

# Foundations

# Working with Children

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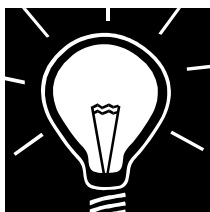
UNICEF and the OHCHR have participated in the development of sections of these Resource Packs, in accordance with the principles and policies of their missions and within the scope of their respective mandates.

Particular recognition is given to the four independent consultants who have helped in developing the training approach and materials, namely Bruce Britton, Peter Firkin, Maureen O'Flynn and David Tolfree.

Editor: David Nosworthy.

## Working with Children

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### Introduction

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Facilitators who have not recently trained or worked in the area covered by this Resource Pack, should read carefully through the various Topics, Overheads, Exercises, and Handouts before starting to plan their training activity. Please note that these materials aim to stimulate learning and discussion, and should be used in conjunction with stated policy (they do not replace it).

### **KEY CONCEPTS**

The following are the key concepts, which are addressed in this Resource Pack.

1. Communicating with children is a core skill for some personnel working with refugee and displaced populations. Those who regularly work with children will need in-depth specialised training in this field.
2. Communicating effectively with children requires specific skills some of which are distinctively different from those involved in communicating with adults.
3. Inter-personal interaction between adults and children needs to be conducted in a way that is sensitive to cultural norms.
4. Communicating with distressed children requires particular skills and personal qualities.
5. A detailed understanding of cultural factors is essential in planning programmes to facilitate children's psycho-social recovery from distressing experiences.
6. There are some key principles which can guide the process of programme planning in respect of enhancing the psycho-social well-being of children.

(These Key Concepts appear in **Overhead 1.0**).

Important: This resource pack is intended to provide an introduction to the skills of working effectively with children: it does not aim to provide comprehensive training. It is strongly recommended that personnel who have a regular need to communicate with children, and particularly those who regularly work with distressed children should seek more specialised training in this field.

### **THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD**

The human rights of children are fully articulated in one treaty: the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989), offering the highest standard of protection and assistance for children under any international instrument. It provides the most comprehensive framework for the responsibilities of States

parties to all children within their borders: by ratifying the Convention, national governments have committed themselves to protecting and ensuring the rights of all children without discrimination, including the rights of refugee and displaced children and adolescents.

The need for effective communication skills with children is implicit in many articles of the CRC. Under the CRC, the child has the right to freedom of expression and the right to express his/her views in all matters affecting him/her. This becomes important in many situations including, for example: with children who are seeking refugee status and needing to be interviewed by staff who have good skills in enabling children to articulate their claims, needs and rights; with separated children not only providing information for tracing purposes but also expressing their will etc. The views of the child have to be listened to and taken into account: this is part of the best interest principle that should be the primary consideration in all actions concerning children.

With regard to issues concerning the well-being of children affected by armed conflict and forced migration, the CRC identifies children's rights to physical and psychological recovery from the effects of armed conflicts, in an environment which "fosters the health, self respect and dignity of the child". The environment of these children will depend, for a big part, on the skills of the caring staff.

## **STRUCTURE OF THE RESOURCE PACK**

The first three topics of this resource pack offer an introduction to the skills of communicating with children. Topics 4 and 5 examine strategies for promoting the well-being of children affected by conflict.

**Topic 1** examines some introductory concepts and considers the importance of communicating with children in order to ensure that their needs and rights are met.

**Topic 2** examines some of the key skills required for effective communication with children.

**Topic 3** then considers some of the particular skills and personal qualities needed for communicating with distressed children. This topic provides a 'bridge' to Topics 4 and 5 which look in more detail at issues involved in promoting the psycho-social well-being of children who have had traumatic experiences.

**Topic 4** examines the importance of cultural factors in understanding how children react to distressing experiences.

**Topic 5** outlines a range of principles and approaches to promote the psycho-social well-being of children.

Participatory exercises, case studies and overheads are provided. Facilitators are strongly recommended to develop regionally or country-specific materials such as case studies, in order to make the training even more relevant.

## Working with Children

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### Topic 1

## The Importance of Skills in Communicating with Children

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### KEY LEARNING POINTS

- *Various categories of personnel working with refugees or the displaced require skills in communicating with children.*
- *The implementation of various articles in the CRC require skills in communicating with children.*
- *Staff who frequently need to communicate with children will need in-depth, specialised training in this field.*
- *Communicating with children requires different skills from communicating with adults.*
- *Communicating through an interpreter raises a number of difficulties.*

### WHY ARE SKILLS IN COMMUNICATING WITH CHILDREN IMPORTANT?

It is a common mistake to assume that children (from age of about 6 and over) are too young to be aware of what is going on around them or too young to be adversely affected by dangerous or distressing experiences. Communicating with children and adolescents, for a variety of purposes, can be difficult and demand skills significantly different from those used when communicating with adults.

Child participation is strongly emphasised in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and several articles are important in the context of communicating with children.

- Article 13 refers to the child's right to freedom of expression - including the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds.
- Article 12 emphasises the right of the child, who is capable of forming his or her own views, to express those views in all matters affecting him or her.
- Separated children (articles 9 and 10) require effective communication if their care and protection needs are to be met.
- Children who are seeking refugee status need to be interviewed by staff who have good skills in enabling children to articulate their claims, needs and rights (article 22).
- Article 3 states that in all actions concerning children, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.

The ability to communicate effectively with children is hugely important whether for the purposes of imparting or gaining information, enabling the child to communicate his or her concerns, or in protecting and assisting the child. The provision of accurate and truthful information can be empowering to children and facilitates their involvement in making appropriate decisions and choices. It is doubtful that the best interests of any particular child can be determined if it is not possible to effectively communicate directly with him/her.

Situations where effective communication will be important, and involve various categories of personnel, include the following.

- A child-centred situation analysis will require skills of communicating directly with young people.
- Separated children will need to be interviewed for the purposes of planning care, gaining life-history information for the purposes of family tracing and assisting the child with the many issues he or she faces.
- Children and adolescents need to be interviewed, sometimes separately from their families, in order to help determine refugee status.
- Children need to be interviewed in connection with particular assistance or protection needs which they may have - e.g. reproductive health, education etc.

In refugee and other situations of displacement, it may be necessary to communicate with individual children in many different situations and for many different purposes. Sometimes a fairly formal interview situation is required (e.g. for the purposes of documenting a separated child), while in other contexts, a more informal conversation may be used to obtain or impart information. In this resource pack, the term “interview” is used to encompass this range of encounters.

It needs to be emphasised that staff whose role regularly includes the need to communicate with children and adolescents will need detailed and in-depth training in the particular skills demanded.

## **HOW IS COMMUNICATING WITH CHILDREN DIFFERENT FROM COMMUNICATING WITH ADULTS?**

Children are not just small adults: they have needs and abilities which are significantly different from those of adults. Communicating with children has some particular requirements which include the following:

- the ability to feel comfortable with children and to engage with them in whatever style of communication suits the individual - e.g. by sitting on the ground, through play etc., and to be able to tolerate expressions of distress, aggression etc.;
- the ability to use language and concepts appropriate to the child's age and stage of development, and culture;
- an acceptance that children who have had distressing experiences may find it extremely difficult to trust an unfamiliar adult. It may take a great deal of time and patience before the child can feel sufficient trust to communicate openly;

- an ability to appreciate that children may view their situation in ways distinctively different from that of adults: children may fantasise, invent explanations for unfamiliar or frightening events, express themselves in symbolic ways, emphasise issues which may seem unimportant to adults, and so on.

## **CULTURAL ISSUES IN COMMUNICATING WITH CHILDREN**

Different cultures have different norms about inter-personal communication. In many societies there are rules about what topics can be discussed with particular adults - for example, girls in some cultures may only discuss sexual topics with aunts or grandmothers and may be even be forbidden from having contact with anyone outside of the family. Professionals who need to communicate with children need to understand the cultural norms for expressing feelings and emotions: in some societies, for example, it would be a source of great shame for children - especially boys - to cry. It is important that those trying to help children do not make matters worse by encouraging them to talk and express feelings in a way which contravenes such norms. There are also cultural norms about what forms of expression are appropriate - the use of physical touch, or eye contact, for example, will vary between cultures, while the degree of formality and social distance between adults and children may, in some societies, limit the exchange of personal information and feelings.

## **LANGUAGE AND THE USE OF INTERPRETERS**

There are obvious advantages in communicating in the child's mother tongue: where the adult is not from the same culture as the child, it may be more difficult to interpret the child's gestures and body language, and to grasp the nuances of words and expressions.

Where the use of an interpreter is unavoidable, it is vital that the interpreter is fluent in both languages, understands any specialist terminology and is able to use words which the child can understand. He or she needs to be acceptable within the community and be seen as impartial. It is vital to ensure that the interpreter has good skills at communicating with children, can cope with any emotions being expressed and does not influence the conversation by mis-translating, summarising or omitting selected sections of what is said.

## **COMMUNICATION IN THE CONTEXT OF DISPLACEMENT**

Very often, effective communication is impeded in these situations by an atmosphere of mis-trust and suspicion. There may be real fears regarding the way in which information might be used, especially when the interviewer is perceived as a public or authority figure. Moreover, some children will have had experiences (such as some form of exploitation) which will have demonstrated that adults are not always reliable or trustworthy: hiding information, or revealing incomplete or inaccurate information may have been used as a survival strategy. Opening an effective and transparent line of communication with a child may take a great deal of time and trust-building.

## **TRAINING MATERIALS FOR TOPIC 1**

Overhead 1.1: Key Learning Points for Topic 1	Summary of key learning points
Overhead 1.2: The CRC and Communicating with Children	Effective communication with children is required in order to realise a number of their rights as detailed in articles of the CRC
Exercise 1.1: CRC Articles Implying the Need for Communication Skills	Card exercise to identify relevant articles in the CRC
Exercise 1.2: Cultural Factors in Communicating with Children	Assists participants in identifying cultural issues involved in communicating with children

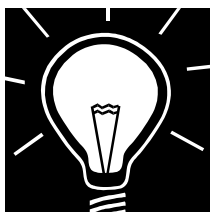
## **FURTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR TRAINING**

Ask participants to identify situations in which they need to communicate directly with children and adolescents. What particular issues emerge in communicating with these young people?



## Working with Children

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### Topic 2 Key Skills

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#### KEY LEARNING POINTS

- *The physical location of an interview has an important bearing on its effectiveness.*
- *There are particular attitudes and approaches which facilitate communication with children, though there are some cultural variations.*
- *There are also some specific skills and techniques which enable children to express themselves.*

#### PROVIDING AN APPROPRIATE LOCATION AND ENVIRONMENT

Selecting an appropriate location for interviewing children, or having an informal conversation, can have an important bearing on the effectiveness of the communication. For most young people, a quiet space with comfortable and culturally appropriate seating may be the ideal choice, though for others going for a walk, or playing or working together may provide the best opportunity for communication.

**Privacy** can be important, especially when the interview relates to personal or potentially painful information. Equally, some children may prefer to be accompanied by a trusted adult or friend.

**A non-distracting environment** can also be important - especially if the child has been exposed to an environment of uncertainty, change and anxiety.

**Comfortable seating** will help the child to feel relaxed. Different cultures will have different norms about the appropriate distance and relative seating arrangements for the child and the adult: in general, sitting on the same level is often found to be appropriate, with no barriers (such as desks etc.) between the two people.

#### ATTITUDE AND APPROACH

Communicating effectively with children requires a particular approach, and although some techniques will vary from culture to culture, a vital objective is to facilitate children's self-expression. In general, the following guidelines should be followed.

**Introductions** are important so that the child knows who the interviewer is, what role he or she has, and what is the purpose of the meeting with the child.

**Confidentiality** should be respected: but it is also important to explain carefully why information is being collected, who will know about it and how it will be used.

**Simple language** should be used, and which the child can readily understand. If there is a suspicion that the child has not understood something you have said, it can be helpful to **ask the child to repeat or paraphrase**.

**A friendly, informal and relaxed approach** will help the child to feel at ease.

**Adequate time needs to be given** to help the child to feel relaxed, to develop mutual trust and to enable the child to feel that he/she is being taken seriously. Time for playing together may be helpful in developing rapport, and conversation about neutral issues (school, games etc.) may be appropriate before more personal or painful topics are discussed.

