



International  
Rescue  
Committee

# **The IRC's Psychosocial Teacher Training Guide**

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# Introduction

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Caring for and protecting children in countries of conflict has become increasingly complex. Even if children's physical survival needs are being met, the displacement, multiple losses and violence children are forced to endure interrupts normal healthy child development. Children's reactions may range from replicating the violence they have seen, to avoiding any situation, person, or thought which reminds them of the violence. Children may be agitated and destructive towards themselves or others, or they may be passive, withdrawn, or severely depressed. Some children may appear to be and may be untouched by the events they have undergone. Much depends upon the intensity of the conflict a child has witnessed or been a part of, and the individual and social supports a child possesses. Frequently, however, armed conflict takes away important developmental opportunities for children that would normally help to mitigate the effects of violence and serve as building blocks toward healthy adulthood.

Education can play an integral role in the psychosocial protection of children affected by conflict. In order to grow and develop normally, a child has certain age-specific requirements, which must be satisfied. Healthy psychosocial development depends on the nurturing and stimulation that children receive as they grow, and on the opportunities that they have to learn and master new skills. For many of these children, education through schools or non-formal education sites are one of the only places in their community in which they can hope to access this crucial developmental and psychosocial support. Indeed, for many communities impacted by conflict and displacement, education is the focal point of their efforts to help support their children.

The importance of teacher training for restoring nurturing developmental opportunities cannot be overstated. With the protection and psychosocial needs of children in mind, trained teachers communicate critical lifesaving messages to children, model caring adult behavior and help reestablish children's trust, and have the potential to create a climate in the classroom that helps children heal.

As important caregivers of children outside the home, teachers are in a unique position to help children recover through doing what they do everyday – teaching, sharing, playing and listening to children. They not only try to effectively promote quality education and learning but they use the classroom as a place of security through which normalcy, curiosity and play can be promoted. However, teachers frequently find both themselves and their students in need of additional support such as new tools, and partnerships to help get themselves and their students through difficult times. Teachers often face a myriad of questions and emotions from students, many of which they may not always know how to respond to. Teachers may face the challenges unfamiliar, multi-age and multilevel classrooms, limited teaching and learning materials, and crowded classrooms

or shortened days. Classroom management in such a context requires basic knowledge of child development and different pedagogic techniques.

The IRC hopes to help prepare teachers in communities affected by conflict to meet the developmental and emotional needs of children. This short guide is designed to help prepare and motivate teachers for the challenges of such classrooms with simple advice, basic awareness raising of the emotional needs and reactions of children, and strategies to help reach all children in the classroom. This guide will:

- Introduce teachers to the range of emotional responses of children in conflict situations and enable them to better understand and empathically respond to the child in conflict and post-conflict situations
- Engage teachers in reflection and recognition of the importance of the teacher-student relationship in helping children heal.
- Provide some concrete lessons and activities teachers can use in the classroom to promote healing and good classroom management
- Recognize the stresses teachers themselves are facing and help facilitate discussion and support for those teachers.

With the inclusion of background information on psychosocial concepts, introductory training sessions for teachers, and suggested activity lists, it is hoped that this guide will help build a foundation of support for teachers and children and promote quality education as a means of both healing and protecting children.

# War and Child Development

## *How do children react to war?*

No one child is alike. Many responses fall within a range of what can be considered normal. Some children are naturally more prone to be fearful, and news of a dangerous situation may heighten their feelings of anxiety. At the other extreme, some children become immune to, or ignore the violence and suffering around them. Often it is a child's age and ability to understand information that partly determines his/her reaction. For example:

- *Preschool children* confuse facts with their fantasies and fear of danger. They do not yet have the ability to keep events in perspective and may be unable to block out troubling thoughts. For example, they may mistake a single incident rebroadcast on television or radio for happening repeatedly, leading them to believe that many more people are involved than is actually the case.
- *School age children* can understand the difference between fantasy and reality but may have trouble keeping them separate during times of stress and uncertainty. They may also be susceptible to rumors.
- *Middle school and high school age* children may be interested and intrigued by the politics of a situation and feel a need to take a stand or action. They are concerned about concepts of ethics and justice and may show a desire to be involved in related political or charitable activities.

## *Are children always traumatized?*

No! Children's responses to disturbing events will vary, and their resiliency to situations of conflict is dependent upon a number of factors such as the temperament of the child, the support a child has around him or her and the severity of the interaction with distressing or unsettling events. Further, a child's sense of control over her/his environment, such as opportunities for mastery over tasks in reading, drawing, helping with chores in school, or at home, are also important contributing factors to promoting resiliency and coping. For older youth, actively learning about, discussing, and sharing information with peers and family members about the situation of conflict can be critical for promoting their recovery and resiliency following stressful events.

A simple way to imagine how the majority of children react to conflict is to think of a triangle. Children's responses to violent, shocking or otherwise distressing events and their potential for recovery tend to form a pyramid with the resilient majority at the wider, bottom part of the pyramid and the very small number of severely affected children at the top.

