

# SAFE4CHILD

Official Newsletter of Safe4Child Project



Safe4Child - Trauma informed approaches to support staff working with children and adolescents exhibiting behaviors that challenge



## PROJECT MILESTONE: MATERIALS NOW AVAILABLE!

As our Safe4Child project nears its conclusion, we are excited to share the results of our hard work and fruitful collaboration with our partner group. Together, we have developed a range of innovative and practical resources and training material designed to frontline workers and nursing students related to aggression management in child and adolescent psychiatric and residential units. In addition, we have developed high fidelity simulation virtual platform that works with VR glasses.

The culmination of this collaboration is now available in the form of a comprehensive Material Bank, where you'll find project videos, Moodle files, and guides we've created throughout the project. Whether you're looking for the Implementation Guide or the Installation instructions for Moodle, or Research Papers written during the project, there's something for everyone. We invite you to watch the [Implementation Guide video](#) on Youtube and explore the [Material Bank](#). We hope these resources will inspire and provide value to our community and beyond.



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# SAFE4CHILD PARTNER MEETING IN HAMBURG

Satu Haapalainen, Ville Vainio, Maria O'Malley, Ryan Goulding

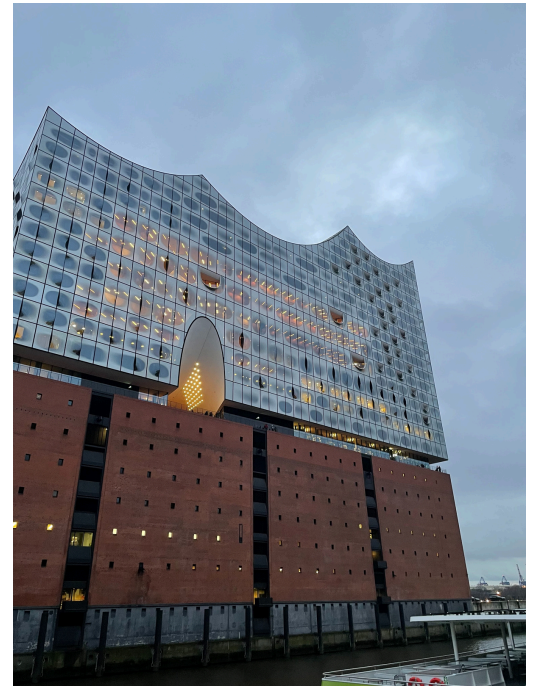
From December 3rd to 5th, 2024, the Safe4Child project partners gathered in Hamburg for a productive and engaging meeting hosted at HAW Hamburg. The event brought together all partners to discuss the project's progress, share insights, and plan future activities.

The meeting kicked off with a warm welcome and introductions, followed by an overview of results of final part of the project, focusing on the implementation guide and scientific publications. Our newest publication is Goodwin et al 2024 "Staff Experiences of Working with Children and Adolescents Engaging in Behaviours That Challenge in Mental Health and paediatric Inpatient Environments: A Qualitative Exploratory Study across Four European Countries." The day concluded with a delightful dinner at HATARI | Pfälzer Stube, providing an excellent opportunity for networking and informal discussions.

The next day, sessions on finalizing the project and dissemination strategies took place. After lunch, attendees visited the FTZ Digital Reality Lab. The day ended with visits at the Elbphilharmonie and to the Christmas Market, offering a perfect blend of work and leisure.

The final day focused on reflecting on lessons learned and discussing future activities. These sessions provided valuable insights and set the stage for the project's next steps.

Overall, the Safe4Child partner meeting in Hamburg was a resounding success, fostering collaboration and setting the groundwork for continued progress in the project.