It is important to **allow for children's limited concentration span**: a series of shorter meetings may be more effective than a few longer ones.

**A non-judgemental attitude** which conveys acceptance of the child, whatever he or she has or has not done, is essential. It is important to convey respect for his or her beliefs, feelings etc. and not to judge his or her behaviour - for example in the case of former child soldiers.

**Taking notes** during the interview may be distracting for the child and raise questions and uncertainties about confidentiality. If it is necessary to take notes, it is important to explain the reason and seek the child's permission first.

**Ending the interview or conversation** appropriately is also important: providing the child with an opportunity to ask questions, say anything else which he or she would like to say etc and summarising what has been said or agreed may help the child feel that he or she has been taken seriously. It is also advisable to finish the interview on a positive element particularly where the child has been recounting traumatic events.

After the end of the interview, it is important to **make sure that there is follow-up support available to the child**, especially if painful and difficult issues have been discussed.

These points are summarised in **Overhead 2.2**.

## **VERBAL AND NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION**

People communicate through words (verbal communication) and through a wide variety of gestures, body language, tone of voice etc. (non-verbal communication). It is important to note that there are significant differences in the way different cultures use non-verbal communication such as gestures. It is particularly important when working with children to be sensitive to what they communicate non-verbally as this may give important clues to what they are really thinking or feeling, especially when it is difficult to put their ideas into words. Equally, children can be highly sensitive to adults' non-verbal behaviour so it is important for the adult to be aware of what he or she may be conveying to the child.

## HELPING THE CHILD'S SELF-EXPRESSION

There are various techniques which may help the child to express himself or herself.

**A quiet tone of voice** can help the child to feel safe, and shows that the adult is being sympathetic.

**Gestures** such as nods of the head (or whatever is appropriate within the particular culture) can encourage the child to continue to talk.

**An appropriate degree of eye contact** also helps the child: again this will vary with culture.

**Listening attentively and demonstrating that you have heard the child** - e.g. by summarising what has been said, seeking clarification etc. confirms to the child that you are actively listening.

**Showing respect for the child's feelings** is also important - e.g. by reflecting the feelings ("that must have made you feel very sad/angry", etc.). This helps to convey *empathy* - the capacity to identify with the child's situation and feelings.

**Avoid interrupting** the child.

**Asking open questions** generally will encourage the child to explain something in his/her own way: for example, an open question such as "tell me about life in your village" may elicit a more free response than a closed question such as "where did you live?". It is usually best to avoid leading questions - i.e. those which suggest an answer to the child such as "You like school, don't you?"

These points are summarised as **Overhead 2.3**.

## TRAINING MATERIALS FOR TOPIC 2

Overhead 2.1: Key Learning Points for Topic 2	Summary of key learning points
Overhead 2.2: Attitude and Approach to Communicating Effectively	A framework for encouraging children to express themselves
Overhead 2.3: Facilitating Children's Self Expression	Lists key techniques for helping children to express their views
Exercise 2.1: Reflection Exercise	Helps participants to identify the qualities and skills needed to work with children
Exercise 2.2: Interviewing Children	Role play exercise which enables participants to practise interviewing skills

## FURTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR TRAINING

The facilitator can conduct a semi-rehearsed role play with a volunteer member of the group who plays the role of a child: the aim is for the facilitator, playing the role of interviewer, to demonstrate negative approaches and skills, which can be amusing as well as illuminating.

## Working with Children

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### Topic 3

## Identifying and Communicating with Distressed Children

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### KEY LEARNING POINTS

- ***Children's behaviour can give important clues about distressing events which have been experienced.***
- ***Communicating with distressed children requires particular skills; and some professional workers will need specialised training in this area.***
- ***Difficulties in helping children to communicate may have their roots in the child's experiences: they may also reflect the lack of skills on the part of the interviewer.***
- ***Extreme caution should be exercised before distressed children are offered any form of psychological therapy or counselling: to be appropriate, such approaches must be rooted in the child's culture.***

### IDENTIFYING CHILDREN'S DISTRESS

Many refugee or displaced children will have had experiences which are deeply distressing to them - separation from family members, witnessing frightening events, experiencing abuse, facing danger, disruption to their education, loss of friends, uncertainty about the future and so on. Many of the children who need to be interviewed by NGO or UNHCR staff will have had these kinds of experience. Very often, the way they behave in their day to day lives will reveal signs of their distress. These may include the following:

- lack of interest and energy – apathy;
- withdrawal from relationships with adults or other children;
- excessive clinging to familiar people;
- prolonged sadness or generalised anxiety;
- loss of appetite;
- sleep disturbances;
- headaches or other somatic complaints;
- poor concentration, restlessness, sudden changes in mood etc.;
- sexual behaviour inappropriate to age;

- aggressiveness or destructiveness;
- preoccupation with violence, suffering or separation in their play.

Such reactions will vary from child to child and between different cultures. These points are summarised in **Overhead 3.2**.

Many of the children who need to be interviewed by staff of UNHCR or NGOs will have had distressing experiences: these staff members may need specialist training in working with children. The following sections are meant as an introduction to some of the considerations that are taken into account when working with distressed children.

## **COMMUNICATING WITH DISTRESSED CHILDREN**

Distressed children may find it extremely difficult to talk to others about what they have experienced. Some will have had experiences which make it especially difficult to trust adults, especially those they do not know well. Some children will be afraid of being overwhelmed by their emotions if they express them to someone else. Some will probably try to avoid adults: others may use particular behaviours to "test out" whether adults will react critically or sympathetically towards them. Some children will be feeling guilty or ashamed - for example they may feel a sense of responsibility for what has happened: such feelings may make it doubly difficult to talk about what has happened.

In many societies, it does help distressed children if they can be helped to talk about their experiences with understanding and supportive adults, and to express their feelings in cultural appropriate ways - perhaps through singing, dancing, drawing or play. Where others have shared similar distressing experiences, group activities may be the most helpful way of helping the child.

In some societies, people are encouraged to "forget" painful experiences, but some children may find this impossible and may need to remember the experience and talk before they can "forget" or come to terms with it.

In situations where it is necessary to get children to talk about painful experiences (for example, the separated child may need to talk about the experience of separation in order to provide essential information to aid family tracing efforts) or where a child communicates a need or desire to talk, the following may help the staff in this difficult task.

1. **Allow the child to set the pace:** children should not be forced to discuss or reveal experiences and the lead should always come from the child. Allow the child to set the pace of the interview and take note of non-verbal signals which indicate that the child does not wish to continue. It may be necessary to stop the interview, or if it is critical to find out information, to have a break and come back to it.
2. **Give adequate time to the child:** don't expect him/her to reveal the whole story in one session: very often it is best for the child to reveal a little of his/her painful memories at a time. Don't rush to fill silences - these may provide important spaces for quiet reflection.
3. **Provide emotional support and encouragement to the child,** in whatever ways are appropriate to the child's culture and stage of development.

4. **Accept the child's emotions, such as guilt and anger**, even if they seem to you to be illogical reactions to events. Talking through painful experiences may enable the child to view them in a different light - for example to let go of a sense of responsibility for what has happened. Talking through events that led to the child being abandoned, for example, may enable him/her to understand the situation that was faced by his/her parents and this may lead to the child being able to let go of feelings of anger and bitterness. It is often helpful to convey to the child that the feelings he/she is experiencing are quite normal and understandable.
5. **Never give false reassurance**: telling a separated child that "we will soon find your parents" raises expectations which, if not met, may increase the child's loneliness and lack of trust towards adults. Helping the child to face the reality of his/her situation is almost always preferable to avoiding it, provided this is done in an atmosphere of trust and support.
6. **Talking about difficult situations may enable children to work out their own solutions**: this is especially the case with older children and adolescents. Simply listening to the problem in an attentive and supportive way can be experienced as extremely helpful. If young people can arrive at their own decisions, this is often more satisfactory than being provided with advice from an adult. For example, it may be more helpful for a separated child who is not attending school to talk around his/her situation and discuss the advantages and disadvantages of attending school than for the adult simply to advise him/her to attend.
7. Sometimes it is **necessary to allow regression** - i.e. a return to behaviour typical of younger children: for example, children or adolescents may need personal care, affection and physical contact more characteristic of younger children in order to overcome the emotional problems they are facing.

These points are summarised in **Overhead 3.3**.

## **RESPONDING TO THE UNCOMMUNICATIVE CHILD**

When distressed children continue to find it difficult to communicate, it is important to try to identify possible reasons for this - is the problem perhaps with the adult?

1. Is the adult expecting the child to confide in him/her before establishing mutual trust?
2. Has the child been given an explanation of the adult role and the purpose of the interview?
3. Is language being used which he or she doesn't fully understand?
4. Is the adult uncomfortable or embarrassed by silence or the child's emotions, or talking too much or responding in a way which is perceived by the child as critical?
5. Do the child's experiences bring back painful memories for the adult from his or her own experiences that he or she is struggling to deal with?

If the adult is satisfied that the reasons lie within the child and his/her experiences, then the following may help to unblock communication.

1. Be patient and allow time to build up trust. Give lots of positive messages of warmth and acceptance.
2. Use games, activities, drawing, writing, outings etc. to help develop trust and open lines of communication.
3. Avoid pressurising the child to talk: continue to communicate but also continue to allow silences.
4. Find out more about the child from others who know him/her.

### **WHEN IS IT APPROPRIATE TO SEEK COUNSELLING OR THERAPY?**

Children who have had distressing experiences are usually best helped by their families and communities. The following will be particularly important:

- the provision of support from their own (or substitute) families;
- the restoration of a structure to their daily lives (school and pre-school play a vital role here) and the provision of opportunities for play and recreation;
- the provision of support from other adults and children within their communities.

If children continue to display some of the signs of distress listed above, over prolonged time-scales, it may be that they need specialised professional help. However, **extreme caution** should be exercised in providing counselling or psychological therapy unless these are rooted in the local culture. Most approaches to counselling and psychological therapy have been developed in the West and cannot easily be translated into non-western societies. The inappropriate use of such approaches can be not only unhelpful, but potentially damaging to the child. On the other hand, in societies such as the former Yugoslavia which are familiar with counselling and therapeutic approaches, these may be appropriate, though there may be questions about the affordability of such individual treatment. The case of Dusan (**Exercise 3.5**) may raise the question of the appropriateness of psychological treatment.

If counselling or therapy is deemed to be appropriate, this should be undertaken in a stable environment which is not likely to be disrupted and where support and follow-up is available for the child.

### **TRAINING MATERIALS FOR TOPIC 3**

Overhead 3.1: Key Learning Points for Topic 3	Summary of key learning points
Overhead 3.2: Indicators of Distress in Children	Eleven signs that may reveal distress in children
Overhead 3.3: Communicating with Distressed Children	Guidelines for how best to communicate with distressed children
Exercise 3.1: Personal Experiences of Being Helped	Identifies emotional reactions to distressing events and the qualities and activities of people who responded helpfully

### Action for the Rights of Children (ARC)

Exercise 3.2: Cultural Factors in Helping Distressed Children	Identifies and discusses cultural factors which impact on communication with distressed children
Exercise 3.3: Communicating with Maria	Identifies reactions in distressed children and enables participants to practise skills in working with them
Exercise 3.4: Facilitating Children's Self-Expression (1)	Video exercise to stimulate discussion of the use of traditional activities as means of communication
Exercise 3.5: Facilitating Children's Self-Expression (2)	Case study exercise to stimulate discussion of communicating with a severely traumatised child
Exercise 3.6: Facilitating Children's Self-Expression (3)	Exercise to discuss the use of activities as a means of communication

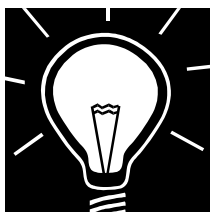
### **FURTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR TRAINING**

Ask participants to identify problems and issues they experience in communicating with distressed children and use these as a basis of discussion. Compile case studies based on the participants' own experience and use as role play exercises.