**70% or the majority of the children are resilient and will recover if their basic needs are met.**

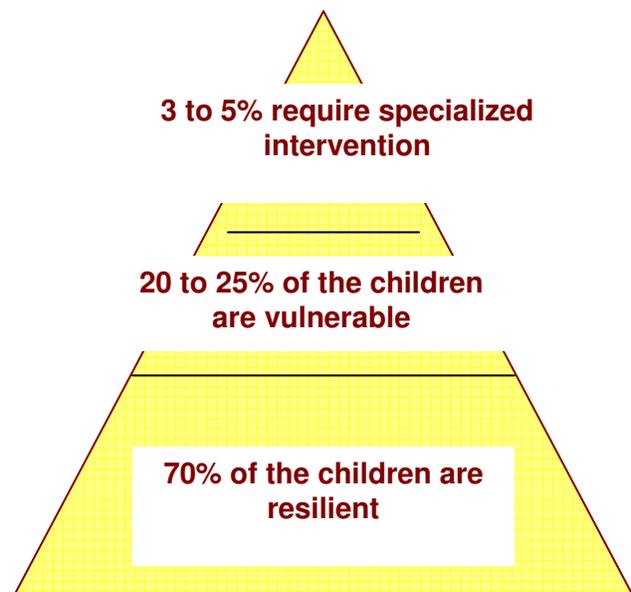
*What to do? - These children should be provided with normal developmental activities, schooling, skills training, sports, recreation activities, etc. With education, family and community support, most children will recover and thrive if given the opportunity to go to school, play, and interact with peers. This is the reason why structured, meaningful activities for children and adolescents are so important during and immediately after a crisis situation.*

**20 to 25% of the children are vulnerable following their exposure to the crisis.**

*What to do? - Like the other groups, these children should be provided with the developmental activities listed above. At the same time, extra attention may be needed. For example: additional supportive conversation, group discussions, expressive art activities, help with a difficult situation at home, or other support. Close observation may help identify the children that require extra attention (i.e., those who are withdrawn, those who are overly aggressive, those no longer functioning in the classroom as they did previously.)*

**3 to 5% of the children may require specialized intervention due to losses, trauma, or unresolved grief.**

*What to do? - Teachers and other adults need to know how to recognize these most vulnerable (least resilient) children, and refer them for special help (i.e., medical doctors, traditional healers, mental health professionals, or other appropriate service providers.) These children should be included in all of the structured,*



*normalizing activities and education opportunities organized for the other children as much as possible.*

# The Role of Education and the Role of Teacher

**In order to teach well, it is essential to know how to motivate and support children. Education and learning involve an active process in which the students can experiment, explore and create. The teacher-pupil relationship is the most important resource in this process. It is particularly important when supporting children with difficulties in learning or adapting to school, whether caused by war, social conflict, economic crisis, environmental disaster or family problems.<sup>1</sup>**

## *Restoring What is Normal*

Children's mental health may be positively supported by meeting their basic social needs. **All children will benefit from restoration of normal daily life experiences such as school, sports and play. Resuming structured activities through daily routine will help the child's self-confidence, increase social integration and may raise an outlook of hope for the future. Education programs can assist in meeting these needs.**

### Children's Needs

### Possible Psychosocial Interventions

#### **A Sense of Belonging**

**\*Establish an educational structure where children feel included.**

**\*Promote the restoration of cultural, traditional practices of childcare, whenever possible.**

#### **Relationships with Peers**

**\*Provide a dependable, interactive routine, through school or other organized educational activity.**

**\*Offer group and team activities (i.e., sports, drama etc.) that requires cooperation and dependence on one another.**

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<sup>1</sup> *Helping Children in Difficult Circumstances, A teacher's Manual*, prepared by Naomi Richman for Save the Children/UK, 1991

**Personal Attachments**

**\*Enlist teachers that can form appropriate caring relationships with children.**

**\*Provide opportunities for social integration and unity by teaching and showing respect for all cultural values, regardless of differing backgrounds.**

**Intellectual Stimulation**

**\*Enhance child development by providing a variety of educational experiences.**

**Physical Stimulation**

**\*Encourage recreational and creative activities, both traditional and new, through games, sports, music, dance etc.**

**To Feel Valued**

**\*Create opportunities for expression through individual/group discussions, drawing, writing, drama, music etc. which promote pride and self-confidence**

**\*Recognize, encourage and praise children**

***Providing Safety, Security, and Support***

Children need to find consistency and security in their day, especially when the rest of their life is unpredictable. Providing a framework that will be the same from day to day and emphasizing familiar routines such as study time, playtime, naptime, can help ensure children are able to anticipate and predict the environment around them. This is very important as it helps children begin to master their environments and participate more fully in the classroom and community life. While some children may have a difficult time accepting routines, most thrive in the structured, predictable environment the classroom and organized activities offer.

Teachers can promote feelings of safety and security by promoting stable routines in the classroom. The mere act of taking attendance can help students realize they are accounted for and their participation is expected. Engaging children in dialogue, listening and sharing information is helpful for creating an environment in which children can relax. Classroom management and the use of discipline in the classroom are important indicators for children's recovery. As teachers model peaceful resolution to

conflicts so too will children learn how to manage the conflicts around them in the interpersonal, classroom and community levels.

The following five chapters will focus more specifically on the types of approaches, skills and tools teachers can use in the school and classroom that will maximize children's ability to learn as well as promote healthy and rapid recovery. The emphasis is on how good teaching practices that reflect respect and empathy for children also positively contribute to helping children heal. Annex 3 at the end of this guide is a brief introductory training to be used with teachers to help them see how their role is key to child protection.

# Healing Classrooms: The School and Classroom Environment

## Part 1: What should my classroom look like?

Child friendly or healing classrooms recognize each child as an individual with unique abilities, personality traits, learning styles, interests, needs, background and ways of responding to the world. It allows children to become fully involved in activities, actively explore their environments, enjoy playing and learning with others, and develop personal strengths and self-esteem while being challenged to excel. Child-centered teaching allows teachers to know their students and address their individual needs; this plays a particularly important role in situations where stability in children's lives has been threatened or disrupted.

