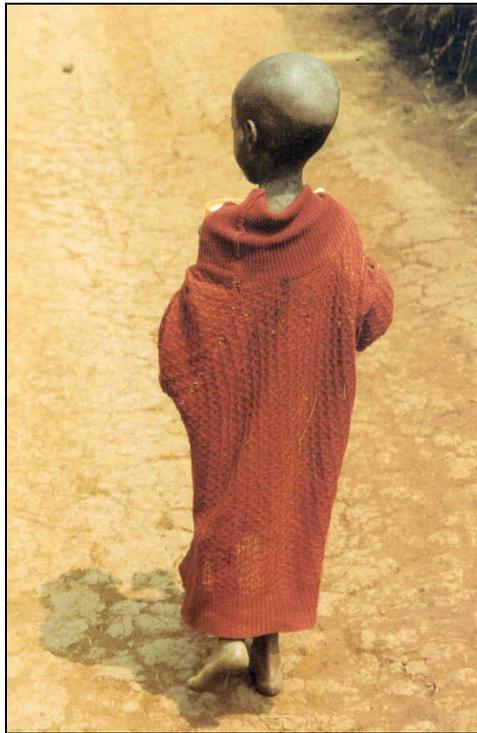


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**THE LOST ONES
EMERGENCY CARE AND FAMILY TRACING
FOR CHILDREN FROM BIRTH TO FIVE YEARS**



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION	2
Purpose of the manual	
UNHCR/NGO policies	
II. WHO ARE SEPARATED CHILDREN?	3
Who are separated children?	
How do young children become separated?	
Why is it important to find the youngest separated children as soon as possible?	
III. HOW CAN WE PREVENT FAMILY SEPARATION AND LOSS OF IDENTITY IN EMERGENCIES	4
Ways to prevent separation	
How to prevent forced separation due to economic situation	
IV. CARE AND DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS OF ALL BABIES AND YOUNG CHILDREN	11
Early development	
Caring for young children is different and why	
Developmental needs of children from:	
Birth to one year	
One year to two years	
Three to five years	
Communicating with young children	
Why do infants need attention and stimulation?	
Why is it important to talk and play with young children?	
How do older children help in the development of young children?	
The importance of play	
Loss, grief and suffering	
How to help children recover from their fears and distress	
V. CARE OF SEPARATED CHILDREN IN EMERGENCIES	17
The case for family care	
Foster care	
Small group care	
Long term Care	

VI. FINDING THE FAMILIES OF YOUNG SEPARATED BABIES AND CHILDREN	23
Identification	
Registration	
Photographs and interviews	
Active tracing methods	
VII. VERIFICATION OF KINSHIP, FAMILY REUNIFICATIONS AND FOLLOW-UP	39
Verification of kinship	
Family reunification	
VIII. SUMMARY	44
IX. ANNEXES	46
Bibliography	
Sample forms	
DNA Testing	

I. INTRODUCTION

The Lost Ones: Emergency Care and Family Tracing for Children from Birth to Five Years describes both how to care for the youngest children, newborns to five years old, who are separated from their families in emergencies and to trace their families. Different possible care settings, and how to meet developmental needs of very young children separated from their families in emergencies are presented and discussed. It provides information on how parents and humanitarian workers can prevent children from becoming separated in emergencies, and, in the event of separation, a comprehensive guide on how to elicit information from the children and others around them and conduct family tracing and reunification.

The manual is intended for NGOs, communities, national agencies and UN organizations and other groups who are responsible for the care of very young separated children and who want to look for the children's families.

The United Nations (UN) and NGOs have formulated comprehensive policies concerning the care, protection, family tracing and reunification of separated children. Several excellent manuals and papers exist on guidelines and principles in addressing the needs of that child population. (Please refer to the Bibliography in Annex 1). It was decided that a practical field-oriented methodology to guide an appropriate response to the specific needs of emergency care, tracing and family reunification of babies and children five years and younger, was still lacking. Thus, this manual intends to fill this specific gap and should be read in conjunction with other more comprehensive works on the subject of separated children, noted in the Bibliography of this manual.

II. WHO ARE SEPARATED CHILDREN?

Who are separated children?

In every war and mass movements of populations -especially in refugee emergencies- a significant number of children become separated from the families who care for them. Families are defined here as parents, close relatives or other persons designated by law or custom to care for the child.

Separated children are persons under the age of 18 who are separated from both parents, or from their previous legal or customary primary care-giver, but not necessarily from other relatives. “Separated Children” include both “Unaccompanied” and “Accompanied” children (See below).

Unaccompanied children “(also called *unaccompanied minors*) are children who have been separated from both parents and other relatives, and are not being cared for by any adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so.”¹

Accompanied children are children who have been separated from both parents but are being cared for by an adult who is either a close or distant relative, or who by law or custom is responsible for doing so.

How do young children become separated?

The reasons why babies and very young children become separated during an emergency vary greatly, but can generally be grouped into two broad categories: **accidental** or **intentional** separation.

Accidental reasons for separation may be that the children:

- ◆ were not with their parents when people were forced to leave suddenly, as often in the case of an armed attack;
- ◆ became lost during the chaos of flight, at the onset of an attack or during the trip to a safer place;
- ◆ lost their parents because they died of illness or were killed.

Intentional reasons for separation may be that the children have been :

¹ Inter-agency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children, Geneva, 2003, p. 7

- ◆ abandoned by their parents because of war-related emotional exhaustion or material hardship;
- ◆ entrusted to a neighbor or a stranger for temporary safekeeping;
- ◆ taken to an orphanage by destitute or frightened parents, who felt unable to care for or protect them;
- ◆ sent away to other family members believed to be living in a safer area;
- ◆ set down or left briefly unattended while parents went to search for food or water;
- ◆ in the care of others who had to move before the parents returned;
- ◆ in the hospital but parents could not be found at the time of discharge because their address had not been recorded fully (often the case of refugee or displaced persons camps).

Why is it important to find the youngest separated children as soon as possible?

Children in this age group have special needs as they depend entirely on adults for their care. Without the care of others, they will die. The youngest ones do not have words to tell us who they are and may not remember where they lived. Not only are the youngest vulnerable, they rely, for their survival and well-being, on caretakers for the beginning years of their life. They may regress to an earlier age because they feel the loss of their parents so deeply. Some no longer speak or they forget the few words they once knew. Because of the rapid growth and changes in appearance, photographs must be taken as soon as possible. Their continued growth and well-being depends on having a person or family to care for them. There is an urgent need for this age group to have the care of an adult, until they can be returned to their own parents or relatives.

III. HOW CAN WE PREVENT FAMILY SEPARATION AND LOSS OF IDENTITY IN EMERGENCIES?

Family separation can occur at any stage of an emergency, even after refugees have arrived and are safely settled in refugee camps. However, in some instances steps can be taken ahead of time to prevent family separation and, if separation does occur, to reduce the risk of babies and very young children losing their identities, and with it also their chances of their families ever finding them again.

Measures can be taken to reduce the risk of family separation in emergencies, the number of young children losing their identity, and with it, their chances of ever seeing their families again

Steps to prevent separation and loss of identity

When there are real possibilities that a population, either in tense political situations, refugee camps or other circumstances, may have to suddenly flee or be forced to leave in large numbers, there are ways to prevent separation and loss of identity.

1. Identify most vulnerable children and families and places of likely separation

a) *Identification of most vulnerable children:*

During an emergency, it is vital to remember that some groups of children are at risk of permanent family separation. These, among others, are babies and young children, children who are physically or mentally disabled or who have special needs; children who are already living apart from their families, such as children in hospitals, health centers, residential homes, feeding centers, and children in foster families. Identify vulnerable children and families before the emergency begins. What you can do:

- Interview new arrivals at a registration site, border crossing, feeding station or hospital
- Ask women, community leaders and local organizations to identify families at risk
- Conduct house-to-house surveys or add relevant questions to surveys done by others to identify families at risk

- Work with hospitals to identify new vulnerable mothers at risk of abandoning their infants

b) Identification of residential centers for children:

Experience has shown that institutionalized children are at great risk of permanently losing their families in wartimes.

