

Creating Healing Classrooms:

Guide for Teachers and Teacher Educators

For Field Testing





International Rescue Committee
Child and Youth Protection and Development Unit

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Mission Statement

Founded in 1933, the IRC is a global leader in emergency relief, rehabilitation, protection of human rights, post-conflict development, resettlement services and advocacy for those uprooted or affected by conflict and oppression.

Background and Acknowledgements

This guide is a product of IRC experience and expertise in many different countries over a number of years. It draws on the work of the diverse IRC education programs supporting crisis-affected students, teachers and their families in more than 20 countries. The guide was originally developed by Wendy Smith, Joan Duncan, Marie de la Soudière and Catherine Weisner, with additional input from Jackie Kirk. Rebecca Winthrop, Jane Warburton and Janet Shriberg have all contributed to its review and development. Special thanks also go to the Pearson Foundation for their editorial, design and production assistance.

The guide has been piloted in a range of diverse emergency situations, including Iraq, Liberia, northern Ethiopia and Aceh. Thanks go to all IRC education teams in these locations who provided feedback throughout this process. Most recently, the guide has also been distributed to and used by organizations working in the USA in response to Hurricane Katrina. We believe that the guide will only be enriched with further field testing, and the IRC's education team welcomes readers' comments or feedback.

For further details of IRC Education programs please see: www.theirc.org

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Introduction

Caring for and protecting children in countries in the midst of crisis and post-crisis recovery¹ has become increasingly complex. Even if children's physical survival needs are being met, the displacement, multiple losses and violence children are often forced to endure interrupt normal healthy child development. Children's reactions may range from replicating the violence they have seen to avoiding any situation, person or thought that reminds them of the violence. Children may be agitated and destructive toward themselves or others, or they may be passive, withdrawn or severely depressed.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 crisis a child has witnessed or been a part of, as well as the individual and social supports a child possesses. Frequently, however, crises such as armed conflict or natural disasters take away important developmental opportunities for children that would normally help to mitigate the effects of violence or disruption and serve as building blocks toward healthy adulthood.

Education can play an integral role in the psychosocial² protection of children affected by crisis. In order to grow and develop normally, a child has certain age-/development-specific requirements that 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. Research has shown that most children are resilient, meaning they have the capacity to bounce back in adverse settings, if they are given adequate opportunities for healthy development.³ For many of these children, education, through formal schools or nonformal learning, is one of the ways in which – in their community – they can hope to access this crucial developmental and psychosocial support. Indeed, for many communities impacted by crisis and displacement, education is the focal point of their efforts to help support their children.

From a child rights perspective, education is a particularly important intervention. Education is a right in itself, and it is also a means to fulfilling other rights, such as providing children with protection from physical harm and from exploitative work, giving them space and time to play and make friends, and encouraging them to express themselves. Education is also an enabling right in that literacy and numeracy assist children, youth and adults to access their range of other rights.

¹ The International Rescue Committee works in acute and protracted emergency, return and reintegration, and reconstruction contexts. Our mission is to support people uprooted or affected by violent conflict and oppression. At times, when already on the ground and best placed to respond, we support people affected by natural disasters. In this document, the term "crisis and post-crisis recovery" refers to the range of contexts in which we work.

² For a more in-depth discussion of the term psychosocial well-being, please see PWG (2003). *Psychosocial Intervention in Complex Emergencies: A Framework for Practice*. Edinburgh/Oxford: The Psychosocial Working Group (<http://www.forcedmigration.org/psychosocial/papers/A%20Framework%20for%20Practice.pdf>).

³ For a more in-depth discussion of resiliency and children affected by war, please see Loughry, M. and Eyber, C. (2003). *Psychosocial Concepts in Humanitarian Work with Children: A Review of the Concepts and Related Literature*. Washington, DC: National Research Council.

