


LISTENING LEARNING ACTING



Preventing and responding to violence against children
in homes and communities

Listening, Learning, Acting

Preventing and responding to violence against children
in homes and communities



**If we all learn to treat
our children with love
and respect, we will all
come out winners!**

Save the Children fights for children's rights.
We deliver immediate and lasting improvements to children's lives worldwide.

Save the Children works for:

- a world which respects and values each child
- a world which listens to children and learns
- a world where all children have hope and opportunity

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Preface: Stop violence against children

In 2006, the UN Secretary General's Study on Violence against Children found that the short and long-term repercussions of the violence faced by millions of children are devastating - including injuries, disabilities, life-long emotional and psychological effects, sometimes death, as well as significant economic and other costs to society.

Save the Children has developed this book as part of a package of learning materials for child rights workers about relevant measures to protect children. The book uncovers the concept of violence, gives an update on the UN Study on Violence against children, and advice on how to act to promote protection of children.

Save the Children is dedicated to creating a better world for girls and boys. We believe that all children, whatever their circumstances, should have the right to lead happy, healthy and secure lives, and we are committed to making children's rights a reality.

Save the Children has engaged closely with the UN Secretary General's Study on Violence against Children since 2001 and has been recognised as the key non-governmental organisation, especially for its knowledge and experience in involving children as rights holders and social actors, as well as for the thematic expertise.

The UN Study concluded that a holistic, systemic approach emphasising prevention, strengthened national data collection, awareness raising and children's participation, to mention a few recommendations, is necessary to address violence against children. The study offers a unique opportunity to challenge and change attitudes towards children and to respond to violence against children by integrating measures into national planning processes, ensuring resource allocation and coordination between government sectors.

A UN Special Representative on Violence against Children will be appointed to promote and monitor the implementation of the UN Study recommendations and to act as a high level advocate for the protection of children from violence. The Special Representative will be able to add an independent voice and speak up strongly, especially when the other existing agencies cannot or are not in the position to do so. Furthermore, the Special Representative is responsible for producing annual reports to the General Assembly, the Human Rights Council and the Economic and Social Council based upon country visits and documentation from governments and civil society organizations, including children.

Thus it is important that the experience of children and NGOs such as Save the Children continue to be included in the processes by the UN Special Representative and government bodies in order for measures to be taken to prevent and stop violence against children as a matter of priority.

Violence against children needs to be kept on the 'international agenda' and we must work on the momentum created by the UN Study process in all regions. This book is dedicated to all those involved in supporting the UN study on Violence against Children and to all girls and boys – all of them deserve a happy and healthy life.

Gabriella Olofsson,

Save the Children's Task group on Violence against Children

C ontents

| | | |
|----------|---|----|
| | Introduction | 1 |
| I | The family of four fundamentals | 5 |
| 2 | Understanding the different forms of violence | 16 |
| 3 | The effects of violence against children | 23 |
| 4 | Talking with and listening to children who have experienced violence | 33 |
| 5 | Helping children cope with violence | 36 |
| 6 | What can communities do to stop violence against children? | 40 |
| 7 | What can parents and caregivers do to stop violence against children? | 49 |
| 8 | Protecting children against violence in emergencies | 51 |
| 9 | Annexes | 54 |
| | References | 59 |

Introduction

This book is about understanding:

- what violence against children means
- how children experience and are affected by violence
- how we as adults in our various roles as parents and professionals in homes and communities can try to prevent violence from happening
- how we can help in the best way possible children who have already experienced violence
- how we can support children in the fight to end violence against them

The definition of “violence against children” varies somewhat according to the focus and context in which the definition is being used, for example for legal, medical or sociological purposes. The United Nations Study on Violence against Children (called the UN Study from now on) drew on both a definition based on Article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child:

All forms of physical or mental violence, injury and abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse

and that used by the World Health Organisation (WHO):

The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against a child, by an individual or group, that either results in, or has a high likelihood of resulting in actual or potential harm to the child’s health, survival, development or dignity.