- Meet with the heads of residential centers for children (orphanages, boarding schools, hospitals, etc) and discuss with them plans to keep the children safe and their identity secure (see below). In particular, discuss the critical importance of having the children join their families as soon as possible (before the onset of the war).

c) Identification of places where family separations are most likely to occur:

Along the fleeing roads, simple stopping or transiting points could become places of separation. Places where separations are more likely to occur include: border crossings, checkpoints, loading points for transport, way stations (points along the roads where water and emergency assistance is available), transit sites, health facilities, distribution or registration points, bridges and other narrow points, and along the roads themselves. In addition, children may run ahead to get water or other services and are then unable to find their families.

- Determine the most likely routes of flight. Identify the expected stopping points (where people might gather for water, health care and other services or stop for rest).
- Map these places and plan to post team members there to carry out preventive work.

2. Find ways to provide support to those identified as being at risk

- Work with the UN and other relief agencies to ensure that families receive their entitled rations
- Ensure that separated children in foster families are duly registered and thus receiving their food and other entitlements
- Refer vulnerable families to agencies or associations providing additional services for such persons, or if needed begin relevant assistance programs

3. Encourage parents to take home their institutionalised children immediately

Recent experience has shown that institutions, including hospitals were not in a position to offer special safety to resident children. In fact, institutions have been the target of attack in recent past and hence children may be most vulnerable than if they were with their families. In addition, there is a risk that

institutions evacuate the children to faraway locations making family reunification later on very problematic, if not impossible in some cases.

- Explain to parents that institutions are not in a position to provide special safety to their children.

4. Teach parents ways to prevent loss of identity of their children and ways to stay together during flight

To ensure that the children's identity is not lost during wartime is one the most effective measures to prevent permanent family separation. Parents can teach even their very young children their names and addresses. They can also put identity tags on babies and those who cannot speak. Simple measures (see "Message to parents" below) can also reduce the risk of separation.

- Conduct massive education campaigns (media, radio, flyers, meetings and gatherings in villages/communities, etc) about ways to prevent loss of identity and risk of separation.

Message to parents

If you have to leave home in a hurry, here are simple things you can do to keep your family together.

Before you leave:

- ❑ Make sure each of your children knows his name, address, and both parents' names. For the little ones, use a rhyme or song and rehearse and make sure they can answer and give their name, address, and parents' names.
- ❑ Prepare an identity tag for your youngest children with his/her name, your full name and address of origin. It can be a label attached to their clothes or a necklace too small to go over their head. The identity tag must be placed inside a wallet (i.e. small plastic bag) that protects it from water and wear.
- ❑ Use a rope or cloth to tie your child to you as you travel.
- ❑ When you leave, go together. Don't send your children ahead. It is of vital importance that family groups leave as units. Children should not be moved without their families.
- ❑ Tell your children – even the older ones - they should go immediately to the first Red Crescent worker and tell they are separated from their family.

When you are on the road:

- ❑ Don't let your children stray from your side. Make sure your children stay close to you. Hold their hands. Use the rope to connect them to you.
- ❑ Secure your baby on your back, especially if you have other young children who need to hold your hand.
- ❑ Remind older children to hold hands with their younger brothers or sisters and to keep an eye on them.
- ❑ Unless there is an imminent danger, NEVER move a baby or very young children from the location where you found him/her without immediately inquiring of the older children and adults around whether they know the child or his/her family; where this particular group of people come from – name of village, area of a country, etc. This will facilitate family tracing later on

4. Conduct emergency training at the NGO and community levels in basic principles and practises of protection, care and tracing of separated children

Training of NGO and community leaders should be conducted immediately and should include:

- a) *Measures that can be taken now to prevent family separation and safeguard children's identity* (see above).
- b) *Measures that can be taken when people are on the move or after an attack*. This training will review and discuss the range of actions to take by various actors so that they are ready to respond. These actions include:
 - Position team members at specific places along the road where separations are likely to occur (see point 1).
 - Distribute identification tags or bracelets for small children if they don't have any and help families write the necessary information on them.
 - Look out for potential separations and identify and immediately register newly separated children. *Separated children who are immediately identified can often be reunified with their families very quickly.*
 - Set up a "Lost children booth" where children and parents can go for emergency care, registration and tracing.
 - Take photos of lost children to display along the road.
 - Use a megaphone to announce lost children.
 - Give out messages reminding adults to keep the family together. *These messages should be agreed within the team and with other agencies. It is important that everyone is given the same messages, as otherwise there might be misunderstanding that could result in more separations. Messages should not be delivered in a way that might encourage families or carers to give up their children, messages giving the impression that separated children may get special services. The messages can be given by megaphone, either by team members at specific sites or by mobile teams. If possible, they should also be broadcast over the radio.*
 - Action by drivers responsible for transporting affected population:
 - Make sure families are together in the trucks; wait for missing children
 - Distribute identification tags and help parents write young children their identity if necessary
 - Refer separated children to agencies working with separated children
 - Action by medical professional and para-professional personnel.
 - Ensure that pre-printed registration forms requesting **full name of child, parents or guardians and present location** of family are available and staff trained in filling them thoroughly

Checklist

- Identify most vulnerable children and places of likely separation
- Encourage parents to take home their institutionalised children immediately
- Teach parents ways to prevent loss of identity of their children and ways to stay together during flight
- Conduct emergency training at the NGOS and community levels in basic principles and practises of protection, care and tracing of separated children
- Raise awareness among governments, NGOs, teachers and local community groups of ways in which separation can be prevented
- Ensure that personnel, supplies and logistics are organized
- Pre-position registration forms in health facilities and train medical personnel in taking down full identifications of child and parents/guardians present location/address

IV: CARE AND DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS OF ALL BABIES AND YOUNG CHILDREN

Early development

Before the age of one, a young child's body and brain mature at a very rapid rate: twenty times more rapidly than at any other time of life. Evidence now shows that environmental factors have great impact on brain development at this age.

At the same time, the child is completely dependent on others to survive. The quality of a child's interaction with others and a child's cumulative experience (health, nutrition, care and stimulation) during the first eighteen months of life lead to developmental achievements which are long lasting.

Caring for babies and young children is different

Caring for separated children under the age of five is different from caring for older children. Babies cannot tell you what is wrong or why they are crying so it takes more time and attention to find out their likes and dislikes; what they can eat and what makes them sick; what upsets them and what helps them feel safe or what makes them laugh again.

While every child is different, we do know that in order to develop in a healthy way over time, they must receive:

- Protection form physical danger**
- Adequate nourishment and health care**
- Communication and sensory stimulation**
- Physical contact and touch**
- Individual interaction with a caring adult**
- Consistent and stable care (difficult in emergency – no effort should be spared to try and secure this)**

All children are entitled to protection and care under a broad range of national, regional and international instruments, including the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Of particular relevance for separated children are:

- the right to a name, legal identity and birth registration
- the right to physical and legal protection
- the right not to be separated from their families and reunited with family members if possible
- the right to provisions for their basic subsistence
- the right to care and assistance appropriate to their age and developmental needs, including the preservation of language and culture
- the right to participate in decisions about their future

Developmental needs and stages

All children go through similar developmental stages, although the expression and in some cases the timing of these stages may vary depending on cultures. Within a particular culture, mothers usually know what these stages are for healthy children. It is useful to find out the knowledge, understanding and perception of developmental stages of children within the respective culture from national staff responsible for separated children's programs; from foster mothers or from other caregivers and key community members. It is important to establish what is culturally recognized as developmentally sound. It will help the people who are responsible for separated children to identify healthy babies as well as babies who aren't thriving or who are developmentally delayed.

