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The Trauma of the Gaza Envelope Youth: "I cover myself with the blanket, and then everything comes back."

The young people of the Gaza Envelope have already gotten used to the alarms and the security tensions, but nothing prepared them for the murderous attack by Hamas on October 7th. S., 14 years old: "I have no privacy, I have nothing. I can't cry in front of them because then we all fall apart." A., 15 years old: "In the evening it is the hardest, because in the evening I start to think." ELEM warns: "All of the Gaza Envelope youth have become youth at risk."

Written by Hadar Gil-Ad

"Since we established ELEM's pop-up spaces for evacuated youth across the country, we have encountered many types responses," says Gaya Nir, ELEM's pop-up spaces program manager, who reports an increase of over 50% in inquiries from youth. "Some of them ask questions that indicate an attempt to grasp the experience, or an attempt to make sense of why they survived when others didn't. Many who have lost friends, family, and community members are now flooded with the documentation on social media and watch these videos time and time again. Behaviors that characterize loss are beginning to emerge, we are noticing risky behaviors".

It is important to understand that many of the teenage boys and girls who were evacuated from the Gaza Envelope lost their homes, and some also lost friends and family. The horrors to which they were exposed are joined by the horrors they see on social media.

Tali Erez, ELEM-Israel CEO, warns that the situation is extremely serious: "The youth of the entire Gaza Envelope have suddenly changed from normative to youth at risk." She calls on the

government to act quickly: "The state must understand that the detachment of the youth puts them at tremendous risk."

"I Don't Have a Spot of My Own."

S., 14 years old, talked about her personal trauma, and dealing with it to this day: I was there. You know what 'there' means. I don't want to go back there. Now we're in Central Israel, in a hotel. All of us. During the day, I try to be outside as much as I can. I can't be in the hotel room with everyone. I have no privacy, I have nothing. I can't cry in front of them because then we all fall apart. And I can't handle another fight with them."

There are a lot of people outside that I don't know. They came to help. I'm tired of everyone trying to hug me and asking what I need. I'm tired of everyone looking at me with sad eyes."

"I want to wake up from this nightmare. I walk around and everything seems tense. As if people are waiting for something to happen. Then I go back to the hotel, and I don't have my own room. I don't have a spot of my own. I can't slam the door in someone's face when I get angry, so I cover myself with the blanket over my head. Then everything comes rushing back. What happened there. What I saw."

"It's hard for me here. I want my room, I want my friends. I want to sleep for more than an hour straight. I am going through something that I didn't know and didn't want to know."

"What's Safe About This Place?"

A., 15 years old, had already gotten used to the grim reality of rockets being fired at his home, but nothing prepared him for that dark Saturday: "We are used to it. We are used to alarms and booms, but it has never been like this. Terrorists shoot at us, in our homes. Kidnapped. In our worst nightmares, we didn't believe that something like this could happen."

"We see WhatsApp messages all day long. We've heard about friends who were murdered in the house next door, and we couldn't help them. And then the videos started surfacing. On Instagram, on TikTok. You can't go online without seeing a (horrifying) video."

"We are in Central Israel now, in a safe place. But what's so safe about it? There are actors, singers, activities, and whatnot. It helps me to stop thinking a little about the kibbutz and what I saw. So the days go well, but the evenings are the hardest. In the evening I start thinking. I'm tired of being in this room and think."

"Those who come from outside to help ask me how I'm doing. What am I supposed to tell them? That I want to do normal things that normal people do? I want normal worries. Sivan from ELEM told me about her cat, he's sick and she is worried about him. I have a cat. So far I didn't have the courage to say it, that I also worry about my cat. Then we started talking. And I really needed it. We just need to have someone there who understands."