



BUILDING GOOD MEMORIES

THE IDEA

Work with children and adults in families affected by HIV and AIDS has shown how important memories are. With a store of happy memories, children can know that they were greatly loved by their parents and others. They also gain a sense of who they are, where they have come from and what goals they may want for the future. Children who have lost their parents draw great comfort from reading their Memory Books and going through the items in their Memory Box. They feel close to their parents and feel that they still have their guidance and are reminded about their parents' achievements and hopes. Some children, especially orphans, will also have sad and distressing memories. They may want to talk about these as well. The teacher or group leader should be supported in this session by another adult who is trusted by the children and who can provide counselling if the children want to talk one-to-one.



The activities in this topic do not replace the work in the Memory Project, which prepares and supports adults to write Memory Books for their children. For more information on the Memory Project contact Healthlink Worldwide (www.Healthlink.org.uk/project/hiv/imp.html). The activities here are to help children also think about the importance of memories, about open communication in their family, and about planning for the future. It aims to help them feel more confident about themselves.

Important!

This activity helps children to build up their store of memories about themselves and their families. When children are orphans, it may still be very helpful for them to build up their Memory Books or a Memory Box with the help of their grandparents, elder siblings, other relatives and friends. However, this may also be a painful process for the children, since there may be answers which only their mother or father would have known. The teacher or facilitator should be sensitive in considering the age and situation of the various children in the group and then deciding which activities are appropriate.

Understanding why memories are important

- Everybody has memories. Our experiences in the past partly shape the kind of person we are today. Invite one or two older people to come and visit the group. The children can ask them about their memories of childhood and adulthood. What memories have been the happiest for them? Have their good memories sometimes helped them in difficult times? What about sad or bad memories? How have they managed to move forward and continue with life?
- Let the children imagine that they want to create a box of memories for their grandchildren's grandchildren. What things would they collect and put into the box which show what life is like NOW for

children? The items may be very ordinary – but they tell a story about life in today's world, e.g. a newspaper, an old school book, a photograph, a coin, etc. The children can work in groups to collect these items. They can explain to the other children why they think each item is important. If you can get an air-tight and water-proof box, then the children could actually bury this collection and leave it for future generations to discover.

- Children can ask their grandparents or another old relative what is their favourite memory from their childhood. The children could write down these memories in little books, with their own drawings. The old people and younger children would enjoy hearing these stories being retold.



- Children can talk with their parents or guardians, grandparents, relations and neighbours to find out as much as they can about their own early childhood. The box on the next page contains some of the items they might want to include.
- After answering the questions on the next page ask the children what three things they would like to research further, asking questions of their family members.

Planning and doing

If possible, raise some funds so each child can get an exercise book, 'My Life's Journal', so that they can write down their memories and draw pictures or stick in photographs. Some children may prefer only to draw pictures, with labels if they can write, to tell their story. This is fine. The children should feel free to tell their story in any way they like. They may like to use the questions in the box on the next page.

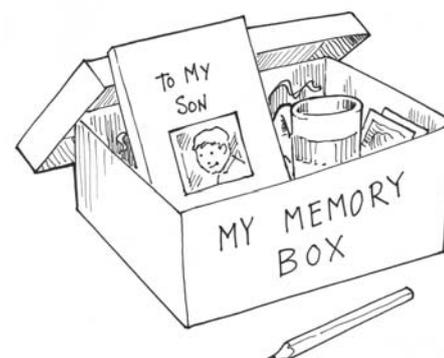
- The children may like to collect items to put into Memory Boxes. This could include photographs and little objects that feel precious to them. If the materials are available, children could make and decorate boxes to make them look special for their collection.

Children's Memory Boxes and Memory Books

Children in Zimbabwe have made their own Memory Boxes. If their parents are alive, then they collect the items together. These include special items that will remind the child of their parents and reassure them of the love their parents had for them. Children can go to the box and read a letter or look at a photo and remember the happy memories of their parents. The Memory Box or Book can also include valuable information about the children's inheritance and about arrangements for their care if they are orphaned.

Discussing the results

- The children can discuss what they have done to build their memories. What is the happiest memory they found out?
 - Did they find anything difficult or upsetting?
 - How can they help each other to cope?
 - Which adults can help in counselling them?
 - Have children made their own Memory Books or Memory Boxes?
 - Would the children encourage other children to make them? How would they help them?



MY MEMORIES

- Date of birth.
- Place of birth.
- Favourite food when I was a child.
- Why was my name chosen?
- What does my name mean?
- Where did I live when I was a child?
- What is my own first memory?
- What are the happiest memories of my childhood?
- Who are the important people in my life?
- When did I first go to school?
- What was the name of the school?
- What is my religion? What do we believe in?
- What games did I enjoy playing as a young child?
- Who are my friends?
- What are the special events and traditions in my family?
- What are my likes and dislikes? (food, music, school subjects, etc.)
- What were my talents as a young child and now?
- What are my values? (What things are important to be a good person?)
- What are my family's hopes for my future?

USING THE SHEET

Community groups, especially peer support groups for people living with HIV and AIDS, can introduce these activities with the children of their members.

Teachers and head teachers can use this sheet to develop activities in schools to help children to think about the importance of their family memories.

Community groups, faith groups and youth group leaders can promote these ideas and organise activities with their children and young people.

Parents and guardians can develop Memory Books or Memory Boxes with their children, whatever their health status. It will be a valuable activity for strengthening the bond and communication between them. It will also help children to prepare for the future.

This Activity Sheet can be used together with 1.3 **Understanding Children's Feelings** and 8.3 **Helping Children whose Friends or Relatives Die**.

Doing it better

Children can continue to help others to develop their own Memory Boxes or Memory Books. Helping others will help orphans to gain a sense of resourcefulness for themselves. Schools and community groups working with young people can coordinate with groups supporting parents living with HIV, who are also involved in using the ideas of the Memory Project.