## Working with Children

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### Topic 4

## Psycho-social Intervention and Cultural Considerations

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### KEY LEARNING POINTS

- ***People in different cultural contexts perceive, understand and make sense of events and experiences in different ways. Traditional beliefs and practices, religious beliefs and political ideology may confer a sense of meaning on events and thereby contribute to healing and recovery.***
- ***Different societies have different norms about responding to and dealing with distressing events such as loss and death.***
- ***Understandings of, and responses to, distressing events are experienced collectively rather than individually in many cultures.***
- ***Intervention strategies need to build on traditional norms and practices and to avoid inadvertently undermining them.***

A central aspect, for any child, of recovering from distressing experiences is the task of understanding and making sense of their experiences, accepting and “processing” the feelings associated with them and integrating these understandings into their view of themselves and their world. Religious and spiritual beliefs can be an important source of meaning and can provide a vital form of expression of the feelings associated with traumatic experiences. Traditional healers can play a significant role in helping to confer meaning and help the individual to deal with his or her reactions to events. Carrying out culturally prescribed rituals can be extremely important - for example in mourning the dead, or in seeking forgiveness. Political ideology can also be significant in enabling people to understand and make sense of events: sometimes people who have been directly involved in conflict cope better than others if they can derive meaning through ideological commitment.

### PSYCHO-SOCIAL INTERVENTION

Developing on issues raised in Topic 3, Topic 4 examines strategies for promoting the psycho-social well-being of refugee and displaced children. The CRC identifies a child’s right to appropriate measures to promote their psychological recovery and social reintegration as a result of their experiences of armed conflict (Article 39), but opinion is divided on the most appropriate means of achieving this.

Recent years have seen a dramatic growth in programmes designed to assist in children’s recovery from traumatic events and experiences: many of these have

uncritically applied western, individualised approaches to counselling and therapy to cultures in which they do not readily apply. The consequences can be not only wasteful of scarce resources but also potentially damaging to children.

This resource pack strongly advocates for community-based approaches which acknowledge, and build on, existing coping strategies within the community, and which seek to enhance the resilience of children and their families. An understanding of the culture is of fundamental importance in planning programmes: without recognising and valuing what already exists within the culture there is a great danger that programmes will undermine existing practices and traditions which may be of great importance in facilitating children's recovery.

The term "trauma" is the subject of some confusion. The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines the term as "morbid condition of body produced by wound or external violence", but frequently it is used to describe an **event** which may have a traumatic effect rather than the effect itself. Many western approaches to therapy make assumptions that certain types of event have universal and predictable effects on people, but it is clear that frightening or dangerous experiences do not automatically lead to any particular human reaction, and that factors derived from individual characteristics, cultural factors and environmental differences mediate between the event and the individual's response.

Facilitators are encouraged to look at the **ARC Resource Pack on Child and Adolescent Development, Topic 3** which examines the concepts of risk and resilience and which is highly relevant to working with children who have had traumatic experiences. Reference can also be made to the **ARC Resource Pack on Community Mobilisation**.

## **RESPONDING TO AND DEALING WITH DISTRESSING EVENTS**

Different societies have different traditional ways of responding to difficult life-events such as death and loss, and it is vital to understand them if interventions are to reinforce traditional means of coping rather than undermine them. In many societies, for example, it would be disrespectful or even insulting for a stranger to ask someone to talk about personal or painful events: in others, it would confer a great sense of shame for children to be seen to be crying. Many societies have rules about the expression of emotion: the direct expression of emotion is frequently discouraged, while discussions tend to centre on events rather than the emotions they arouse.

## **UNDERSTANDINGS OF, AND RESPONSES TO, DISTRESSING EVENTS**

In many traditional societies, the socialisation of children emphasises compliance in the undertaking of roles and tasks. Children live in much more of a communal context than is typical of western societies, and their sense of identity may be not so much as that of an individual, autonomous person but rather what has been described as "self-embedded-in-community". It has frequently been observed that in such collectivist cultures, people tend to experience traumatic events not so much in a private and individualistic sense but in a collective way. It is not surprising to find that many indigenous healing systems emphasise the community context and the spiritual dimension.

Katz and Wexler<sup>1</sup> define healing as “a process of transition towards greater meaning, balance, connectedness and wholeness, both within the individual and between individuals and their environment”. Many non-western ethnomedical systems do not distinguish body, mind and self, while social relations are understood as a key contributor to health and a sense of well-being. It follows that if people tend to experience events collectively, they are likely to use mechanisms to cope collectively.

In contrast individualised Western “talk-therapy” approaches aim to alter the individual’s behaviour through gaining insight into his or her inner-self. This approach is based on a conception of the person as a distinct and independent individual who is capable of self-transformation in isolation from the social context - an approach that is alien to many cultures.

## **INTERVENTION STRATEGIES**

The development of strategies to promote the psycho-social well-being of children and families needs to be based on a thorough understanding of existing cultural norms, traditions and practices. For this reason, there can be no universal prescription: rather an approach founded on community needs has to be developed.

**Topic 5** of this Resource Pack explores further some of the principles and approaches which may be used in programme planning.

## **TRAINING MATERIALS FOR TOPIC 4**

Overhead 4.1: Key Learning Points for Topic 4	Summary of key learning points
Exercise 4.1: The Importance of Socio-cultural Understanding	Helps participants to identify the socio-cultural information required for planning psycho-social interventions

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<sup>1</sup> Katz, R and Wexler, A (1989): “Healing and Transformation” in Peltser, K and Ebigbo, p (eds.) (1989): “Clinical Psychology in Africa, Nigeria, Emugu

## Working with Children

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### Topic 5

## Psycho-social Intervention – Principles and Approaches

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### KEY LEARNING POINTS

- *Programmes should seek to identify and strengthen existing coping mechanisms and not impose alien ones.*
- *A broad community development approach which responds to the range of current stresses and difficulties is often the most effective strategy for facilitating psycho-social recovery.*
- *Supporting parental capacity should be seen as a key strategy which can be pursued in a variety of different ways.*
- *Children who have experienced wholesale change, loss and disruption to their lives benefit greatly from an early restoration to a sense of structure in their lives, a sense of purpose and the rewards of achievement.*
- *Schools can play an important role in identifying and monitoring vulnerable children, enhancing their understanding of events, and providing personal support.*
- *Care needs to be taken to avoid inappropriate responses which may serve to inflict secondary distress on already vulnerable children.*

### THE IMPORTANCE OF CULTURAL UNDERSTANDINGS

As was discussed in **Topic 4**, all cultures contain within them means of dealing appropriately with painful and stressful issues. Failure to understand these may result in the development of inappropriate, unhelpful or even damaging forms of assistance based on experience from other, possibly alien, contexts. The most helpful forms of intervention are likely to consist of measures which build on local traditions and which strengthen familiar coping mechanisms. Two examples of specific approaches employed in actual programmes are given below.

#### **An Approach Rooted in the Culture of Refugees from south Sudan**

*In a remote part of northern Kenya is a large refugee camp in which there is an extraordinarily large concentration of unaccompanied children, mainly boys. The exact circumstances of their flight from Sudan and their separation from their families is not entirely clear. What is clear is that the process of flight, initially into Ethiopia, and later because of threats to their safety there, the long*

*walk through south Sudan and into Kenya was fraught with dangers, from soldiers, from wild animals and from the threat of starvation, dehydration and disease. If any group of refugee children would be expected to be deeply affected by their experiences of war, separation, multiple displacement and hardship, it would be this group.*

*From the beginning, Save the Children Sweden saw the need to construct a composite programme based carefully and sensitively around the cultural traditions and practices of the refugees. Care arrangements were based on the tradition of group-living in "cattle camps" and the acceptability of care provided by unrelated families. A range of activities facilitated the children's recovery from traumatic experiences in a way which respected culture and tradition: these included story-telling, composing poems, recounting and discussing dreams, traditional singing and dancing and an art form based on the traditional importance of knowing the colours of each boy's bull. The involvement of the whole community was significant in emphasising the importance of collectively coping with shared experiences.*

*Despite the repeated experiences of danger, fear and flight, and the fact of separation from their families, the psycho-social health of these children remained remarkably good: only a tiny percentage were functionally impaired, as evidenced by their behaviour patterns, the quality of inter-personal relationships and their performance in school. An investigation of their psychological health revealed remarkably few children reporting symptoms of stress and it was clear that, in general, these children were coping remarkably well.*

*Another example comes from the work of Refugee Action, a UK based NGO working with Bosnian refugees in the UK. A significant cultural custom is the "coffee and talk" session which people used to share life problems and give and receive support. In the UK it was found that this tradition had ceased to exist, and the project felt that it would be more appropriate to incorporate a "coffee and talk" approach rather than setting up a more overt means of addressing the community's mental health problems.*

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF THE TOTAL CONTEXT**

Experience suggests that refugees and displaced persons themselves rarely identify psychological issues as their priority concern: people's reactions to war and displacement tend to be inextricably bound up with their reactions to the totality of their current situation. It is generally unhelpful to split off people's reactions to events in the past and treat these in isolation from the whole range of problems they are experiencing.

It is vital that programmes are planned on the basis of the communities own view of their problems, needs, resources and priorities, and not on outsiders' definitions of what their needs might be. It is generally wise to avoid seeing psycho-social well-being as the preserve of specialist workers: rather it should be seen as the

responsibility of everyone within the particular context - UNHCR, UNICEF and NGO staff from all sectors, community leaders and so on.

The most effective route to restoring the sense of well-being of children affected by conflict, violence or forced migration is often the adoption of a broad community development strategy which:

- enables communities to begin to restore control over their own lives;
- facilitates the development of community facilities such as schools, pre-schools, health facilities and recreational activities;
- helps to restore or create a range of other supportive structures within the community;
- and which enables people to address those aspects of their lives that continue to create stress for them.

## **SUPPORTING PARENTAL CAPACITY**

As suggested in **Topic 3 of the ARC Resource Pack on Child and Adolescent Development**, children's psycho-social well-being is inextricably bound up with that of their parents or other carers, and it is with this in mind that measures to enhance parental competence and to develop protective factors for parents within the community may be an important part of any strategy to promote the well-being of children. A wide range of different approaches can have an impact on the well-being of parents, especially women: from appropriate and accessible health services to economic activities, from educational opportunities and programmes to promote livelihoods to cultural and recreational activities. While some programmes specifically aim at enhancing parental competence (for example Homecraft Groups), others aim more generally to improve the quality of life and opportunities for development by targeting women. The literature on resilience (see **ARC Resource Pack on Child and Adolescent Development Topic 3**) suggests that *empowering people* can lead to increased resilience. Issues of social mobilisation and empowerment, especially of women, are considered in the **ARC Resource Pack on Community Mobilisation**.

Separated children may be disproportionately affected by their experiences: not only have they experienced violence, loss of their family and the experience of sudden uprootedness: they are having to cope with all of this without the presence and support of familiar adults. It is for this reason that identifying these children, documenting them and tracing their families is an urgent priority: see **ARC Resource Pack on Separated Children Topic 3**.

## **CREATING A SENSE OF NORMALITY**

Children who have been exposed to violence, loss and disruption to their lives often express a change in their beliefs and attitudes, including a loss of trust in others. The re-establishment of familiar routines and tasks creates a sense of security, of purpose and meaning and enables them to start functioning again as fully as possible. It is in this context that the implementation of structured recreational activities and schools (and pre-schools) are hugely important in

facilitating children's recovery from their experiences. The role of schools and teachers is dealt with below.

The restoration of the child's capacity to trust other people is a task for everyone, especially those closest to children - i.e. parents or other carers, school-teachers, NGO staff, community leaders and so on.

Adolescents - who may not be able to take advantage of formal educational opportunities - may be especially at risk but relatively invisible in the refugee or displaced situation.

Involving them in useful tasks in a real (i.e. in a non-tokenistic and non-patronising) way, developing vocational training programmes, and encouraging youth in self-help activities may all be useful ways of restoring a sense of purpose and in helping them to rebuild self-esteem.

## **THE ROLE OF SCHOOLS AND TEACHERS**

The **ARC Resource Pack on Education** offers a useful analysis of the role of teachers in promoting children's psycho-social well-being: the following is a summary of some of the key points from that discussion.