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

As important caregivers outside the home, teachers are in a unique position to help children recover through their everyday activities – teaching, sharing, playing and listening to and with children. They not only try to effectively promote quality education and learning, but they also use the classroom as a safe place in which normalcy, curiosity and play can be promoted. However, teachers frequently find both themselves and their students in need of additional support. Teachers often face a myriad of questions, reactions and emotions from students, and they may not know how to respond. Teachers may face the challenges of 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 aims to help prepare all teachers in communities affected by crisis 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 class. The guide will:

- ❑ Introduce teachers to the range of emotional responses of children in crisis and post-crisis recovery situations and enable them to better understand and empathically respond to children in crisis and post-crisis recovery.
- ❑ Engage teachers in reflection and recognition of the importance of positive teacher-student relationships in helping children heal.
- ❑ Provide some concrete lessons and activities that teachers can use in the classroom to promote healing through positive classroom management strategies.
- ❑ Recognize the stresses teachers themselves are facing and help facilitate discussion and support for such 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 children and teachers and promote quality education as a means of both healing and protecting children.

Crisis and Child Development

How do children react to crisis?

No two children are alike in their response to crisis. 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 a child's age and ability to understand information partly determines his or her reaction.

For example:

- ❑ **Young children (0–7)** 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 as something that is happening repeatedly, leading them to believe that many more people are involved than is actually the case.
- ❑ **Older children (8–13)** 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.
- ❑ **Teens and adolescents (14–18)** 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 they 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 in situations of crisis is dependent upon a number of factors, such as the temperament of the child, the support the child has around him or her – especially support of family and community – and the severity of the interaction with distressing or unsettling events. Further, a child's sense of control over her or his environment, such as opportunities for involvement in tasks such as reading, drawing or helping with chores in school or at home, is also an important contributing factor to promoting resiliency and coping. For older youth, actively learning, discussing and sharing information about the situation of the crisis with peers and family members can be critical for promoting recovery and resiliency following stressful events.

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

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

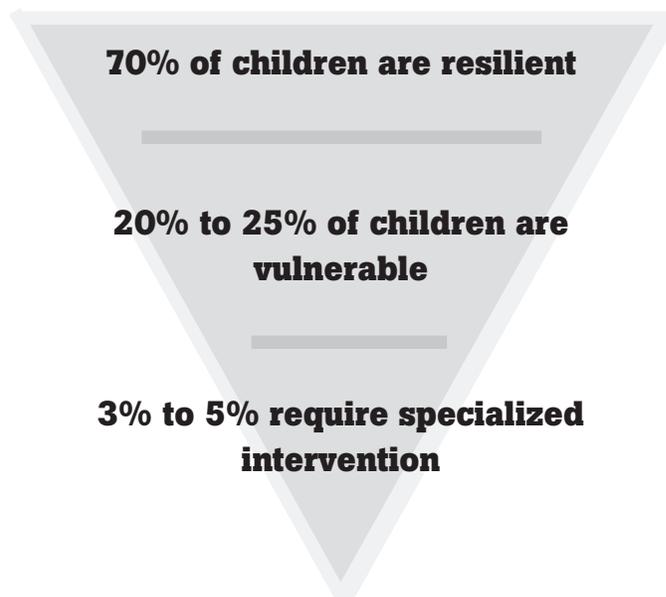
What to do? *These children should be provided with normal developmental activities, such as schooling, skills training, sports, recreation activities and so on. With education and family and community support, most children will recover and thrive if given the opportunity to go to school, learn, play 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 children are vulnerable following their exposure to a 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 to identify the children who require extra attention (e.g., those who are withdrawn, those who are overly aggressive, those no longer functioning in the classroom as they did previously).*

- **3% to 5% of 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 (e.g., medical doctors, traditional healers, mental health professionals or other appropriate service providers). While it is normal for children to have behavioral and other reactions to crisis, children requiring specialized intervention are often identified because their reactions persist over time. As much as possible, these children should also be included in all of the structured, normalizing activities and education opportunities organized for the other children described above.*



The Role of Education and the Role of the 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 who evidence difficulties in learning or adapting to school, whether caused by war, social conflict, economic crisis, environmental disaster or family problems.⁴

