

Fact sheet N° 16

A global policy for Children and the Family PROVISIONAL PROTECTIVE MEASURES: THE PRINCIPLES TO BE OBSERVED DURING THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF A CHILD (3/3)

It is particularly important for all institutions where children are living to implement the principle of article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, known as « participation ». The natural way in which family members talk and listen to each other, and particularly parents listen to their children, cannot easily be replicated in more formal living institutions. Deliberate steps must be taken to ensure that the staff hear and take proper account of the children's views and respect their civil rights.

Also, as the Committee on the Rights of the Child emphasizes that States should make every effort to ensure, in recruiting staff to care for children in all types of institutions, that due attention is given to the need to ensure the capacity of staff to make effective use of non-violent methods of discipline. Institutions should adopt anti-bullying and anti-violence strategies and policies, and provide training for staff in their implementation*.

Working to guarantee the participation of every child

It is important that people who work with children:

1. Listen to the child and the messages that he sends about the way in which he assimilates what reaches him/her, particularly, because he no longer lives with his/her parents.
2. Ask the child to comment which helps them to evaluate if he/she has understood what they have said.
3. Give the child the chance to ask questions.
4. Leave him/her the possibility of expressing his/her feelings or create occasions for this purpose.
5. Show the child positive reinforcement
6. Communicate with the child in simple language that is clear and comprehensible for him/her, depending upon his/her age and level.

7. Use for this purpose tools like drawings, photographs, the child's personal objects, toys with little dolls (or simple pieces of wood that stand for the key people in the child's life: mother, father, brother, sister, grandparents, himself/herself, etc).

The lay-out and the decoration of the rooms should also be done with the children's participation, if that's possible, based on a family model, in a warm way that encourages living together. Every child needs to have a certain number of objects around him/her and space, however small it may be (a shelf, cupboard or part of a cupboard) for his/her personal use.

The child mustn't be subjected to maltreatment, like corporal punishment

In the event he himself/she herself is aggressive, the people who look after him/her must learn not to respond to

his/her violence with more violence but rather to help him/her to calm down, before saying anything, by means of restraint techniques that come across through the body and the voice of adults, speaking to him/her as much as possible. Verbal and psychological violence are just as serious as physical violence and should also be banned.

It is essential that the institution adopts a clear set of rules that help to avoid situations that can lead to certain abuses. Defining precisely the ways of behaving with the children (especially in the care of their physical self, medical treatment, or for example, in a case where the child is alone with an adult). In creating a system of caring, control and sanctions, the institution should guarantee the child's protection.

Data relating to the child are of a confidential nature.

Opening the institution to the outside world

In order to stimulate the development and socialisation of children as well as preparing them for their future final departure from the institution, should provide a multiplicity and variety of activities and contacts, should encourage opening up the institution to the family and

surrounding society. The interests of the children require their integration in normal life as soon as possible. The opportunities should be taken, whenever possible, to put the children in touch with the community, for example by means of parties open to the public, public works, or taking public transport, etc. Educational and recreational activities are opportunities to develop their capacity to socialise and to identify their special interests. It is also an opportunity to renew contact with the family and to teach the child new skills (cooking, playing music, putting on shows, etc).

Leaving the institution: programmes for personal autonomy

It is vital to find answers for the young people in institutions when they reach the age of 14 to 18. They cannot "be abandoned" yet again by the institution, parachuting them into society without any help. Their reintegration in society should be prepared gradually (professional training and preparation for the problems they will encounter), and should be accompanied by monitoring and support. This is in the interests of the young people, and of society too, of which they are going to form a part.

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For more information:

UNICEF "Implementation Handbook for the Convention on the Rights of the Child" (article 20); fully revised edition 2002 (* extract).

BAAF "Adoption and Fostering (Special issue: listening to children)"; 2005, 199pp. BAAF (British Association for Adoption and Fostering), 200 Union Street, London SE1 0LX, UK; www.baaf.org.uk

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