

*Irina Haba*

Vinnitsia Mykhailo Kotsiubynskyi State Pedagogical University,  
Associate Professor (Ukraine)

[gabaira@ukr.net](mailto:gabaira@ukr.net)

[https:// orcid id: 0000-0003-4606-4504](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4606-4504)

## CONTEMPORARY METHODS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSISTANCE IN CONDITIONS OF UNCERTAINTY

**Анотація.** У статті розглядаються сучасні методи психологічної допомоги в умовах невизначеності, яка виступає потужним стресогенним чинником унаслідок воєнних конфліктів, пандемій, економічних та соціальних криз. Проаналізовано теоретичні засади проблеми нетолерантності до невизначеності (Intolerance of Uncertainty, IU) як трансдіагностичного механізму, що підвищує ризик розвитку тривожних, депресивних та посттравматичних розладів. Узагальнено доказові психотерапевтичні підходи, зокрема когнітивно-поведінкову терапію, терапію прийняття та відповідальності (АСТ), майндфулнес-програми, а також арт- та ігрові методи (хібукі-терапію, сендплей-терапію), які сприяють розвитку психологічної гнучкості, толерантності до дистресу й інтеграції травматичного досвіду. Окремо акцентовано увагу на цифрових форматах допомоги (онлайн-КПТ, blended-моделі, телемедицина), ефективність яких підтверджена систематичними оглядами. Висвітлено спеціальні випадки застосування інноваційних методів, зокрема дистанційного EMDR у роботі з наслідками масових подій, а також підтримку груп підвищеного ризику.

**Ключові слова:** психологічна допомога; невизначеність; нетолерантність до невизначеності; когнітивно-поведінкова терапія (КПТ); АСТ; майндфулнес; хібукі-терапія; сендплей-терапія; цифрові формати; EMDR; групи підвищеного ризику; професійне вигорання.

**Abstract.** The article examines contemporary methods of psychological assistance in conditions of uncertainty, which functions as a powerful stressor resulting from armed conflicts, pandemics, economic instability, and social crises. Theoretical foundations of intolerance of uncertainty (IU) are analyzed as a transdiagnostic mechanism that increases the risk of developing anxiety, depressive, and post-traumatic disorders. Evidence-based psychotherapeutic approaches are summarized, including cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), mindfulness-based programs, as well as art- and play-based methods (Hibuki therapy, sandplay therapy), which foster psychological flexibility, distress tolerance, and the integration of traumatic experience. Special attention is given to digital formats of assistance (online CBT, blended models, telemedicine), whose effectiveness has been confirmed by systematic reviews. The article also highlights special cases of applying innovative methods, such as remote EMDR in working with the consequences of mass traumatic events, as well as psychological support for high-risk groups.

**Keywords:** psychological assistance; uncertainty; intolerance of uncertainty; cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT); ACT; mindfulness; Hibuki therapy; sandplay therapy; digital formats; EMDR; high-risk groups; professional burnout.

**Formulation of the problem.** The modern world is characterized by rapid dynamics of change and the growing scale of global challenges – armed conflicts, pandemics, climate disasters, economic crises, and social instability have become a constant background for the lives of millions of people. These processes are not isolated or temporary – they shape a new social reality in which uncertainty becomes a habitual condition of existence. As a result, there is an increasing need for both society and

individuals to find resources that enable them to maintain psychological resilience despite unstable and often unpredictable circumstances.

For an individual, uncertainty means a lack of predictability, controllability, and security – it deprives a person of a sense of stability, undermines trust in the future, and disrupts the fulfillment of basic needs for safety and consistency. Such conditions provoke experiences of anxiety, confusion, and helplessness, which over time may develop into chronic stress or psychosomatic disorders. Research shows that intolerance of uncertainty (IU) is one of the key factors of psychological vulnerability – high IU levels correlate with emotional instability, difficulties in affect regulation, and an increased risk of developing anxiety and depressive disorders. This indicates that the ability to tolerate uncertainty is an important marker of mental health.