### *What does a child-centered approach to education look like in practice?*

- ❖ A child-centered school is safe and open to all children, boys and girls alike. Each child is respected, differences are accepted, and children are able to take responsibility for their learning.
- ❖ The school's resources include safe water and sanitation facilities, age-appropriate furniture, first aid equipment and adequate, accessible learning resources.
- ❖ The school's curriculum contains lessons on values, skills and knowledge, including language, mathematics, science, social studies and life skills.
- ❖ Teachers are respected and their professional skills are nurtured through ongoing support. They use a variety of methodologies that engage the student as an active participant in the learning process, and not merely a passive recipient of information.
- ❖ The community is actively involved in school management and each child's education and development, recognizing that learning takes place both in and out of school and maintaining an overall child-friendly environment.<sup>2</sup>

Here are some basic steps that teachers can take to create school environments that are child-centered:

- ❖ Show respect and empathy for each child and encourage all the children to do the same.
- ❖ Teach tolerance by being tolerant: accept the children with all their faults, do not condemn or reject them, do not laugh at them.

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<sup>2</sup> adapted from <http://www.unicef.org/teachers/>

- ❖ Give children a sense of self-worth by giving encouragement, recognition and praise.
- ❖ Structure the classroom to create positive learning situations. For example, arrange gender equal classroom seating, ensure safe and easy access to bathrooms and exits for multi-age children and children with disabilities, create a “break room” or separate space for teachers to use for their own planning and meetings. Develop curricula and learning activities that actively engage the students.
- ❖ Develop learning activities for example in reading and arithmetic and social studies that incorporate group work to encourage peer interacting, problem-solving and leadership skills.
- ❖ Create interesting classrooms with flexible space (i.e. hang teaching and learning aids and students' work on the walls).
- ❖ Make the classrooms as comfortable as possible with the resources available.

# Healing Classrooms: Communication for Coping

## Part II: Discussing Conflict with Children

Re-entry into school following a violent conflict creates apprehension for teachers and students. These are normal, common reactions to an abnormal event. For teachers, the tasks of leading classes and answering difficult questions from students after a potentially confusing crisis can be understandably overwhelming.

Some children have serious worries but they refrain from talking about them, sometimes out of shame, or because they are not used to talking about themselves with an adult. Many children may share similar experiences and fears but they don't know it because no one is talking to each other about it. It is a great source of support for children to have common problems openly discussed. They stop feeling alone and little by little they feel that they can cope better. At the same time, there are no "perfect" ways to handle the situation and sometimes teachers will not have many answers to students' questions.

The list below provides some guideposts for helping students discuss main worries, exchange experiences, feel listened to, help dispel some damaging rumors that may exist, and promote positive thinking about the future.<sup>3</sup>

### *Talking Points for Creating a Classroom Environment Conducive to Discussion of Shared Worries and for Addressing Students' Need for Information Following a Crisis*

- Recognize that children want and need as much factual information as possible.
- Allow children to discuss their own theories and ideas about what happened so that they can begin to “master” the events.
- Tell students how and where they can obtain information and assistance.
- Initiate group discussions about distressing events that many may –or may not- have experienced, because even those who have not would have heard about them. This will help affected children feel less alone in their suffering.
- At the same time, do **not** ask students to tell their own individual stories. Recounting distressing events is usually beneficial to the speaker only if

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<sup>3</sup> Adapted from *Trauma and Children* (Authors: Lazarus, P.J.) and *Depression in Children* (Authors: Saklofske, D., Janzen, J., Hildebrand, D., and Kaufmann, L.) and *Helping Children in Difficult Circumstances, A Teacher's Manual*, Prepared by Naomi Richman for Save the Children/UK, 1991

this is done spontaneously, within an environment where the child feels emotionally secure, and adults are professionally trained to support the child.

- Tell students that it is okay to feel afraid, confused, angry, and guilty. These are all normal responses to a very abnormal crisis or tragedy.
- Ask if students have questions. Remember to listen carefully and be honest.
- Answer only the questions that students ask you.
- Admit when you don't have specific answers.
- Use realistic terms with students when discussing aspects of an accident, injury, and loss.
- Avoid euphemisms.

### **Emphasize**

- Each student is valued and will be supported in this time of strife.
- School is safe and central to the community.
- Varied reactions are OK.

While many children begin to heal by talking about their experiences and feelings following stressful event, for some children talking is not helpful. In some cultures, for example, talking openly is not comfortable, appropriate, or even "polite." Some children have been raised in families or situations where talking about one's feelings was not possible, supported, or practiced. Other children simply prefer not to discuss their feelings openly, due to the nature of their personality, worries about privacy, or a lack of trust in the process. If discussion is not appropriate, consider the other range of techniques proposed in Part III.

# Healing Classrooms: Psychosocial Activities for Improved Learning and Recovery

## Part III: What types of activities promote children's learning and recovery?

### *Encourage Play and Expressive Activities*

Play is the work of children. **Especially during stressful times, parents need to encourage children to play. Play allows children to relate to events around them and to express these events in their own simplified way. When we realize how important play is for the development of children, we are able to recognize the need to provide distressed or traumatized children with 1) the opportunity to play, 2) a safe place to play in, and with 3) things with which to play with. Children can then re-enter their development cycle, which has been so violently interrupted. The sooner we can intervene with play in the life of a distressed or traumatized child, the sooner the child can appropriate the healing effects of the play environment and the sooner hope will re-enter the world of these children.**<sup>4</sup>

**Younger children will deal with distressing or traumatic events in their play or drawings. They may make toys clearly related to the event, or act out parts or the entire event in individual and collective play. This is a way of mastering both the cognitive and emotional aspects of what they have experienced; it also helps them work through negative events. Their participation in play with others can raise their spirits and occupy them in meaningful ways.**

**While play usually gives children some relief from feelings, especially anxiety, they are unable to get any relief from the anxiety if their play is repeated over time. Adults need to help the children alter the pattern of play in a way that will give them some mastery of the situation. This may be done by joining in their play and modifying the sequence of events, helping the child, for example, give a different ending to the**

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<sup>4</sup> Adapted from *Rapid Educational Response In Complex Emergencies: A discussion document*, Aguilar and Retamal, 1998.

event or placing a child who otherwise may let others lead, be the leader in her/his play

Often children identify with the forces that control the traumatic events. Through play, they are able to handle fear and anxiety in their fantasy and thus change the course of events and exercise control over what is happening. At times, they take the role of those in charge, of those in power. Play can also involve drawing. Through drawings, children can participate in wish-fulfillment, express feelings that are difficult to put into words, and deal with a traumatic event in a symbolic manner. Role-play and singing also provide ways to represent what they have experienced.