# SAFE4CHILD MET WITH GREAT RESONANCE IN PRACTICE

## MULTIPLIER EVENTS ACROSS PARTNER COUNTRIES HIGHLIGHT THE RELEVANCE OF TRAUMA-SENSITIVE APPROACHES TO UNDERSTAND AND MANAGE BEHAVIOURS THAT CHALLENGE

Astrid Jörns-Presentati, Gunter Groen, Kostadin Kostadinov

Multiplier events serve as dynamic platforms for knowledge exchange, collaboration, and the dissemination of innovative approaches. From expert-led workshops to engaging discussions, these gatherings bring together professionals, academics, and practitioners dedicated to creating meaningful change in their communities. As the Safe4Child project is coming to its close, multiplier events took place in Finland, Bulgaria and Germany to explore practical strategies, and share experiences regarding a trauma-informed approach to de-escalate behaviours that challenge.

The Multiplier Event, "Promoting Awareness and the Management of Institutionalized Aggression in Children with VR-Based Techniques for Teaching and Behavioral Interventions" took place on September 28, 2024, in **Plovdiv, Bulgaria**, during the annual public health conference organized by the Bulgarian Scientific Society of Public Health. A total of 61 participants attended, including 59 national participants from prominent medical universities and public health departments across Bulgaria—such as Sofia, Pleven, Burgas, and Varna—alongside two international guests from North Macedonia



Multiplier Event  
"Promoting awareness and the management of institutionalized aggression in children with VR-based techniques for teaching and behavioral interventions"



### Event program

28 (Saturday) September 2024, 10-13:00  
Medical University of Plovdiv, Auditorium complex, IV auditorium  
Plovdiv, 15 A "Vasil Aprilov" Blvd.

10:00 – 10:30	REGISTRATION – Welcome gathering with coffee and biscuits
10:30 – 11:00	Opening Assoc. Prof. Gergana Petrova, PhD Project Leader at MU-Plovdiv, Bulgaria. Prof. Dr. Maria Samerdjieva, MD, PhD Dean of the Faculty of Public Health, MU-Plovdiv.
11:00 – 11:30	Safe4Child Project – aims and objectives Assoc. Prof. Gergana Petrova, PhD Project Leader at MU-Plovdiv, Bulgaria. Department of Nursing Care, Faculty of Public Health, MU-Plovdiv.
11:30 – 12:00	Virtual simulation education of students from speciality of "Nursing care" Gergana Petrova <sup>1</sup> , Kostadin Kostadinov <sup>2</sup> , Valentina Lalova <sup>1</sup> , Svetla Ivanova <sup>1</sup> <sup>1</sup> Department of Nursing care, Faculty of Public Health, Medical University of Plovdiv, Plovdiv, Bulgaria. <sup>2</sup> Department of Social Medicine and Public Health, Faculty of Public Health, Medical University of Plovdiv, Plovdiv, Bulgaria.
12:00 – 12:30	Visit to the Simulation Training Center at MU-Plovdiv and demonstration of the VR scenario Assistant Professor Kostadin Kostadinov Department of Social Medicine and Public Health, Faculty of Public Health, Medical University of Plovdiv, Plovdiv, Bulgaria.
12:30 – 13:00	Panel Discussion on Effective Educational Strategies for Training Nursing Students and Frontline Workers in Managing Aggressive Behavior in Children and Adolescents
13:00	Closing remarks

The event facilitated cross-border collaboration and exchange of best practices and spotlighted the use of Virtual Reality (VR)-based techniques for teaching and behavioral interventions. The integration of VR technology into training for managing child and adolescent behaviours that challenge was a major highlight, aligning with the Safe4Child project's goals of developing a high-fidelity simulation platform and trauma-focused care framework. Led by Prof. Petrova, the oral presentation session gained significant recognition and emphasized the innovative use of VR in trauma-focused care for aggression management, showcasing the practical application of the Safe4Child project's tools and methodologies.



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On January 22, 2025, the **HAW Hamburg** hosted a symposium that attracted over 230 participants, including professionals from fields such as early childhood education, social work, child psychiatry, school, and students from relevant academic fields, and other interested individuals. With such a remarkable turnout, the symposium was a resounding success and underscored the importance of this critical topic. The afternoon began with a welcome by Prof. Dr. Gunter Groen who outlined the principles and strategies for addressing challenging behavior as adaptive responses to stressors, trauma, or unmet needs.



