



HELPING CHILDREN WHO EXPERIENCE WAR, DISASTER OR CONFLICT

THE IDEA

War, poverty, natural disaster or conflict often cause children to have learning problems and difficulties in their relationships with others. A secure environment, caring families or understanding adults and friends, help these children to develop better.

Understanding children's needs

Besides the basic needs for survival, children also need:

AFFECTION – SECURITY ATTENTION – PLAY

Children need help to recognise their own value and their rights.

Basic needs

When children are cold, hungry and without shelter, they do not develop well, and become ill quickly.

Affection: When parents are frightened and trying to survive, they cannot give their children the affection and care they need for proper physical, mental and emotional development.

Security: When violence and catastrophe happen daily, children lose their knowledge of normal, good behaviour. Children lose their trust in adults who act violently.

Attention: When people, places and other things that matter to children are threatened or destroyed, and when adults are too worried or unhappy to notice them, the children may feel unimportant, useless or helpless.

Play: When children have to care for themselves they have little time for play and fun.

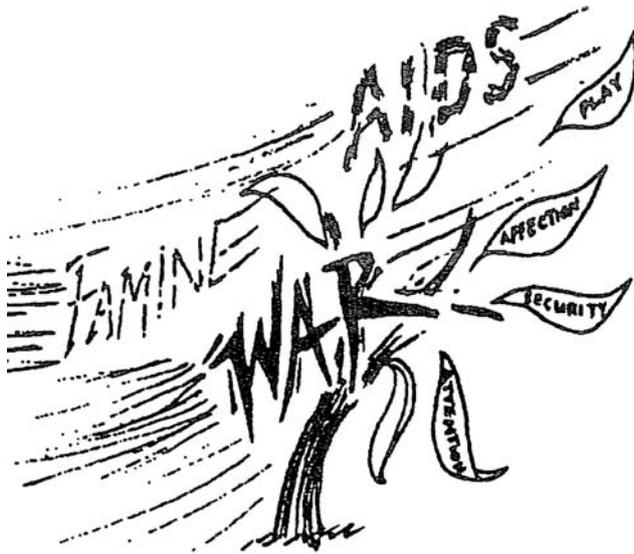
The effects of war, disaster or conflict can leave children:

- burdened with knowledge of hardship and violence.
- worried and insecure.
- unwilling to trust people, even those who want to help them.
- in poor health and with low spirits. This can make children uninterested and slow to learn.
- angry, restless, over-excited or behaving in surprising ways.

Children may appear to be coping well on the surface, but still have fears and problems which they will need to sort out.

Where and how these activities have been used

Millions of children are affected by war, natural disaster and conflict. Many of these have been displaced and live in refugee camps. In many countries, Child-to-Child activities are helping children to discover a new sense of purpose. The Sudanese health scouts in Kakuma Refugee Camp in northern Kenya have helped to control malaria in the camp, to teach the community about self-esteem, and help them to develop better communication skills. Child-to-Child ideas are being built into the curriculum of schools in camps in Nepal and other countries.



**WAR, DISASTER AND CONFLICT
BREAK UP AND DISRUPT A
NORMAL HEALTHY PATTERN
OF LIFE.**

Twelve-year-old Dan lives in a refugee camp. He has seen many people killed and wounded, including his uncle whom he loved very much. Although in the daytime he is polite, helpful and caring towards his family, during the night he cries, screams out, and talks in his sleep as he remembers the frightening things he has seen. His older brother tries to help him by talking to him and reading to him each night before he goes to sleep.

How to help

Children need help from adults and other children

Parents (or other adults caring for the children) need to understand the importance of listening to the children, discussing and explaining things to them, being honest and truthful to them, planning things together, and giving children another chance when they make mistakes. Children need a trusted adult to talk to.

Children need a secure environment

To provide a caring environment, adults will also need help and support from others in the community.

Teachers or organisers can encourage discussion with children about things which worry or frighten them.

It is important for parents and other adults such as community leaders to understand and discuss children's fears and worries. Teachers or organisers can encourage them to do so. Some adults may be able to get training in counselling children.

Children may find it difficult to talk directly about their problems. Adults must listen carefully to what children are saying and watch what they do; this often explains how children feel.



Adults:

- Listen to children.
- Watch how they behave.
- Listen to what they do not, or cannot, say.

Children:

- Notice when friends are sad or worried.
- Talk and play together.
- Help solve other children's problems.

Activities

There are many activities that are fun and at the same time help children to gain confidence, to be able to express themselves, and to make a contribution. Children gain confidence and self-esteem by participating in Child-to-Child activities.

Activities such as meetings, clubs and campaigns, can help develop a child's sense of belonging. Sports, making toys and games, drawing or play-acting can help restore children's interest in things around them and build up their self respect.

