

## A Counseling Program Based on Emergency Response Theory to Develop Proactive Coping Skills among Educational Counselors in Safe Educational Spaces During the Aggression on Gaza Strip (2023–2025)

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### Abstract

**Objectives:** The present study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of a counseling program based on the Emergency Response Theory in developing proactive coping skills among educational counselors in safe educational spaces during the aggression on the Gaza Strip (2023–2025).

**Methodology:** The study adopted a quasi-experimental design. The sample consisted of (30) counselors (15 males and 15 females), who were purposively selected. A one-group experimental design (One-Group Experimental Design) was employed. The Proactive Coping Skills Scale was administered, in addition to implementing a counseling program based on Emergency Response Theory. The program consisted of (15) counseling sessions conducted over a period of (5) weeks.

**Results:** The findings revealed that the level of proactive coping skills reached a relative weight of (55.4%), which is considered a moderate level according to the study criterion. The results also indicated statistically significant differences between the pre-test and post-test measurements in proactive coping skills in favor of the post-test for the experimental group. Furthermore, the effectiveness of the counseling program persisted in the follow-up measurement conducted two months after the program implementation, indicating sustained impact.

**Conclusion:** The study concluded that the counseling program based on Emergency Response Theory was effective in enhancing proactive coping skills among educational counselors. The study recommends the necessity of training educational counselors and providers of psychological, educational, and community services in emergency psychological response skills, including psychological first aid, early detection, and self-care.

**Keywords:** Counseling program, Emergency Response Theory, Proactive coping skills, Educational counselors, Safe educational spaces

برنامج إرشادي قائم على نظرية الاستجابة الطارئة لتنمية مهارات المواجهة الاستباقية لدى المرشدين التربويين في المساحات التعليمية الآمنة خلال العدوان على قطاع غزة (2023-2025)

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### المخلص:

**الأهداف:** هدفت الدراسة الحالية إلى معرفة فاعلية برنامج إرشادي قائم على نظرية الاستجابة الطارئة في تنمية مهارات المواجهة الاستباقية لدى المرشدين التربويين في المساحات التعليمية الآمنة خلال العدوان على قطاع غزة (2023–2025).

**المنهجية:** استخدمت الدراسة المنهج شبه التجريبي، حيث تكونت عينة الدراسة من (30) مرشداً ومرشدة، بواقع (15) مرشداً و(15) مرشدة، جرى اختيارهم بطريقة قصدية، باستخدام التصميم التجريبي ذو المجموعة الواحدة (One-Group Experimental Design). تم تطبيق مقياس مهارات المواجهة الاستباقية، إضافة إلى البرنامج الإرشادي القائم على نظرية الاستجابة الطارئة، والذي تألف من (15) جلسة إرشادية نُفذت خلال فترة زمنية مقدارها (5) أسابيع.

**النتائج:** أظهرت النتائج أن مستوى مهارات المواجهة الاستباقية بلغ وزناً نسبياً (55.4%)، وهو مؤشر متوسط وفقاً لمحك الدراسة. كما تبين وجود فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية بين القياسين القبلي والبعدي في مهارات المواجهة الاستباقية لصالح القياس البعدي لدى المجموعة التجريبية. إضافة إلى ذلك، استمر أثر البرنامج الإرشادي في القياس التتبعي بعد مرور شهرين من تطبيقه، مما يدل على فاعليته واستمراريته تأثيره.

**الخلاصة:** خلصت الدراسة إلى أن البرنامج الإرشادي القائم على نظرية الاستجابة الطارئة كان فعالاً في تنمية مهارات المواجهة الاستباقية لدى المرشدين التربويين. وتوصي الدراسة بضرورة تدريب المرشدين التربويين ومقدمي الخدمات النفسية والتربوية والمجتمعية على مهارات المواجهة النفسية الطارئة، بما يشمل الإسعافات النفسية الأولية، والكشف المبكر، والرعاية الذاتية.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** برنامج إرشادي، نظرية الاستجابة الطارئة، مهارات المواجهة الاستباقية، المرشدين التربويين، المساحات التعليمية الآمنة

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## Introduction

Since the events of October 7, 2023, the Gaza Strip has been exposed to an unprecedented military aggression by the Israeli occupation forces, described as a “genocide.” This aggression resulted in the comprehensive destruction of the region’s infrastructure, with deliberate targeting of residential neighborhoods, hospitals, schools, and public facilities. The assault left more than 60,000 martyrs and over 120,000 wounded, the majority of whom were civilians (World Health Organization, WHO, 2025). This situation has driven the humanitarian conditions to their peak, further complicating the economic, social, and psychological crises in Gaza, and exposing the population to escalating pressures that exceed their coping capacity.

In the midst of this devastating reality, psychological disorders have emerged as one of the most dangerous consequences of the genocide. A study by Abdullah et al. (2025) revealed that (97.05%) of children and adults following the events of October 7 suffer from severe depressive symptoms, (84.37%) reported persistent anxiety and tension, and (63.4%) showed symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). These figures reflect a tragic psychological reality described by the World Health Organization (2025) as a “continuous community psychological crisis” in which the population does not experience a post-traumatic phase but rather lives in a state of ongoing trauma. These indicators align with the Trauma Theory, which asserts that repeated exposure to collective trauma—especially those involving violence directed at children and adults—leads to deterioration in emotional and cognitive regulation functions and weakens individuals’ ability to adapt or respond appropriately (Al-Maqbali & Al-Zahrani, 2025).

Mental health professionals in the Gaza Strip face massive challenges due to the psychological pressure resulting from ongoing wars and genocidal conditions. Among the most significant challenges are the lack of specialized expertise in dealing with complex psychological crises emerging from war and disaster settings. It has been observed that practitioners in Gaza suffer from a shortage of

specialized training in providing psychological support during large-scale crises such as wars and disasters. Many counselors also lack the essential skills to manage psychological emergencies, which adds to their burdens as they strive to support the affected community. Therefore, there is an urgent need for psychological counseling programs targeting frontline professionals such as educational counselors, equipping them with theoretical and field tools to deal with ongoing psychological crises (Al-Bana, 2009).