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 family and community activities, school, sports and play. Resuming structured activities within a 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 Interventions
<i>Sense of Belonging</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Establish an educational structure where children feel included.<input type="checkbox"/> Promote the restoration of family and community-based cultural, traditional practices of childcare, whenever possible.
<i>Relationships with Peers</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Provide a dependable, interactive routine through school or other organized educational activity.<input type="checkbox"/> Offer group and team activities (e.g., sports, drama) that require cooperation and dependence on one another.
<i>Personal Attachments</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Recruit teachers who can form appropriate caring relationships with children and who, as leaders in their communities, support families and others to care for children.<input type="checkbox"/> Provide opportunities for social integration and unity by teaching and showing respect for all cultural values, regardless of differing backgrounds.
<i>Intellectual Stimulation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Enhance child development by providing a variety of educational experiences.
<i>Sense of Control</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Offer opportunities for children to complete regular and manageable assignments to promote a sense of accomplishment and give children a sense of control over some part of their lives.

⁴ Richman, N. (1991). *Helping Children in Difficult Circumstances, A Teacher's Manual*. London: Save the Children/UK.

Children's Needs	Possible Interventions
<i>Physical Stimulation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Encourage recreational and creative activities, both traditional and new, through games, sports, music, dance and so on.
<i>Feeling of Self-Worth</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Create opportunities for expression through individual/group discussions, drawing, writing, drama, music and so on, which promote pride and self-confidence. <input type="checkbox"/> 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, play-time and nap-time can help to ensure that 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 classroom and community life. While some children may have a difficult time accepting routines, most thrive in the structured, predictable environment offered by the classroom and organized activities.

Teachers can promote feelings of safety and security by establishing stable routines in the classroom. The mere act of taking attendance can help students to realize that 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 at 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 to maximize children's ability to learn, as well as to promote healthy development. The emphasis is on how good teaching practices that reflect empathy and respect 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 I: 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. Such environments allow children to become fully involved in learning, actively exploring their environments, playing and learning with others, and developing 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, relating to language, mathematics, science, social studies and life skills.
- ❑ **Teachers** are respected, and their professional skills are nurtured through training and 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.
- ❑ Families and the **community** are 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.⁵

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 of the children to do the same.
- ❑ Teach tolerance by being tolerant: accept the children with all of their weaknesses and do not condemn, reject or laugh at them.
- ❑ Give children a sense of self-worth by providing encouragement, recognition and praise.

⁵ Adapted from www.unicef.org/teachers/

- ❑ Structure the classroom to create positive learning situations. For example, ensure boys and girls are comfortable with classroom seating arrangements, ensure safe and easy access to toilets or latrines (with appropriate exits for children of different ages and children with disabilities). Develop curricula and learning activities that actively engage the students.
- ❑ Develop learning activities – for example, in reading, math and social studies – that incorporate group work to encourage peer interaction, problem-solving and leadership skills.
- ❑ Create interesting classrooms with flexible space (e.g., hang teaching and learning aids and students’ work on the walls, store teaching and learning materials in open boxes for easy access). Consider providing safe and supervised spaces within the classroom or the school where students can go if they are feeling overwhelmed, allowing those students to take a break from formal learning activities.
- ❑ Make the classrooms as comfortable as possible with the resources available.
- ❑ Create a “break room” or separate space for teachers to use for their own planning and meetings.



East Timor - Photo courtesy of the IRC

Healing Classrooms: Communication for Coping

Part II: How should I discuss crises with children?

Reentry into school following a crisis, such as violent conflict or natural disaster, often creates apprehension for teachers and students. This is a normal, common reaction 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 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 without realizing it, because no one is talking about his or her concerns. It is a great source of support for children to have common problems openly discussed. They stop feeling alone, and gradually 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 guidelines to help students discuss their worries, exchange experiences and feel listened to; to help dispel some of the damaging rumors that may exist; and to promote positive thinking about the future.⁶

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 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.

⁶ Adapted from Lazarus, P.J. (1998). *Trauma and Children*. Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists; Saklofske, D., Janzen, J., Hildebrand, D. and Kaufmann, L.A. (1998). *Depression in Children*. Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists; Richman, N. (1991). *Helping Children in Difficult Circumstances, A Teacher’s Manual*. London: Save the Children/UK.

- ❑ Ask whether 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 and when you are unsure yourself.
- ❑ Use realistic terms with students when discussing aspects of an accident, injury and loss.
- ❑ Avoid euphemisms and use appropriate but accurate words to explain situations.