Although play and other expressive activities is a preferred activity of younger children, it can also be effective with adolescents. Youth can use expressive activities as an alternative approach to address questions and concerns about their ongoing developmental growth. Through self-expression, they can enhance and further develop their advanced problem solving skills, innovation, and abilities to think critically about themselves and their surroundings. Expressive activities also offers youth necessary windows to enjoy relaxation, laughter and spontaneity

There are a number of different kinds of activities that teachers can use in a classroom to help children recover. Depending on the age of students, teachers can:

**Table 1. Age-specific Activities for Children After Stressful Events<sup>5</sup>**

| Preschoolers                        | Elementary (grades K-5)   | Middle/Junior High to High School (grades 6-12)  |
|-------------------------------------|---|--|
| Draw-a-picture                      | Draw-a-picture  | Art, music, dance  |
| Tell-a-story                        | Tell-a-story  | Stories, essays, poetry, video production  |
| Coloring books on disaster and loss | Books on friendship, families, animals, upbeat and joyful stories   | Books on friendship, adventure, poetry   |
| Doll, toy play                      | Create a play or puppet show about a disaster – But if it has a sad ending <u>never</u> let the child leave without further discussions and always end on a positive note | Create a play, puppet show, or - If it has a sad ending <u>never</u> let the child leave without further discussions and always end on a positive note |

<sup>5</sup> Reprinted and adapted from Lystad, M. (Ed.). (1990). *Innovations in Mental Health Services to Disaster Victims* (DHHS Publication No. ADM 90-1390). Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office.

|   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| Group games                                     | Create a game about disaster recovery, disaster preparedness, partnerships   | Group discussions about disaster preparedness, or disaster recovery and partnerships   |
| Talks about disaster safety and self-protection | School study or community service projects   | School projects on health or natural and social sciences<br>Community service projects |
| Coloring books on happy family times            | Ask the children to create a play or puppet show about positive outcomes after a disaster – or simply “happy times” with friends and family. | Group discussions about what they would like to do/be when they grow up                |

### **Expressive and Participatory Activities**

**1) Daily Journaling** - Keeping a journal is a very effective way for students to express and explore their feelings. Students who have never used this method to communicate their feelings may find it easier to use a combination of words and pictures in their journal to express thoughts and feelings. Journaling can be done on a daily basis for a short period of time. It can be the opening activity everyday for ten minutes. Journals can be dealt with in several ways -- they can be personal journals that students write to themselves only, or the journal can provide a method of written correspondence between student and teacher. Teachers can encourage more dialogue and expression by the student by asking open-ended questions when responding in writing to student’s journal entries. <sup>6</sup>

**2) Poetry** - Poetry provides students with a slightly different approach for expressing feelings. The "haiku," for example, require students to provide not only the setting, but the mood as well. Not sure if this sentence is necessary. Writing a picture book, or short story can help students express their feelings and complement most history, language arts or science classes.

**3) Short Stories** - **Often adolescents seek to master the trauma through written expression.**

**4) Drawing pictures** - Writing a picture book alone or with other students about their lives and hopes for the future - or the lives of an imaginary character - can help students express their feelings and complement most history, language arts, or science classes. Emphasize stories with characters that overcome difficulties. Try not to ask children to draw a particular theme but a) leave the initiative of what they want to draw to them, and b) only ask general questions about a “sad” drawing, and refrain from asking details if they are not forthcoming.

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<sup>6</sup> Resource Material: *The Creative Journal for Teens*, by Lucia Capacchione, Ph.D.

**5) Using puppets and masks** - Pretending to be someone else allows children to communicate ideas or feelings that otherwise would be too difficult to talk about.

**6) Music and dance** - Movements and rhythm can help to release tension, produce a feeling of well-being, and possibly link the child with familiar happy memories.

**7) Theatre** - Children can create their own stories and endings.

**8) Conduct study projects or multidisciplinary units focused on war**

as a way of integrating learning across the curriculum. Students can learn and apply math, science, and language skills in exploring the causes and consequences of conflicts.

**9) Introduce units on conflict resolution** or health and safety to give students a sense of competence, confidence, and control in being able to handle the environment around them now and in the future.

**10) Organize or encourage community service projects** that give children the opportunity to use their skills and to help their family, school, or community prepare for or recover from natural disasters. Doing meaningful work and helping others during a disaster might also give them a sense of mastery or keep them from feeling helpless and victimized.

# Healing Classrooms : Teaching the Whole Child

## Part IV: Teaching Strategies for Reaching all Students

- *A child learns as a whole person*
- *A child progresses in their intellectual ability (cognitive development)*
- *A child is an active learner*
- *A child builds their own knowledge of the world*
- *A child's learning is individual*
- *A child's learning is a process that takes time*
- *A child learns best when the activity is based on real life experiences*
- *A child learns through play*
- *A child learns from being with others (social interaction)*
- *A child learns from practicing new skills*
- *A child learns when they feel good about themselves*

Based on: 1996, Stone S., Creating the Multigrade Classroom  
1994, Polotino, C and Davis, A., Multi-age and More

### ***Reaching all Learners: Diversify teaching styles***

Each child is a unique person, with an emotional self, an intellectual self, and a physical self. As a child learns new ideas and skills they use their emotional, intellectual, and physical self to learn. After a conflict children may need to connect with learning materials in different ways. Each child learns in a different way. They learn at different rates and in different styles. Any progress a child makes in their learning should be praised and encouraged. Children should not feel they are a failure because they don't learn at the same rate as other children. Children who learn quickly should be able to progress in their learning at a faster rate.