In this context, researchers in the field of psychological counseling play a crucial role, as they can provide scientifically grounded psychological intervention models to help the local community overcome continuous psychological crises. Through such counseling programs, individuals’ psychological skills—especially those of educational counselors—can be strengthened in light of the complex psychological environment experienced by the population. There is also an urgent need for immediate psychological interventions based on sustainable counseling programs that help alleviate the psychological burdens resulting from ongoing crises.

One of the most significant models of urgent psychological intervention is the Emergency Psychological Response, which is an immediate intervention aimed at providing psychological support to affected individuals in the early stages of trauma. A study by Al-Kaabi (2017) indicated that emergency response has great effectiveness in reducing acute psychological symptoms such as anxiety and depression when properly applied. In the Gaza Strip, where people live under constant aggression, this type of intervention is considered one of the essential tools to reduce immediate psychological burdens.

The Emergency Response Theory is among the most widely used conceptual frameworks in war and disaster contexts. It is based on the fundamental assumption that immediate intervention following a crisis is crucial in preventing the worsening of psychological disorders. The theory posits that individuals exposed to collective trauma need rapid, directed, and initially non-specialized psychological intervention that is precise in timing and content (Hobfoll et al., 2007). This

theory closely intersects with the Crisis Intervention Model in clinical psychology, which emphasizes short-term interventions to restore psychological balance immediately after traumatic events through five key principles: a sense of safety, calmness, self-efficacy, social connectedness, and realistic hope. The World Health Organization has adopted these principles as a foundation for designing its psychological first aid programs during crises (WHO, 2023).

The Emergency Psychological Response Model is considered one of the most effective tools for dealing with psychological crises, encompassing direct emotional support, application of calming techniques, and enhancement of individuals' adaptability to crises. Multiple studies have shown the effectiveness of these models in reducing stress and anxiety levels and enhancing psychological adaptation to trauma—especially when implemented by trained field teams (Brown & Ryan, 2020; Hobfoll et al., 2007). The emergency response is thus a vital factor in alleviating initial psychological symptoms such as fear and anxiety, which may suddenly appear after crises. By providing immediate emotional support and reinforcing social communication among the affected, individuals can experience rapid improvement, thereby reducing the impact of psychological trauma.

A core component of the Emergency Response Theory is Proactive Coping Strategies, considered one of the most important preventive psychological models in crises and disasters. These strategies aim to empower individuals to confront psychological stressors before they escalate. They rely on prior preparation, crisis anticipation, and the use of personal and social resources to adapt to traumatic events (Gist & McClellan, 2015).

A study by Zeidner & Matthews (2011) demonstrated that individuals who adopt proactive coping styles exhibit lower levels of stress and anxiety and show better psychological performance in high-risk and stressful environments such as war and repeated crisis settings. Al-Halabi (2016) highlighted that proactive coping goes beyond theoretical planning to include self-regulation, contingency planning, and mobilization of

available resources to face future threats effectively. Similarly, Schwarzer & Moskowitz (2004) confirmed that proactive coping enhances psychological self-efficacy and helps mitigate the negative effects of stress by shifting focus from negative emotions to organized, practical steps to confront the crisis.

Furthermore, Hassan (2022) indicated that proactive coping contributes to strengthening psychological self-efficacy and reducing susceptibility to external stress by adopting organized preventive steps instead of engaging in impulsive emotional reactions. Al-Kaabi (2017) added that mental and emotional preparedness, along with the presence of an effective social support network, plays a pivotal role in activating the effectiveness of proactive coping in war and crisis environments.

In the context of the genocide in Gaza, proactive coping can be seen as a necessary complement to emergency response. Continuous crises necessitate intervention models that go beyond momentary rescue efforts and instead aim to prepare individuals and professionals for sustainable engagement with future traumas. This aligns with the findings of Miller et al. (2000), who emphasized that individuals trained in proactive coping techniques are more capable of making rational decisions during disasters and are less vulnerable to psychological collapse.

Therefore, integrating proactive coping into psychological counseling programs enhances the capacity of individuals and institutions in Gaza to face recurring traumas and increases opportunities for psychological recovery—not only during crises but also in the post-crisis phases—where the greatest challenge lies in restoring long-term psychological and social balance.

Amid the ongoing aggression on the Gaza Strip and the collapse of most educational and psychological infrastructures, Safe Educational Spaces have emerged as alternative psychological and educational initiatives that play a dual role in protecting children psychologically while maintaining their social and educational engagement in environments that nurture them emotionally

and educationally, away from violence and destruction.

Jones & Miller (2016) found that safe spaces effectively reduce anxiety and stress levels among children affected by wars and crises, help rebuild psychological and social routines, and enhance their sense of safety and belonging. Positive group interactions within these spaces also help contain impulsive or aggressive behaviors resulting from trauma through structured psychological and educational activities.

Field observations indicate a significant increase in participation in these spaces amid the escalating crisis. The current study will cover over twenty safe educational spaces across various areas in Khan Younis Governorate, serving approximately 10,000 students—mostly children psychologically and behaviorally affected by the war—suffering from noticeable disturbances in behavior, social interaction, and emotional regulation such as isolation, anger outbursts, lack of focus, and sleep disorders.

These spaces serve as essential entry points for early psychological intervention, providing semi-therapeutic, informal environments that integrate counseling and educational programs within physical, artistic, and interactive activities. They are managed by teachers, facilitators, and educational counselors. Thus, safe educational spaces are not merely alternative learning environments but also supportive psychological incubators that help reduce cumulative psychological distress and provide effective field monitoring channels for identifying cases that require specialized intervention. Integrating these spaces within the proposed training and counseling framework of this study represents a strategic step toward developing a comprehensive model linking the school environment with children's psychological needs during prolonged crises.