Emphasize

- ❑ Each student is valued and will be supported in this time of strife.
- ❑ School is safe and central to the community.
- ❑ Different reactions and uncertainties are okay.

While many children begin to heal by talking about their experiences and feelings following a 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 is 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 range of alternative approaches proposed in Part III.

Healing Classrooms: Creative 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 3) appropriate things to play with. Children can then reenter 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 reenter the child's world.⁷

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 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 control 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 event or placing a child who otherwise may let others lead as the leader in her or his play.

Often children identify with the forces that control 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 provide ways to represent what they have experienced.

Although play and other expressive activities are enjoyed by younger children, they can be effective with adolescents as well. 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 offer youth necessary windows to enjoy relaxation, laughter and spontaneity.

⁷ Adapted from Aguilar, P. and Retamal, G. (1998). *Rapid Educational Response in Complex Emergencies: A Discussion Document*. Geneva: UNESCO International Bureau of Education.

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 attempt to engage students as outlined in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Age-specific Activities for Children after Stressful Events⁸		
Young children 0–7 years	Older children 8–13 years	Teens & adolescents 14–18
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
Playing with dolls, toy play	Create a play or puppet show about a disaster; if it has a sad ending, never let the child leave without further discussions, and always end on a positive note	Create a play or puppet show; if it has a sad ending, never let the child leave without further discussions, and always end on a positive note
Group games	Create a game about disaster recovery, disaster preparedness and 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; 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

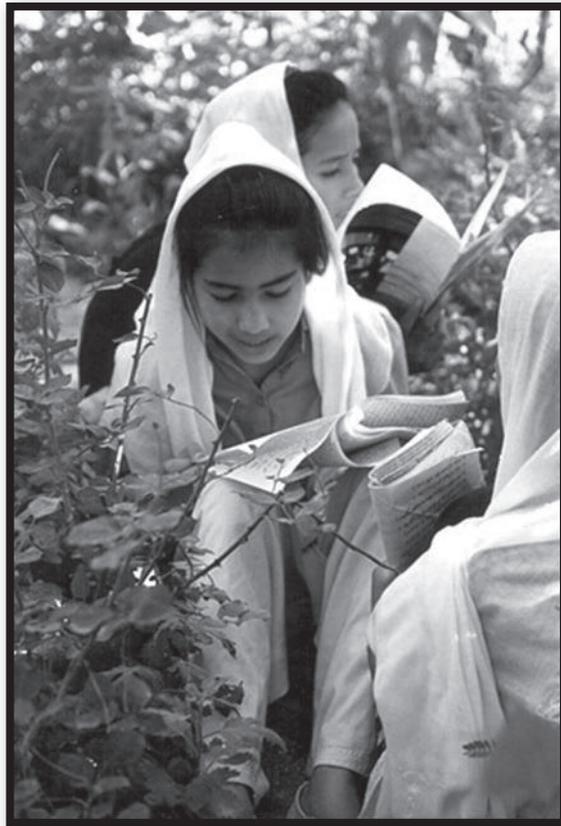
⁸ Reprinted and adapted from Lystad, M. (Ed.). (1990). *Innovations in Mental Health Services to Disaster Victims* (DHHS Publication No. ADM 90-1390). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

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 every day for 10 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 a student’s journal entries.⁹
- 2) *Poetry*: Poetry provides students with a slightly different approach for expressing feelings. Many different forms and styles can be used, using rhyme or not. 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 appreciate opportunities to express themselves and their ideas and experiences in short stories.
- 4) *Drawing pictures*: Writing a picture book alone or with other students about their lives and hopes for the future – or the life of an imaginary character – can help students express their feelings and complement most history, language arts or science classes. Emphasize stories with characters who overcome difficulties. Try not to ask children to draw a particular theme, but a) encourage them to draw what they want and b) ask only general questions about a “sad” drawing, refraining from pursuing details if they are not forthcoming.
- 5) *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) *Theater*: Children can create their own stories and endings.
- 8) *Study projects or multidisciplinary units focused on crises*: Conduct such activities 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 crises.