Healthy development will occur if these basic needs are met

Basic needs for children from birth to one year include:

- Breast milk (wet nursing if possible) or milk substitutes prepared with clean water
- Medical attention and care (for well baby check-ups and sickness)
- Immunizations (immunizations may be the only records for young separated children)
- Individual attention by an adult who can protect, nurture and treat the child with care
- Being held, touched and talked to throughout the day
- Receiving other visual and auditory stimulation

**Babies and Children under Two Must be
Carried, touched, spoken and sung to**

Their Life Depends on It

Basic needs of children from one to two years, in addition to those above:

- Addition of soft foods for early feeding; this may start as early as 6 months or as late as 10 months according to custom and available foods
- An area to learn to walk, touch things and explore the world (in some cultures babies may still be

carried at this age but will do these things later according to custom and culture)

- Adults and/or older children who teach the child words and meanings, which encourages language and early learning

Basic needs of children three to five years in addition to those above:

- Addition of more foods for nutritional development and soft foods for older children
- Exposure to more words and activities
- Have role models through older children or adults that they can copy and learn from
- A place to learn social skills and cooperative play with others
- A safe place and safe objects or toys to practice simple tasks and to develop motor skills (throwing a ball, balancing objects, filling or pouring, putting one object inside another)
- A community of people from which to learn

Communicating with young children

Why do infants need attention and stimulation?

Communication starts as soon as a baby is born. Good communication is critical to the development of the child. Babies learn to smile, and over time to talk by watching and listening to the adults around them. They carefully watch the mother's face, listen for her voice and see her reaction to their own smiles and sounds.

Babies learn to communicate with others when the mother, or caretaker and other persons in their environment:

- ◆ Looks, smiles at them and responds to their body and eye movements
- ◆ Talks to them and makes sounds
- ◆ Holds and plays with them
- ◆ Holds a toy or object and encourages them to reach for it
- ◆ Names persons, objects and feelings over and over until they understand the meaning
- ◆ Plays and repeats simple games with the baby (i.e. hide and seek)
- ◆ Encourages them to move legs, arms and body for muscle development and coordination

Babies and children communicate in many ways that do not involve language. Communication includes language, social skills and our perception of the world around us. Those caring for babies and young children must know the importance of and understand the meaning of behavior; the quality and frequency of movements, sounds, cries, glances and smiles. Likewise, even if we are not aware of it, we also communicate important feelings and perceptions of the world through our non-verbal communication. For example, through the quality of our movements, our smiles or frowns; how long we let a baby cry before we pick him/her up and other ways.

Why is language important?

Language and how to communicate with others is one of the most important tasks in the life of a young child. Children learn how to talk and how to use words to describe what they see; what they need and how they feel. Language and how to communicate with others is one of the most important tasks in the life of a young child. Children must learn how to use words and how to express themselves to others. It is not just the words they learn, but the way people smile, laugh, frown and express feelings. Young children need adults and older children to teach them words and show them how to become social beings.

Children away from their own families often have little opportunity for communication with others

In Your Setting:

Are older Children and Adults Talking to and Playing with Babies and Little Children Often?

Why is play important in child development?

Play is vital to the health and well being of a young child. Even in the worst of circumstances, children will attempt to play and to interact with the world around them. This is a normal activity that children use to manage their fears. In times of crisis, children like adults will tell others what happened to them. They cannot tell it in words, but they do it through play. Children may act out what has happened to them by repeating the same game or story or by asking the same questions again and again. By doing this, just like adults, they will feel some relief from their fears and anxieties.

Play is necessary for the cognitive and emotional development of children. It is also useful in recovery from losses, because it helps children:

- ◆ Normalize their present life
- ◆ Find relief from stress and from memories of past events
- ◆ Understand and accept what has happened to them

Loss, grief and suffering in young children

Very young children and even infants experience loss, grief and suffering. Children suffer because they have lost people they love and have had frightening experiences. They suffer in ways that are different from adults and their behavior and recovery is thus different. We know that the timing of the stages of

babies' development may vary according to cultures. Knowing what is normal for the culture and what is not can tell us about their emotional well being as well. With their limited language and emotional development, young children show their feelings by their behavior. Some children are too quiet or too loud; do not play with others; hardly ever laugh or smile or may cry very frequently for no obvious reason. Some children may fight too often or argue with others. They may have bad dreams or be afraid to go to sleep at night. They may act younger than their age. They may cling to every adult they meet or be afraid of any adult who comes near them.

The behavior may be due to emotional or physical causes. You must first find out if there isn't any medical condition. For example:

- ◆ A child who is not trying to talk or cannot say words may have a hearing problem
- ◆ A speech difficulty may be caused by a physiological problem in the mouth, tongue or vocal chords
- ◆ A child who is listless and does not want to be touched or played with may be sick, malnourished or suffering from a vitamin deficiency
- ◆ Other children who are very slow to develop (sitting, feeding themselves or walking) may have more serious physical problems or even suffer from a permanent disability
- ◆ Delays could be due to mental retardation, certain medical conditions or even HIV/AIDS

All of these cases may require the help of a doctor, nurse, child specialist or physical therapist. If the problem is not physical, due to malnutrition or illness, it may stem from emotional causes.

Most young children will recover from loss of parents and family if given adequate support (as outlined in this manual). However, emotional stress can overcome the capacity of a child to cope with what has happened. How serious the distress for a child is mitigated by the reactions of the adults and the support given the child. If adults are coping well, the children are often less affected and recover faster.

Children showing troubled behavior may:

- **Be sad because they have lost their mother and family**
- **Be distressed or shocked by the frightening events they have experienced or seen**
- **Not be receiving the care and attention they need**
- **Be suffering from physical, nutritional or health problems**
- **Suffer from more than one or all of the above**

How to help children recover from their fears and losses?

You can try the things listed below for all children in your care and for all separated children. Keep a list of other ideas you have for the children in your particular situation

- Ensure that separated children are cared for by an adult who has the time and patience to give them enough attention; who carries babies, smiles, sings, talks and listens to them
- Immediately include young separated children in any pre-school activities or recreation that may exist in the community. If none exists, encourage simple activities within your setting
- Orient caregivers to identify children who are doing poorly and to look for physical causes of distress before turning to possible emotional ones
- Ask foster mothers and care givers what they think can be done to help children recover. What have they done to help their own children? What was traditionally done to help children and families before the displacement?
- Discuss with other community members – especially members of women’s organizations, teachers, and grandparents – what is usually done to help emotionally distressed children, including orphans to recover

Some cultures have special ceremonies for healing and for recovering from past events; most have traditional stories about overcoming difficulties, which might help young children feel better. Even for infants, the ceremonies and rituals will encourage the adult caretakers to accept them and care for them in a different way

- Organize group discussions about how to help these children in severe cases; arrange for home visits and offer counseling to the caregiver or foster mother
- Reassure the children by talking to them about their lost parents and tell them that people are looking for them. Even very young children may have some understanding or they will learn what it means over time, if it is talked about in an encouraging way
- For the three to five year olds, talk about their lives before the family separation occurred, but ONLY IF staff and caregivers can do this in gentle, non-intrusive ways and can handle these discussions emotionally
- Children who demonstrate that they are ready – for example those who talk spontaneously about their families – may be encouraged to further discuss their families and feelings
- It is very important to talk to children and even babies about upcoming changes in their lives. Talk about movements and help prepare them for future changes

Even small babies can understand the soothing voice and learn to recognize a few words that will help them know what is going on

- Set up a routine and follow it as much as possible. A schedule provides a stable, familiar and comforting routine that will help to sooth and calm an anxious child
- Help care givers learn how to recognize what the children do and need to feel safer and calmer
- Remind all caregivers to reassure children over and over again that they are safe. At first, children need the repetition and the reminder on a daily basis. They may not be able to ask for this but it still needs to be given over a long period of time. This can be done through a song (lullaby) or a simple game or story that speaks of safety. The simplest game of hide and seek helps a child learn that the caregiver is still there and will stay with them, which alleviates their fears of isolation

V. CARE OF SEPARATED CHILDREN IN EMERGENCIES

In most emergencies, communities will spontaneously take in separated children, particularly babies and young children.