**Assessing the needs of children and monitoring their situation and well-being.** Teachers may be the only professional group to have regular contact with children and hence have a vital role in identifying vulnerable young people and monitoring their progress.

**Schools provide a daily structure, purpose and meaning for children:** this is frequently identified by affected populations as an urgent priority in emergency situations.

**Education facilitates the development of children's understanding of events** and enhances their chance to have a say in future decisions. The teaching of such subjects as history, geography and civics may be especially important, particularly if the teaching promotes dialogue and discussion which enables children to "process" information and make sense of it in their own lives.

**Teachers can provide avenues for the expression of feelings and opportunities for more personal support:** teachers can act as good role models, can offer a concern for their well-being and a context in which they can feel accepted and valued. In some contexts, it has been possible to extend the role of teachers to give them a more specific role in providing emotional support, but this requires a level of training and support for the teachers which is not always possible to provide.

**Schools can adopt a broader role of education of children and others in the community:** often schools have become vital resources, and sources of support, for the whole community. For example, through Child to Child approaches, schools are often used to promote awareness of health issues and of social problems.

**The school can be an important resource for promoting reconciliation** not just between children but within the community as a whole.

## **THE DANGER OF INAPPROPRIATE RESPONSES**

Some well-meaning agencies, concerned about the mental health of refugee and displaced children and families, have implemented programmes which have a real danger of actually making matters worse. As a general rule, the following should be avoided:

- responses which label children as “traumatised” or “mentally ill” - this may have an unhelpful, stigmatising effect. It is often more helpful to convey the idea that distressed children may be responding normally to abnormal events.
- responses which isolate children from the many others who may have had similar experiences. Programmes which “treat” children away from their own environment (such as in “trauma centres”) are to be avoided, and treating children in institutional settings has the potential to be particularly damaging.
- programmes which use methods that transgress cultural norms - for example encouraging children to discuss and express their feelings about painful memories in cultures which do not sanction such behaviour.
- agency staff should also take care to avoid allowing children to be interviewed to “tell their story” to researchers and journalists: insensitive interviewing can easily cause secondary distress. The child’s best interest should be a guiding principle in all situations.

## **THE SITUATION OF FORMER CHILD SOLDIERS**

Child soldiers and others who have taken part in violence and combat may have very particular needs if they are to be successfully reintegrated into society. The **ARC Resource Pack on Child Soldiers** addresses these issues in some detail.

## **TRAINING MATERIALS FOR TOPIC 5**

Overhead 5.1: Key Learning Points for Topic 5	Summary of key learning points
Overhead 5.2: The Role of Schools and Teachers	Potential roles that schools and teachers can play in promoting children’s psycho-social well-being.
Exercise 5.1: Building on Existing Cultural Traditions	Brainstorm and discussion exercise
Exercise 5.2: Psycho-Social Well-being - Everybody’s Responsibility	A role play exercise to illustrate the need for a broad community-based strategy
Exercise 5.3: The Role of Schools in Psycho-Social Well-being	A small group exercise using SWOC analysis

## **FURTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR TRAINING**

Compile one or more case studies of individual children or who have been adversely affected by their experiences and ask participants to “map” the potential sources of support: then discuss which ones can be strengthened and by what means.



**The ARC Resource Pack on Community Mobilisation Exercise 3.2** provides a small group exercise to examine risk and protective factors for children and parents.

## Working with Children

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### Sample Programmes

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Different participants are likely to have different learning needs and priorities. We have divided participants into three broad groups: senior managers, sector co-ordinators and field staff.

**Senior managers** are those people who have key responsibility for an NGO's operations in a country or region or a UNHCR Section. They will have overall responsibility for strategy and resource allocation within the organisation's policy framework. Senior managers' needs are likely to be best served through briefings.

**Sector co-ordinators** comprise those people who have responsibility for a particular aspect of their agency's work in a country or region or who have a responsibility for a particular function within an operation, such as for example UNHCR programme, protection or community services officers. Sector co-ordinators are those responsible for translating policy into practice and ensuring that programme budgets reflect the necessary resources to support good practice.

**Field staff** are those people working in the field who are responsible for implementing the programme activities. They often have considerable front-line experience. Field staff may value the opportunity to develop and practise new skills as well as develop their knowledge and understanding.

Training programmes should be designed with the responsibilities and learning needs of these different groups in mind. If possible, participants from different groups should be trained separately but if this is not possible, exercises and input should be selected which will meet the needs of all groups. It may be possible to use different small group exercises to address the needs of each type of participant in a mixed group workshop.

Two types of programme are included in this Resource Pack. The first describes a half day awareness-raising workshop. The programme makes detailed reference to materials from the Resource Pack and describes how a facilitator might use these materials to conduct a session lasting just under four hours.

The second example is for a full day workshop. It is written in the form of a Session Plan that covers:

- the overall aim of the training session;
- specific learning objectives;
- a description of what will be covered and the sequence to be followed;
- the timing for each part of the session;
- who will take responsibility for the different parts of the programme;

- what inputs and exercises will be used;
- what materials (e.g. handouts, overheads, briefing papers, index cards) will be required;
- what equipment (e.g. flipchart, overhead projector, blackboard, video) is needed.

The purpose and development of session plans are described in detail in the **ARC Facilitator's Toolkit**.

Both programmes are intended as guidance examples only. It is very important that the facilitator should think carefully about the group of participants with whom he or she will be working and devise a programme that takes into account:

- the role and responsibilities of the participants;
- the learning needs of the participants;
- their existing level of knowledge;
- their interest in the subject;
- their willingness to share experience and admit to gaps in their knowledge / skills;
- current/local issues and priorities for the participants;
- the amount of time they have available;
- their position in their organisation.

Any training programme should be devised, if possible, in consultation with the intended participants. If it is not possible to consult with all participants (for example, by sending out an application form including questions about their expectations for the training), the facilitator should try to speak to a sample of participants before making final decisions about the programme.

The facilitator should also consider:

- the range of topics to be covered;
- the order in which topics should be addressed;
- how to encourage the sharing of experience and information between participants;
- who will carry out the training;
- what methods will be most appropriate for the participants.

More detail on the process of training can be found in the **Facilitator's Toolkit**.

Remember to build in a workshop evaluation - you will find ideas for this in the **ARC Facilitator's Toolkit**.

## **DETAILED PROGRAMME FOR A HALF DAY AWARENESS WORKSHOP**

This programme comprising two sessions of about two hours each is designed to provide participants with an overall awareness of the subject and an introduction to some of the key issues.

### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

By the end of this workshop, participants will be able to:

- explain why skills in communicating with children are an important element of upholding their rights;
- explain how communication with children is different from communicating with adults;
- describe the key attitudes, approaches and skills that facilitate communication with children;
- describe the importance of cultural considerations in understanding and promoting the psycho-social well-being of children.

### **PREPARATION**

The facilitator should prepare a comprehensive information pack for the participants that includes:

- copies of the relevant handouts;
- a copy of the reading list and any readings;
- copies of relevant materials from the region/country/locality (e.g. research papers, monitoring reports).

If possible, this pack should be sent out in advance.

The facilitator should gather any locally relevant information on the Topics to be addressed in the training and identify individuals with specific expertise who could act as resource persons. All participants can be asked to bring along relevant material to display / share with others.

The facilitator should study the notes for each Exercise carefully to ensure that all the necessary materials are prepared in advance.

## Introduction – Working with Children

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10 min	Introduce the agreed aims of the workshop on Working with Children on a prepared flipchart.	Flipchart summarising aims of workshop.
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## The Importance of Skills in Communicating with Children

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5 min	Remind participants that children typically form half of refugee and displaced populations and have been identified as one of the three policy priorities of UNHCR.	
40 mins	Introduce and facilitate <b>Exercise 1.1</b> . Discuss issues raised using <b>Briefing Notes for Topic 1</b> and <b>Overhead 1.2</b> .	Exercise 1.1 Overhead 1.2
15 mins	Using <b>Briefing Notes for Topic 1</b> make a brief presentation covering the following areas: How communicating with children differs from communicating with adults Cultural issues Language and the use of interpreters Communication in the refugee or displaced context	

## Key Skills in Communicating with Children

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30 mins	Introduce and facilitate <b>Exercise 2.1</b> .	Exercise 2.1
20 mins	Using <b>Briefing Notes for Topic 2</b> and <b>Overheads 2.2 and 2.3</b> , introduce the attitudes, approaches and skills that can facilitate children's self-expression.	Overheads 2.2 and 2.3

## Identifying and Communicating with Distressed Children

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20 mins	Introduce the subject using <b>Briefing Notes for Topic 3</b> and <b>Overheads 3.2 and 3.3</b> .	Overheads 3.2 and 3.3
35 mins	Introduce and facilitate <b>Exercise 3.5</b> .	Exercise 3.5

## Cultural Considerations

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15 mins	Using the <b>Briefing Notes for Topic 4</b> and <b>Overhead 4.1</b> , introduce the key learning points.	Overhead 4.1
35 mins	Introduce and facilitate <b>Exercise 5.1</b> .	Exercise 5.1
10 mins	Summarise the workshop using the Key Concepts <b>Overhead 1.0</b> .	Overhead 1.0

## Summary and Evaluation

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5 mins	Remind participants about the aims of this session on Working with Children by referring to the Session Aims Flipchart.	Aims Flipchart.
5 mins	Conduct a brief evaluation using forms which you can customise from the <b>ARC Facilitator's Toolkit</b> .	Evaluation forms.
5 mins	Ask participants to identify three action points they intend to follow up.	

## **TRAINING PLAN FOR A DAY WORKSHOP ON WORKING WITH CHILDREN / CHILD SOLDIERS**

This programme has been written in the form of a training plan to demonstrate how materials from more than one module can be combined to create a workshop which is customised to the needs of a particular group of participants. It is intended as an example only.

### **Overall Aim**

To identify and apply the principles and the skills of working with children with those who have been involved as child soldiers in order to promote their psycho-social well-being and support their reintegration into their communities.

### **Learning Objectives**

By the end of this workshop, participants will be able to:

- explain why skills in communicating with children are an important element of upholding their rights;
- identify the particular challenges that working with child soldiers places on adults' communication skills;
- describe and apply the key attitudes, approaches and skills that facilitate communication with children and, specifically, child soldiers;
- describe the importance of cultural considerations in understanding and planning for the psycho-social well-being of children and, specifically, child soldiers;
- appreciate the importance of effective communication in the rehabilitation and reintegration of child soldiers.

Action for the Rights of Children (ARC)

<b>Timing</b>	<b>Content</b>	<b>Methods</b>	<b>Materials</b>	<b>Resources and Equipment</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
30 mins	<b>Welcome and Introductions</b> <b>Sharing and Agreeing of Objectives</b>	Short participatory exercise where participants can get to know each other. Sharing and refining of objectives.	As required in introductory activity	Flipchart and pens.	
40 mins	<b>The Importance of Skills in Communicating with Children</b>	Small-group exercise. Short input by facilitator based on Briefing Notes for Working with Children Topic 1.	Exercise 1.1 Briefing Notes on Working with Children Topic 1 Overhead 1.2.	Overhead projector. Flipchart and pens.	
60 mins	<b>The Key Skills in Communicating with Children</b>	Short input by facilitator. Small group exercise.	Briefing Notes on Working with Children Topic 2 Overheads 2.2 and 2.3 Exercise 2.2	Overhead projector. Flipchart and pens.	
<b>SUGGESTED BREAK</b>					
45 mins	<b>Cultural Considerations in Communicating with Children</b>	Guided plenary discussion.	Briefing Notes on Working with Children Topic 4 Exercise 1.2 Overhead 4.1	Overhead projector. Flipchart and pens.	
30 mins	<b>What is a Child Soldier?</b>	Short input by facilitator. Plenary discussion. Small group exercise.	Child Soldier Exercise 1.1 Child Soldier Overhead 1.1 Child Soldier Handout 3.1	Overhead projector. Flipchart and pens.	