⁹ Based on: Capacchione, L. (1992). *The Creative Journal for Teens*. Newcastle, CA: Newcastle Publishing Co. Inc.

- 9) *Units on conflict resolution:* 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) *Community service projects:* Organize or encourage participation in projects that give children the opportunity to use their skills and to help their family, school or community prepare for or recover from crises. Doing meaningful work and helping others during a crisis or disaster can also give them a sense of control or keep them from feeling helpless and victimized.



Afghanistan - Photo courtesy of the IRC

Healing Classrooms: Teaching the Whole Class

Part IV: What teaching strategies should I use to reach all children?

- A child learns as a whole person.
- A child progresses in intellectual ability (cognitive development).
- A child is an active learner.
- A child builds her or his 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 she or he feels good about herself or himself.¹⁰

Reaching all learners: diversify teaching styles

Each child is a unique person, with an emotional self, an intellectual self and a physical self all rolled into her or his identity. As children explore new ideas and skills, they use their emotional, intellectual and physical selves to learn. In stressful situations, children may need to connect with learning materials in various ways. Each child learns in a different way. Children learn at different rates and in different styles. Any progress children make 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 need to plan and use different kinds of activities in the lesson plan for each day. As a teacher, it is important to think about the whole child so that you can provide for 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.

¹⁰ Based on: Stone, S. (1996). *Creating the Multigrade Classroom*. Glenview, IL: Good Year Books; Polotino, C. & Davis, A. (1994). *Multi-age and More*. Manitoba: Peguis Publishers.

- ❑ help children who are having difficulty learning, so they can experience success in their learning.
- ❑ use different approaches to present important lesson content, so that all children have a chance to learn it well.

Chart 1: Reaching All Children through Diversified Teaching Strategies

Teacher's desired goal	Questions to ask	Ideas to try
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?	Example: After reading a story, ask the children how they feel about what happened in the story. Example: Ask children to write about or draw something they are good at doing, they have learned during the day or they enjoy doing.
Opportunities for combining learning and physical development	Have I planned activities where the children can be physically active?	Example: Ask the students to develop a creative dance to represent a new science concept. Example: Take the students on walks in the community to visit sites relevant to their topics of study.
Promote interaction between students in the classroom	Have I planned activities that allow children to interact socially?	Example: Try grouping students with partners or in groups of three to four to work on projects. Assign specific roles, so some students do writing, some reading, some verbal presentation and some artwork. Vary the roles in the groups.
Improved connections between the classroom and the community	Do my lessons help children to cope with their immediate environment/the situation in their community?	Example: Ask children to make health posters to put up in the town or village. Example: Have a day when the children's families come to the school and the children talk to them about what they have been learning. Example: Ask the children to find out what games their parents and grandparents played when they were children. Invite parents and grandparents to school to teach these games. Use these 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 the students and teacher are agitated and stressed?

The temptation to control a classroom by force is great, and by doing so teachers may be repeating what was considered to be acceptable behavior in the past. Often teachers are faced with overcrowded classrooms and little support, which makes discipline an important concern. Ridiculing students, physical abuse (such as hitting or making children stand in the hot sun for long periods of time) or even sexual exploitation is not uncommon in some classrooms. The benefits of improving teacher classroom management skills are enormous. Values are caught, not taught. Teachers who are courteous, prompt, enthusiastic, calm, patient and organized provide examples for their students through their own behavior. Teachers who demonstrate their ability to work with different learners, different personalities and different dispositions model for children the skills they will need to successfully navigate their new environment.

Prevention

The best way of dealing with misbehavior is by preventing it. Schools with good discipline not only correct misbehavior but also teach appropriate behavior, communication and coping skills. Teachers who have positive relations with their students and who have well-organized classrooms and well-planned and stimulating lessons adapted to students' interests and abilities rarely have to deal with misbehavior or indiscipline. Many teachers spend time with their class at the beginning of the school year to establish guidelines for good conduct in school and identify consequences for any contravening of these guidelines.

Responses

If you do have to respond to inappropriate behavior from students, do so in as calm a way as possible. Make sure that your response is in line with the agreed upon consequences and that you are not driven to say or do anything out of anger. As far as possible avoid direct confrontations with students in the class, and make time to talk to students later.