However, under some extreme circumstances, the capacity for care may be overwhelmed. But most often, it is outside aid that disrupts communities' accepted ways of caring for orphans or other parentless children within families. **The creation of orphanages in the midst of an emergency, or hasty adoptions, for example, destabilizes whole communities. Creating orphanages gives a clear signal to families and communities that others are there to care for children because they are not able to. It is usually a disempowering intervention.**

In emergency after emergency, thousands of families have been enticed into taking their babies and children to orphanages, making them pass as orphans simply in the hope of securing more food and material well being for them. Sometimes in the short term, children in orphanages may receive more food and material security than children in the general population. However, the problem is that no orphanage set up in conflict or post-conflict situations has yet proven that it could offer adequate emotional support and continuity of care that is needed for the healthy development of babies and young children. Also because conflict, displacement and refugee situations are fluid and unpredictable, many of these children never manage to return to their families and in the end become true unaccompanied children for life.

All babies and children need a family

No orphanage has yet proven that it could offer adequate emotional support and continuity of care needed for the healthy development of babies and young children.

In the midst of an emergency, the creation of orphanages or hasty adoptions risks to destabilize whole communities. This hurried act gives a clear signal to communities that they cannot care for their children and it encourages them to give up this responsibility to “others” who are there to do it instead.

If no orphanages, then what?

Fostering and Placement

“Spontaneous Fostering”

The best arrangement is usually when a baby or young child is spontaneously taken in by a family from the same community as the child. The family may or may not have known the child’s family previously. Even in spontaneous care arrangements, regular monitoring of the situation is essential.

- Encourage and help families who have taken in unaccompanied children to continue to care for them. If needed, provide modest assistance to the whole family as much as possible instead of only to the unaccompanied child.

“Foster Placements”

Families must be found for babies and children who have no one to care for them as well as for those in orphanages. The best way to find responsible and caring families is through respected community members, such as those who may be members of a Child Welfare and Protection Committee mentioned below. In an emergency:

- Actively look for families willing to care for babies and children who are separated from their own; enrolling the assistance of religious leaders, women’s associations, community health volunteers and others
- Take the time to learn and review child rearing practices, customs and accepted ways of caring for orphans or children who are without parents. Learn who had the responsibility for the care and outlook of the children before they were displaced or separated. The most successful emergency care program for children engages key community members in decision making from the beginning. One way to do this is help create a Child Welfare and Protection Committee, comprised of key community members, religious leaders, teachers, social workers and parents.

Child Welfare Committees can:

- Develop the standards of care for separated children
- Develop criteria for foster families and then find them
- Monitor the care of separated children in foster families
- Determine if there is any problem of abuse or neglect and generally if the care arrangement is adequate before deciding to move a child and disrupt the connection with the family
- In all cases, care of unaccompanied children by substitute families must be regularly monitored. Some

families may need support to care for the child, but the support should not be the reason for taking in the child. It is best when support can be given to the family as a whole.

All children need a family

- **Encourage and help families to continually care for the unaccompanied children whom they have taken in**
- **Look for families willing to care for children who are separated from their own families**
- **Monitor the care of separated children in foster families**

Some factors to explore in choosing a foster family

- Role the child will have within the family
- Any particular conditions in which the family would stop caring for the child
- Attitude of the extended family towards fostering the child
- Expectations of the family for material support
- Suitability of the family make-up (number of children in family, future plans, resources to care for children)
- Keeping the child within the same language, religious and ethnic background

Important process and procedures in making foster arrangements

- Comply with government guidelines relating to fostering
- Inform local authorities of the placement and as appropriate in a particular setting- UNHCR, ICRC and/or UNICEF
- Legally sanction the foster placement where possible and if appropriate
- Include a screening process and matching of family with the child's personality where possible
- Secure written agreement of the foster family to release the child if and when a family reunion becomes possible
- Discuss with the family their willingness to care for child until the child is traced to its own family members and if necessary, to care for the child long-term if no family is found
- Make sure that the family agrees to be monitored by a welfare committee, local agency or international organization
- Ascertain that the family agrees to notify not to leave with the child or change the child's placement without agreement of the monitoring committee or agency
- Record every foster placement using appropriate forms that also outline the duties and responsibilities of the foster family
- Set up a system for monitoring the placement on a regular basis

Emergency group care when family care is temporarily not possible

Even within a “Children’s Center”, a family-like life can be organized:

- Small family-like groupings, with children of mixed ages**
- Caretaker lives with the children**
- Cooking and washing done within the “family”**
- Family group eats together**

Group care is never the choice placement, especially for babies and very young children as they need a family the most. However, there are cases in emergency situations when no family placement is immediately possible and group care in what is usually called “Children’s Centers” [in some places still called “orphanages”] must be arranged. **Even if a large numbers of babies and children need emergency care, you can still create a family-like environment within a larger institutional setting.** The guidelines below will help create a model of care as close as possible to that of a family.

- Make sure that one caregiver does not care for more than one baby under two years old in order to ensure that that baby receives plenty of physical contact and attention
- Babies and young children do **not** need professional caregivers. They need to be cared for as they would be in a family. In potential caregivers, look for adults who have already cared for children and who are patient, energetic and caring
- A maximum of five children may live together under the care of a responsible adult whenever there is a child under two years old
- Mix ages and sex so that the group is more like a family in which older children take care and play with the little ones
- **Always keep siblings together; do not separate them by ages**
- Small houses or divided spaces within a larger area must be provided for each family group who lives,

sleeps, cooks and eats together within the home. This can be done even when a dormitory or other large building is used

- The family group prepares its own meals (not in a central kitchen) and eats together
- The caregiver is responsible for and involved in the child's health care, play or any other family activities as she would be in her own family
- Basic supplies such as clothing and cooking utensils are provided to the caregiver for each "family".
- Make sure that the nutrition of babies and children is adequate. If at all possible, get a wet-nurse for babies (See WHO guidelines). If this is not possible, training is critical, specifically boiling water for mixing baby formula (milk) and sterilizing feeding bottles. Monitor that this is done and that it is done properly
- Organize regular medical check-ups and ensure that vaccinations are regularly recorded and updated
- Make sure that every baby and child is photographed and fully documented, using a modified generic UN form or another approved form for the particular setting
- To the extent possible, keep unaccompanied babies and children close to the area where they were found and/or within the area where their community has gone. This assists to facilitate tracing and family reunification

VI. FINDING THE FAMILIES OF SEPARATED BABIES AND YOUNG CHILDREN

**With Speed and Determination:
IT CAN BE DONE!**

Tracing the families of older separated children, those who know their identities and place of origin, are by now a well-established part of any emergency. Using a combination of several methodologies, in some cases the success rate of family tracing has reached 90% or more. Of course, the success rate also depends on the context and how long children have been separated from their families.

On the other hand, systematic tracing of the families of babies and very young children has been a more haphazard business. Lacking methodologies and tracing tools for that age group, humanitarian and other workers usually direct tracing efforts first to the easier caseload represented in the older children. They only turn their attention to the littlest ones several months or longer into an emergency.

While tracing little children is different and more difficult, do not despair! There are many examples where the families of “untraceable” children were in fact found, thanks to the imagination and perseverance of the workers. The methods that follow have all been tried, although not all of them in every given situation. These methods have been very useful. But please, also remember to use the communities’ resources and your own imagination to find the families!