Action for the Rights of Children (ARC)

15 mins	<b>The Challenge of Communicating with Child Soldiers</b>	Brief input and plenary discussion on the particular challenges of communicating with child soldiers.	Working with Children Overhead 3.1	Flipchart and pens.	
	<b>SUGGESTED BREAK</b>				
60 mins	<b>Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Child Soldiers</b>	Short input by facilitator. Small group case study exercise.	Briefing Notes on Child Soldiers Topic 3 Child Soldiers Exercise 3.1	Flipchart and pens.	
	<b>SUGGESTED BREAK</b>				
60 mins	<b>A Return to Normal Life</b>	Short input by facilitator. Small group exercise. Plenary discussion.	Briefing Notes on Child Soldiers Topic 4 Child Soldiers Overhead 4.3 Child Soldiers Exercise 4.1 Working with Children Overhead 5.1	Overhead projector. Flipchart and pens.	
15 mins	<b>Summary</b>	Short input by facilitator.	Working with Children Overhead 1.1.	Overhead projector.	
15 mins	<b>Action-planning</b>	Small group action-planning exercise.		Flipchart and pens.	
15 mins	<b>Workshop evaluation</b>	Evaluation exercise.	Evaluation form		

## Working with Children

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### Overheads

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<a href="#">1.0</a>	Key Concepts
<a href="#">1.1</a>	Key Learning Points for Topic 1
<a href="#">1.2</a>	The CRC and Communicating with Children
<a href="#">2.1</a>	Key Learning Points for Topic 2
<a href="#">2.2</a>	Attitude and Approach to Communicating Effectively
<a href="#">2.3</a>	Facilitating Children's Self Expression
<a href="#">3.1</a>	Key Learning Points for Topic 3
<a href="#">3.2</a>	Indicators of Distress in Children
<a href="#">3.3</a>	Communicating with Distressed Children
<a href="#">4.1</a>	Key Learning Points for Topic 4
<a href="#">5.1</a>	Key Learning Points for Topic 5
<a href="#">5.2</a>	The Role of Schools and Teachers

## **Key Concepts**

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1. Communicating with children is a core skill for some personnel in refugee and displaced situations. Those who regularly work with children will need in-depth specialised training in this field.
2. Communicating effectively with children requires specific skills.
3. Inter-personal interaction between adults and children needs sensitivity to cultural norms.
4. Communicating with distressed children requires particular skills and personal qualities.
5. Detailed understanding of cultural factors is essential in planning programmes to facilitate children's psycho-social recovery from distressing experiences.
6. Key principles guide the process of programme planning in respect to the psycho-social well-being of children.

## **Key Learning Points for Topic 1**

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1. Various categories of personnel require skills in communicating with children.
2. The implementation of various Articles in the CRC requires skills in communicating with children.
3. Staff who frequently need to communicate with children will need in-depth, specialised training in this field.
4. Communicating with children requires different skills from communicating with adults.
5. Communicating through an interpreter raises a number of difficulties.

## **The CRC and Communicating with Children**

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1. **Article 13** refers to the child's right to freedom of expression - including the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds.
2. **Article 12** emphasises the right of the child, who is capable of forming his or her own views, to express those views in all matters affecting him or her.
3. Separated children (**articles 9 and 10**) require effective communication if their needs and rights are to be met.
4. **Article 3** states that in all actions concerning children, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.
5. **Article 39** identifies children's rights to physical and psychological recovery and from the effects of armed conflict.

## **Key Learning Points for Topic 2**

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1. The physical location of an interview has an important bearing on its effectiveness.
2. There are particular attitudes and approaches which facilitate communication with children, though there are some cultural variations.
3. There are also some specific skills and techniques which enable children to express themselves.

## **Attitude and Approach to Communicating Effectively**

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1. Introductions are important
2. Confidentiality should be respected
3. Simple language
4. A friendly, informal and relaxed approach
5. Adequate time
6. Allow for children's limited concentration span
7. Non-judgemental attitude
8. Seek the child's permission before taking notes
9. Ending the interview or conversation appropriately
10. Follow-up support should be available to the child

## **Facilitating Children's Self Expression**

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1. A quiet tone of voice
2. Gestures
3. An appropriate degree of eye contact
4. Attentive listening and demonstrating that the child has been heard
5. Respect for the child's feelings
6. Avoiding interrupting the child
7. Open questions



## **Key Learning Points for Topic 3**

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1. Children's behaviour can give important clues about distressing events which have been experienced.
2. Communicating with distressed children requires particular skills; and some professional workers will need specialised training in this area.
3. Difficulties in helping children to communicate may have their roots in the child's experiences: they may also reflect the lack of skills on the part of the interviewer.
4. Extreme caution should be exercised before distressed children are offered any form of psychological therapy or counselling: to be appropriate, such approaches must be rooted in the child's culture.

## **Indicators of Distress in Children**

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1. Lack of interest and energy - apathy
2. Withdrawal from relationships with adults or other children
3. Excessive clinging to familiar people
4. Prolonged sadness or generalised anxiety
5. Loss of appetite
6. Sleep disturbances
7. Headaches or other somatic complaints
8. Poor concentration, restlessness, sudden changes in mood etc.
9. Inappropriate sexual behaviour
10. Aggressiveness or destructiveness
11. Preoccupation with violence, suffering or separation in their play

## **Communicating with Distressed Children**

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1. Allow the child to set the pace
2. Give adequate time to the child
3. Provide emotional support and encouragement to the child
4. Accept the child's emotions such as guilt and anger
5. Never give false reassurance
6. Talking about difficult situations may enable children to work out their own solutions
7. Sometimes it is necessary to allow regression

## **Key Learning Points for Topic 4**

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1. People in different cultural contexts perceive, understand and make sense of events and experiences in different ways.
2. Different societies have different norms about responding to and dealing with distressing events such as loss and death.
3. Understandings of and responses to distressing events may be framed collectively rather than individually in many cultures.
4. Intervention strategies need to build on traditional norms and practices and to avoid inadvertently undermining them.

## **Key Learning points for Topic 5**

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1. Identify and strengthen existing coping mechanisms and not impose alien ones.
2. A broad community development approach is often the most effective strategy for facilitating psycho-social recovery.
3. Supporting parental capacity should be seen as a key strategy.
4. Children who have experienced wholesale change, loss and disruption to their lives benefit greatly from an early restoration to a sense of structure in their lives, a sense of purpose and the rewards of achievement.
5. Schools can play an important role
6. Care needs to be taken to avoid inappropriate responses which may serve to inflict secondary distress on already vulnerable children.

## **The Role of Schools and Teachers**

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1. Assessing the needs of children and monitoring their situation and well-being.
2. Schools provide a daily structure, purpose and meaning for children.
3. Education facilitates the development of children's understanding of events.
4. Teachers can provide avenues for the expression of feelings and opportunities for more personal support.
5. Schools can adopt a broader role of education of children and others in the community.
6. The school can be an important resource for promoting reconciliation.

## Working with Children



### Exercises

No.	Title	Target Group
<a href="#">1.1</a>	CRC Articles Implying the Need for Communication Skills	Senior Managers, Sector Co-ordinators, Field Staff
<a href="#">1.2</a>	Cultural Factors in Communicating with Children	Senior Managers, Sector Co-ordinators, Field Staff
<a href="#">2.1</a>	Reflection Exercise	Sector Co-ordinators, Field Staff
<a href="#">2.2</a>	Interviewing Children	Sector Co-ordinators, Field Staff
<a href="#">3.1</a>	Personal Experiences of Being Helped	Sector Co-ordinators, Field Staff
<a href="#">3.2</a>	Cultural Factors in Helping Distressed Children	Sector Co-ordinators, Field Staff
<a href="#">3.3</a>	Communicating with Maria	Sector Co-ordinators, Field Staff
<a href="#">3.4</a>	Facilitating Children's Self-Expression (1): Dancing with Hope	Sector Co-ordinators, Field Staff
<a href="#">3.5</a>	Facilitating Children's Self-Expression (2): The Case of Dusan	Sector Co-ordinators, Field Staff
<a href="#">3.6</a>	Facilitating Children's Self-Expression (3): The Use of Activities	Sector Co-ordinators, Field Staff
<a href="#">4.1</a>	The Importance of Socio-Cultural Understanding	Sector Co-ordinators, Field Staff
<a href="#">5.1</a>	Building on Existing Cultural Traditions	Senior Managers, Sector Co-ordinators, Field Staff

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<a href="#">5.2</a>	Psycho-Social Well-Being – Everybody's Responsibility	Senior Managers, Sector Co-ordinators, Field Staff
<a href="#">5.3</a>	The Role of Schools in Psycho-Social Well-Being	Senior Managers, Sector Co-ordinators, Field Staff



## Working with Children

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### Exercise 1.1: (Facilitator's Notes)

## CRC Articles Implying the Need for Communication Skills

---

### **TARGET GROUP**

Senior Managers, Sector Co-ordinators, Field Staff.

### **OBJECTIVE**

By the end of this exercise, participants will be able to:

- identify which articles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child imply effective skills in communicating with children.

### **TIMEFRAME**

10 minutes to identify relevant articles of the CRC

20 minutes in small groups

10 minutes review in plenary session

### **METHOD**

Participants are asked to examine the CRC and identify those articles which imply the need for effective skills in communicating with children. Participants note the number and title of the article on index cards or Post-Its. These are then assembled on a board or table, with any points of disagreement noted.

Participants are then divided into groups which focus on particular work roles (e.g. Protection Officers, Field Officers, etc.) and identify which of these articles particularly apply to that role. They then identify the kind of situations where they do (or need to!) communicate with children. Key points are noted on flip-charts and these provide the focus for the final plenary session.

This exercise can be varied in several ways. If desired, this exercise can be used (as an extension of the small group task) as a means of identifying training needs in communicating with children. In training with senior managers it can be used as a means of identifying the training needs and resource implications in respect of communicating with children.

### **RESOURCES**

Copy of the Convention on the Rights of the Child for each participant.

Index cards or Post-Its

## Working with Children

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### Exercise 1.2: (Facilitator's Notes)

## Cultural Factors in Communicating with Children

---

### TARGET GROUP

Senior Managers, Sector Co-ordinators, Field Staff.

### OBJECTIVES

By the end of this exercise, participants will be able to:

- explain the main cultural factors in communicating with children;
- describe the impact of these on effective communication.

### TIMEFRAME

10 minutes in small groups

15 minutes in plenary session

### METHOD

In small groups, ask participants to identify a list of cultural norms which regulate patterns of communication between adults and children within their particular cultural setting. Ask them to consider, for example, the following:

1. How is adult authority understood - e.g. are children expected to relate to adults with a sense of reserve and respect - and what are the implications of this?
2. What impact would this have on seating arrangements, physical distance, eye-contact and the degree of mutuality between adult and child?
3. What are the norms regarding physical contact between adults and children, and what gender issues are raised by this?
4. What norms are there regarding the expression of feelings? Are these norms the same for both genders?
5. What norms are there regarding what topics can be discussed by whom?
6. How does the culture define the appropriateness of playful interaction between adults and children?

In plenary session, combine the contributions into a composite list: then consider to what extent these cultural norms facilitate or inhibit the kind of communication required in the work of the participants. Where they inhibit effective communication, what can be done to help children to communicate?

## Working with Children

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### Exercise 2.1: (Facilitator's Notes) Reflection Exercise

---

#### **TARGET GROUP**

Sector Co-ordinators, Field Staff.

#### **OBJECTIVE**

By the end of this exercise, participants will be able to:

- identify the key qualities and skills needed to work with children.

#### **TIMEFRAME**

5 minutes individual work

15 minutes in small groups

10 minutes review in plenary session

#### **METHOD**

Ask participants, individually, to recall a difficult situation they faced during their childhood and an adult who was helpful: identify the qualities which enabled them to confide in him/her and the responses which they found helpful. Then in small groups make a composite list of the qualities and attitudes of the people who were experienced as being helpful to them as children. Then in plenary session review the lists and summarise key points.

## Working with Children

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### Exercise 2.2: (Facilitator's Notes) Interviewing Children

---

#### **TARGET GROUP**

Sector Co-ordinators, Field Staff.

#### **OBJECTIVE**

By the end of this exercise, participants will be able to:

- try out and assess their own skills of interviewing children.