Based on the above, adopting the Emergency Psychological Response Model in the Gaza Strip is not merely an optional complement—it is a fundamental necessity to protect children from collective psychological collapse and ensure the stability of the fragmented psychological environment left by the ongoing aggression. This study seeks to

develop an integrated psychological counseling program targeting educational counselors during wartime, as training in proactive coping skills constitutes an essential tool for empowering counselors to provide effective psychological support during crises. Studies such as Brown & Ryan (2020) have shown that integrating these methods enhances individuals' adaptability to difficult psychological conditions and promotes flexible crisis management, contributing to community resilience and psychological recovery amid ongoing challenges.

### **Problem Statement**

In recent years, and particularly amid recurrent military escalations, the Gaza Strip has witnessed a complex humanitarian crisis with severe psychological and social dimensions. Daily violence, loss of loved ones, and forced displacement have become part of everyday reality, to the point where places that should be safe—such as homes, schools, and shelters—have become spaces burdened with fear and insecurity (UNICEF, 2023). Approximately 96% of Gaza's population lives in multidimensional poverty, which directly impacts the community's mental health, particularly that of children.

Reports from child rights organizations indicate an alarming increase in psychological disorders among children. WHO & UNICEF (2024) report that over one million children in Gaza suffer from severe psychological effects requiring urgent intervention. A study by Thabet & Vostanis (2020) revealed that more than 53% of Gaza's children exhibit symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), while depression rates reach approximately 97%.

These statistics are not mere numbers but represent painful human experiences, evident in practical settings within educational spaces, particularly during counseling sessions. Interaction with affected children shows silent behaviors such as withdrawal, nail-biting, daydreaming, and repetitive violent-themed drawings in expressive activities, indicating unaddressed internal disorders.

Moreover, the crisis is exacerbated by challenges faced by the educational counselors themselves, who are under severe psychological pressure due to the nature of

their work in conflict environments. Gould & McNally (2019) highlighted emotional exhaustion among personnel working in crisis and war settings, noting that many counselors suffer from chronic emotional fatigue, reducing their ability to provide effective psychological support to children. The Palestinian Psychological Relief Organization confirmed these findings, pointing out that daily exposure to complex cases without adequate training has deteriorated the mental health of counseling staff (Al-Hasani, 2023).

Thus, the study problem emerges as a critical gap between the increasing psychological needs of children in the Gaza Strip and the capacity of educational institutions and psychological counseling teams to respond effectively. This gap can be summarized in three main points:

1. Lack of professional training on proactive coping tools: Multiple studies indicate that educational counselors lack systematic training in psychological support tools tailored for emergency situations, hindering their swift and effective response to crises (Jones & Miller, 2016).
2. Limited ability to detect “silent cases” among psychologically affected children: Many children do not show immediate psychological symptoms, making it difficult for counselors to identify their disorders (Jum’a, 2017; Wethington, 2021).
3. Widespread psychological and emotional exhaustion among counselors: This affects their performance and limits the effectiveness of the psychological support provided (Gould & McNally, 2019; Jum’a, 2017).

Accordingly, the importance of this study lies in highlighting this gap and advocating for specialized training programs that enhance educational counselors’ capacity to handle escalating psychological crises among children in educational spaces, which are marked by disturbances and stress. The study’s central research question is:

**What is the effectiveness of a counseling program based on the Emergency Response Theory in developing proactive coping skills among educational counselors in safe educational spaces during the Gaza Strip aggression (2023–2025)?**

The study designed, implemented, and then verified the impact of the program.

### **Hypotheses**

- The level of proactive coping skills among educational counselors in safe educational spaces during the Gaza Strip aggression (2023–2025) reaches a relative weight of 60% as a hypothetical level.
- There are statistically significant differences between the pre- and post-test mean scores of the experimental group on the Proactive Coping Skills Scale, in favor of the post-test, among educational counselors in safe educational spaces.
- There are no statistically significant differences between the post-test and follow-up mean scores (after two months) on the Proactive Coping Skills Scale among educational counselors in safe educational spaces.

### **Objectives**

The study aims to:

- Identify the level of proactive coping skills among educational counselors in safe educational spaces during the Gaza Strip aggression (2023–2025).
- Determine the effectiveness of a counseling program based on the Emergency Response Theory in developing proactive coping skills among educational counselors in safe educational spaces during the Gaza Strip aggression (2023–2025).
- Examine the sustainability of the impact of the counseling program based on the Emergency Response Theory on proactive coping skills among educational counselors in safe educational spaces after two months of implementation during the Gaza Strip aggression (2023–2025).

### **Significance**

#### **Theoretical Significance**

This study contributes to enriching theoretical knowledge regarding the effectiveness of the Emergency Response Theory in preparing mental health personnel within educational institutions by integrating academic concepts with field application in war and societal crisis contexts. It provides a comprehensive scientific framework for understanding the relationship between proactive coping skills,

as preventive and therapeutic tools, and school environments affected by psychological crises resulting from wars and disasters. The study opens avenues for future research to develop training manuals grounded in contemporary psychological principles for managing collective trauma. It also enhances understanding of the educational counselor's role in stabilizing the psychological environment in schools during emergencies (Gould & McNally, 2019).

### **Practical Significance**

The practical importance of this study lies in providing a new, applicable, and generalizable model based on the Emergency Response Theory to develop educational counselors' proactive coping skills in war and crisis contexts. The study offers a scientific guide for institutions, educational initiatives, and international organizations to train psychological personnel in conflict zones, enhancing their capacity to address crisis-induced psychological challenges. It enables individuals, institutions, and supervisors in safe educational spaces to develop internal psychological response plans that ensure rapid intervention and crisis containment, reducing the exacerbation of psychological symptoms among students. Furthermore, the study provides new scientific psychological tools and measures for assessing impact and improving future programs, ensuring the sustainability of positive outcomes. Finally, the study contributes to spreading a culture of psychological first aid within educational spaces, fostering a supportive psychological environment for students and enhancing teachers' and counselors' ability to respond to emergency cases effectively.

