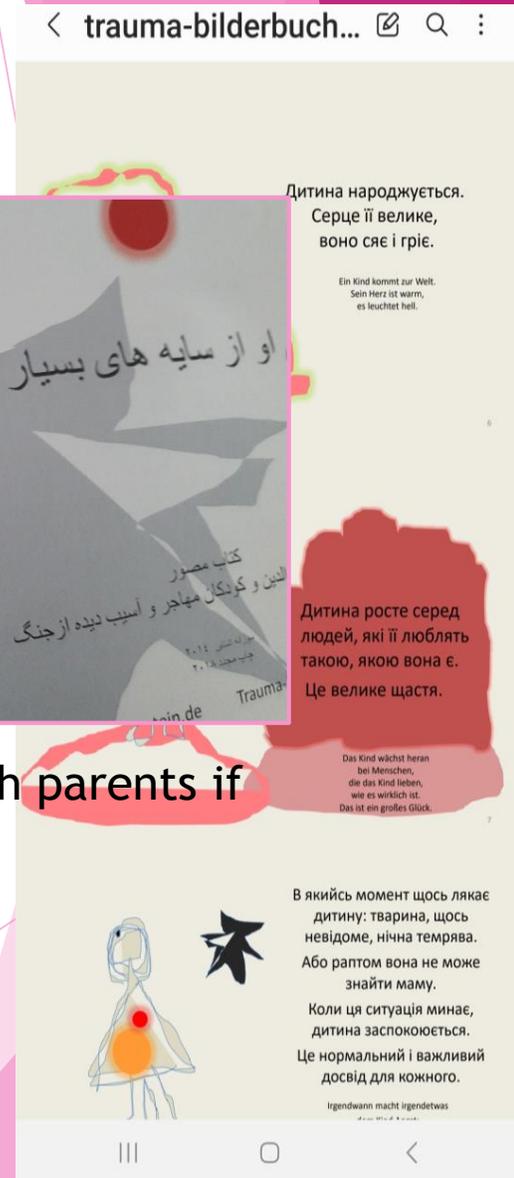
Show the book, read it, maybe just a few pages from one of the booklets



Take home to read with parents if the child wants it



Maybe paint in it, cut it out, glue it, even crumple it up



Possible use in personal consultation



- ▶ The picture book consists of several parts for different uses: a story to read aloud, coloring pages and cut-out sheets. What is suitable for the individual child depends entirely on the age, level of development and language ability of the individual child.
- ▶ If necessary, you can look at the picture story or even individual pictures in which the child recognizes themselves. Then it realizes: - I'm not alone with my feelings. - Someone understands me - It's normal that I can't do something now or that I always have to do something "stupid". - I am not "stupid" or "evil". - What I experienced was bad! I am normal! I'm even strong! Things will be different again!
- ▶ You can use the coloring templates with your child in a resource-oriented manner if they are comfortable with painting. The advantage of the coloring pages is that they indicate themes and that there is a framework.
- ▶ You can also lay collagen instead if the child prefers to cut and paste.
- ▶ You can create solution pictures with the child: What do you like here? Who belongs to you? What do you like to do? If the child can't cut out yet, he or she is given cut-out figures and objects that they can then place on colored paper.

The advantage of simplicity



- ▶ The booklets are not bound books and needn't be handled with care. The simple printouts also make it possible for the child to “put the booklet in the corner”, crumple it up or stomp on it. A good reaction if the child - all too understandably - gets angry or is currently overwhelmed by the topic.
- ▶ Prints are cheaper than hardcover books. Several thousand free copies could and can be made available through donations.
- ▶ The online versions can be viewed free of charge anywhere. Some kids “love” this.



What should the booklets do in advising children?



- ▶ The main goal is relief!” We understand you! Your difficulties can be explained. You're not crazy, you're reacting normally to something bad in your past. You are strong, a survivor. Glad you're with us and safe!”
- ▶ The picture book also formulates good parental messages for the child. These can help the child even if the parents are not present or are temporarily unable to convey these messages due to their own stress.
- ▶ The book gives the child suggestions on how they can do something for themselves to counteract the feeling of powerlessness.
- ▶ The book gives the child the right to get help: You have every right to help, here from us or from specialists.
- ▶ It introduces the child to the existence of therapeutic specialists.
- ▶ The book can strengthen confidence: What is now will not always remain so.

Good prerequisites for advising the child

- ▶ We have good contact with the child.
- ▶ Perhaps we have already looked at other picture books with the child.
- ▶ We have experience calming an agitated child.
- ▶ We dare to have such a conversation. A little fear before such a conversation is good because it makes us pay attention and be careful. A lot of fear is a sign that it's better not to do it or to call in colleagues or professionals.
- ▶ We have the opportunity to speak to the child calmly, if necessary with an interpreter. The child is not left alone afterwards.
- ▶ If necessary, we only use individual images from the booklets to talk to the child about their situation/symptoms or wishes.