#### **TIMEFRAME**

20 minutes in small role-play groups (can be repeated several times for different participants)

20 minutes to share key points in plenary session

#### **METHOD**

Prepare participants for this exercise by presenting relevant information from **Topic 2**. Divide the group into small groups of 3 or 4 people. In each group, one person is to role-play the child, one the interviewer, the rest act as observers. Use the role-play briefs provided, or write additional ones which suit the circumstances of the particular group of participants. It is important that participants take a few minutes to “get into role” and to decide on any additional background information relevant to the scenario: if appropriate, the observer may help the person playing the role of the child to decide on appropriate background information. Ideally, time should be given for each participant to play the role of the child. Feedback should be given within the small group, with key points brought back to the plenary session.

#### **RESOURCES**

Copy of Participants' Notes for each participant.

Checklist for observers.

## Working with Children

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### Exercise 2.2: (Participants' Notes) Interviewing Children

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#### **OBJECTIVE**

By the end of this exercise, you will be able to:

- try out and assess your own skills of interviewing children.

#### **TIMEFRAME**

20 minutes in small role-play groups (can be repeated several times for different participants)

20 minutes to share key points in plenary session

#### **METHOD**

Divide into small groups of 3 or 4 people. In each group, one person is asked to role-play a child, one the interviewer, and the rest act as observers. Choose from the role-play briefs provided.

It is important that you take a few minutes to “get into role” and to decide on any additional background information relevant to the scenario: if appropriate, the observer may help the person playing the role of the child to decide on appropriate background information. Each participant should play the role of the child.

Observers should give feedback to the ‘interviewer’ within the small group. Be ready to bring key points back to the plenary session.

## **ROLE PLAY BRIEFS**

1. A twelve-year-old boy is found wandering alone in the camp. He appears lost. He is brought to the UNHCR office and is seen by a fieldworker to try to ascertain whether he has a family in the camp.
2. A ten-year-old child arrives in school late - for the fifth time this week. The teacher interviews her during a break in the morning to find out why she is repeatedly late.
3. A 16-year-old comes to the office of an NGO asking if there is any paid work he can do. He is bored as he has no access to school.
4. A 14-year-old is found trying to get into the UNHCR food store: he is brought to the office by the guard because he has caused trouble before.
5. An eight-year-old child came into school looking unusually dirty and uncared-for and has seemed miserable during school all day. The teacher decides to have a quiet word with her after school to try to find out if something is troubling her.

**Note:** The facilitator or participants may like to identify other real-life or fictional scenarios to use in this exercise.

## CHECKLIST FOR OBSERVERS

If you are an observer, please use the following questions to make notes for the feedback discussion.

1. How did the interviewer **begin** the conversation?
2. Comment on the **seating arrangements** for the conversation. Were they appropriate?
3. What **techniques** were used to encourage the child to talk and to express his/her feelings?
4. What **kind of questions** were used - closed, open, leading questions?
5. Comment on the interviewer's **tone of voice** - did it encourage the child to talk?
6. How sensitive was the interviewer to the child's **non-verbal behaviour** - gestures, tone of voice, body language etc.?
7. How was the child affected by the interviewer's tone of voice, gestures and body language?
8. How did the interviewer **convey interest, active listening, empathy** etc.? Did you notice clues or pointers from the child that the interviewer did not?

## Working with Children

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### Exercise 3.1: (Facilitator's Notes) Personal Experiences of Being Helped

---

#### **TARGET GROUP**

Sector Co-ordinators, Field Staff.

#### **OBJECTIVE**

By the end of this exercise, participants will be able to:

- use their personal experience of being helped to improve their skills in communicating with distressed children.

#### **TIMEFRAME**

25 - 35 minutes

10 minutes in plenary session

#### **METHOD**

In small groups, participants are invited to identify the emotions they experienced after a negative personal experience such as bereavement, loss, an experience of war, etc. - either as children or as adults. Discuss how long it took for the individual to come to terms with the experience, and what helped them most through the experience and the feelings it engendered.

It is strongly advised that each small group should be facilitated by someone who is prepared for the task: in particular it is important that group facilitators ensure that excessive self-disclosure is avoided. The small group discussions should not become therapy groups!

Each group is asked to list the qualities and the activities of persons who were perceived as being helpful. These lists are then compiled into a composite list during the plenary session.

#### **CHECKLIST FOR FACILITATORS**

- Children have broadly similar emotional reactions to events as adults.
- Individuals vary in the length of time needed to get over negative experiences.
- The personal qualities of people who are experienced as helpful may include the following: sympathetic, understanding, accepting of feelings, respectful.



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- The activities of people who are experienced as helpful may include the following: gave time, made themselves available, listened attentively, enabled them to express their feelings, provided emotional support, avoided giving advice etc.
- There may be cultural variations in what people find most helpful.

## Working with Children

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### Exercise 3.2: (Facilitator's Notes)

## Cultural Factors in Helping Distressed Children

---

### **TARGET GROUP**

Sector Co-ordinators, Field Staff.

### **OBJECTIVE**

By the end of this exercise, participants will be able to:

- identify cultural factors that may influence appropriate ways of communicating with distressed children.

### **TIMEFRAME**

30 minutes

### **METHOD**

First identify a population of refugees from a particular cultural setting which is familiar to the participants. Then ask the participants to identify norms which are relevant in developing appropriate ways of communicating with distressed children. The following questions may be relevant.

1. Do people experience talking about distressing events as helpful?
2. Is it considered appropriate to facilitate the expression of feelings? If so, how?
3. How is comfort given to children of different ages? How appropriate is physical touch?

Discuss whether or not these cultural norms facilitate or impede helping distressed children.

Facilitators may wish to use this exercise in conjunction with **ARC Resource Pack on Situation Analysis Exercise 6.1**.

## Working with Children

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### Exercise 3.3: (Facilitator's Notes) Communicating with Maria

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#### TARGET GROUP

Sector Co-ordinators, Field Staff.

#### OBJECTIVES

By the end of this exercise, participants will be able to:

- identify the emotions experienced by a distressed child in a particular context;
- identify the particular skills needed for working with distressed children.

#### TIMEFRAME

5 minutes individual work

10 minutes plenary discussion

10 minutes preparation for role play

10 minutes role-play in small groups

10 minutes feedback in small groups

20 minutes plenary discussion

Additional time will be needed if the role-play is conducted several times.

#### METHOD

1. **Individual work:** participants are asked to read the case study and then list the emotions which they feel that Maria will be experiencing now, two weeks after the death of her parents.
2. **Large group work:** create a composite list from everyone's contributions.
3. **Divide the group into small groups of 3 or 4 people:** in these groups, plan a role play in which Maria is interviewed by a social welfare worker to try to find out about her history, family members and current living situation. One person plays the social welfare worker, one the child, the other 1 or 2 people act as observers. It is suggested that one of the observers should help the person playing the child to get into role and to elaborate the background history.
4. Role-play an interview between the child and the social welfare worker: the observer should stop the interview after 10 minutes.

5. **Feedback in the small groups:** the observers should have copies of the checklist.
6. Plenary session to discuss key issues emerging from the role-play and to review the key learning points.

## **RESOURCES**

Copy of Participants' Notes for each participant.

Checklist for observers.

## Working with Children

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### Exercise 3.3: (Participants' Notes) Communicating with Maria

---

#### **OBJECTIVES**

By the end of this exercise, you will be able to:

- identify the emotions experienced by a distressed child in a particular context;
- identify the particular skills needed for working with distressed children.

#### **TIMEFRAME**

5 minutes individual work

10 minutes plenary discussion

10 minutes preparation for role play

10 minutes role play in small groups

10 minutes feedback in small groups

20 minutes plenary discussion

#### **Case Study**

Maria was 12 when her village was attacked by guerrillas. Her three brothers and sisters and her grandparents managed to run off but she and her parents were caught. The house was set on fire and her parents were both shot in front of her. She was taken away by the guerrillas, but managed to escape at night. For several days she wandered trying to get as far away as possible, sleeping during the day, and eventually arrived in a refugee camp. There she happened to meet a family whom she knew in her village and they took her in.

Initially unable to speak about her experiences, she spent the first few days hiding in the house, refusing to speak, but eventually the small son of the family drew her out and she began to play, silently with him. A few days later she was able to tell her foster family about what had happened and they contacted the social welfare worker in the hope that something might be done to find other members of her family.

What emotions do you think Maria will be experiencing now, two weeks after the death of her parents?

## CHECK-LIST FOR OBSERVERS

1. How did the interviewer **begin** the conversation?
2. Comment on the **pacing** of the interview - did he/she give Maria time? Were silences broken, and if so was this appropriate?
3. What **techniques** were used to encourage the child to talk and to express her feelings?
4. What **kind of questions** were used - closed, open, leading questions?
5. How did the interviewer provide **support and encouragement**?
6. How did the interviewer respond to Maria's expressions of emotion?
7. How sensitive was the interviewer to the child's **non-verbal behaviour** - gestures, tone of voice, body language etc.?
8. How could the communication skills of the interviewer be improved?

## Working with Children

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### Exercise 3.4: (Facilitator's Notes)

#### Facilitating Children's Self-expression (1): Dancing with Hope

---

#### **TARGET GROUP**

Sector Co-ordinators, Field Staff.

#### **OBJECTIVE**

By the end of this exercise, participants will be able to:

- describe possible approaches to enabling distressed children to express themselves.

NOTE: The video in this exercise is set in a Southern Africa context: it may prove unsuitable for use in some other cultural contexts.

#### **TIMEFRAME**

15 minutes to view video

20 minutes for small group discussion

10 minutes plenary review

#### **METHOD**

Ask participants to watch the video "Dancing with Hope", having briefed them to look out for issues on the topic of facilitating children's self-expression. Then in small groups, ask them to consider the following questions:

1. What issues do children face in expressing themselves and the difficult experiences they have had?
2. What forms of self-expression are illustrated in the video?
3. More specifically, how does the medium of music and dance help children to express themselves?

#### **Issues**

The girl called Tamarin is mentioned early on in the video: it is said that memories of witnessing death have remained in her mind, that she cries when anyone tries to talk to her about her experiences and that she won't talk. It may be helpful for the group to reflect on why this might be and what forms of communication might be helpful to her.

The term “forgetting” is used a lot in the video: how should this be interpreted - is it literally helpful to help children to forget, or is a question of integrating those experiences in order that children can face the present and future rather than being preoccupied with the past? Towards the end of the video, Samson talks about “leaving behind this gun business”.

How important is activity for children who have had distressing experiences? Samson talks about learning some skills, “then I did nothing. It doesn’t do to just sit”.

What is the significance of the dance in coming to terms with past experiences of violence? What is the importance of using the medium of traditional music and dance? How is re-enacting violence helpful to children? What is the significance of this being a shared experience among a large group of children?

How can the video be related to the experience of the participants?

## **RESOURCES**

Copy of the video “Dancing with Hope”, video player and monitor.

Flip charts and pens if appropriate.



## Working with Children

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### Exercise 3.5: (Facilitator's Notes)

#### Facilitating Children's Self-expression (2): The Case of Dusan

---

#### **TARGET GROUP**

Sector Co-ordinators, Field Staff.

#### **OBJECTIVE**

By the end of this exercise, participants will be able to:

- describe possible strategies for facilitating the self-expression of distressed children.

Note: This case study is set in the context of the former Yugoslavia: it may prove unsuited to contexts which are very different from this one.

#### **TIMEFRAME**

5 minutes to read the case study

20 minutes in small groups

10 minutes review in plenary session

#### **METHOD**

Ask participants to read the case study of Dusan and in small groups discuss the questions raised on it. The final plenary session should review key points to emerge from the small group discussion.

#### **RESOURCES**

Copy of Participants' Notes for each participant.

## Working with Children

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### Exercise 3.5: (Participants' Notes)

#### Facilitating Children's Self-expression (2): The Case of Dusan

---

#### **OBJECTIVE**

By the end of this exercise, you will be able to:

- describe possible strategies for facilitating the self-expression of distressed children.

#### **TIMEFRAME**

5 minutes to read the case study

20 minutes in small groups

10 minutes review in plenary session

#### **METHOD**

You are invited to read the case study of Dusan and in small groups discuss the questions raised on it. The final plenary session will be used to review key points to emerge from each small group discussion.