Some children learn best through activities that involve the use of language. Others require a lot of visual information, collecting and sorting information and games, or physical activities. Because different children learn in different ways teachers needs to plan and use different kinds of activities in the teaching and learning plan for each day. **As a teacher it is important to think about the whole child so that you can provide for their full development as a whole person.**

Always try to:

- get to know the strengths and weaknesses of children in your classroom
- praise children when they have done something well

- help children who are having difficulty learning so they can experience success in their learning.

**Chart 1: Reaching all children through diversified teaching strategies**

| <b>Desired Goal</b>  | <b>Questions to ask</b>   | <b>Ideas to try</b>   |
|--|---|---|
| Greater communication in the classroom about feelings and emotions | Have I planned activities where the children have been given the opportunity to express their feelings?   | <u>Example:</u> After reading a story, ask the children how they feel about what happened in the story.<br><u>Example:</u> Ask children to write or draw something they are good at doing, have learnt during the day, something they enjoy doing   |
| Opportunities for combining learning and physical development      | Have I planned activities where the children can be physically active?                                    |   |
| Promote interaction between students in the classroom              | Have I planned activities that allow children to interact socially?                                       | <u>Example:</u> Try grouping students with partners or in groups of three to four to work on projects. Assign roles so some students do writing, some reading, some verbal presentation and some artwork. Vary the roles in groups.   |
| More connections between the classroom and the community           | “Do my lessons help children to cope with their immediate environment /the situation in their community?” | <u>Example:</u> Ask children to make health posters to put up in the town or village.<br><u>Example:</u> Have a day at the school when the children’s families come to the school and the children talk to them about what they have been learning.<br><u>Example:</u> Ask the children to find out what games their parents and grandparents played when they were children. Use these card games in teaching and learning activities. |

# Healing Classrooms : Effective Classroom Management and Child Friendly Discipline

## **Part V: How do I keep my classroom friendly when students are uncooperative?**

The temptation to control a classroom by force is great and teachers may even be repeating what was considered acceptable behavior in the past. Ridiculing students, physical abuse or exploitation is not uncommon in some classrooms. Changes in teacher classroom management skills will be slow and hard won, but the benefits enormous. Values are caught, not taught. Teachers who are courteous, prompt, enthusiastic, calm -control, patient and organized provide examples for their students through their own behavior. Teachers that demonstrate an ability to work with different learners, different personalities and dispositions model for children the skills they will need to successfully navigate their new environment.

1. Develop a set of expectations in collaboration with other teachers or your school administration. This might cover issues of punctuality, attendance, acceptable behavior given the learning and community environment students are in, and policies on homework or projects.
2. Be consistent with your rules or expectations and make sure students know them well.
3. Be patient with yourself and with your students. These are not easy times for everyone.
4. Communicate with parents often about their son or daughter's progress and try to work as a team with them.
5. Remember to diversify your teaching strategies. An example might be to use the first 15 minutes of class for lectures or presentations, then get children working together in groups or with partners.
6. Break the class period into two or three different activities to keep children's attention high and make sure you are reaching different types of learners.
7. Begin class on time and end on time. Idle time can encourage misbehavior.
8. Start your day's lesson with something interesting such as a song, joke, or interactive activity.
9. Keep all students actively involved. For example, while a student does a presentation, involve the other students in evaluating it.

10. Discipline individual students quietly and privately. Never engage in a disciplinary conversation across the room. This could humiliate the students or put the teacher and student into a public disagreement.

# Supporting Teachers in Difficult Times

Teachers are also frequently affected by the traumatic events they or their family members have lived through. Teachers may have experienced personal losses, such as the loss of property, loved ones, jobs and homes. When these individuals come forward to help care for children in situations of conflict, it is important to recognize these losses and their impact on teachers' abilities to educate and respond to the emotional needs of children. Teachers may need space or accompaniment in processing their own grief before they can effectively find the emotional resources to serve children.

Below are some general reminders that can be shared with teachers if culturally appropriate.

- Sadness, grief, and anger are normal reactions to an abnormal event.
- Acknowledging your feelings may help recovery.
- Focusing on strengths and abilities will help you to heal.
- Accepting help from community programs and resources is healthy.
- We each have different needs and different ways of coping.
- It is common to want to strike back at people who have caused great pain. However, nothing good is accomplished by hateful language or actions.

Like their students, the signs that teachers may need stress management assistance will vary and only through observation and dialogue can behavior be identified as more normal or less normal. Like their students, teachers too will benefit from opportunities to communicate, normative routines, and support from family, peers and community. Some of the following can be communicated with teachers:

- Talk with someone about your feelings— anger, sorrow, and other emotions-- even though it may be difficult.
- Take steps to promote your own physical and emotional healing by staying active in your daily life patterns or by adjusting them. This healthy outlook will help yourself and your family. (i.e. healthy eating, rest, exercise, relaxation, meditation.)
- Maintain a normal household and daily routine, limiting demanding responsibilities of yourself and your family.
- Participate in memorials, rituals, and use of symbols as a way to express feelings.
- Use existing supports provided by family, friends, and religious communities.
- Establish a family emergency plan. Feeling that there is something that you can do in the event of future violence or unrest can be very comforting.