### **Definition of Terms**

#### **Emergency Response Theory**

It is a set of psychological and social models aimed at mitigating the impact of crises and psychological trauma through an immediate and organized response, using specific strategies to reduce negative effects on individuals and communities. This theory focuses on organizing responses to emergency situations such as wars and natural disasters, enabling individuals and communities to adapt quickly and effectively to urgent circumstances (James & Roberts, 2019).

#### **Emergency Response Theory Counseling Program**

A training program directed at educational counselors in safe educational spaces operating amid the genocide war in Gaza. The program aims to equip counselors with the necessary skills to effectively confront successive crises by developing proactive coping skills, enhancing their ability to provide immediate, effective, and safe psychological support to students during difficult times. It also includes specialized psychological techniques designed to help counselors manage stress resulting from the conditions of the genocide war and to foster a safe and stable learning environment under emergency circumstances.

#### **Proactive Coping**

Proactive coping is the process of advance planning and taking actions aimed at reducing the impact of future stressors through adaptive and preventive strategies to confront difficult situations before they occur. These strategies include early risk identification, planning for dealing with them, and promoting effective crisis response (Zeidner & Matthews, 2011). Operationally, it is defined as the set of scores that educational counselors obtain on the Proactive Coping Skills Scale.

#### **Safe Educational Spaces**

Safe educational spaces are learning environments that support students' physical and psychological well-being by promoting a sense of security and mutual respect. These spaces are free from violence, discrimination, and psychological stress, and provide psychological support to students during crises (Jones & Miller, 2016).

#### **Educational Counselors**

Professionals working in educational settings to provide psychological and emotional support to students. Counselors assist students in coping with personal and academic challenges and address psychological and behavioral issues through active listening, guidance, and counseling (Al-Hasani, 2023).

#### **Limitations**

- **Human Limitations:** The study included all educational counselors working in safe educational spaces and accredited by the Ministry of

Education and Higher Education in Khan Yunis Governorate.

- **Place Limitations:** The study was conducted at the Teacher Creativity Center training hall in the Al-Attar area, Khan Yunis.
- **Time Limitations:** The study was conducted from 15/10/2024 to 15/02/2025.
- **Topic Limitations:** The study focused on a counseling program based on the Emergency Response Theory to develop proactive coping skills among educational counselors in safe educational spaces during the Gaza Strip aggression (2023–2025).

### Methodology

The study employed multiple research methods to verify the study hypotheses. The **descriptive approach** was applied to test the first hypothesis, analyzing the level of proactive coping and its relationship with the independent variable, and justifying the development of the counseling program quantitatively. The **quasi-experimental approach** was used to verify the second and third hypotheses, involving deliberate changes to one variable to observe its effect on another. Experimental design is a primary learning method as it helps understand the results of introduced changes, reflecting the concept: *“As humans, we are constantly experimenting to learn”* (Abu Alam, 2020).

### Population

The population consisted of all educational counselors working in safe educational spaces and accredited by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education in western Khan Yunis between 01/07/2024 and 01/09/2024, totaling **80 counselors**.

### Sample

- **Exploratory Sample:** The Proactive Coping Skills Scale was applied to an exploratory sample of **(20) counselors** out of the total population of 80 to verify the validity and reliability of the tools.
- **Actual Sample:** The study sample consisted of all counselors excluding the exploratory sample, selected purposively, totaling **(60) counselors**, on whom the Proactive Coping Skills Scale was applied to select the experimental group.

- **Experimental Sample: (30) counselors** were selected, divided into (15) male and (15) female counselors, based on the lowest scores obtained on the Proactive Coping Skills Scale applied to the (60) counselors from the study population.

### Experimental Design

The study employed a one-group experimental design due to the limited number of participants and ease of communication. This design aims to maximize the benefits of the counseling program for educational counselors, enhancing their psychological and professional competence. It focuses on measuring the program's impact on the target group before and after implementation, allowing the researcher to assess changes resulting from the program.

### Instruments

1. **Proactive Coping Skills Scale**
2. **Counseling Program Based on Emergency Response Theory** to develop proactive coping skills among educational counselors in safe educational spaces.

### 1. Development of the Proactive Coping Skills Scale

#### A. Psychometric Properties:

The scale was designed to align with the study's objectives and sample, as no comprehensive tool existed covering the targeted dimensions precisely. The scale was developed based on a literature review in emergency response and proactive coping, drawing from the following sources: Brown & Ryan, 2020; Gist & McClellan, 2015; Gould & McNally, 2019; Hobfoll et al., 2007; James & Roberts, 2019; Jones & Miller, 2016; Kendall-Tackett, 2017; Lqmaš & Znad, 2022; Matthews & Zeidner, 2011; Thabet & Vostanis, 2020; Wethington, 2021; Zahrani, 2024. The scale initially consisted of 32 items across main dimensions; after statistical analysis and verifying psychometric properties, it was finalized to 25 items.

#### B. Scale Validity

- **Content Validity (Experts):** The initial scale was reviewed by 7 university professors and specialists in psychology and counseling to provide feedback on items and dimensions. Agreement among experts ranged between (80–85%).

Adjustments were applied, reducing items from 32 to 25 for the final scale.

- **Internal Consistency Validity:** Calculated on an exploratory sample of (20) educational counselors by computing the correlation between each

item and the total score of its respective dimension. Results were as follows:

**Table (1)** shows the correlation coefficients between each item of the "Proactive Coping Skills" scale and the total score of the scale (N=20).

Dimension 1: Pre-crisis Planning		Dimension 2: Rapid Decision-Making		Dimension 3: Psychological Flexibility		Dimension 4: Effective Communication		Dimension 5: Stress Management	
Item	Correlation	Item	Correlation	Item	Correlation	Item	Correlation	Item	Correlation
1	0.580**	6	0.500*	11	0.690**	16	0.536**	21	<b>0.733**</b>
2	0.512**	7	0.788**	12	0.955**	17	0.611**	22	<b>0.700**</b>
3	0.633**	8	0.600**	13	0.790**	18	0.645**	23	<b>0.811**</b>
4	0.587**	9	0.750**	14	0.700**	19	0.655**	24	<b>0.710**</b>
5	0.601**	10	0.630**	15	0.765**	20	0.721**	25	<b>0.733**</b>

**Note:** Correlation is statistically significant at  $\alpha \leq 0.01$ .

It is evident from Table (1) that the correlation coefficients between each item of the "Proactive Coping Skills" scale and the total score of the scale are high. All correlation coefficients are statistically significant at  $\alpha \leq 0.05$ . Therefore, the scale demonstrates good internal consistency validity, which supports the reliability of the "Proactive Coping Skills" scale.