#### **Case Study - Dusan**

Dusan is a tall and good-looking 10-year-old boy who was living happily with his parents in Tuzla before the war changed their lives for ever. He was born of a mixed marriage, his mother being a Croat, his father a Serb, and they lived in a predominantly Muslim town in Bosnia. When the war started, they faced both the physical dangers of the war and the risks stemming from their respective ethnic origins. Because of this, his father decided that he and Dusan would try to leave and seek refuge with the two grown-up children of a former marriage who lived in a predominantly Serb part of Bosnia. His mother, however, preferred to stay, feeling safer in Tuzla.

Dusan and his father tried to cross the dividing line secretly at night, but in the process stumbled on a landmine which killed father outright, severely injuring Dusan in the leg, arm and eye. He is thought to have lain unconscious by the body of his father before managing to continue his journey, eventually being found by soldiers who arranged for an ambulance to take him to hospital in Belgrade. He arrived in a very poor shape, not only injured but so severely traumatised by witnessing the death of his father that he was unable either to eat or talk about what had happened.

The hospital decide to contact UNHCR who, in turn, refer the case to an international NGO with particular concerns for separated children.

### **Discussion Questions**

Try to devise a strategy for communicating with Dusan. You might like to consider the following issues:

1. How far do you consider that the environment of an unfamiliar hospital will impact on Dusan's ability to communicate?
2. What arrangements would you want to arrange for Dusan's day to day care as soon as he is medically fit for discharge from hospital? How might this impact on Dusan's ability to communicate?
3. What media of communication might be considered as a means of reaching out to Dusan? What skills would be required and, relating this case to your own context, what sort of resources would be required to respond appropriately to cases like this one?
4. Consider whether this is a culture in which there is familiarity with the idea of counselling or therapy: if you feel it is appropriate, consider what avenues there might be for seeking specialised help.

## Working with Children

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### Exercise 3.6: (Facilitator's Notes)

#### Facilitating Children's Self-expression (3): The Use of Activities

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#### **TARGET GROUP**

Sector Co-ordinators, Field Staff.

#### **OBJECTIVE**

By the end of this exercise, participants will be able to:

- describe possible strategies for facilitating the self-expression of distressed children.

#### **TIMEFRAME**

5 minutes to read the Participants' Notes

20 minutes in small groups

10 minutes review in plenary session

#### **METHOD**

In small groups, ask participants to read the Participants' Notes and using these notes as a trigger, invite them to explore, in an open way, the use of activities such as story-telling, drawing and painting as a means of communicating with distressed children and ask them to try to apply their ideas to their own work situation. Review key points in short plenary session.

#### **RESOURCES**

Copy of Participants' Notes for each participant.

## Working with Children

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### Exercise 3.6: (Participants' Notes)

#### Facilitating Children's Self-expression (3): The Use of Activities

---

#### **OBJECTIVE**

By the end of this exercise, you will be able to:

- describe possible strategies for facilitating the self-expression of distressed children.

#### **TIMEFRAME**

5 minutes to read the Participants' Notes

20 minutes in small groups

10 minutes review in plenary session

#### **METHOD**

In small groups, please read the Participants' Notes and using these notes as a trigger, you are invited to explore, in an open way, the use of activities such as story-telling, drawing and painting as a means of communicating with distressed children. Try to apply your ideas to your own work situation. Key points will be reviewed in short plenary session.

Sybella Wilkes has edited a book<sup>1</sup> of refugee children's stories and paintings which depict their experiences - of life, of war and flight, of living in refuge. In the introduction to the book she writes:

*It was very difficult for these children to deal with the emotional horrors they have experienced. The idea that "a problem shared is a problem halved" does not really apply to children. Many find it hard to put how they feel into words, and are reluctant to discuss their experiences. I found the Sudanese children particularly difficult to talk to. Robbed of their childhood innocence by the civil war, they were scared to talk in case they said anything that their elders disapproved of. They often repeated well-rehearsed phrases about the "condition of Sudan" which told me nothing about their own feelings and experiences. Many of the children found my questions stupid and obvious: yes, of course, they had seen dead and dying*

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<sup>1</sup>Wilkes, Sybella (1994): "One Day We Had to Run", London, Evans Brothers, in Association with UNHCR and Save the Children.

*people, so what? But when asked, "How do you feel about this?" they would withdraw into themselves and refuse to reply.*

*However, it was the children who helped me to find a way of communicating. Having spent several awkward hours with a group of Somali children who were telling me how they had reached Kenya, one of them said to me, "Why are you asking so many questions?". When I replied that I wanted to tell their stories to other children in the world, they brightened up enormously.*

*"Do you think they would like to hear the story about the lion that was larger than a camel and faster than a horse?" asked one of them.*

*Children who had previously been bored and shy came to life. I realised that if we had fun together I would learn more about them and they would learn to relax. Wherever I went after that I carried an armful of comics and story books. I would tell them stories that I had heard as a child and, in return, they would tell me their own stories and fairytales.*

*I worked with a Kenyan artist to teach the children how to use paints. Painting gave these children a great freedom of expression. They would queue up with their pictures, wanting to tell me "their story". One boy was very keen that "the children of the world know that my picture is about the suffering of Sudan". The children found it less disturbing to relive their memories through their art-work than in words.*

Before discussing this in small groups, identify 4 or 5 key words from this passage which are important in thinking about techniques and skills of working with distressed children. Then in small groups explore, in an open way, the use of activities such as story-telling, drawing and painting as a means of communicating with distressed children and try to apply to your own work situation.

## Working with Children

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### Exercise 4.1: (Facilitator's Notes)

## The Importance of Socio-cultural Understanding

---

### **TARGET GROUP**

Sector Co-ordinators, Field Staff.

### **OBJECTIVES**

By the end of this exercise, participants will be able to:

- identify socio-cultural information required in considering planning a child fostering programme;
- identify appropriate sources of such information.

### **TIMEFRAME**

60 minutes

### **METHOD**

Divide participants into small groups. Give each group a copy of the Participants' Notes for this exercise. They will read the following information and instructions.

Participants are invited to consider the following scenario and then determine what socio-cultural information is required.

#### **Scenario**

A large influx of refugees into a neighbouring country in Africa contains a large number of children who are separated from their families, either because of the death of parents or separation from them during the chaos of fighting and flight. Some have been spontaneously absorbed into other families (some related, others unrelated to the child), some adolescents have formed themselves into groups and other children have been found wandering around the camp looking lost. In order to begin to plan care arrangements for unaccompanied children, and in order to decide what to do about children who have been spontaneously fostered, you need to find out about the relevant cultural norms and practices. What do you need to know about? How will you find this information?

Allow 30 minutes for this exercise.

Plenary: use flip chart to summarise the key issues that emerge from this discussion. The following questions and points should be used by the facilitator to guide the plenary session.

1. Who traditionally cares for the child when: the mother dies; when the father dies; or when both die?
2. Under what circumstances - if any - are children cared for by unrelated carers?
3. Under what circumstances are children taken into institutions and how acceptable is institutional care seen to be in this culture?
4. What are the cultural expectations about the quality of care for unrelated children - i.e. are they treated the same as children of the family? Does the idea of care in this context refer to "care for the whole child" or just physical care? What are the risks of abuse? Or differential treatment such as restricted access to food, clothes, schooling etc.? Are the work obligations any different for an unrelated child? These may be very difficult questions to find out about: there may be a useful parallel in the characteristic relationship between a child and a stepparent. These issues raise ethical issues regarding what is an acceptable level of care. Who determines what is acceptable?
5. How might a lost parent be understood within this culture? E.g. might there be a presumption of death?
6. What are the norms regarding caring for children from different clanship or tribal groups?
7. What are the norms regarding caring for children of a different religious persuasion?
8. How might the inheritance rights of a child be altered by fostering? From whom would he/she inherit land or property?
9. What are the norms regarding the name of a fostered child?
10. What are the potential sources of support/supervision/monitoring of a fostered child - e.g. existing community leaders, elders, teachers, women's organisations, welfare agencies etc.? Does the culture allow for a child to express his/her opinion freely to an outside person? What is the likelihood of abuse or exploitation being concealed?
11. Are there any customs regarding children living together in groups in this culture?

Possible sources of information:

- Refugees themselves (probably the most important and most accessible)
- University Departments of Anthropology
- Governments
- NGOs
- UNHCR

Note: some of the above points may need to be disaggregated by age and gender.

## **RESOURCES**

Copy of Participants' Notes for each participant.



## Working with Children

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### Exercise 4.1: (Participants' Notes)

#### The Importance of Socio-cultural Understanding

---

#### **OBJECTIVES**

By the end of this exercise, you will be able to:

- identify socio-cultural information required in considering planning a child fostering programme;
- identify appropriate sources of such information.

#### **TIMEFRAME**

60 minutes

#### **METHOD**

Participants are invited to consider the following scenario and then determine what socio-cultural information is required.

#### **Scenario**

A large influx of refugees into a neighbouring country in Africa contains a large number of children who are separated from their families, either because of the death of parents or separation from them during the chaos of fighting and flight. Some have been spontaneously absorbed into other families (some related, others unrelated to the child), some adolescents have formed themselves into groups and other children have been found wandering around the camp looking lost.

In order to begin to plan care arrangements for unaccompanied children, and in order to decide what to do about children who have been spontaneously fostered, you need to find out about the relevant cultural norms and practices.

What do you need to know about?

How will you find this information?

## Working with Children

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### Exercise 5.1: (Facilitator's Notes) Building on Existing Cultural Traditions

---

#### **TARGET GROUP**

Senior Managers, Sector Co-ordinators, Field Staff.

#### **OBJECTIVE**

By the end of this exercise, participants will be able to:

- describe coping mechanisms which exist within a particular culture and how these can be developed and built upon.

#### **TIMEFRAME**

5 minutes to read the Participants' Notes and brainstorm

20 minutes in small groups

10 minutes review in plenary session

#### **METHOD**

In the plenary group ask participants to brainstorm those factors within the particular cultural context which might in some way contribute to people's recovery from traumatic experiences. If the group represents various different cultures - or if the participants work with refugees or displaced persons from different cultural backgrounds - this task should be done in small groups. Then in small groups the participants should discuss the advantages and limitations of each element of the list, and then discuss how these traditions might be developed as a means of facilitating people's recovery from traumatic experiences, with particular reference to children and their parents.

#### **RESOURCES**

Copy of Participants' Notes for each participant.

## Working with Children

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### Exercise 5.1: (Participants' Notes) Building on Existing Cultural Traditions

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#### **OBJECTIVE**

By the end of this exercise, you will be able to:

- describe coping mechanisms which exist within a particular culture and how these can be developed and built upon.

#### **TIMEFRAME**

5 minutes to read these notes and brainstorm

20 minutes in small groups

10 minutes review in plenary session

#### **METHOD**

You are invited to brainstorm those factors within the particular cultural context which might in some way contribute to people's recovery from traumatic experiences. Then in small groups you are asked to discuss the advantages and limitations of each element of the list, and then discuss how these traditions might be developed as a means of facilitating people's recovery from traumatic experiences, with particular reference to children and their parents.

## Working with Children

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### Exercise 5.2: (Facilitator's Notes)

## Psycho-social Well-being – Everybody's Responsibilities

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### TARGET GROUP

Senior Managers, Sector Co-ordinators, Field Staff.

### OBJECTIVE

By the end of this exercise, participants will be able to:

- explain the role of different agencies and individuals in promoting psycho-social well-being of children.

### TIMEFRAME

5 minutes to read the Participants' Notes and prepare for the role play

20 - 30 minutes to conduct the role-play

10 minutes debriefing and discussion in small groups

20 minutes in plenary session to discuss key points

### METHOD

Divide participants into groups of 6 - 8 people and appoint one person in each group to act as facilitator. Invite participants to read the Participants' Notes and prepare for conducting the role play in accordance with the Scenario (which each person has) and the particular role brief (participants should *not* see other than their own). They then conduct the role play for an agreed period (around 20 - 30 minutes) in their group, and the group facilitator should then stop the role play and chair a discussion for a further 10 minutes. Each small group then feeds back key points arising from this discussion.