Under such circumstances, psychological assistance aimed not at eliminating uncertainty itself (which is objectively impossible) but at fostering tolerance toward it becomes particularly relevant. The task of modern psychotherapeutic approaches is to help individuals change their attitude toward unpredictability, find internal resources for its acceptance, and learn to act even when the future remains uncertain. Such assistance simultaneously fulfills several functions – it reduces the intensity of stress reactions, promotes the development of resilience, forms new adaptive behavioral strategies, and supports the recovery process after crisis experiences.

**Analysis of recent research and publications.** Recent studies emphasize intolerance of uncertainty (IU) as a transdiagnostic factor underlying anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress symptoms (Carleton, 2016; Sahib et al., 2023). Evidence-based approaches such as CBT, ACT, and mindfulness-based programs (MBSR, MBCT) have consistently demonstrated effectiveness in reducing IU and enhancing resilience (Treanor et al., 2010; Kraemer et al., 2020). Art- and play-based interventions, including Hibuki therapy and sandplay therapy, are increasingly applied in trauma work with children and adults, fostering symbolic expression and emotional integration. Parallel to these methods, systematic reviews in *JMIR Mental Health* confirm the efficacy of digital interventions (internet-based CBT, blended models, telemedicine), while recent publications in *Frontiers in Psychology* and *BioMed Central* highlight the feasibility of remote EMDR and the necessity of targeted support for high-risk groups such as healthcare workers, internally displaced persons, and older adults. Collectively, these findings underline the importance of integrating traditional, creative, and digital approaches to psychological assistance in conditions of uncertainty.

**The purpose of the article** is to provide a comprehensive analysis of contemporary evidence-based methods of psychological assistance that strengthen resilience and foster tolerance of uncertainty in conditions of crisis and unpredictability. The study seeks to examine the theoretical foundations of intolerance of uncertainty as a transdiagnostic factor of psychological vulnerability, systematize the most effective therapeutic approaches – including cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), mindfulness practices, art- and play-based interventions, and digital formats – and outline their practical significance for both individual clients and communities facing large-scale traumatic events.

**Outline of the main material.** Contemporary methods of psychological support – including cognitive-behavioral approaches, acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), mindfulness practices, and innovative online interventions – demonstrate consistently high effectiveness in enabling individuals to tolerate uncertainty, alleviate distress, and preserve inner balance. These approaches go beyond symptom reduction: they foster the development of psychological flexibility, strengthen resilience, and cultivate the capacity to reconstruct meaning and maintain a sense of coherence even under the most challenging and unpredictable life conditions. By combining evidence-based strategies with integrative and scalable formats of care, such methods lay the foundation for a new culture of psychological assistance – one that prioritizes adaptability, sustainability, and empowerment rather than avoidance or mere crisis stabilization.

The analysis and systematization of these approaches in the context of uncertainty therefore represents not only an academic contribution but also a practical necessity. It creates the groundwork for designing effective support programs tailored to the needs of both individuals and communities that are directly or indirectly affected by crises such as armed conflict, pandemics, displacement, or socio-economic instability. Such programs may integrate traditional face-to-face interventions with digital solutions, expand the use of art- and play-based modalities for symbolic processing of trauma, and emphasize preventive strategies that enhance resilience before stress escalates into chronic psychopathology. In this sense, contemporary methods of psychological support serve as a bridge between clinical effectiveness and social relevance, ensuring that mental health care remains responsive, accessible, and sustainable in the face of global uncertainty.

The problem of uncertainty is central to modern psychology, as it reflects not only external life circumstances but also internal mechanisms of mental functioning. The key concept in this context is intolerance of uncertainty (IU), defined as the tendency to perceive the unknown as threatening and unbearable. Intolerance of uncertainty is considered a transdiagnostic mechanism, meaning it affects a wide range of psychological disorders. It underlies generalized anxiety disorder, depression, obsessive-compulsive symptoms, as well as manifestations of post-traumatic stress disorder. Meta-analyses demonstrate that reductions in IU during therapy are closely associated with improvements in clients' mental health (Miller et al., 2023).