In order to find the families of babies and young children, you will need:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Speed | <input type="checkbox"/> The search must start immediately |
| Creativity | <input type="checkbox"/> Use innovative methods and also involve the community |
| Attention to details | <input type="checkbox"/> Attentive listening to young children’s words and babbles |
| Perseverance | <input type="checkbox"/> Do not leave any stone unturned, no matter how small |

The process of locating separated children’s families is comprised of four distinct components, some of them carried out simultaneously. They are:

- **Identification**
- **Registration and documentation**
- **Tracing activities**

➤ **Family reunification**

A fifth component, **Follow-Up** is highly recommended but not always feasible due to geographical distance.

Most children are not full orphans

Even if both parents are dead, almost all of the children have family members able and willing to care for them if only they can be found.

Identification

Separated babies and young children come to our attention in different ways. Sometimes they are left in hospitals or you may find them all alone on a road after an armed attack or forced population movement. Separated children need care, protection, food, medical attention, and of course their families. For those reasons, in emergency and post-emergency situations, we must actively seek to identify children who have been separated from their families.

How can separated children be identified?

Talk to people who can help you find unaccompanied children. They are community leaders, teachers, health workers, nurses, social workers, women in the market or religious leaders. Ask community groups such as women's auxiliaries, local police, Red Crescent or Red Cross Societies, sports or youth organizations, where they think children might be.

Make a list of all possible places you think children might be found. This may be in churches, hospitals, feeding stations, orphanages, near market places, temporary shelters, under the care of churches, in army barracks or prisons, gathered at border crossings, on the streets, or in the homes of family (related or unrelated) and neighbors. From your list, decide which places may be the most precarious for children. Start looking in the least safe places first.

The process of identifying separated children is not a neutral exercise. It carries the risk of disrupting a care arrangement. For example, communities who learn about the systematic identification of separated children may think that an orphanage will be built for them and may assume that this is best for the children. Spontaneous foster families may assume that some assistance to the child will follow

identification and registration interviews. It is very important to make very clear from the beginning that the intent is not to disrupt any care arrangement that is beneficial to the children. This exercise is only for the purpose of ensuring that the children are well cared for and for starting tracing their families as soon as possible.

However no matter how careful we are in presenting this, there are often misunderstandings and false expectations of assistance that you should try to clear up as soon as possible.

Registration and Documentation

As soon as an unaccompanied child is found, s/he must be registered. During the initial registration exercise, you must also make a rapid assessment of the situation. Also if needed, act to ensure immediate medical assistance or any other assistance deemed necessary or if the case may be-improve or change the care arrangement.

Why register separated children?

Separated children and young children have lost their identity. They depend on adults to document their very existence. Registration is the first step towards regaining an identity and establishing a legal process for their protection. Information on separated children need to be written down in order to begin immediate tracing activities and plan a specific comprehensive program for separated children.

How do you register young separated children?

Registration of babies and young children always goes hand in hand with questions and activities associated with the tracing of their families. The chances of finding their families are good if intervention is done early after separation. The moment of the initial registration may be the only time you have to talk to the people who found the baby; know someone who found him/her; or at least know which village or from which area the particular group came with the baby. (Please refer to section below entitled Tracing)

- Start by reviewing the sample Registration Form (See Annex 1) and modify it to fit the specific context
- Give each child a Registration Number
- Children should be both registered individually on their own Registration Forms and entered one by one in a Registration Book
- Use of a database for case management and tracing is also highly recommended.

Photographs and Interviewing

How to photograph separated children?

Taking a photograph of the babies and young children is also part of the Registration process. Babies and very young separated children must be photographed as a matter of priority over older separated children. Early on a photograph is often their only identity, the proof of their existence. Babies and young children grow up and change physically but if photographs are taken soon after separation, they have a chance of being recognized later by parents, other family members or even friends of the family.

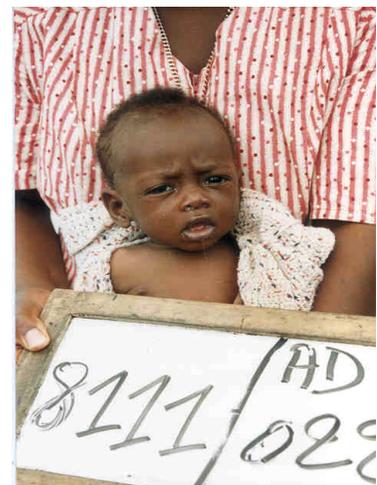
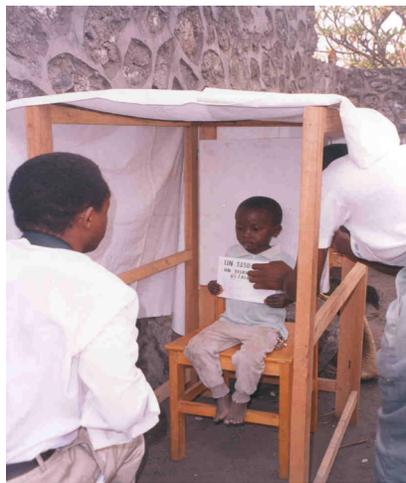
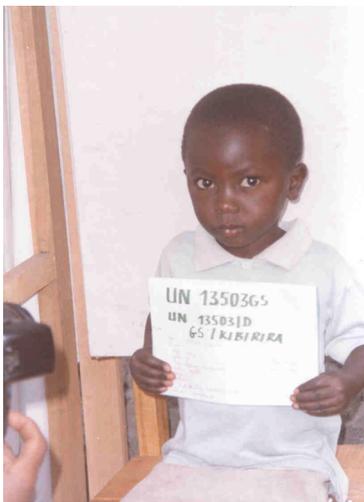
Any camera will do, but plan carefully how you will reproduce the photographs in sufficient numbers for tracing purposes

- Use a Polaroid camera for immediate use, – stapling a photo onto the child’s Registration Form right away and for immediate tracing – in cases when people are on the move and able to view photographs as they go
- It is also good to use a digital camera because it enables a large number of reproductions of all sizes and at very little cost
- Obtain a printer. Color reproductions are best but expensive; black and white prints are fine IF large enough
- Prepare a small board (white board or large cardboard) and write the child’s registration number on it in BIG LETTERS. Under the number, write the location of the child in a code* and other information you think is necessary
- If possible, do a trial run before photographing a large number of children to be sure the registration number is enlarged and dark enough to be visible on the printed photos
- The number must correspond to the Registration Number of the child on his/her Registration Form
- Sit the child on a chair and have him/her hold the signboard with the Registration Number in front at the level of the chest. The child’s caregivers or foster parents hold infants and signboards (see photo below)
- Place a plain background behind the child such as a light colored cloth or a blank wall. If there are patterns in back of the child, such as a window or leaves of a tree, it will be more difficult to recognize the child in the photo
- Always take the photo with a flash even if photographing takes place outside
- If you photograph outside, eliminate shadows and bright light by making a small tent over the child

with a white sheet or thin cloth (see photo below). If this is not possible, take the photo in a shady place

- Photograph the child only from the chest up to ensure the face is visible. Make sure the whole face and the number are included
- Place the camera on a tripod about 1 meter (3 feet) from the child
- Ask the child to look straight at you. Do what you can with babies.
- Write the name of the child on the back of the photo (if it is instantly developed) or keep a careful record of this information to match each negative
- Take TWO photographs so that you have one to place immediately in the Registration Book and one to use for tracing, either immediately or at a later stage (see tracing with photographs, below)

* Code of location may be needed to protect the child. Use a letter or number code that only you or your agency recognize.



What can children “tell you” when they are too young to talk?

Babies rely on others to "speak" for them. Speed is critical. When an infant is found, you must start asking questions around immediately. Parents, siblings or relatives could still be close by.