## Conclusion

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**The important contribution that teachers make in helping children cope and heal following stressful events cannot be overstated. This guide is dedicated to providing teachers with an understanding of psychosocial concepts, training in creative and caring teaching activities and to lay a foundation for psychosocial healing in their classrooms. This guide also recognizes that teachers themselves have lived through stressful experiences and still they bravely continue working under difficult circumstances. It is therefore hoped that teachers themselves will benefit from engaging with their students in activities that promote coping and resilience.**

**With the healing and protection of students and teachers in mind, those who use this guide for teacher training are encouraged to actively listen to teachers, and to remain flexible, reflective and responsive to the ideas and input of the participating teachers. In situations for which stressful events impact whole communities, teachers offer a unique and important understanding of their present context and should be included in all levels of activity design and implementation to best meet their own, and their students' particular needs.**

# Annex 1 Training Activity: Teaching Methods and the Child-Centered Teacher

## Sample Training Lesson Plan

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|                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| <b>TIME:</b>      | 160 minutes  |
| <b>MATERIALS:</b> | Flipchart and stand, Markers, Masking tape   |
| <b>HANDOUTS:</b>  | Three Teaching Methods; Rectangle/Triangle Puzzle  |
| <b>OUTCOME:</b>   | The participants will understand the principles of good educational practice, how to create supportive, stimulating, and stable classroom environments, as well as the attributes of a good teacher and how good teachers teach. |

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### ACTIVITIES:

**1. Opening Activity: A Good Teacher** **10 minutes**

Participants share a song or poem children in their country really enjoy.

**2. Activity: A Good Teacher** **30 minutes**

Begin this activity by asking participants to suggest different types of learning situations and examples of who might be a “teacher” in each. Answers should identify:

1. Formal learning environments: An educational system with a fixed curriculum and a chronological progression through levels or grades, usually taking place in an institution and involves some kind of assessment leading to a certificate or qualification. (Example of “teacher”: School teacher)
2. Non-Formal learning environments: A flexible approach to education using alternative modes of delivery outside the formal system. (Example of “teacher”: Tutor, or Trainer)
3. Informal learning environments: A process of learning through everyday experiences and the transfer of knowledge. (Example of “teacher”: Relative or Friend)

Ask participants to take a few minutes to think of someone in their life who was a good “teacher.” What were the characteristics that made him/her a good teacher? As noted above, this person need not have been a schoolteacher and may have been a family member, etc.

In pairs, participants tell their partner about their teacher. When the pairs have finished, a few individuals should describe their partner's teacher to the whole group. Together, the whole group creates a list of characteristics of a good teacher.

*To help guide this discussion, consider the following questions:*

- ❖ How were the descriptions of a good teacher similar? Different?
- ❖ Did the characteristics of a good teacher include:
  - Understands children's development and how children learn;
  - Takes into account individual differences and lets students know what is expected of them;
  - Provides students with opportunities to practice what they have learned;
  - Helps students develop creative and analytical thinking skills;
  - Monitors and evaluates students work in a way that students learn from their mistakes;
  - Helps students develop independent learning skills?

*Conclude this activity with a discussion of how all people who work with children are "teachers" whether they are in a classroom or not. Discuss the implications of this on behaviour*

### **3. Modeling Teacher-Centered Teaching 20 minutes**

Begin with a quick discussion of teacher-centered teaching, asking participants to identify the main methods used (teacher lectures, students take notes, memorization, and group response to questions...). When this list has been assembled, ask for volunteers to model these methods, teaching to the entire group of participants. This can be done in a lighthearted way, so encourage participants to have fun "acting" as a teacher. Finish with a quick closing discussion of this teaching style.

### **4. Teaching Strategies – Adding to Our Repertoire 20 Minutes**

Begin this session by asking participants to suggest other student-centered activities/strategies, especially those that they already use in their work. Participants should also identify possible obstacles that might prevent the implementation of the strategies. Responses should be recorded and, if the group wishes, participants who suggested additional strategies may be given paper to write them up formally for the group.

### **5. Activity: Create a Student-Centered Lesson Plan 90 minutes**

Building off the student-centered techniques and the simple method of group work, teachers now create a lesson-plan incorporating these methods. The activity takes place in two parts, first modeled by the facilitator for the whole group, and then by small groups working on their own.

- A. Ask the group to decide on a hobby or skill (theme) of which they have good knowledge and which can be taught to others. When the group has reached a decision,

the facilitator models the creation of a lesson plan with the group. First, outline the basic components of a lesson plan (below) and then complete each component on a flipchart paper with the group.

- Theme (As chosen by participants)
- Learning goals (“At the end of the lesson, participants will be able to...” List 3-5 goals.)
- Activities to reach goals; (Enumerated and drawn from the three types of teaching. emphasize learner-centered activities, such as group work. Note: If participants want to include teacher-centered methods such as lecturing, they should not be discouraged, as long as they also include student-centered activities.)
- Materials (Staff and space/location necessary for implementation.)

**B.** Have participants form small groups and distribute the handout *Lesson Plan Format* (one A4-sized copy for each participant and one copy of flipchart paper for each group). Ask participants to create a lesson plan around a topic of their choosing. Topics may be academic, which might work better with a group predominantly composed of teachers, or drawn from issues of concern for children in their community, e.g. landmine awareness, which might work better with a mixed group of participants.

Circulate among the groups to answer questions and give guidance, as needed.

**C.** Participants present their lesson plans and take comments and questions from other groups. Participants post the flip chart version so others may share the lesson plans.