In contemporary psychotherapeutic practice, increasing emphasis is placed on methods whose effectiveness has been confirmed by empirical studies and meta-analyses – and given the theoretical foundations of the problem of intolerance of uncertainty (IU), particular importance is attributed to approaches that foster psychological flexibility and the ability to act under conditions of unpredictability. One such method is cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), often referred to as the “gold standard” in the treatment of anxiety disorders, since its efficacy in reducing IU has been well established. The central idea of CBT is that human emotions are largely determined not by events themselves, but by the way these events are interpreted. In practice, this is realized through exposure to uncertain situations, which gradually decreases fear of the unknown; cognitive restructuring, which helps transform catastrophic thinking patterns into more realistic and flexible appraisals; and cognitive flexibility training, which develops the ability to generate multiple interpretations of events and construct alternative scenarios. As a result, CBT does not eliminate uncertainty per se, but teaches individuals to reduce its perceived threat – leading to a decrease in anxiety and an improvement in overall quality of life.

Unlike CBT, which is primarily oriented toward cognitive restructuring, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) emphasizes acceptance, based on the central premise that uncertainty cannot be eliminated from life, but individuals can learn to coexist with it while remaining faithful to their core values. Rather than attempting to suppress or control difficult thoughts and emotions, ACT encourages clients to acknowledge their presence, thereby reducing the struggle with internal experiences. The use of mindfulness exercises supports the ability to observe cognitions and emotions as transient events rather than absolute truths, while the clarification of personal values provides a stable inner compass for behavior. This allows individuals to act not from a position of fear or avoidance, but from what is meaningful and significant in their lives. The practice of committed action “here-and-now” strengthens the skill of making decisions in conditions of uncertainty, preventing the postponement of life until circumstances feel more predictable. A growing body of empirical research confirms that ACT is effective in reducing symptoms of anxiety and depression, improving overall well-being, and enhancing stress resilience – a quality that is especially critical in contexts of war, displacement, and ongoing crises.

A significant and complementary place in modern psychotherapy is also occupied by mindfulness-based approaches, particularly Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT). Both are grounded in attentional training and non-

judgmental awareness of the present moment. Their therapeutic value lies in cultivating the capacity to observe emotions and bodily sensations without over-identification, reducing physiological arousal through structured practices such as breathing exercises, body scans, and meditation, and strengthening tolerance of distress by reframing it as a natural part of human experience rather than an overwhelming threat. Research evidence demonstrates that these programs reduce levels of anxiety and depression, improve emotion regulation, and enhance attentional control. Participants frequently report increased concentration, greater self-compassion, and a sustained sense of inner stability, even in conditions of prolonged uncertainty.

When viewed together, ACT and mindfulness-based approaches complement one another: ACT provides a framework for aligning behavior with values and cultivating committed action in the face of uncertainty, while mindfulness offers concrete techniques for moment-to-moment regulation of attention, stress reduction, and emotional stability. Both approaches move beyond the goal of eliminating distress and instead emphasize the development of psychological flexibility – the ability to adapt to changing circumstances without losing touch with one’s inner resources and sense of meaning. This synergy makes them particularly powerful in contexts of chronic unpredictability, such as war, displacement, or global crises, where the challenge is not to remove uncertainty but to learn how to live meaningfully and resiliently within it.

The further development of technology, combined with restrictions caused by the pandemic and military conflicts, has brought digital interventions to the forefront – they have become a key tool for ensuring access to psychological support when in-person meetings with professionals are impossible. These include internet-based CBT, which offers structured programs with exercises, diaries, and self-guided modules; blended models, which combine online and offline formats to maintain therapeutic flexibility and continuity; and mobile mental health applications, which provide tools for relaxation, mood monitoring, and daily self-help. Systematic reviews confirm the effectiveness of digital formats in reducing anxiety, depression, and stress – highlighting their advantage of scalability, which allows large populations to be reached without significant financial or time costs.