- Find the people who found the child and retrieve the details of what happened
- Ask where and with whom was the child. Find them before they move again
- Involve older children in looking for information on younger children
- Even if you do not find anyone who can answer these questions, try to find out among which group of people the babies/children was with when lost and from where they are
- Write down in the revised Sample Form any information they can give you about the child's identity and what happened to them
- Take a photo of the child immediately and staple it to the child's information
- If ICRC is active in the area, give a copy of the Registration Form to the Agency. If the separated child is a refugee, also give a copy of the Registration Form to UNHCR. Discuss with UNICEF whether they would need a copy as well. In most non-refugee situations and some refugee ones, a copy should also be forwarded to local or national authorities
- Make sure that a copy of each child's Registration and Documentation Form is also kept with you. Determine who is the best person to safeguard this form

Interviewing young children for registration, documentation and tracing

- As much as possible, make sure you have plenty of time
- Introduce yourself and explain to the child why you will ask questions. Do mention that you know s/he has been separated from parents; how sad it is and that you would like to help try to find them
- Ask the child if s/he has any questions about you or the interviewer
- When registering young children, first introduce some playful activities
- Even very young children may be able to tell you their names; their siblings' names or places where they have lived. Ask many questions in a soft and sensitive tone of voice, in several different ways. Above all, be patient!
- Note everything even strange words which do not seem to make much sense, as they may be useful for tracing later

- Try to make the child relax and even smiling, this will help him/her remember more about his family and previous address
- You can ask them to describe what they remember about being separated from their parents or where their brothers or sisters are
- Asking about parents and separation may upset the child terribly. If the child cries or is otherwise upset by the interview, simply stop the direct interview and say that you empathize with how sad this situation is. Remind the child then that you are looking for his/her family and want to sincerely and greatly help
- After the interview, be sure the child is with someone s/he knows and with whom s/he feels safe
- Try not to interview children at night so that they will have time to talk to others about the interview or process it in other ways before they go to sleep. This is to minimize the risk of nightmares associated with bad memories brought back during the interview
- Notify the adults caring for the child if the child is sad or upset by the interview and orient these adults on taking the time to listen to and talk with the child after upsetting interviews
- Make a note if a child needs attention, is malnourished or sick and be sure to inform others who will follow up and attend to the child's needs

If a child trusts you, feels relaxed and can smile then he or she will usually remember more of the past.

Create a pleasant and even playful environment when interviewing for registration

Documenting separated children is done over time

Once separated children are identified, photographed and registered, more information is gathered over time that slowly adds to the records of the child. This includes observations by the caregiver or foster parent and if possible yearly photographs of the child.

Children become separated from their parents and family for different reasons. They may not be able to tell you much because they are too young and they are too upset to say what took place. Other children may be confused because their parent took them to orphanages or other places and told them not to tell anyone. Other children may be initially in shock and not remember their names for days or even weeks. While it is important to try and find out what the child knows as soon as possible before they forget names and locations and before the parents or family leave the area and cannot be found again, children must also be re-interviewed over time because much useful information can resurface later. Do not be surprised if information changes over time.

Separated children must be interviewed over time

Continue to gather information over time

Enter every new piece of information in the child's file: this is important for the purpose of tracing, for verification of family ties and for the child him/herself when s/he grows up

Listening to and recording the memories of young separated children

- Collecting information on very young children, which can be useful for tracing and verification of family ties, cannot be done in a short interview. Those who care for the child on a daily basis can only do that. Childcare workers and foster mothers must be oriented in listening to and recording the things children say or act out in play**

- Childcare workers can listen for family names or who is in the family:
For example, a young child might respond to a game or song and say the name of the person who taught or sang the song to s/he. A childcare worker can ask a child if his/her mother prepared a certain food and who else liked the food; if a child is feeling safe and relaxed s/he might mention an older brother or the name of a little sister or other information in a conversation that can be collected and provide a better idea of the child's family**

- Childcare workers can listen for places or geographical clues:
For example, a child may be asked if s/he remembers living near the water, in the mountains, by «the big temple» or on the big «highway with lots of traffic» or «by the soccer stadium with the red and blue flags». Sometimes names of refugee camps also come up in young children's talk**

- Childcare workers can listen for memories of events or holidays:
For example, a child might remember attending a weekly market by the river or going to a big religious holiday in the next village that had a mosque or other festivals that might give a clue as to locations for special events**

- Every name or special words the child speaks must be recorded. They will be useful in case a claim is made for this child later.**

Family tracing

Why trace for separated children?

All children suffer greatly when they are separated from family and parents. Babies and young children may even die because of this loss. The sooner a child can be returned to his/her parents or can be placed with a family member, the better and healthier his/her life will then be. (See IV. Care and Development)

What is family tracing?

- It is activities carried out by anyone for the purpose of locating parents or other relatives of a separated child
- It is the search by parents or relatives for their missing child

Who can trace for separated children?

YOU can trace with the help of all the people in your community. Parents, agency staff and community participants carry out tracing programs; tracing relies on human resources. At the same time, a successful Tracing Program must have a **central location** where all information about possible whereabouts of family members is located. Information about children, parents and relatives may come from any location, even distant ones, many hundred of miles away and across borders, and they must be correlated with existing information in the central tracing location.

Tracing Programs thus require a complex and rigorous organization. While it is encouraged that individuals carry out their own search for their missing children, agencies who cannot guarantee regular flow of information between various locations should not attempt to set up a comprehensive tracing program. On the other hand they may collaborate with tracing agencies, for example helping identify and register children and also provide useful information about movement of populations.

Parents want to find their children and are generally eager to learn how to help in finding their children. Parents can be helped by receiving information on how to register missing children and how and where to look for their children. They should be told about the ICRC tracing program and encouraged to register their missing children with the Agency.

Communities can be active participants in tracing for children. They know far more than outsiders where the children's families may have gone. In places where communication and travel is extremely difficult, they have informal ways of getting information to distant places with difficult access. Communities are an essential resource.

Tracing methods

Speed and **time** are the two essential and critical components in the identification, registration and tracing of separated children

Immediate tracing

- As we have seen, in the case of babies and young children, registration and beginning tracing exercises are actually done simultaneously.
- Talk to surrounding community members as soon as the child is identified to find out where the child may be from and what may have happened to his/her people. Did fighting occur in one area that forced people to flee in a certain direction or location? Did a village or group of people move from one location to another and if so, where were they going?
- Show the child to people in the immediate area before more movements occur to see if anyone recognizes or remembers anything about the child or with whom s/he was. Show the child to other children and in other locations where children or adults have gathered.
- Do not throw away the clothing of the child and any other possession. It can be washed and placed in a bag. This is needed for subsequent verification of family ties and successful family reunification.
- Photograph the child's clothing and other possessions or write down a description of everything that is with the child (clothes, bracelets, necklaces, toys, etc.).
- If at all possible, do not move children from the area where they are found.
- If the child is not with the person who found him/her at the time of separation, it is necessary to try to find that person. You may have to keep trying and go from caregiver to caregiver until the one who first took the child in or cared for the child in a children's center is found. Ideally this person should have valuable information
- Help parents quickly search for lost children in the immediate area.

On-going tracing

It is difficult to find parents and other family members of babies and young children who are unable to give us their names, their parents' names, or the place of origin but in most cases it is possible.

Examples of tracing methods given here are only meant to guide your efforts. After discussing the situation with colleagues and community members, you will have to decide which of the methods outlined below are safe and useful for your particular situation.

1) Physical recognition of the child

- For babies, toddlers and other children too young to talk, physical recognition is the best and fastest form for immediate reunification. The moment a baby or child is found, ask anyone in the area if they recognize him/her. Ask if anyone with or around the baby or child knows who the child is. Show the child to anyone in the vicinity; ask others to spread the information. Utilize a megaphone or other ways of immediately notifying all in the area that a child has been found.
- Show the child to other adults who are looking for their young children. Other adults searching for children may recognize the child of a neighbor, relative or remember seeing the child with other adults. Experience in other emergencies has taught us that sometimes, large groups of children come from the same village or area where people were forced to move.
- Drive the young children around for physical recognition. In some circumstances, children can be driven from one location to another to allow others to see them. An action such as this needs to take into account the feelings and fears of the child and must only be done when an adult s/he knows and trusts accompanies the child. When it is known that many children have been reunited to a particular village or location, it may be worth setting up a visit to bring young children and infants to that location in the hopes that someone will recognize them also. Again, it must be done in a way that does not frighten the children being transported.