#### C. Scale Reliability:

Dimension	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Split-Half Method
		Before Correction	After Correction
Dimension 1: Pre-crisis Planning	5	0.789	0.733
Dimension 2: Rapid Decision-Making	5	0.899	0.852
Dimension 3: Psychological Flexibility	5	0.901	0.888
Dimension 4: Effective Communication	5	0.750	0.766
Dimension 5: Stress Management	5	0.720	0.711
<b>Total Score</b>	25	0.896	0.866

It is clear from Table (2) that Cronbach's alpha values for the Proactive Coping Skills variable are high. The total score of the variable reached 0.896, indicating high and statistically significant reliability. The corrected reliability coefficient reached 0.835, which shows that the scale has a high level of stability and the results can be trusted.

#### D. Scale Scoring:

The scale in its final form consists of 25 items, representing all the items of the Proactive Coping Skills scale. Respondents rate their answers using a 3-point Likert scale: Large (3), Medium (2), Small (1). Based on this, the scale scores range from 25 to 75, with a midpoint of 37.5. This allows for a relative judgment of the respondent's level of proactive coping skills.

### 3. General Framework of the Guidance Program Based on Emergency Response Theory to Develop Proactive Coping Skills of Educational Counselors in Safe Educational Spaces

#### Steps for preparing the guidance program:

- Reviewing theoretical frameworks, scientific references, and training/guidance programs related to the study variables, including: Emergency Response Theory, Proactive Coping Skills (e.g., Brown & Ryan, 2020; Gist & McClellan, 2015; Gould & McNally, 2019; Hobfoll et al., 2007; James & Roberts, 2019; Jones & Miller, 2016; Kendall-Tackett, 2017; Matthews & Zeidner, 2011; Thabet & Vostanis, 2020; Wethington, 2021; Zahrani, 2024).

- Identifying sample characteristics (educational counselors), including service provision methods and main problems faced during the ongoing genocide.
- Determining general and specific objectives of the guidance program and formulating them procedurally.
- Identifying topics, skills, and experiences that counselors will be trained on.
- Designing program content with sessions including essential information, skills, and applied techniques.
- Setting administrative and technical procedures for program implementation.
- Finalizing and organizing the guidance program including sessions, content, and training material.

#### **Definition of the counseling program based on Emergency Response Theory:**

It is a training program for educational counselors in safe educational spaces under the ongoing genocide in Gaza. The program aims to equip counselors with skills to effectively face consecutive crises by developing proactive coping skills. It includes psychological techniques to help counselors manage stress and maintain a safe, stable learning environment during emergency situations.

#### **General Objectives of the Counseling Program:**

**Developmental Objective:** Enable counselors to develop proactive coping skills to effectively deal with crises and psychological stress, make well-informed decisions, and execute effective strategies under pressure, minimizing negative impacts on the learning environment.

**Preventive Objective:** Enhance counselors' ability to resist psychological pressures in educational settings during crises through training in mental relaxation, emotional control, and self-regulation to manage stress professionally.

**Therapeutic Objective:** Provide psychological support to reduce the impact of ongoing aggression, enhance counselors' ability to deliver effective psychological first aid, and train them to handle trauma among students, improving mental health in learning environments.

#### **Procedural Objectives:**

- Train counselors on proactive coping skills, focusing on quick thinking and decision-making in crisis situations.
- Teach effective psychological first aid methods including active listening, dealing with crisis-induced psychological disturbances, stress reduction, and emotional containment.
- Train counselors to manage anxiety and stress during ongoing aggression, including analyzing triggers and applying techniques like deep breathing, mental relaxation, and mindfulness.
- Enhance mental relaxation skills, such as meditation and regulated breathing.
- Develop skills to support students in emergency situations, including providing reassurance, fostering a sense of safety, and promoting social communication skills.
- Achieve psychological balance and flexibility during emergencies.

#### **Methods and Techniques Used in the Program:**

1. **Emergency Response Theory Techniques:** Gradual exposure to stressful situations in a safe environment, integration of psychological first aid through emotional support, emotional response retraining, and muscle relaxation techniques to quickly restore psychological balance.
2. **Proactive Coping Techniques:** Cognitive positive thinking, creative expression (art therapy), cognitive restructuring, positive reinforcement, and mindfulness to improve coping skills and manage stress effectively.

**Counseling Skills Used:** Opening, questioning, listening, silence, empathy, reformulation, clarification, confrontation, interpretation, and closing.

**Target Group:** Educational counselors in safe educational spaces under the Ministry of Education.

**Sample for Program Implementation:** (30) counselors with the lowest scores on the Proactive Coping Skills scale (15 male, 15 female).

**Session Duration:** (60) minutes per session.

**Program Facilitator:** Researcher.

**Number of Sessions:** 16 counseling sessions.

## Results & Discussion

### First Hypothesis:

**“The level of proactive coping skills among educational counselors in safe educational spaces during the aggression on the Gaza Strip (2023–2025) reaches a relative weight of (60%) as a hypothetical level.”**

Dimension	Arithmetic Mean	Standard Deviation	Relative Weight	Rank
Crisis Pre-planning	2.766	0.402	55.3%	3
Rapid Decision-Making	2.803	0.393	56.1%	1
Psychological Resilience	2.714	0.430	54.3%	5
Effective Communication	2.795	0.451	55.9%	2
Stress Management	2.752	0.344	55.0%	4
<b>Total Score</b>	<b>2.769</b>	<b>0.209</b>	<b>55.4%</b>	—

It is evident from Table (3) that the total mean score of proactive coping skills reached a relative weight of 55.4%, which represents a moderate level according to the study's adopted criteria. However, the current study considers this level statistically acceptable, as it aligns with several previous studies such as Al-Bana (2021); Al-Maksoos (2021); Hassan (2022); Gray, Maguen & Litz (2023); and Kitchener & Jorm (2008).