After considering evidence-based cognitive-behavioral, mindfulness, and acceptance-based approaches, it is important to turn to methods that integrate emotional support with symbolic processing of experiences. One such method is Hibuki Therapy, developed in Israel as an innovative approach to supporting children who have lived through traumatic events – such as war, natural disasters, or violence. The central element of Hibuki Therapy is a toy dog named Hibuki, with long arms designed to “hug” the child. Through this physical and simultaneously symbolic contact, the child develops a sense of safety, care, and unconditional acceptance. The method combines elements of art therapy and play therapy: the child projects emotions onto the toy, shares experiences with it, or reenacts situations that have caused pain and fear. In this way, the child symbolically “transfers” sadness, anxiety, or anger onto the toy, thereby reducing internal tension. Practice has demonstrated that Hibuki Therapy effectively helps children restore trust in adults, enhances their capacity for emotional expression, and serves as a bridge to more in-depth psychotherapeutic work [3].

This approach has also been successfully adapted in Ukraine, particularly in the Vinnytsia region, where communities have received large numbers of internally displaced families since the beginning of the full-scale war. Local psychologists introduced Hibuki Therapy as part of psychosocial support programs for displaced children. Each child received a Hibuki toy, which became not only a comforting presence but also a symbolic companion for expressing difficult feelings. For example, in a group of primary school children relocated from the Kharkiv region to Vinnytsia, it was observed that after several sessions with Hibuki, children became more willing to express emotions through words and drawings. One boy, who initially avoided interaction with peers, began telling stories through his Hibuki and even initiated play with other children. This case illustrates how Hibuki

Therapy can reduce isolation, support emotional regulation, and foster the rebuilding of social connections in displaced children.

Thus, the experience of implementing Hibuki Therapy in Vinnytsia confirms the universality and adaptability of this method: it combines symbolic work with emotions, play-based activity, and embodied comfort. These elements are especially valuable for children who have endured the traumatic consequences of war, as Hibuki Therapy not only provides a sense of safety and care in the here-and-now but also creates a pathway toward deeper psychotherapeutic work and long-term resilience. Another innovative method is Sandplay Therapy, which has deep roots in the Jungian tradition and is oriented toward symbolic work. The essence of the method lies in the client's creation of miniature worlds in a sandbox using figurines and objects that represent different aspects of inner experience. This projective technique allows clients to safely reconstruct internal conflicts, traumatic memories, or current problems.

The sandbox becomes a space where the individual can directly engage with the unconscious, process experiences in symbolic form, and simultaneously discover new solutions. The method is highly versatile – it is applied in work with children, who can express through play what cannot be verbalized, as well as with adults, helping them integrate traumatic experiences and restore a sense of inner wholeness. The advantages of Sandplay Therapy include its gentle nature, which reduces emotional tension, stimulates self-expression, and activates new personal resources.

Despite the high effectiveness of art- and play-based methods, contemporary psychological practice increasingly integrates **digital tools** that significantly expand access to support. This is particularly relevant in crisis contexts, when in-person therapy is limited or impossible due to armed conflict, pandemics, or forced displacement. Among the most common formats are **internet-based CBT** – structured programs with interactive exercises, video sessions, and self-monitoring diaries that have demonstrated effectiveness in reducing symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress (*JMIR Mental Health*) [1]; **blended models**, which combine online and offline formats to ensure flexibility and continuity of the therapeutic process; and **telemedicine**, which enables remote consultations via secure video conferencing and provides access to psychological assistance even in remote or high-risk regions. Systematic reviews confirm that digital interventions are no less effective than traditional methods and, in some cases, even surpass them due to their scalability and ease of access. Thus, they are becoming an essential tool for supporting mental health under conditions of prolonged uncertainty [1]. Alongside general methods widely applied in psychological practice, there are a number of specialized approaches designed to address the consequences of mass traumatic events and to support vulnerable populations at high risk. One of the most extensively studied methods is **Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)** – a technique of desensitization and reprocessing through guided eye movements, which has proven effective in reducing symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and depressive manifestations. The method is based on the principle that, during the recollection of traumatic memories, the client performs a series of directed eye movements that stimulate the reprocessing of traumatic experiences and reduce their emotional intensity. Today, in the context of armed conflicts and other large-scale crises, EMDR is increasingly delivered in a **remote format**. This significantly expands access to therapy for individuals with pronounced post-traumatic symptoms who, for objective reasons, cannot attend in-person consultations – including displaced persons, residents of unsafe regions, and individuals with limited mobility. Initial clinical trials and case studies published in *Frontiers in Psychology* and *BioMed Central* confirm both the technical feasibility and the high effectiveness of remote EMDR, opening new prospects for its application on a global scale [2].