The event was then kicked off by Dr. Andreas Krüger, medical director of the renowned local Ankerland Trauma Therapy Center. His presentation emphasized the need to understand the root cause of such behaviours rather than simply reacting them. His expertise and practical advice resonated with the audience, sparking questions and discussions. Ines Tietjen then shared moving and insightful perspectives on the healing processes of children with attachment-related trauma living at a trauma-sensitive facility. Her talk, titled "Where Souls Can Unfold", highlighted the profound resilience of children and the importance of creating safe, nurturing environments to foster their growth and recovery.





In a brief coffee and networking break, participants were provided the opportunity to try the Virtual Reality glasses and experience the Safe4Child simulation firsthand. The event resumed with a joint presentation by Prof. Dr. Gunter Groen and Dr. Astrid Jörns-Presentati covering the results of the Safe4Child project and providing the audience with insights into the training. Feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive, with many praising the diversity and quality of the presentations, as well as the practical applicability of the insights shared.



Overall, the multiplier events provided not only a platform for knowledge dissemination but also valuable insights into addressing behaviors that challenge, focusing on trauma-sensitive strategies that empower professionals and improve outcomes for children and adolescents.



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# MULTIPLIER EVENT AT TURKU AMK 28 NOV 2024

Eveliina Vahter, Katri Mattsson, Satu Haapalainen and Joonas Korhonen, Turku UAS

The Multiplier Event of the Safe4Child project was organized at Turku University of Applied Sciences on 28 Nov 2024, as part of a nursing student's bachelor thesis. The thesis dealt with trauma-informed approaches in demanding pediatric nursing, the main product of which was a training day, a mental health theme day, organized in cooperation with the Safe4Child project. The aim of the event was to provide professionals and students working with children with further training on trauma-informed approaches and their use in challenging interaction situations. The success of the day was evaluated through an electronic feedback questionnaire, which the students created as part of their thesis.

The theme day was planned during the autumn in joint meetings with the project team (Safe4Child Finland representatives and the student). The project team was responsible for publishing the event, coordinating speakers, booking rooms, organising catering and informing speakers, participants and stakeholders. The student took the main responsibility for coordinating the theme day, preparing the programme and the advertisement, informing the participants, hosting the theme day and carrying out and analyzing the feedback survey. A wide range of health and social professionals were invited to speak at the event.

The training day was conducted bilingually (Finnish and English) and the aim was to create as relaxed and enjoyable an event as possible, while also involving the participants in discussion and activities, for example through VR simulation.

The theme day consisted of an informative and a functional part. The informative part included presentations by experts who discussed the theme of the day from different perspectives, such as trauma-informed working methods, child protection, patient safety, staff safety and behavioural disorders. The length of the presentations ranged from 20 to 45 minutes. The presentations were followed by ten minutes for questions from the audience, during which an active discussion ensued. Speakers included a crisis and violence work supervisor, experts from the Child Psychiatry Research Centre and a child psychiatry unit manager. In addition, nursing students from TUAS Kiia Lähteenmäki ja Sanni Haloila presented their thesis on "Challenging and dangerous situations in child psychiatric nursing".

The day started by introducing the programme and the speakers and ensuring the smooth running of the programme and the schedule. During the day, representatives of the Safe4Child project in Finland presented the project's outputs. The Safe4Child project received positive feedback after the day, especially on its importance and timeliness. In addition, the S4C project was perceived as interesting and impactful, giving participants a new perspective on how to deal with child, who has behaviour that challenge.



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During the operational part of the day, participants were able to try out the project's Virtual Reality (VR) simulation. The results of the feedback survey showed that the simulation was perceived as an educational and useful experience that gave new perspectives on how to safely confront a child with challenging behaviour. The simulation was a realistic, emotive experience and provided an opportunity to experience how to act in a real situation.