Nevertheless, from a field perspective, there appears to be a clear weakness in the practical application of these skills and their dimensions. This indicates the need for greater improvement, especially under the ongoing crises and psychological trauma. The psychological readiness level of educational counselors should be higher, given the complex situation in Gaza and the continuous exposure to traumatic environments. Therefore, intensive and supportive training programs must be provided to enhance effective response levels proportional to the increasing scale of crises in the surrounding environment. Based on these findings, the hypothesis stating that “the level of proactive coping skills among educational counselors in safe educational spaces during the aggression on Gaza (2023–2025) reaches a relative weight of 60% as a hypothetical level” is accepted.

According to the Proactive or Adaptive Coping Theory developed by Aspinwall & Taylor (1997), proactive coping is an advanced cognitive-behavioral pattern aimed at anticipating stressful situations before they occur through pre-planning and organizing self and social resources. These strategies

To verify the validity of this hypothesis, the arithmetic mean, relative weight, and standard deviation for the total score of the Proactive Coping Skills Scale and its dimensions were calculated, as shown in Table (4).

**Table (3)** *Arithmetic Mean, Standard Deviation, and Relative Weight of the Total Score of the Proactive Coping Skills Scale*

require executive skills such as self-awareness, flexible thinking, and emotional regulation—skills that are highly affected in crisis environments like Gaza. These results align with Garcia et al. (2021), which showed that proactive coping tends to weaken in war and disaster contexts due to chronic anxiety and continuous threat that hinder individuals from using effective preventive strategies. Similarly, Jum'a (2017) found that many counselors tend to engage in “delayed coping” and lack preventive intervention.

The current study adds that the moderate quantitative and weak qualitative level of proactive coping skills may result from the structural collapse of the psychological and educational sectors due to the ongoing aggression. Counselors in Gaza face an environment filled with pressure and violations that obstruct their ability to adopt long-term preventive strategies. The depletion of psychological resources and the lack of effective institutional support are among the major obstacles preventing the development of proactive coping skills. Consequently, many counselors remain trapped in reactive responses rather than proactive planning.

During fieldwork with the study participants, a general sense of psychological exhaustion and inability to plan for the future was observed. Many counselors reported that they deal with crises “moment by moment” without sufficient time or tools for proactive thinking, reflecting the absence of organized coping strategies. Some expressed a lack of early psychological risk assessment skills and admitted not having a “clear plan” for intervention before a crisis occurs. Others indicated a “fear of failure” if

their predictions about psychological outcomes were incorrect, leading them to avoid proactive decision-making and rely instead on post-crisis intervention.

Based on these findings, it is crucial to develop proactive coping skills within psychological training programs targeting educational counselors. Training should focus on enhancing their effectiveness in providing professional psychological support in crisis and disaster environments. Such programs must include preventive and proactive thinking mechanisms, which would strengthen counselors' ability to deal with stressful

situations before they escalate into severe psychological crises.

**The Second Hypothesis:**

*"There are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group in the pre- and post-measurements of the Proactive Coping Skills Scale, with a significant difference in favor of the post-measurement, among educational counselors in safe educational spaces."*

To verify the validity of the hypothesis, the arithmetic means were calculated. Table (5) shows the arithmetic means for the experimental group in the pre- and post-measurements (N = 80).

**Table (4) shows, Arithmetic Means for the Experimental Group in Pre- and Post-Measurements (N = 80)**

Dimension	Pre-Measurement Mean	Post-Measurement Mean
Crisis Pre-planning	1.333	4
Rapid Decision Making	1.333	4.333
Psychological Resilience	1.373	4.345
Effective Communication	1.426	4.001
Stress Management	1.413	3.662
Total Score	1.380	4.003

It is clear from **Table (4)** that there are statistically significant differences at the level of ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ) between the experimental group in the post-measurement compared to the pre-measurement. To verify these results and determine the significance of the differences between the pre- and post-measurements for the experimental group's mean scores, the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test was used, as shown in **Table (5)**.

**Table (5) shows, Significant Differences Between the Mean Scores of the Experimental Group and Z-Value in the Pre- and Post-Measurements (N = 80)**

Dimension	Measurement	Number	Mean Ranks	Rank Sum	Z-Value	Significance Value (sig)	Level of Significance	Effect Size
<b>Crisis Pre planning</b>	Pre/Post	Negative Ranks	0	0	-3.401	0.00	Statistically Significant	Large
		Positive Ranks	80	8	120			
		Tied	0					
<b>Rapid Decision Making</b>	Pre/Post	Negative Ranks	0	0	-3.452	0.00	Statistically Significant	Large
		Positive Ranks	80	8	120			
		Tied	0					
<b>Psychological Resilience</b>	Pre/Post	Negative Ranks	0	0	-3.345	0.00	Statistically Significant	Large
		Positive Ranks	80	8	120			
		Tied	0					
<b>Effective Communication</b>	Pre/Post	Negative Ranks	0	0	-3.400	0.00	Statistically Significant	Large
		Positive Ranks	80	8	120			
		Tied	0					
<b>Stress Management</b>	Pre/Post	Negative Ranks	5	0	1.50	-3.321	0.00	Statistically Significant
		Positive Ranks	75	8	118.50			
		Tied	0					
<b>Total Score</b>	Pre/Post	Negative Ranks	0	0	-3.400	0.00	Statistically Significant	Large
		Positive Ranks	80	8				
		Tied	0					

Table (5) shows, it is evident that there are statistically significant differences at the level of ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ) between the arithmetic mean scores for the experimental group in the pre- and post-measurements, with a Z-value of (-3.400), which is statistically significant in favor of the post-measurement. Therefore, the hypothesis stating, *"There are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group in the pre- and post-measurements of the Proactive Coping Skills Scale, with a significant difference in favor of the post-measurement, among educational counselors in safe educational spaces,"* can be accepted. The statistical analysis in Table (5) shows that the Emergency Response-based Counseling Program has had a significant positive impact on improving the proactive coping skills of educational counselors in safe educational spaces. Post-measurement scores showed a

considerable increase in the mean scores of the experimental group compared to pre-measurement scores, with clear statistical significance. This means that the program effectively contributed to enhancing the proactive coping skills of the counselors to deal with potential psychological crises, which aligns with studies by Gray & Litz, 2023; Hassan, 2022; James & Roberts, 2019; Mqabaliya & Al-Zahrani, 2024.

