

UNICEF: Field-based psychological support

UNICEF UK is a registered charity raising funds and awareness to support UNICEF's work to protect child rights worldwide, in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

Due to the high stress contexts of many UNICEF staff, a comprehensive system of field-based psychological support ensures that staff have access to internal and external professionals for preventing and mitigating psychological distress on assignment.

UNICEF has a multifaceted system by which staff in the field can access professional psychological support.

- **Global Staff Counsellor:** UNICEF has a Global Staff Counsellor who is available for email and phone consultations and face-to-face counselling when in-country. Additionally, all staff have access to an international EAP.
- **UN Counsellors:** UNICEF links with a global network of other UN agency Counsellors to cover the needs of psychological support to national and international staff. UNICEF also uses local counsellors through the agency-wide Critical Incident Stress Intervention Cells. The Intervention Cells are comprised of in-country professionals who are hired on a contract basis to support staff. Each of these mental health practitioners are vetted through the UNDSS (Department of Safety and Security in New York) by reviewing qualifications and credentials and phone interviews. The UNDSS then liaises with the in-country Security Management Team and advises on practitioner and institutional selection. This level of support is particularly useful in high stress, yet secure contexts that do not have UN Peacekeeping missions. The UNDSS has a Staff Counselling Unit that provides technical supervision to the in-country professionals when appropriate. There are around 85 professional counsellors in the UN system globally that can be accessed by UNICEF staff when needed.
- **Referral system:** UNICEF has also identified a large number of private counsellors at the local level. UNICEF staff members, and their direct dependants who require ongoing professional psychological support, are provided with the contact details of these counsellors, where available. UNICEF's medical insurance covers the majority of the cost of consultation with these professionals, with additional co-pay covered by the staff member.

UNICEF also utilizes a robust peer helper methodology to support staff on an informal basis as well as provide crucial support during crisis.

Through a combination of internal, external and informal psychological support, UNICEF has found that staff report feeling well-supported in the field. This comprehensive system is the result of coordination across the UN agencies both in the field and at headquarters, and the requirement for all country operations to identify qualified practitioners.