#### **4. Discussion: Good Pedagogical Practice is Good Psychosocial Practice** **30 minutes**

Review the day up to this point with participants. Encourage any questions that they may have. When the review is finished, ask participants to take a few minutes to reflect on student-centered teaching. Have participants share their opinions of the benefits of student-centered teaching. Divide a flipchart paper in half and record academic benefits on one half and emotional/psychological benefits on the other half. If participants have trouble identifying psychological benefits, ask them about their own experience of working in groups or learning through the discovery method. How do they feel when they present their group’s work to their peers?; When they discover something new?

## **Annex 2 Teacher Training Activity: Identifying Children's Well-Being**

### **Group Activity: A Happy Child**

**30 minutes**

**A.** Have the participants form groups and ask them to draw the outline of a child on a sheet of flipchart paper. Each group's child should be given a name, which is also written on the page. On the left side of the page, have each group list "normal" behaviors and characteristics that they would expect their child to display under ordinary circumstances. The lists will probably record things like "playful, curious, friendly, trusting, etc." Report these lists back to the large group, and establish a list.

**B.** Ask each group to return to their child outline and list children's behaviors and emotions in a post conflict situation. Responses such as "sad, withdrawn, fearful, anxious, etc." will likely be recorded. Again, report these lists back to the large group, and establish one overall list. When comparing the two lists, children's suffering will become clear.

**C.** Distribute the handout *Understanding Children in Difficult Circumstances* and read through it together with the participants, taking comments.

### **Brainstorming: Helping Children Cope**

**30 minutes**

In this activity, participants begin thinking about how to help children who have been traumatized by conflict.

**A.** In the large group, use a question and answer format to discuss differences in degree of traumatic response among children, noting that each child reacts in her/his own way. Introduce the pyramid depicting different levels of traumatic response in children and ask for feedback and comments from the participants. Ask participants to discuss the traditional ways that children who exhibit distressful behaviors are treated and helped. All participants should be aware of how to access the traditional treatments suggested.

**B. Discuss and list the potential psychosocial benefits children can receive through recreation programs and schooling. Give participants time to make their own detailed lists of activities that would be appropriate in their community context. A leading question might be: "Imagine that you are working with a group of children who are exhibiting distressed behaviors, what activities can you use to help them feel better?"**

**Below are some ideas that might be introduced when training teachers and increasing their psychosocial care awareness. This list may be made into a handout ahead of time or posted on an overhead. Have participants discuss this list in comparison to theirs and create a final list reflecting all ideas. With regard to "communicating/listening," take time to discuss positive communication techniques.**

**Examples of play and expression may include:**

*Using stories* – Emphasize stories with characters that overcome difficulties. (Draw upon songs and stories presented in opening activities, and connect to future presentations.)

*Drawing pictures* – Through drawings, children communicate experiences and feelings that are hard for them to talk about.

*Using puppets and masks* – Pretending to be someone else allows children to communicate ideas or feelings that otherwise would be too difficult to talk about.

*Music and dance* – Movements and rhythm can help to release tension, produce a feeling of well-being, and may link the child with familiar happy memories.

*Theatre* – Children can create their own stories and endings. They may develop characters, dialogue, and actions that reflect and/or resolve their experiences.

*Writing* – For those who can write, stories and poems are useful means of expression.

*Communicating/Listening* – For some children, verbal expression may be a significant way they communicate their feelings.. To be good listeners and develop children’s trust, children must know that what they say will be kept private and confidential, except in cases where the child is at risk of harm. Communicating well involves understanding the thoughts and feelings that the other person is expressing and responding in a way that is helpful.

**Activity: Practicing Activities for Children**

**90 minutes**

**Below are two practice exercises to give participants experience in leading such activities. The facilitator may use either one or both, depending on time.**

**I. Drawing Events from Life Experiences** (expression through drawing)

**Drawing is an excellent non-verbal method that encourages children, especially shy and withdrawn ones, to express themselves. If drawing materials are not available, encourage the practice of drawing on the ground with a stick.**

**A.** Have each participant make two drawings:

- 1) an unhappy event. 2) a happy event

**B.** In pairs, have participants listen in a non-judgmental way to their partner's explanations of their drawings. Emphasize that the quality of the drawing is not to be discussed – only the content. Participants should ask questions of each other to encourage explanation, including how they felt in each situation they have drawn.

**C.** In the large group, summarize the feedback as to the appropriateness of this activity for the participants’ community. Ask participants how they felt when they were asked to describe their drawings. When did they go into more detail? When did they stop talking? (This gets to the qualities of a good listener without directly confronting specific participants.)

*Points to emphasize regarding working with children:*

- ❖ All children (and adults) are creative and can draw with practice and encouragement.
- ❖ Don't compare the children's drawings, saying that some are better than others are, as this will inhibit those not praised.
- ❖ If children say they can't draw, tell them that they can. They just need to practice more.

**Note:** Adults often assume that children under the age of 7 are not aware of dangerous or sad things happening around them and so do not explain anything to them. Sometimes adults think that young children are unable to communicate their thoughts and feelings. The result is that young children may be left without any explanation as to why they had to come to live in a new place, why some people are suddenly gone from their family, etc. Take time to make the point that these activities can be adapted for use with children of all ages and that providing information, or communicating the truth if one does not know also helps children feel comfortable that they are being responded to seriously.

## **II. Dance, Drama Movement and Music**

Ask participants to read or recollect traditional stories or folk tales from their culture that can be reenacted. Create small groups (3 or 4) and have each group enact a story for all the participants using movement, drama, music and dance. The purpose of this activity is for the participants to learn how these kinds of activities can help students recover from trauma. The actual enactments should be no more than 5 minutes each.