Working with children who have difficulties is not easy. The children can often be uncooperative, destructive or aggressive. Try to find out what is behind it and give them interesting things to do. Children often respond well if they have responsibility. This also helps them earn the respect of others.

Working together as a group

Talking and working things out in small groups can be a good way to develop children's self confidence and help them to express their problems and fears. Many children will not find it easy.

When children work together in groups, they will need plenty of encouragement. At first they may find working together frustrating, but as the activities progress, children will become more open with their feelings and opinions. In the end, children should be participating and cooperating well.

Children enjoy making up and keeping to rules which help the group work well, such as:

- raise your hand if you want to speak.
- only one person speaks at a time.
- only disagree in a nice way.
- limit the number of times one person can speak.
- in some cases, choose a chairperson and someone to take notes.

Helping children feel more secure

Children who have had bad experiences are sometimes easily frightened and suspicious of others. These activities (among many others) may help.

Games

The trust circle

A small group stands in a close circle with one in the centre who closes his eyes. He lets himself fall towards the circle of children. Those closest to him catch him

and push him gently towards another part of the circle – and so on until the one in the centre wants to stop.

The blind walk

Do this in pairs. One is blindfolded (or keeps their eyes shut). The other one guides them around the room, or outside, explaining the obstacles. Try this with and without talking.

Cat and mouse

The group forms a circle. One person stands in the centre of a circle. This is 'the mouse'. One person stands outside the circle. This person is 'the cat'. The cat has to try to catch the mouse. The group tries to stop the cat reaching the mouse. After one or two minutes the cat and mouse can change roles.

Relaxation

With their eyes shut children can:

- listen to music or sounds outside.
- squeeze and relax each part of their body in turn.
- listen to the rhythm of their breathing.
- listen to a story or a 'picture' being painted in their minds by the organiser or by another child, such as a beach scene, a mountain scene, or somewhere peaceful and beautiful.

Story telling

Older people can read or tell stories to children.

Individually or in groups, children can tell stories; they can act out stories; they can make up new stories, or tell traditional stories.



Helping children to listen and express themselves

A role-play about listening

Divide into small groups. One person is the speaker and talks about any subject they like for about three minutes. Another person is the listener and must show the speaker that they are listening carefully. They can ask questions to understand better but they should not give advice unless it is asked for. The third person is an observer and must observe how 'well' the listener was listening and then report on this to the rest of the group. After a feedback session, speakers, listeners and observers can exchange roles.

A listening activity

Decide on a place in the group where a 'speaker' can be seen by everyone. Call this the 'speaking place'; it might be on a chair in front of a group, sitting on a desk, or under a tree. The leader announces a 'speaking topic' such as 'Accidents'. Children come out in turn and tell a story related to the topic, e.g. 'When I was very young, I climbed this tree and ...' Then the next child takes over the story.

Other ideas for topics:

- If I was a rich person, I would ...
- What makes me feel good and hopeful.
- What makes me angry or frightened.

The children will have many more ideas. When they get more confident, this time can be used more freely, to share experiences and problems. Children can form small groups of 'circle friends', getting together in circles to share their worries and help each other. At first an adult may be needed to help guide the discussion.

Group discussions

Children in groups can work together to solve problems. Here are two examples:

- Two families quarrel when the animals from one family have caused damage to the crops growing on the other family's land.

- In one family there are many children who make a lot of noise. The neighbours are angry with this family who do not seem to care.

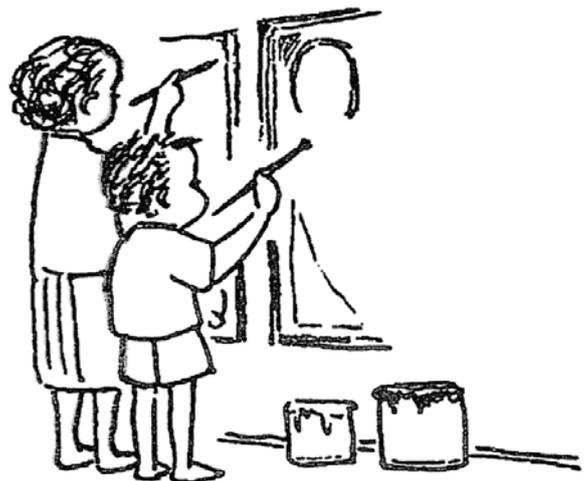
Children have to think of peaceful ways to resolve these quarrels.

Drawing

Drawing can be used to help children express their feelings and individuality. Children can illustrate stories people tell them or their own stories. Children

may want to draw about their bad experiences – or to draw their happy memories before the crisis happened.

Children can draw on the ground, on paper, on walls, with paints, with pencils, chalks, sand, etc; they can draw while listening to music. Drawing can be used as a starting point for story-telling, drama or music. They could paint life-size pictures of themselves as a group on a long wall.



Writing

Writing can help children to express their feelings.