2) Word of mouth

- That is probably one of the most successful methods. Everyone who knows about an unaccompanied child should be encouraged to always tell others about the child. Ask others if they know anyone missing a child and also encourage parents searching for children to tell their story to anyone who will listen. In times of armed conflict when roads are impassable and formal communication like radio or telephone are not possible, people still pass on the news from one end of the country to the other. Children have been reunited under the most difficult of circumstances because someone heard that they were lost and told someone elsewhere to find them.

3) The use of photographs in tracing

- Post photos and tracing posters in both public and private places, where people gather. Display them in churches, markets, hospitals, schools, clinics, stadiums, collective centers, feeding stations, border crossings and distribution points. Put them up or pass them out at any event where a large number of people are gathering, such as a weekly market, sports event or monthly auction. Post them near where the most traffic passes by on highways, footpaths and intersections. Put them in bus stations, bus stops, train stations and taxi stands, where the most people will see them from other areas.
- Photos need to be reproduced for circulation. This can be done in the form of flyers, posters, newspapers, tracing books, signboards or any other way a group of pictures can be circulated to a large number of people over a large area. The information needs to include a copy of the photo, the name or identity number of the child and the area where the child was found. Usually, for reasons of protection, **the exact location of the child is not disclosed** on the photo itself. The name and

contact information of the tracing agency is only given. How they are copied and what size they are will be decided by how easy it is to make them, as well as how expensive it is to make them and how long it takes to prepare them for circulation.

Setting up a photo-tracing program

Photographs are very useful in tracing the family of infants and young children. At the same time, establishing a sound photo-tracing program is complex and requires a large and trained staff, usually significant transport capacity, vigilance, attention to details and compassion. The percentage of “positive” identification through viewing photographs of babies and young children is very low, among population not very familiar with photographs. In one large emergency when this was monitored, it was around 10 to 15% the first time parents viewed photo-tracing boards and the rates increased to about 25% in cases of older children (over 2 years old) or after parents have learned to “read” a photograph.

The reasons are:

Parents are so eager to find their child on the photo-boards that they tend to “recognize” a child very rapidly. Sometimes recognition via photograph is not that simple because

- Separation may have been so long ago that memories have faded;
- the baby was so young and the photo did not capture him or her adequately, or
- Parents are not accustomed to seeing photos and are unable to “read” them adequately

In one tracing location upon looking at photographs, several parents were very upset that children had lost their trunks, arms and legs. They did not immediately realize that this was the way the photo was taken. In other instances, parents pointed repeatedly at photographs of very young children insisting that it was their twelve to sixteen year old missing child.

The photo display should include as many details as possible: name of the child, if known – and does not constitute a protection issue- , possible location where he or she was found and anything else that can be helpful.

The photo tracing station must be staffed, as much as possible with staff who have the full file or at least some additional information about each child whose photo is posted. This permits a first, on-site verification of family links. Claims for a child of the wrong sex or the wrong age for instance, can be quickly clarified without having the parent go through the ordeal of traveling to the location of the child to find out it is not his or her child.

You must be prepared to assist parents, who think they have identified their child, to actually go to the location where the child is located for verification of family ties.

You must have trained staff able to help parents go through the verification of family ties as well as to support them emotionally when the verification proves negative.

4) Use of radio broadcasting and other media

If it is available, radio broadcasting and other media are another way that can reach the largest number of

people in the shortest period of time. It is a practical and convenient way to trace over large geographical areas or in places with difficult access. **In some countries the names of children and what is known about them have been broadcast over the radio, printed in the newspapers and shown on television.** Battery operated radio and special frequencies have been used with considerable success to provide tracing information on unaccompanied children to refugees and other conflict-affected populations. Media has also been used to promote the ideas and methods of tracing and reunifications as well as to inform parents of how and where to find information on their missing children.

**Over the course of four years, multiple attempts to trace the parents of a by now seven year old little girl had failed.
A simple message over the radio stating the girl's first name and that apparently of a sibling instantly brought a teary and joyful mother to the orphanage to reunite with her daughter.**

5) Talk to older children who have been reunited

A good source of information over time are the children who have successfully found their families and been reunited. In many cases, **older children have returned home and been able to tell others in the village they saw missing children.** They can identify children they met in children's centers or in orphanages or relay the names of children that they recognize to adults still searching. (See «Word of Mouth» on page 35).

6) Work in cooperation with ICRC and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Always ensure that unaccompanied children are registered with the ICRC and/or Red Cross Societies. ICRC has the capacity to register and circulate information to adults who have registered their children within the ICRC system. This is a valuable source for adults in exchanging information that can go across borders and into areas where other agencies are not allowed or capable of entering in the early stages of an emergency.

7) Computers Databases

Databases have been used for tracing purposes for a long time. It has had limited success only because you need to enter names and details not only of the unaccompanied children but of parents looking for their children as well, before you can hope to effect a positive match. Posting photographs or circulating lists of names will bring assemblage and recognition of a large number of adults besides parents, such as uncles and aunts, siblings and even friends and neighbors. While experience has shown that the success rate of positive matching using databases is very low compared with the success rate of active tracing, the chances of a positive match are further reduced in the case of babies or very young children who have limited or no name identity.

On the other hand, databases are very useful in managing information on unaccompanied children. It helps greatly in sorting out the children by any category required and in producing tracing lists that can then be posted or circulated for child name recognition. Databases are a useful tool for case management and can be used as an adjunct to tracing. They require technical training of staff, constant updating and of course a computer and the appropriate software.

8) Renew periodically efforts to trace children

Over time, especially with the *under five*-age group, tracing efforts stop and parents give up hope of finding their children. Experience has taught us that even after a year or many years, children may still be reunited with parents or other family members. Keeping the issue alive and in the minds of the community will help. If you re-circulate photographs and names of children, a parent may not see a picture of their child however just seeing the tracing photos may give them renewed hope that their child is alive and help them renew their own search efforts. One reunification in an area can give others new hope for their own search.

Do not give up hope!

Successful tracing often takes months and sometimes years of continuous efforts.

CHAPTER VII: VERIFICATION OF KINSHIP, FAMILY REUNIFICATIONS AND FOLLOW-UP

The final process following Identification, Registration, Documentation and Tracing is the verification of kinship, should a claim be made for a child. If the verification is successful then the final step of reuniting the child with the family is done.

VII-1 Verification of kinship

Once a claim is made for an unaccompanied child, it is necessary to find some evidence and proof that the adult claiming the child is in fact the child's relative. False claims occur due to accidents and mistakes in recognizing young children or by those wishing to take a child who is not their own. The latter could be to replace a child lost by the parent or to take a child for reasons of exploitation or abuse. This is especially relevant for this young age group who cannot verbally participate in their own verification and often may not recognize a relative after a short span of time.

Methods of verification include the following:

- Asking the adult to pick the child's photo out of a number of photos shown. (Please see Photo-Tracing on page 26)
- Asking the adult to describe the child, including any birthmarks, scars, skin markings, tattoos, or other physical characteristics that would identify the child
- Asking the adult to describe the clothing the child was wearing, any jewelry or objects with the child at the time of separation (if these have been saved then they can be compared to the description)
- Asking the adult to describe the place where the child was left and how the separation occurred; this can be checked against any known information about the child or the location where the child was found
- Asking the adult, if the claim is by a parent or relative, what words or phrases the child knew before the separation. (In cases where the child is already talking). This might include nicknames, pet names or a certain way a child pronounced the name of a sibling or family member
- Asking for any names of locations or places the child knew at the time of separation. These may have been repeated and recorded by caregivers (i.e. a child might talk about an older sister or «going to the river» or the name of a family pet)
- Asking the adult if they recall a favorite game or song sung by the young child

- Asking a parent for characteristics of the child’s personality (does the child have a special routine when going to sleep or strong likes and dislikes in foods, etc.)
- Testing for DNA identification as proof of family blood ties; this is recommended when more than one family member claims the same child and the dispute cannot be resolved in any other way. DNA testing is available in some places. *Names of a few places, which can do DNA testing, are in Chapter Eight*

Document the method of verification or use a verification form that is placed in the child’s records in case it is needed in the future. In some instances, a child has been reunited and then a subsequent claim has been made by another relative or family.