The techniques of the Emergency Response Theory directly contributed to enhancing the proactive coping skills of educational counselors. The training focused on developing organized and rapid responses to emergency situations through an integrated process that includes assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation (Hassan, 2022). These techniques enabled counselors to analyze stressful situations accurately, prioritize interventions, and make effective

decisions during crises, thereby strengthening their ability to anticipate problems and respond flexibly before they escalate (Gray & Litz, 2023).

Moreover, the program improved their emotional regulation and self-control skills, making them more balanced and better prepared to provide psychological support to students in crisis-affected environments (Hamoudi, 2021). These findings align with previous research emphasizing that applying the techniques of Emergency Response Theory fosters the development of professional and proactive competencies among counselors, enabling them to manage stress and crises effectively (Mqabaliya & Al-Zahrani, 2024; James & Roberts, 2019).

The improvement can be interpreted through a review of the Proactive Coping Theory developed by Aspinwall & Taylor, 1997, which confirms that proactive coping is not an innate trait but a learned skill acquired through continuous training. It suggests that proactive coping requires the ability to anticipate stressful situations before they occur through pre-planning, organizing self and social resources, and emotional regulation. These skills were the core of the training provided by the counseling program.

The current study attributes the improvement in the post-measurement to the positive interaction of the educational counselors with the program. During the training, the researcher observed that the counselors began to plan ahead for their field activities and scheduled cases, as well as identifying major problems that could occur due to the ongoing aggression in Gaza. This shift from the previously dominant reactive thinking to proactive planning indicates a fundamental change in the professional methods of counselors working in educational spaces. Furthermore, the improvement was not just theoretical knowledge, but also in practical practices. Several counselors indicated they were more prepared to handle psychological crises before they occurred, such as (a child's family martyrdom, nearby shelling, emergency evacuation, loss of loved ones). Initially, counselors focused solely on crisis containment after it occurred, but after training, they began thinking about how to prepare for crises before they happened,

incorporating them into emergency plans during their work.

This shift in thinking patterns reflects the transition from reactive emotional coping to proactive preventive coping, a crucial step in developing advanced psychological skills that help reduce the effects of crises before they escalate. This change was clearly observed during the program evaluation in the final session. One counselor said, "I used to focus only on containing the crisis after it happened, but now I start thinking about how to prepare for it before it happens." Another counselor said, "Now I have a mental plan to handle situations, instead of improvising every time." This demonstrates a level of internal readiness based on awareness and planning, which is a key indicator in evaluating any successful behavioral change in training programs and the effectiveness of professional training.

The study believes that the significant difference in favor of the post-measurement is a positive indicator, especially considering the chronic psychological pressure counselors face, the lack of preventive training, and repeated exposure to the trauma of war and aggression. The improvement in proactive coping skills after the program suggests that optimal investment in practical psychological training can lead to a qualitative shift in counselors' performance. This can help build a psychological protective wall for students affected in educational spaces, by having trained counselors capable of anticipating psychological risks and intervening at early stages, which aligns with Hassan, 2022.

Furthermore, there was a noticeable increase in the use of specialized scientific concepts in counselors' daily counseling dialogues, whether during practical exercises or written contributions. Terms like "psychological planning," "control strategies," "self-monitoring of stress," and "preventive psychological fortification" emerged, indicating a cognitive and practical integration with the program's content. These concepts transitioned from theoretical terms to operational tools in the counseling work environment, which the current study aims to achieve. This is consistent with the results of Aspinwall & Taylor, 1997, which confirmed the importance of structured training in enhancing these psychological skills.

Counselors are now more capable of designing preventive counseling interventions, both individually and collectively, a development that was not evident before the training. These behavioral changes support the theoretical analysis, indicating that training in cognitive and behavioral skills related to proactive coping enhances individuals' ability to manage stress before it turns into a severe psychological crisis.

This result aligns with Garcia et al., 2021, which showed that specialized training in proactive coping skills in war and crisis environments improves workers' ability to control stressful situations and plan ahead, leading to the development of calm thinking skills and avoidance of delayed emotional responses. Shapiro et al., 2023 also confirmed

**Table (6) shows, Arithmetic Means for the Experimental Group in Post- and Follow-up Measurements (N = 80)**

Dimension	Post-Measurement Mean	Follow-up Measurement Mean
Crisis Pre-planning	4	4.02
Rapid Decision Making	4.333	4.423
Psychological Resilience	4.345	4.350
Effective Communication	4.001	4.301
Stress Management	3.662	3.710
Total Score	4.003	4.10

It is clear from Table (6) that no significant differences were found between the experimental group in the post-measurement compared to the follow-up measurement. To verify the lack of statistically significant

that providing specialized psychological training programs for specialists in war-affected areas significantly enhances their effectiveness, particularly in organizational and preventive coping skills.

**The Third Hypothesis:**

*"There are no statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group in the post- and follow-up measurements of the Proactive Coping Skills Scale two months after the intervention among educational counselors in safe educational spaces."*

To verify the validity of the hypothesis, the arithmetic means were calculated. Table (7) shows the arithmetic means for the experimental group in the post- and follow-up measurements (N = 80).

differences between the arithmetic means of the experimental group in the post- and follow-up measurements, the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test was applied, as shown in Table (8).