Strategies for positive classroom management

1. Develop a set of behavior expectations in collaboration with students, other teachers and your school administration, as well as with parents and the community (possibly through the school's community education committee, such as the Parent-Teacher Association). 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 expectations and what happens if they are not met. Make sure your students understand and know these rules and consequences well.
3. Provide consistency, structure, continuity and predictability in children's lives.

4. Be patient with yourself and with your students. These are not easy times for anyone. Modeling kindness, empathy and cooperation, you can be a powerful influence.
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. Plan lessons that provide realistic opportunities for success for all students.
7. 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.
8. Begin class on time and end on time. Do not keep students waiting, as idle time can encourage misbehavior.
9. Start your day's lesson with something interesting, such as a song, joke or interactive activity.
10. Keep all students actively involved. For example, while a student conducts a presentation, involve the other students in evaluating it. Provide help to students who are having difficulty and supplemental tasks to students who finish work early.
11. Communicate with parents about their son or daughter's successes in school.

Strategies for responding calmly and professionally

12. Discipline individual students quietly and privately. Never engage in a disciplinary conversation across the room. This could humiliate the students or put you and the student into a public disagreement.
13. As far as possible discuss with the child his or her behavior and the negative impact it has on the class. Talk about why it happened and how it could be prevented in the future.
14. Communicate with parents about their son's or daughter's difficulties and try to work as a team with them.

Supporting Teachers in Difficult Times

Teachers are also frequently affected by the traumatic events their students and their family members have lived through. Teachers may have experienced personal losses, such as the loss of loved ones, jobs, homes and property. When such individuals come forward to help care for children in situations of crisis, 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 support 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 and sharing 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.

As with students, the signs that teachers may need stress management assistance will vary; 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, daily and weekly routines, and from support from family, peers and community. Some of the following advice can be communicated to 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 (e.g., healthy eating, rest, exercise, relaxation, meditation). This healthy outlook will help you and your family.
- ❑ Maintain, as far as possible, a daily routine, limiting demanding responsibilities for yourself and your family.
- ❑ Participate in memorials, rituals and the 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

The important contribution that teachers make in helping children to cope and heal following stressful events cannot be overstated. This guide is dedicated to providing teachers with an understanding of Healing Classrooms concepts, and training in creative and caring teaching strategies. These lay a foundation for psychosocial healing in their classrooms. This guide also recognizes that teachers themselves have lived through stressful experiences, and yet they bravely continue working under difficult circumstances. It is 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. When 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.