Possible uses at home: The children take a booklet with them to their parents



- ▶ Of course, a child can take the picture book home and show it to their parents. If he or she wants to share the picture book, it is a sure sign that the content has meaning for the child.
- ▶ If there is no printed booklet, the family can use the link.
- ▶ If possible, parents should be informed in advance.



And if the picture book triggers strong feelings in the child? A frequently expressed concern...

It may happen that children start crying while looking at the picture book. Out of relief that someone understands or out of sadness. Children may get angry and throw the picture book away. They may start to talk about their bad experiences.

These are all signs that the children (finally) feels understood in their inner distress. In all of these cases, use your pedagogical repertoire of actions and comfort the children or let them react to their aggression in a harmless way. Or you listen sympathetically. In any case, calm them down.



If children start to cry, it is often a good sign: frozen feelings are thawing. We comfort. We take our time, we don't insist. When the child is calmer again, we do something with him that he likes to stabilize.

The same applies if the child gets angry. We support you to express your previously held back anger in such a way that no one comes to harm.

The child may begin to talk about his or her bad experiences. We confirm that it was terrible "That was definitely really bad! It's completely normal that you now....! No one should experience something like that! It's good that you told me. It's good that you're getting help! It's good that you're here with us now. It's good that the bad things are now far away..." . The child can pour out his heart to us. We help him or her to express himself. We don't ask any in-depth questions, we ask about survival aids if necessary and ultimately lead the child back to the here and now. We do something with them that they enjoy doing. Important: We accept stories. We don't force it.

Experiences: What the picture book can trigger and what not

- ▶ Very unlikely and not yet proven: A child becomes more and more agitated and in the end appears as if he or she has withdrawn. Neither the experts involved in the creation of the picture book have pointed out this danger of dissociation, nor are there any reports of such strong reactions to the picture book. On the contrary: The picture book as a medium seems to enable us to deal with the horrors and at the same time create distance from them. The most common reaction is therefore relief.
- ▶ If we do fear dissociation, here is a note from Dr. med. Sabine Sobirey, psychiatrist and trauma therapist: “Notice in good time when it becomes too much. You can close the picture book and put it away, reorienting the child through calming, activity, presence, contact, touch and sensory stimuli. Stay calm yourself. It’s important to keep your emotions within the “tolerance window”, including yourself. Praise for the work the child has done.”

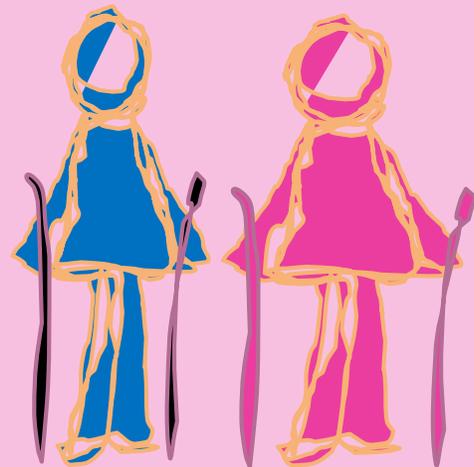
Use in training



- ▶ The picture books have been used to introduce the major topic of “consequences of trauma and forms of help” in many training events for various professional groups from the areas of daycare, school and extracurricular care.
- ▶ This use was not intended when it was created.
- ▶ But it gave me great pleasure to hear about it from colleagues from Germany, Switzerland, Greece, Iraq and Ukraine and to offer seminars myself.

Much better than without...

A final note



The trauma booklets do not replace therapy. They are little trauma aids. In metaphor, they are two “crutches” that help you get through the difficult time of a “leg injury” much better, until the wound slowly heals or can be treated by a specialist.

Feedback on the booklets from Greece



Prof. Anastasia Kalantzi-Azizi, emer. Professor of Clinical Psychology at the University of Athens and experienced supporter of refugees, writes:

“One of the biggest difficulties in providing psychosocial support to severely traumatized children is getting to know them emotionally and creating a mutually positive relationship. Susanne Stein's TRAUMA PICTURE BOOK offers an ideal tool for our work with these children. Colleagues of mine and I translated the trauma picture book into Greek and used it with refugee children from the Agios Andreas camp near Athens.

Based on these experiences and feedback from people who work with children and their families in refugee camps, we developed a three-hour seminar and offered it to employees of NGOs. The trauma picture book was also presented at congresses, conferences, postgraduate university programs, etc.

The positive feedback we have received so far gives me the certainty that the trauma picture book fulfills its purpose of providing relief.”

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You are welcome to send me your experience report or your own suggestions for use.

All picture books for free download, part1 of “Helping through Understanding” and further information at www.susannestein.de

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