אוניברסיטת חיפה
UNIVERSITY OF HAIFA
جامعة حيفا

Academic Year 2025-26

Home within the Heart

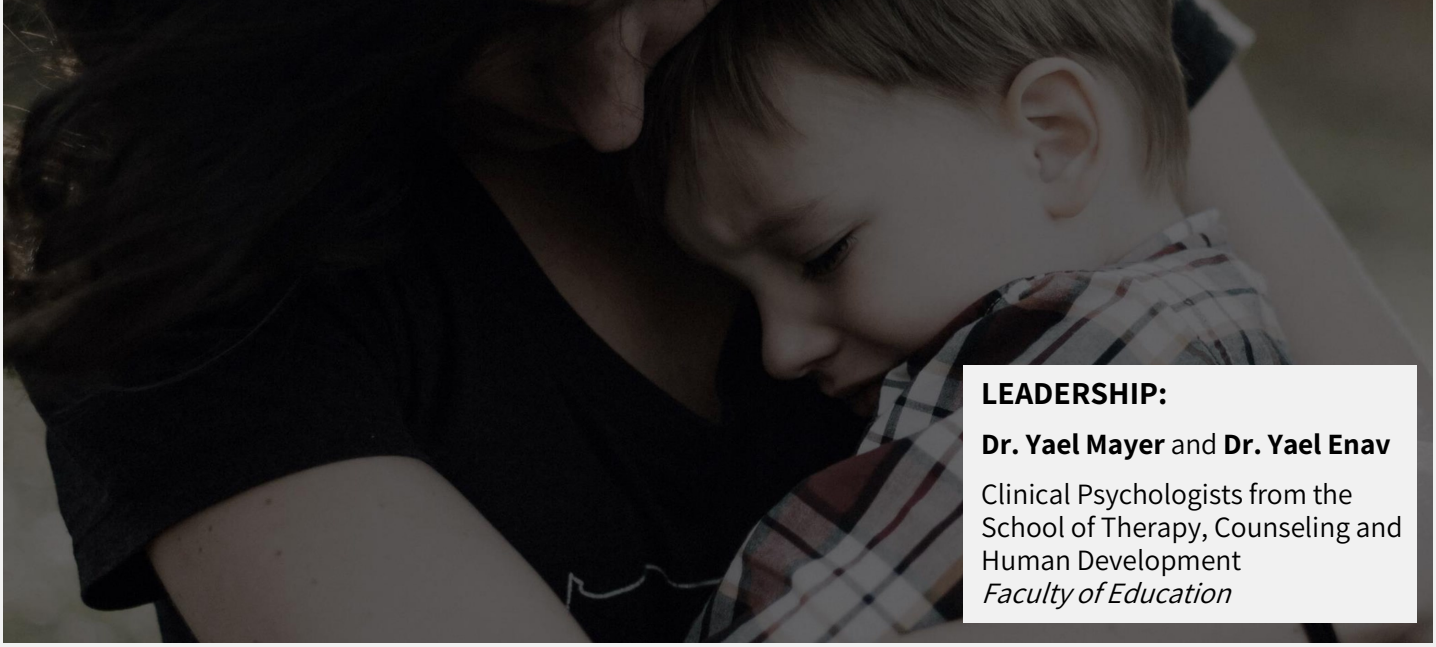
Guiding Families Toward Healing and Resilience

The October 7th, 2023 attacks by Hamas on Israel's southern border sent shockwaves across the country. The following day, Hezbollah rockets rained down on northern Israel, forcing tens of thousands of residents along the Lebanon border to evacuate their homes. The ensuing *Swords of Iron War* led to widespread evacuation of families, prolonged reserve duty call-ups across the country, and entire communities living under frequent bombardment. These events placed parents and children – especially young children – at significant risk for mental health challenges.

In response, Dr. Yael Enav and Dr. Yael Mayer from the University of Haifa launched a trauma-focused initiative to support displaced families as they navigate the emotional challenges of uncertainty, separation, and loss. *Home Within the Heart* is part of the University's broader **#HomeAgain** campaign – an ambitious effort to help Northern Israel recover, addressing not only trauma but also the collapse of the educational system, complex legal disputes, and the physical devastation of farmland and natural ecosystems.

HOME WITHIN THE HEART

Designed for parents and young children (ages 3–6), *Home Within the Heart* recognizes the family as the most powerful protective factor for both children and parents. Even when far from their physical home and facing uncertainty, families can create a sense of security and belonging within each other.



LEADERSHIP:

Dr. Yael Mayer and **Dr. Yael Enav**

Clinical Psychologists from the School of Therapy, Counseling and Human Development
Faculty of Education

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Home Within the Heart is the result of extensive work with displaced families, families living in border communities, as well as those navigating the challenges of one parent serving emergency reserve duty.

The intervention will also serve as the foundation for a research study assessing its effectiveness and long-term impact. The team aims to demonstrate that even a brief, five-session program can meaningfully reduce stress, enhance parent–child communication, and strengthen overall family functioning. The resulting insights are expected to inform the development of scalable, evidence-based models that can be rapidly implemented in future crises, both in Israel and around the world.

PROGRAM GOALS

The program includes five sessions: four weekly, one-hour interactive sessions for parents and children together, and one dedicated session for parents only. Using play-based activities, each session is carefully designed to strengthen communication, deepen parent–child bonds, and build emotional resilience. By engaging in shared, meaningful experiences, families not only reconnect but also discover new sources of strength and support within one another.

IMPACT & RECOGNITION

A pre-post intervention study found that ***Home Within the Heart*** significantly reduces anxiety in both children and parents while strengthening their resilience and emotional bond. The program's effectiveness and innovation have been widely recognized, earning first place in a competition by the International Association of Mental Health in Early Childhood, as well as the prestigious Yaffa London-Yaari Prize for Leading Women's Social Entrepreneurship in War.

FUNDING REQUEST

- **A gift of $360,000 will bring stability and resilience to 1,200 families** – reaching 2,400 individuals through structured small-group sessions designed to facilitate one-on-one interactions between parent–child pairs. This funding will allow each family to participate in five guided sessions over the course of five consecutive weeks.

Together, we can help them find strength in each other and build a brighter, more secure future.

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