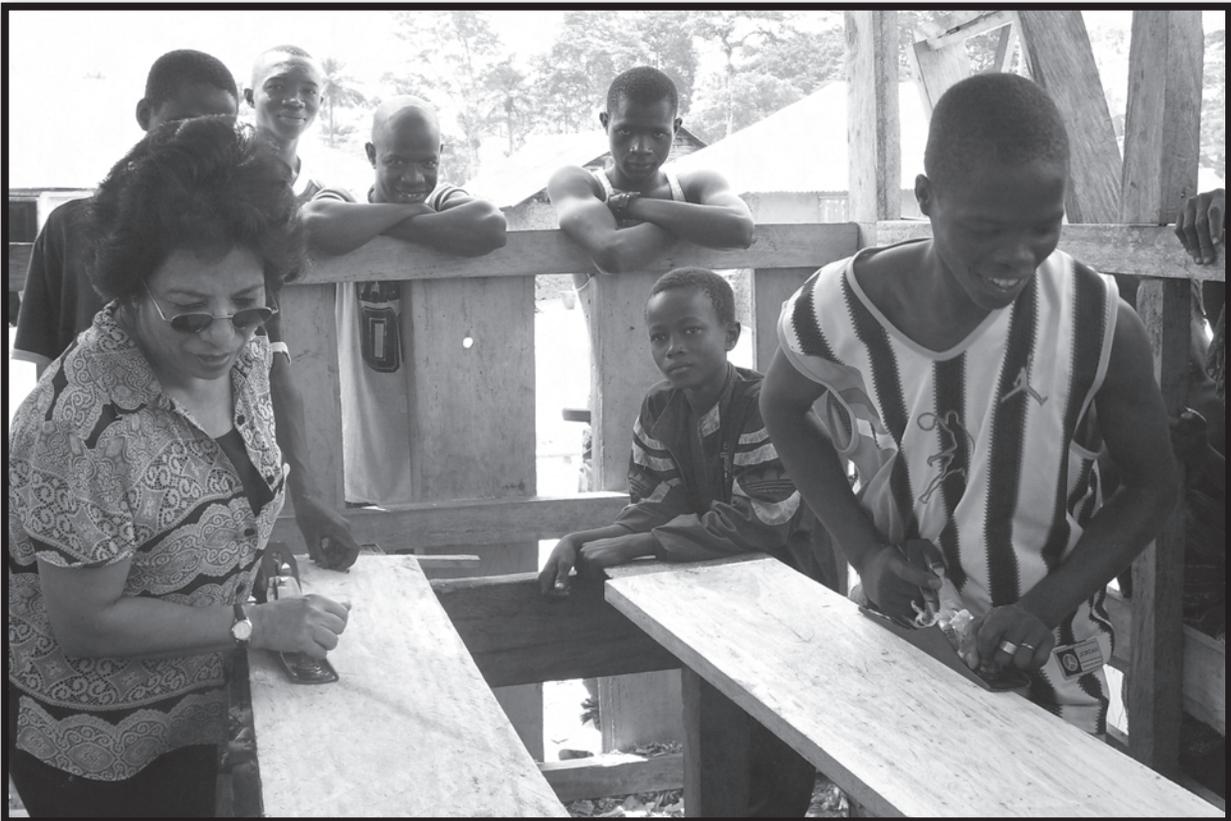


Photo courtesy of the IRC

ANNEX 1

Training Activity: Teaching Methods and the Child-Centered Teacher

Sample Training Lesson Plan

TIME:	160 minutes
MATERIALS:	Flipchart and stand, markers, masking tape
OUTCOME:	The participants will understand the principles of good educational practice and how to create supportive, stimulating and stable classroom environments, as well as the attributes of a good teacher and how good teachers teach.

ACTIVITIES:

Opening Activity: A Good Teacher

10 minutes

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

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 involving some kind of assessment leading to a certificate or qualification (example of “teacher”: school teacher).
2. Nonformal 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 or 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 such a way that students learn from their mistakes?
 - ❑ Helps students to 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 for behavior.

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, student note-taking, memorization, group response to questions and so on). When this list has been assembled, ask for volunteers to model a particular method, 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 the different teaching styles.

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.

Activity: Create a Student-Centered Lesson Plan

90 minutes

Building on 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 that 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 three to five goals)

❑ **Activities to reach goals** (enumerated and drawn from the three types of teaching methods). 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.

❑ **Resources** (staff and space/location necessary for implementation)

B. Have participants form small groups. 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 flipchart version so others may share the lesson plans.

Discussion: Good Pedagogical Practice Is Good Psychosocial Practice 30 minutes

With participants, review the day up to this point. 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

Training Activity: Promoting 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 an overall list.
- B. Ask each group to return to their child outline and list children's behaviors and emotions in crisis and post-crisis recovery situations. Responses such as "sad, withdrawn, fearful, anxious" and so on will likely be recorded. Again, report these lists back to the large group, and establish one overall list. When participants compare the two lists, children's suffering will become clear.

Brainstorming: Helping Children Cope

30 minutes

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

- 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 or his own way. Introduce the pyramid depicting different levels of traumatic response in children, and ask for feedback and comments from the participants. Ask the 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 recreational 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 who 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 and produce a feeling of well-being, and may link the child with familiar happy memories.

Theater – 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 to communicate their feelings. For teachers to be good listeners and develop children’s trust, they must foster children’s understanding that what they say will be kept private and confidential, except in cases where a 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 activities for play and expression. The facilitator may use either one or both, depending on time.