The Multiplier Event was a success overall, with a strong emphasis on co-operation and collegiality, which together ensured a good outcome. The day provided participants not only with new perspectives, but also with concrete tools to support the professional development of frontline workers who work with children and for nursing students, especially in identifying trauma and safely confronting children with challenging behaviour. The results of the feedback survey confirmed that the content of the day provided practical and evidence-based tools for professional life.



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# IMPLEMENTING THE SAFE4CHILD RESULTS

Astrid Jörns-Presentati, Gunter Groen

Over the past three years, the Safe4Child project has been driven by its main goal, which is to equip professionals with practical tools and strategies to address children's behaviors that challenge. Designed to be both flexible and scalable, the Safe4Child training is tailored to meet the needs of a wide range of professionals working with children in diverse settings. As part of these efforts an implementation guide was developed and refined through gathering feedback in focus group and individual interviews with practitioners from various fields, including early childhood education, schools, child protection, special needs education, public health nursing and academia.

The discussions aimed to explore the practical needs, challenges, and opportunities for integrating Safe4Child into diverse work environments. The feedback underscored the program's relevance while offering inspiration for its future evolution. Participants shared their expertise, experiences, and visions for how trauma-informed practices could transform their approaches to managing challenging behaviors in their fields. Many shared the difficulties of managing behaviors that challenge in their daily work routine and described existing strategies as insufficient. These conversations particularly highlighted the gaps in current approaches in schools and early education and the need for more actionable tools to support professionals in these fields. Teachers and early childcare staff emphasized that low resources often led to a higher incidence of behaviours that challenge with which they often felt ill equipped to deal with as they faced challenges to balance existing workloads while integrating new knowledge and tools.

At the same time practitioners emphasized the importance of a needs-based approach in their work with young children and shared many thoughtful suggestions about how to prevent escalation, such as allowing older children to nap in nursery settings, while fostering calm and supportive environments. Measures like "down talking" and de-escalation strategies, as well as ensuring staff are supported and protected, were reported help minimize burnout and reduce staff turnover, enabling stronger attachments to form between children and caregivers. Additionally, supervision and collaboration between the educational, care and health system was mentioned to be crucial to avoid excluding children as a last resort. Across all countries, practitioners perceived insufficient training on hands-on mental health training, of which trauma-informed care would be one important approach.



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With regard to the Safe4Child training program, many noted how relevant and practical the strategies are, with clear connections to the situations they encounter. At the same time, the implementation interviews revealed areas where additional content could strengthen the program further. Participants emphasized the importance of a holistic approach to working with children, which includes involving families as a central part of the process. They highlighted the need to increase understanding of the reasons behind behaviour that challenge, taking the time to explore the "good reasons" children may have for acting in certain ways. These reasons may relate to trauma, but also need wider perspective based on an understanding of inclusion that creates a more compassionate and effective responses to their needs.

Maintaining ongoing training and deepening understanding of these topics were identified as crucial elements for sustaining the project's impact. Participants also expressed their appreciation for being part of the stakeholder panel, noting how valuable it was to contribute to the discussions. Many shared their willingness to provide further feedback and ongoing support to help refine and expand the Safe4Child program. Moreover, the inclusion of parents in this process was stressed as essential, fostering collaboration that benefits both children and their families.

As we continue to build on these ideas in the Safe4Child project, our commitment remains clear: to provide strategies that are not only effective but also adaptable to the realities faced by professionals every day. A key step forward is the release of our implementation video, which showcases all the results achieved in the last three years. The video can be found on the project website (<https://safe4child.turkuamk.fi/our-project/>) and should serve as both a guide and an inspiration for professionals everywhere. We invite you to engage with the project by watching the video, sharing your feedback, and helping us amplify its reach. Together, we can continue to make a meaningful difference in the lives of children and the professionals who care for them.

## CONTACT US!



<https://safe4child.turkuamk.fi/>



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