### **Closing Discussion**

**15 minutes**

Hold a wrap-up question and answer session about strategies and resources that help the majority of children who have gone through frightening and distressing experiences to understand them and process them better. This session should give the participants confidence in helping children recover and become healthy. The session must also address the special situation of the small number of children who are in severe psychological distress. Teachers must be taught to identify these children and what to do for them.

Questions to review with participants:

- ❖ What are the signs of a child in severe psychological distress?
- ❖ What referral systems are in place for handling these special cases?
- ❖ How do recreation and play activities help all children?

Encourage participants to express any lingering concerns about psychosocial issues. It is important for each participant to become actively involved in order to gain a sense of confidence and a tool kit of ways to work in the classroom with these children.



## Annex 3 Teacher Training Activity: Teachers and Child Protection

### Education for Protection – Monitoring

**60 minutes**

**A.** Explain that improving access to school is an example of the ways in which education can protect children’s rights. (i.e. By increasing access the education program protects a child’s right to education.) Ask participants to suggest other ways that education can protect children. Suggestions should include:

- **Student-centered teaching promotes children’s healing from conflict.**
- **Education conducted in a safe space keeps children from harm’s way.**

**B.** When participants have finished compiling a list, introduce the concept of monitoring, noting that monitoring is central to protecting children’s rights.

In the previous activity A, participants noted how monitoring the attendance of groups of children can protect their right to education. Beginning with attendance, participants should brainstorm a list other ways to monitor children through education. Such a list might include:

- Attendance
- Performance
- Physical condition
- Emotional condition

**C.** Working in pairs, participants should complete a monitoring chart (below), identifying multiple responses for each box. As an example, complete one potential response together with the entire group, based on answers from the previous activity.

| <b>Indicator</b>       | <b>Status</b>     | <b>Potential Cause</b>   | <b>Follow-up Steps</b>                    |
|------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|---|
| 1. Attendance          | Stopped Attending | Can’t afford school fees | Talk to parents. Try to find scholarship. |
| 2. Performance         |                   |                          |   |
| 3. Physical Condition  |                   |                          |   |
| 4. Emotional Condition |                   |                          |   |

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**D.** Participants present their answers, which are compiled on flip charts. Give participants time to comment on the exercise and the group's responses. Discuss how the various categories may be interrelated. For example, a student's performance may be affected by her emotional condition.

**4. Discussion: Protection - In the Classroom *30 minutes***

**A.** Review the morning's lesson up to this point. Ask participants to think of ways that a child may be put at risk in a classroom. Prompt discussion by raising the following examples: exploitation by teachers, violence in the classroom, expulsion of pregnant girls, teaching of hate, forced recruitment by militaries who pass by schools, gender or ethnic biasing.

**B.** Highlighting those risks that occur between a teacher and student in a classroom, ask participants to suggest rules that they feel caregivers of children should abide by. Brainstorm a list quickly and without comment, then return to the list and elicit discussion. When the discussion has finished, compile a final list.

## Appendix 4 Teacher Training Activity: Creating A Child-Friendly Environment

A. Brainstorm the following list of “Qualities of a child-friendly environment” to participants. Ask participants to comment on the list and suggest additional qualities, building on the group’s discussions of protection and psychosocial well-being.

### Qualities of a child-friendly environment:

- Structure the learning time. Develop a daily schedule and stick to it.
- Always be prepared before starting the day.
- Design cooperative activities.
- Create a child-friendly atmosphere (set up the room at the eye level of the child, hang up pictures, art, put labels on materials and areas of room if possible: art area, recreation area, etc.)
- Make the room comfortable: not too hot or too cold (if possible), mats for sitting, etc.
- When learners are working in groups, move from group to group and interact
- Show empathy and respect, active listening and encourage the children to do so too

B. From the discussion of a child-friendly environment, open a discussion of discipline. Note that discipline also depends on a good teacher-student relationship and a positive learning environment. All children learn better when they want to please the teacher and think that they will be accepted despite their mistakes and difficulties.

Have participants construct a list of efficient disciplinary measures that take into account children’s rights, protection, psychosocial well-being and a child-friendly classroom atmosphere. A list should include:

- Good class preparation that sparks interest in learning and motivates students. This keeps children on task and limits acting out due to boredom.
- Avoid talking too much about bad behavior and emphasize good behavior.
- If criticism of a child or children is needed, do so only when mistakes are serious.
- Show that all children are accepted and important as group members despite their mistakes.
- Do not punish or humiliate children.
- Avoid comparing the “misbehaving” child to other “behaving” children.

- Avoid expelling children from the learning space. Encourage them to redirect their behavior and do something they like to do.
- If a child becomes too disruptive, have someone sit quietly with them (briefly) or assist them to take a time out break and talk it out. Always make causes and effects clear by discussing consequences.

**C. Making a Group Contract.** One of the best ways to maintain discipline in a classroom is to have well-articulated rules that the children themselves have a role in creating. Explain that this should be something that the young people generate themselves along with adult guidance. At the end, it is best if all parties sign the group contract.

1. By using these approaches, the teacher can help the child to be disciplined or motivated to change their behavior.
2. When children improve their behavior, always give them special attention such as classroom responsibility or public praise.

To practice creating such a contract, first have participants brainstorm topics to be covered in the contract, e.g. being on time, acting out, talking in class, not completing work assignments, etc. Then, assume the role of a teacher (or have an experienced participant teacher do this) and ask the participants to pretend that they are sixth grade students. Work with the “students” to fill in the rules under each topic through a process similar to the one used in creating a list of rules for this training. When the rules are finished, have the “students” decide on the consequences for breaking the rules.

Note: Participants will naturally be skeptical of this type of process. However, assure them that once the teacher shows that they are serious in listening to the students’ input, they will take the task seriously and often turn out to be stricter in suggesting consequences than their teachers usually are.