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

Drawing is an excellent nonverbal 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 nonjudgmental way to their partners’ explanations of their drawings. Emphasize that the quality of the drawing is not to be discussed – only the content. The 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 concerning the appropriateness of this activity for the participants’ community/ies. Ask the participants how they felt when they were requested 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.
- ❑ Do not compare the children's drawings (saying that some are better than others), as this will upset and inhibit those not praised.
- ❑ If children say they cannot draw, tell them that they can. They just need to practice more.

Note: Adults often assume that children under the age of seven are not aware of dangerous or sad things happening around them, and so they 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, and so on. Take time to make the point that these activities can be adapted for use with children of all ages and that providing information, or at least admitting truthfully that one does not know particular information, 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 (three or four participants per group), and have each group enact a story for all of 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 five 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 heal 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 both 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 repertoire of strategies to work in the classroom with these children.

ANNEX 3

Training Activity: Teachers and Child Protection Monitoring

Education for Protection: Monitoring

60 minutes

- A. Explain that improving access to school is an example of a way in which education can protect children's rights (that is, 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 self-confidence and self-esteem.
 - Education conducted in a safe space keeps children away from danger and unnecessary risk.
- B. When participants have finished compiling a list, introduce the concept of monitoring, noting that monitoring is central to protecting children's rights. Furthermore, with their daily, direct contact with students, teachers are ideally placed to monitor child rights and child protection issues.

In the previous activity (A), participants noted how ensuring children can access school can protect their right to education. Beginning with attendance, participants should brainstorm a list of ways to monitor child protection through education. Such a list might include:

- Attendance
 - Performance
 - Physical health
 - Emotional well-being
- 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.

Indicator	Status	Potential Cause	Follow-up Steps
1. Attendance	Stopped attending	Cannot afford school fees	Talk to parents. Try to identify ways to cover fees.
2. Performance			
3. Physical health			
4. Emotional well-being			

- D. Participants present their answers, which are compiled on flipcharts. 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 well-being.

Discussion: Protection – In the Classroom

30 minutes

- A. Review the activity 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 target schools, gender or ethnic discrimination.
- B. Highlighting those risks that occur between a teacher and a student in the classroom, ask participants to suggest rules by which they feel caregivers of children should abide. Brainstorm a list quickly and without comment, then return to the list and facilitate detailed discussion. When the discussion has finished, compile a final list. This list can be used to inform the future development of a code of conduct for teachers and others working with children in the community. If such things as physical or material exploitation of children by teachers are not suggested in the brainstorm, be sure to raise these in the discussion and include them in the final list.

Annex 4

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 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 and art, put labels on materials and areas of the room if possible: art area, recreation area, etc.).
 - Make the room comfortable: not too hot or too cold (if possible), with mats for sitting, etc.
 - When learners are working in groups, move from group to group and interact with each group in turn.
 - Show empathy and respect, as well as active listening, and encourage the children to do so, too.
- B. From the discussion of a child-friendly environment, open a discussion of management and 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 effective management and disciplinary measures that take into account children’s rights, protection, psychosocial well-being and a child-friendly classroom atmosphere. A list should include:

- Conduct 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.
- Praise children who are following instructions and behaving appropriately.

- ❑ If rebuke of a child or children is needed, do so only when mistakes are serious and then talk to the child or children in private at a time when they are calm.
- ❑ Show that all children are accepted and important as group members despite their mistakes.
- ❑ Do not punish or humiliate children.
- ❑ Avoid comparing a “misbehaving” child to other, “behaving” children.
- ❑ Avoid expelling children from the learning space. Encourage them to redirect their behavior and do something that they like to do.
- ❑ If a child becomes too disruptive, have someone sit quietly with her or him (briefly) or assist the child to take a time-out break and talk it out. Always make causes and effects clear by discussing consequences.

C. Make 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 (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 children to be well-behaved 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; for example, being on time, acting out, talking in class, not completing work assignments and so on. 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: Teachers may be skeptical of this type of process – or even nervous about opening up to students’ suggestions. However, assure them that once the teacher shows that she or he is serious in listening to the students’ input, students will take the task seriously and often turn out to be stricter in suggesting consequences than their teachers usually are. The teacher can deal with any inappropriate suggestions from the students by gently raising questions about if they would work, what the results might be and so on, and by asking for other suggestions.