The poem on the next page was written in a war-torn country. The guns of destruction have been transformed into the weapons of knowledge which free people from disease.

Children enjoy writing poems and stories for their friends.

*Ah, Mother, Father, death and terrible tears,
tears were everywhere in our village*

*Oh those six great killers
whooping cough, measles, TB
tetanus, polio, diphtheria*

*They are very close friends,
they are powerful fighters
and their only desire is to kill*

*These six friends move easily
they have special vehicles for travelling
they have germs as their comfortable cars
these cars travel from person to person*

*When they enter a person's body
they organise guerilla warfare
a person who is not immunised
will be killed in this war*

*But clever parents take their children for
vaccination
they become strong, they don't get
diseases*

*Vaccines are the enemies of these great
fighters
they organise a special resistance army
and fight the killers*

*Immunise your children
and fight the great killers
whooping cough and TB
diphtheria and tetanus
measles and polio
and be free.*

Children may also want to write about their good memories of their earlier life.

Plays and puppets

Plays are a useful starting point for discussion. Our play about Maria could be used to start discussions, story-telling, or other drama activities. Children could use the story line or the different characters and make up new plays. Puppets can help children explore sensitive subjects such as missing family or friends, or violent events that children have seen or participated in.

Dancing and traditional ceremonies

Older children can teach traditional dances to younger ones. Children can invent and perform dances. Sometimes these may be used to show peace and cooperation after conflict. If children have been forced to participate in violence, find out if there are local ceremonies which can help them to feel accepted back by the community.

Helping children to make a difference

The older child as a helper

If a child has problems, other children can help. Often children are better at finding the right way to help. Older children can comfort younger ones; make toys for them; tell or read them stories; teach them songs and dances; and help them with school work.

Children as health messengers

Children involved with Child-to-Child health activities feel that they are doing something useful and important. Children spread health messages and teach others about good health. For example, in one refugee camp there were many displaced children who had lost their families. The health workers organised these children into small groups for peer support. Then they taught them about the prevention and management of diarrhoea. The children's groups then taught other children in the camps about hygiene and brought any sick children to the health centre. This made them feel useful and helped them to feel more confident and hopeful about the future.

The Child-to-Child Trust has other Activity Sheets which cover a wide range of health topics such as: nutrition, safe life styles and the prevention and cure of disease. All the skills of group work are developed through Child-to-Child health activities.

Child-to-Child and children in camps

Often children who experience war, disaster and conflict may have to stay for longer or shorter times in refugee camps. The publication *Child-to-Child and Children in Camps* helps give special suggestions on how the Child-to-Child materials can be used, and Child-to-Child activities carried out.

A PLAY

Setting: A 'children's home' for children separated from their parents.

Scene 1 – In the girls' dormitory

Nine-year-old Maria sits on the floor, looking at a photograph. Five of her friends run out of a door to go to a class. Sonia, their housemother, is by the door.

Sonia: Come on Maria, hurry up! You will be late for class.

Maria: Sonia, I don't feel well. I want to talk to you. You see this photo. Do you know ...?

Sonia: Maria. Hurry! I have no time for talking. Go to your class and go quickly!

Scene 2 – On the way to class

Maria is walking alone. Pedro comes running up behind her.

Pedro: Hello Maria. I am late too! Come on, let's run together.

Maria: No, I'm not running. I don't feel well. Sonia just told me to hurry up and go.

Scene 3 – At class

The teacher notices that Maria looks miserable.

Teacher: I'm very sorry that you are not feeling well, Maria. Just sit quietly at the back of the group. Take this book, look at the pictures, and you can tell me which ones you like the best.

Later, the class are having a discussion about feelings.

Camila: I feel happy today because the beans I planted are growing.

Julieta: I am worried because my baby brother is not well.

Tomas: I cried because I saw a big boy shouting at my friend and hitting him.

Maria: I am feeling tired and my tummy hurts.

Teacher: Try and think what you can do to solve your problems.

Camila: Why don't you read your brother stories and give him lots of boiled water to drink?

Julieta: Ask the teacher for help with Tomas.

Maria: Tell your friend to ignore the bullies.

Tomas: Maria, maybe your tummy hurts because you are hungry. You can have some of my bread and we can walk together around the compound. That might make you feel less tired.

Scene 4 – In the evening at the children's home

Rosa is an older child who came to the children's home at the same time as Maria. They talk together at supper time.

Rosa: What have you been doing today?

Maria: Sonia would not talk to me this morning but my friend Tomas gave me some of his bread. He was kind; we played together.

Rosa: What are you going to do now?

Maria: I'm not much good at doing anything.

Rosa: That's not true. Why don't we do something together?

Maria: Can I show you my photograph? It's my parents. I miss them so much.

Rosa: Yes, let's talk about them.



Discuss:

- Why was Maria unhappy?
- How did the other children help Maria?
- How did the teacher help Maria?