NOTE. As we thus saw, means of verifying family ties in the absence of identity and certainty of physical recognition are mostly the clues that both caretakers and program personnel have gathered immediately after the child was found - clothing, other possessions, location and circumstances of separation – and other information gathered over time through listening to the child – songs, words, even names of places.

VII-2 Family Reunification

In most instances, when an unaccompanied child is claimed and a verification is completed the child can then be returned to his or her family in a short time. Most reunions are joyful and poignant for those involved. However, after lengthy separations, if the child is attached to his or her caregiver or when families are severely disrupted –for example when a parent has died in the interval or other children have been born – reunifications may be delicate and have to be carried out slowly and with much preparation.

Arranging the reunification

Preparations for a reunification need to be made to ensure a smooth transition:

- Interview parents or relatives and make sure there are clear indications that they wish to care for the child again
- Spend a little time discussing household composition and arrangements; inquire about other family support such as extended family members, and watch the adults interact with the child as well as the child with the adult/s to get an idea of how easy or difficult the transition into the family will be. This will help you decide on how soon a follow-up post-reunification visit should be made
- Families may very much want to care for a child but may not have the means to do so. In cases when families indicate that they are destitute, explore ways with them in which they can get assistance in order to prevent another separation
- If the relationship is more distant or the relatives are complete strangers to the child or when the child

has formed a strong attachment to the caregiver and the family, arrange for several visits, to the extent possible. This will help the child become familiar and comfortable with the adult/s before releasing him/her.

- Parents may become very upset if the child is not released and entrusted to them as soon as a reunion has taken place. It is our role to explain that the child may have forgotten the parent and will need a little time to develop enough familiarity with the parent so that taking him/her away will not be emotionally hurtful.
- If possible, follow-up visits should be made to the family for a short time after the reunion to make sure that all is going well, both in terms of basic needs and emotional continuum.

Difficulties in completing reunifications

Even in cases when family members are eager and able to care for a child and need no further assistance, some circumstances may temporarily prevent family reunification. For example:

- Foster families may refuse to surrender the child; quick action is required in cases such as this
- There have been instances when foster families have either forcibly kept the child demanding monetary compensation for the expenses of caring for the child or have suddenly moved to an unknown location, preventing family reunification altogether. Actions should include strong negotiations like trying to involve the community, including religious leaders as well as seeking UNICEF, UNHCR and/or local authorities' intervention
- It may be impossible to obtain the appropriate legal or travel documents or visas for entry or exit. National or local services that provide such documents may be disrupted for a long period of time. Armed conflict or other dangers may prevent a safe return or seal off an area that cannot be entered or exited
- When it is not safe or possible for an unaccompanied child to be returned immediately, appropriate interim care should be provided. The government or the international organizations acting on behalf of the child should safeguard the legal rights of the child and family
- The child and family should be informed of what is happening and the idea of rejoining the family in the future kept alive. Even very young children are reassured by the retelling of information in a simple form
- Make sure that the appropriate government and UN -UNHCR in case of refugee children or other officials including an ICRC national Red Cross or Red Crescent Society delegate are notified. Secure their assistance in gaining information and maintaining communication between those awaiting reunification.

Reunification and the best interest of the child

While family reunion may be the ultimate goal for all unaccompanied children, the decision to proceed with a reunification should be made in the best interest of the child. It shouldn't be to serve another's political, philosophical nor economic interest. To the extent possible, law or customary practice as a protective measure should sanction it for the child. However this is easier said than done, as in some cases it may be difficult to determine what course of action is indeed in the "child's best interest." The most difficult cases are those children that have been separated for an extensive length of time. These children often have developed strong attachments to the foster family; have forgotten their parent's language and are well treated and integrated into another family. There are not always easy answers to what appears to be a «simple reunification». Refugee situations are more difficult because leaving a refugee child with a family in the host country will most certainly mean that the birth family will lose contact with the child over time, especially should the family repatriate back to their country.

Family reunifications should be as peaceful as possible.

For that reason if the birth family is too poor to **bring a gift to the foster family**, they should be assisted in doing so. This is a natural gesture by the child's own family in thanking the foster family for caring for their child and is always taken as such and appreciated. A modest gift for example, such as a cooking utensil, a blanket or soap is usually sufficient in rural locations, but appropriate gifts must be decided upon in each respective situation.

Family reunification should be as joyful as possible.

For that reason in situations of material hardship, "**family reunification kits**" are often provided. Naturally, they are never grand enough to risk becoming an incentive to reunification, but they may fill a small material gap. For example, providing the child's own eating utensils – cup, plate and spoon, a blanket or mat, some clothing and soap (much appreciated as well as usually in scarce supply in refugee and other emergency situations) is adequate. Sometimes the families living quarters are too small to accommodate an additional child and plastic sheeting or other material to enlarge a hut or a house should also be provided.

- Take the time to bring about the reunification full circle. After the family has signed the appropriate Reunification Forms (see Chapter 8) ensure that they either visit the children's center or have enough time to chat with the foster family whichever the case may be. In all cases allow plenty of time for good-byes.
- If possible, take Polaroid photographs of the reunification and give a copy to the foster family and another one to the birth family. Confirm that both families have each other's addresses, if they so wish.
- As mentioned above, a follow-up visit should be made about two to four weeks after reunification. If the child is reunified far away from the location of the childcare agency, refer the family to another agency close to where the family lives. In most cases, the young child will have become comfortable with the family and there may only need to be a second and final visit a few weeks later. If however, the

child is found not to be well cared for, is anxious or the family is discontent with the child, then the family requires some counseling or other assistance with the integration of the child within their family.

Reunification

PHOTO TAKEN OUT

CHAPTER VIII: SUMMARY

(To be completed.....)

Basic components to babies and young children's tracing program

- ❖ Find and then train staff in the various components of a tracing program:
 - Interviewing methods with young children
 - Working with babies and very young children
 - Completing the registration forms correctly

- ❖ Set up a central office to where all information on children and tracing is sent.

- ❖ Supplies needed:
 - Abundant amount of paper
 - Carbon paper
 - Files
 - Filing cabinet
 - Duplicated tracing forms and other forms (see Chapter 8)
 - One or more Polaroid and digital camera(s)
 - Printer
 - Boards, transparent plastic sheets, tape and scissors for photo-tracing

- ❖ Review Registration and Tracing Forms (see Chapter 8) and modify them as needed to reflect the specific situation and population

- ❖ Make many copies of these forms

- ❖ If there aren't photocopying facilities, get carbon paper and ensure at least two copies are filled out each time a new child is registered

Initial Tracing

- ❖ Save the clothes and anything else found on the child – Do NOT throw away!
Put a photograph of the child with the washed clothes and then save them

- ❖ Register the child (see Form in Chapter 8)

- ❖ Using a flash, photograph the children with a close up of their faces and upper torso. Their registration numbers need to show up clearly on the photographs

- ❖ Place one photograph in their file and then replicate it making as many copies as needed

- ❖ Ask everyone around the child what they may know about him or her; ask community members, other children and the like

CHAPTER IX: ANNEXES

Bibliography

Sample Forms (CURRENTLY BEING REVISED)

- II-1 Registration and Documentation
- II-2 Child Care Agreement with the Foster Family
- II-3 Verification of Family Ties
- II-4 Reunification
- II-5 Definition of terms