Special attention should be given to high-risk groups, for whom the psychological and social consequences of crisis events manifest with particular severity and long-lasting impact. These include several categories of vulnerable populations whose professional roles, life circumstances, or age-

related factors make them especially susceptible to stress, trauma, and the challenges of prolonged uncertainty.

One such group consists of healthcare workers, who operate under emergency conditions and are confronted daily with intense workloads, limited resources, and constant exposure to human suffering. Their professional duties often require them to make rapid, life-altering decisions in situations characterized by uncertainty and moral complexity. Prolonged exposure to these stressors leads to emotional exhaustion, secondary traumatization, and an increased risk of burnout. For this group, psychological support must prioritize structured crisis interventions, continuous supervisory support, and burnout-prevention programs. Mindfulness-based practices and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) have shown promise in strengthening emotional resilience among healthcare providers, while digital tools such as tele-supervision and online peer-support groups can ensure ongoing access to care despite time and workload constraints.

Another category requiring targeted assistance is internally displaced persons (IDPs), who face the acute consequences of losing their homes, communities, and social networks. These individuals are compelled to adapt to new, often unstable or even hostile environments, while simultaneously coping with uncertainty about the future. For IDPs, comprehensive psychological support must include both immediate crisis stabilization – such as Psychological First Aid, safe spaces for children, and access to basic resources – and longer-term programs aimed at rebuilding a sense of safety, identity, and social belonging. Group-based interventions, including cognitive-behavioral and narrative approaches, as well as art- and play-based modalities such as sandplay or Hibuki therapy for children, can help displaced persons process traumatic experiences and foster resilience. The integration of digital interventions, such as online counseling platforms and moderated support groups, further expands access to care for populations dispersed across different regions.

A third vulnerable category is older adults, who often experience crises in a uniquely challenging way due to age-related physical limitations, reduced mobility, and separation from family members. Social isolation, compounded by limited digital literacy and declining participation in community life, exacerbates feelings of loneliness and helplessness. Psychological interventions for this group must therefore focus on overcoming isolation, maintaining cognitive activity, and promoting social engagement. Approaches such as reminiscence therapy, behavioral activation, and adapted mindfulness practices have proven beneficial, while digital inclusion initiatives – simplified telemedicine platforms, telephone-based counseling, and community-based programs – can serve as vital bridges to sustained support.

For these high-risk groups, the importance of a comprehensive and integrated approach cannot be overstated. Combining rapid-response crisis interventions with long-term therapeutic programs, and supplementing these with modern digital tools, creates a continuum of care that is both flexible and sustainable. Research evidence demonstrates that such integration significantly improves adaptation, reduces the risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder, enhances the sense of social inclusion, and promotes the restoration of psychosocial well-being. At the same time, it is crucial to tailor interventions to the unique needs of each group: for healthcare workers – preventive measures against burnout and structured supervisory support; for IDPs – restoration of safety and rebuilding of social networks; and for older adults – targeted strategies to reduce isolation, preserve cognitive health, and facilitate participation in community life [4].

**Conclusions.** The systematization of contemporary methods of psychological assistance under conditions of uncertainty makes it possible not only to increase the effectiveness of client work, but also to outline new directions for the development of practice – the integration of digital solutions, the expansion of art- and projective approaches, and the creation of support programs for vulnerable groups and helping professionals. Taken together, these components form the foundation for the development of a psychological culture capable of ensuring adaptation, recovery, and the preservation of mental health in today's unpredictable world.

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