**Table (7) shows, Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test for the Statistical Significance of Differences Between the Arithmetic Means of the Experimental Group (N = 80)**

Dimension	Measurement	Mean Ranks	Rank	Z-	Significance	Level of
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			Sum	Value	Value (sig)	Significance
<b>Crisis Pre-planning</b>	Post/Follow-up	Negative Ranks	14	28	-1.800	0.103
		Positive Ranks	6	79		
		Tied	0			
<b>Rapid Decision Making</b>	Post/Follow-up	Negative Ranks	13.50	27	-1.620	0.102
		Positive Ranks	6.50	78		
		Tied	0			
<b>Psychological Resilience</b>	Post/Follow-up	Negative Ranks	8.33	25	-1.022	0.050
		Positive Ranks	7.92	95		
		Tied	0			
<b>Effective Communication</b>	Post/Follow-up	Negative Ranks	4	12	-1.812	0.103
		Positive Ranks	9	108		
		Tied	0			
<b>Stress Management</b>	Post/Follow-up	Negative Ranks	2	4	-1.390	0.163
		Positive Ranks	4.25	17		
		Tied	0			
<b>Total Score</b>	Post/Follow-up	Negative Ranks	3	9	-1.800	0.111
		Positive Ranks	9.25	111		
		Tied	0			

Table (7) shows, it is clear that there are no statistically significant differences at the level of ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ) between the mean scores of the experimental group in the post- and follow-up measurements. The Z-values in the follow-up measurement were (-1.104, -1.630, -1.014, -1.807, -1.382, -1.042, -1.912), all of which are statistically insignificant. Therefore, the hypothesis stating "There are no statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group in the post- and follow-up measurements of the Proactive Coping Skills Scale two months after the intervention among educational counselors in safe educational spaces" can be accepted, as the positive effect of the counseling intervention that the counselors underwent in the safe educational spaces appears to be maintained. This result is a clear indicator of the effectiveness of the counseling program in terms of its impact, and this aligns with the findings of studies such as (Chang et al., 2020; Garcia et al., 2021; Gist & McClellan, 2015).

The continuity of the effect can be attributed to several key factors. First, the program was designed based on Emergency Psychological Response Theory, which emphasizes the importance of rapid and methodical intervention to enhance individuals' ability to adapt in high-stress environments. The integration of proactive coping skills into realistic and practically applicable contexts made them more ingrained and easier to recall in actual situations, which is a critical point in psychological training programs. Brown & Ryan, 2020 emphasized that training based on emergency response models helps in dealing with the problems arising from emergency crises.

Furthermore, the applied practices, including field training and simulations, helped reinforce proactive coping skills among the counselors. This increased their self-efficacy, professional competence, and counseling effectiveness when providing counseling services, as emphasized by Chang et al., 2020; Kitchener & Jorm, 2008.

The implementation of the counseling program within safe educational spaces has been a crucial factor in the continuity and sustainability of the program's impact, as these spaces serve as natural and conducive environments for educational counselors. They provide genuine opportunities to apply acquired skills and knowledge directly with students in real-life situations. This practical integration helped translate theoretical skills into solid professional practices, enhancing counselors' professional confidence and self-efficacy in managing stressful situations and daily crises.

Moreover, the safe educational environment provided a psychological and social climate conducive to learning, characterized by acceptance, support, and constructive interaction. This enabled counselors to act with high responsibility and professional confidence, while continuously reviewing and refining their methods. The environment also fostered collaborative learning and knowledge exchange between counselors and students, making the learning process more interactive, in-depth, and sustainable.

These findings align with Al-Halabi (2016), who indicated that implementing training programs in real-world settings contributes to transferring theoretical knowledge into effective practical behavior, and enhances counselors' performance efficiency and professional readiness through the integration of theoretical expertise with direct field experience.

, which indicated that the relevance of interventions to the field context contributes to the sustainability of behavioral and cognitive effects. The current study found that the program's content, which addressed the psychological and social reality of students and counselors in Gaza, played a pivotal role in enhancing the understanding and continuity of its effects. The program addressed real-life challenges faced by counselors daily and provided practical, applicable solutions, which reinforced their integration into the training process and deepened its impact during the follow-up application.

The current study believes that the sustained effect of the program in proactive coping skills two months after training

indicates the success of the counseling program in achieving its primary goal, which is to equip counselors with sustainable preventive and proactive skills that help them provide effective psychological support to students and the local community in crisis situations. These results reflect the importance of generalizing and repeating the program in other similar educational environments.

### **Recommendations:**

At the end of this study, several key recommendations are directed towards the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, stakeholders in educational spaces, educational initiatives, and international organizations concerned with educational and psychological aspects, as follows:

1. The development of training programs specifically designed for educational counselors in Gaza, focusing on enhancing proactive coping skills to address the needs of students in crisis environments.
2. Emphasizing the importance of continuous training for counselors on handling emergency psychological crises using emergency response and proactive coping models.
3. Supporting the integration of psychological counseling programs within educational curricula in safe educational spaces to enhance students' psychological and social adaptation during crises.
4. Strengthening the environment of safe educational spaces by improving resources available for educational counselors and providing a supportive psychological environment for students to reduce anxiety and stress during periods of aggression.
5. Providing sustainable psychological support for educational counselors through continuous psychological supervision programs to reduce the burnout they experience while working with students in crisis environments.

### **Future Research**

The study suggests the following future research directions for scholars in the field of psychological counseling:

1. Supervisory programs to improve self-care among educational and psychological service providers during the ongoing genocide in Gaza (2023-2025).

- Predicting levels of psychological stress in light of professional resilience and psychological tension among educational counselors working during the ongoing genocide in Gaza (2023-2025).
- A counseling program based on psychological support activities to alleviate psychological stress among unaccompanied children.

### Disclosure Statements

- Ethical Approval and Consent to Participate:** Ethical approval and informed consent were obtained from all members of the study population in accordance with scientific and ethical standards.
- Data Availability:** Quantitative statistical data for all stages of the study are available.
- Author's Contribution:** The researcher contributed to all aspects of the study's scientific preparation.
- Conflict of Interest:** None declared.
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