**Alternatively** one group can prepare and conduct the role play with the rest of the participants acting as observers. If possible, people should be allocated roles with which they are reasonably familiar - especially that of Community Services Officer.

**Note:** if preferred, a scenario and role-play briefs can be devised around a situation derived from the context in which the participants are working.

**An alternative** way of using this exercise (e.g. for senior managers) is to use it as a discussion topic rather than a role-play exercise.

## **RESOURCES**

Copy of Participants' Notes for each participant.

Role play brief - each role player has his or her own brief but not any of the others.  
Group facilitators should have a copy of the full set.

## Working with Children

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### Exercise 5.2: (Participants' Notes)

## Psycho-social Well-being – Everybody's Responsibilities

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### **OBJECTIVE**

By the end of this exercise, you will be able to:

- explain the role of different agencies and individuals in promoting psycho-social well-being in a refugee camp situation.

### **TIMEFRAME**

5 minutes to read the Role Play Scenario and prepare for the role play

20 - 30 minutes for the role play

10 minutes debriefing and discussion in small groups

20 minutes in plenary session to discuss key points

### **METHOD**

#### **The Role Play Scenario**

Almost 70,000 refugees who fled from neighbouring country A are now accommodated in this refugee camp in Country B, following a severe outbreak of inter-ethnic violence. Many had harrowing experiences of flight and faced considerable hostility in trying to cross the border. In the chaos of flight, many families became separated and the planning of the camp did not enable people to build their houses within their original community groupings. Rapid moves were made to develop water and sanitation programmes and health facilities, and now after three months camp schools are opening. Several NGOs are instituting recreation programmes for children and youth, and for women, and discussions are under way regarding the need for vocational training. Separated children are being cared for mainly in small groups and in foster homes, while attempts are being made to trace their families. It seems unlikely that the refugees will be able to return to their own communities within the foreseeable future.

A number of factors have been identified which suggest that people's experiences have had a severe impact on their sense of well-being. The following have particularly been noted:

1. The health clinics have seen large numbers of adults and children with complaints such as sleeping difficulties, loss of appetite, low levels of energy and many aches and pains which have no discernible organic causes.
2. Most of the refugees are Catholics but there appear to be few priests in the

camps and in any case there is a generalised loss of confidence in the church because of its apparent involvement in the inter-ethnic violence.

3. Although schools are now functioning, this is only at primary level and no priority has been given to older children, including those who had not previously been to school. It is known that many children are not in school, but the reason for this is not clear.
4. Traditional healers tend to operate clandestinely in the camps: concern has been raised about the nature of some of their herbal and traditional remedies but many people in the camp have greater confidence in them than in the camp clinics.
5. Women tend to have a very heavy workload, often having to walk considerable distances to obtain firewood, collect water etc.
6. The food rations include culturally unfamiliar foods and many refugees are seeking work locally: many work for very meagre wages in order to earn money to vary their diet.
7. People are reluctant to talk of their experiences: cultural traditions do not encourage the sharing of person information with strangers, but there is a palpable air of tension in the camp, with frequent outbreaks of arguments, sometimes involving physical violence.

A meeting is convened by the Community Services Officer because he/she is so concerned at what she sees as a major mental health issue. The meeting involves, in addition, the Camp Manager (a government employee), a medical doctor from the NGO providing health facilities, the head-teacher of the largest school, the chairman of the refugee committee and the leader of the women's committee in the camp.

## **Role Play Briefs**

**Note: people taking part in the role-play should receive *only* their own role-play brief.**

### **Community Services Officer**

You are extremely concerned at the amount of evidence of the negative effects of the refugees' experiences of violence and displacement. Your own observations lead you to believe that a major part of the problem is that people have not been able to grieve for the losses they have suffered and that people have withdrawn from community involvement as a response to this. It has been suggested that "experts" should be sent in to assist, but you are convinced that it would be better to encourage all actors in the camp, including the refugees themselves, to understand the problem and to promote appropriate responses.

You have convened, and will chair, the meeting. You want to find out if there is any common ground among the participants and if possible to identify a few key steps that can be taken to begin to implement a strategy to impact on the psycho-social well-being of both adults and children in the camp.

### **Medical Doctor**

You are concerned at what you see as a large number of people coming to the clinic with symptoms that you feel must be psycho-somatic. You are unsure of how

to respond. On the one hand, it has been suggested by your agency that a team of psychiatrists and psychologists might be brought in to do an assessment. On the other hand you are unconvinced that western approaches are really appropriate in this culture and have begun to wonder if your community health workers might extend their role so that they can provide a broader basis of support to people in the community. However, you have little experience of this and would need help in developing appropriate training and support for them.

### **Head Teacher**

You were recruited from among the refugees but you had already been a head-teacher in your own country. You are concerned that many of your children are affected by poor concentration, lack of energy and aggressive behaviour. You have heard from the children that many others are depressed and withdrawn, many of whom do not attend school. You also have a problem of adolescents hanging around at the entrance to the school, looking bored and sometimes making a nuisance of themselves. The school adopts quite traditional teaching methods but the teachers are very committed to their task and desperately want to be supportive to the children, but do not know how to do so.

### **Chairman of the Camp Committee**

You are mystified what this meeting is all about, especially as the Community Services Officer has been using long words which you don't understand. Your main priorities are getting better food rations and house-building materials, and from your own point of view there is a problem that most men have no opportunities to work and are bored, fed up and, in many cases, resorting to alcohol: your wife's mother was killed in the inter-ethnic violence, and such were the circumstances at the time that they were not able to bury her or carry out the traditional ceremonies, which would normally involve providing a meal for family and friends who would attend. This has caused your wife a great deal of distress.

### **Refugee Women's Leader**

You feel that the main problem in the camp is that women face a huge burden of work tasks which mean that younger children get rather neglected, and that many women are isolated and lacking in support. One NGO has started a women's programme, but this mainly involves teaching women particular skills, including literacy, and you feel that most women don't have the time to take part and in any case want to be more involved in deciding what they do. In your discussions with women you have learned that many would like to have access to places to meet, and to which they can bring their younger children.

### **The Camp Manager**

You are conscious of a problem of violence in the camp and see this mainly as a problem which needs to be controlled. You don't understand the purpose of the meeting but feel that you should attend. Your main priority is to increase your own personal power so in discussions you tend to side with whichever group you see as having the greatest influence.



## Working with Children

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### Exercise 5.3: (Facilitator's Notes)

## The Role of Schools in Psycho-social Well-being

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### **TARGET GROUP**

Senior Managers, Sector Co-ordinators, Field Staff.

### **OBJECTIVE**

By the end of this exercise, participants will be able to:

- describe the potential role of schools and teachers in promoting the psycho-social well-being of refugee children.

### **TIMEFRAME**

20 minutes in small groups to undertake SWOC analysis

20 minutes in same groups to devise a strategy and prepare presentation

20 minutes in plenary session to receive presentations and discuss key points

### **METHOD**

In small groups, participants are asked to analyse the potential role of a school known to them in their work as a means of examining the role of the school and teachers in promoting the psycho-social well-being of children.

They undertake a SWOC analysis - listing the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and constraints of the chosen situation, specifically in respect of children's psycho-social well-being.

On the basis of that analysis, they then devise a strategy for enabling the school to become a more significant resource. The strategy should include a statement of objectives, a plan which indicates who will do what, an indication of how the achievement of objectives will be assessed and how children themselves are involved in the process.

Each group should then present its strategy to the plenary session, and a discussion of key issues will conclude the exercise.

### **RESOURCES**

Copy of Participants' Notes for each participant.

SWOC analysis framework on prepared sheets.

## Working with Children

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### Exercise 5.3: (Participants' Notes)

## The Role of Schools in Psycho-social Well-being

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### **OBJECTIVE**

By the end of this exercise, you will be able to:

- describe the potential role of schools and teachers in promoting the psycho-social well-being of refugee children.

### **TIMEFRAME**

20 minutes in small groups to undertake SWOC analysis

20 minutes in same groups to devise a strategy and prepare presentation

20 minutes in plenary session to receive presentations and discuss key points

### **METHOD**

In small groups, you are invited to analyse the potential role of a school known to you in their work as a means of examining the role of the school and teachers in promoting the psycho-social well-being of children.

In order to achieve this, you have two tasks:

1. Undertake a SWOC analysis - listing the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and constraints of the chosen situation, specifically in respect of children's psycho-social well-being.
2. On the basis of that analysis, you should then devise a strategy for enabling the school to become a more significant resource. The strategy should include a statement of objectives, a plan which indicates who will do what, an indication of how the achievement of objectives will be assessed and how children themselves are involved in the process.

Your group should then present its strategy to the plenary session, using a flip chart.

## Working with Children

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### Further Readings, Videos and Websites

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#### **RECOMMENDED READINGS**

##### **General texts on working with children:**

Richman, Naomi (1993): “Communicating with Children”, London, SCF. This is a practical book written in simple language which provides a good introduction to the skills of communicating with children. It also includes some practical exercises which can be used in training courses. Particularly relevant to Topics 2 and 3.

##### **Texts on psycho-social work with children:**

Richman, Naomi (1991): “Helping Children in Difficult Circumstances”, London, SCF. This is another practical book, written in simple language, and aimed particularly at teachers concerned to help children who have had frightening experiences: it is also appropriate for other categories of personnel involved with children. Particularly relevant to Topic 4.

International Save the Children Alliance (1996): “Promoting Psycho-social Well-Being Among Children Affected by Armed Conflict and Displacement: Principles and Approaches”, Geneva, ISCA - Working Paper No. 1. This is a short and readable publication which provides practical ideas on assisting children affected by war and displacement. Particularly relevant to Topic 4.

Tolfree, David (1996): “Restoring Playfulness: Different Approaches to Assisting Children who are Psychologically Affected by War or Displacement”, Stockholm, Radda Barnen. This book includes seven case studies of different programmes for children who have been affected by their experiences of conflict and displacement and includes a systematic analysis of some of the key issues and themes involved in developing programmes. Particularly relevant to Topic 5.

#### **FURTHER READINGS**

##### **General texts on working with children:**

Jareg, Elizabeth and Pal (1994): “Reaching Children Through Dialogue”, Oslo, Redd Barna and MacMillan. Mainly concerned with the concept of community diagnosis related to child development, this book includes material on communicating with adults and children (chapter 4). It is written in simple language appropriate to the needs of basic-level field staff.

UNHCR (1996): “Working with Unaccompanied Children: a Community-based Approach”. Geneva, UNHCR. Although aimed particularly at people working with separated children, these guidelines offer practical guidance on the skills of

working with children, and hence are relevant to Topics 2 and 3. Part 3 of this book provides quite detailed information on communicating with children and documentation of separated children.

### **Texts on psycho-social work with children:**

Bracken, Patrick J. and Petty, Celia (1998): “Rethinking the Trauma of War”, London, Save the Children. An excellent collection of papers that offer ideas on appropriate ways of responding to people affected by conflict.

McCallin, Margaret (ed.) (undated): “The Psychological Well-Being of Refugee Children: Research, Practice and Policy Issues”, Geneva, ICCB. A collection of papers covering a wide range of themes and approaches concerning programmes for children affected by war and displacement

Loughry, Maryanne and Ager, Alastair (eds.) (1999): “The Refugee Experience: Psycho-social Training Module”, Oxford, Refugee Studies Programme. Not specifically about children, but provides a useful resource that includes papers on a range of concepts, training materials and resource materials.

International Children’s Institute (2000): “Crossing Bridges: A Guidebook for Psycho-social Programming for Children in Refugee Camps”. This book provides useful and practical material on how children are affected by conflict and displacement, and on programme planning: it also includes some practical activities that can be used with children. However, it should be noted that it is based on experience with refugees in Southern Europe and Canada and cannot be readily transferred to other and different cultural contexts.

### **VIDEOS**

**Makwaya: Dancing With Hope**, Save the Children – US

### **WEB SITES**

International Save the Children Alliance

[www.savethechildren.net](http://www.savethechildren.net)

International Committee of the Red Cross

[www.icrc.org](http://www.icrc.org)

UNICEF

[www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)