In other words, the person carrying out the violent act means to do so (although they may not always mean to cause so much harm). Note that *threats* to carry out a violent act also are “violence”. Physical force is not always necessary for the act of violence, but adults could use their power over children – the power given by a child’s trust and dependence on them – to sexually abuse the child. In the above meaning, violence is linked to the harm it may cause.

This book will talk about sexual abuse, physical violence against children, humiliating and frightening verbal violence, exploitation and neglect – in homes and communities. Although harmful traditional practices, such as early marriage and female genital mutilation, are also forms of violence against children, they will not be discussed in depth in this book, since there is already material about them.

The book begins with a presentation of a “family” of four different but related themes: Child rights, child development, child protection, and child participation, which people working with protection, or all those wanting to join the fight to end violence against children, should know about. The book goes on to look at the different types of violence, the effects of violence on children of different ages and how you might be able to recognise a child who is in distress. The next chapters describe some approaches in helping children who want to report abuse, and who have experienced violence, and ideas on how community-based child protection systems may function. Finally, the last chapters are devoted to actions parents and caregivers may take to protect children, and to child protection in emergency settings.

There are huge differences in financial and other resources in families and countries, which often are significant in addressing violence. In addition, there are many social and cultural barriers to overcoming violence against children (and often also women), and which are found in all countries. Often, the ways we understand each other as human beings and how we behave towards one another need to be radically changed if we are to make progress in reducing violence against children. This makes the struggle to prevent and deal with this violence an uphill battle. But not without hope! Attitudes can and will be changed, although for some children, it will come too late. Children all over the world have the right to expect us all to do what we can with whatever we have to end violence against them.

It costs nothing to refrain from hitting a child, to take the time to really listen to a child who is being abused, and who needs advice and help, or to persuade a neighbour that there might be a better way of treating her/his children.

It is hoped that this book will help inspire and strengthen us all to take action, and to have confidence in ourselves that we can be of great help to children at critical moments in their lives.

Why has this book been written now?

Imagine a world without violence! How many of our problems in the world will then be solved? It is the right moment to find the roots of violence against children in our home countries. It is now the right moment for you to admit that harmful practices against children need to be stopped. Hurting children hurts our world. (Cora, 17 years old, speaking to the UN Third Committee on behalf of children participating in the UN Study during the presentation of the Study Report, October 2006).

The UN Study was carried out over a three-year period, under the leadership of UNICEF, World Health Organisation and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. The Study collected a huge amount of information from all over the world on all forms of violence against children in their homes, schools, communities, in jails, children’s homes, in the streets and workplaces. The Study also held nine conferences in different regions of the world with governments, NGOs, professionals working with children and children themselves, to ensure that a global picture of violence against children was obtained.

The Study found shocking levels of violence against boys and girls of all ages all over the world. Children are experiencing daily violence in their homes, schools and communities. Violence against children was all too common in detention centres, “rehabilitation” homes, and orphanages. Children who have disabilities and those who have lost their parents and homes were found to be especially at risk.. Discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, caste,

disability, sexual orientation or infection with HIV/AIDS was found to be strongly linked to violence, with the risk of this continuing throughout life.

The Study confirmed what has already been known for some time: Those committing violence against children are most often people whom children are dependent on for love, care, guidance, protection, learning and justice: their parents, grandparents or other caregivers, their teachers, neighbours and friends, the local policeman and others whom children should be able to rely on and trust.

The final report, presented to the United Nations in October 2006, contained 12 main recommendations to be found in Annex 1. A main recommendation of the UN Study was that all governments should strengthen their efforts to prevent and protect children from all forms of violence through developing a national child protection system functioning at all administrative levels, as well as finding out the main causes of violence and working to do something about them.

It is realised that to fulfil this will take much time, resources and efficient co-ordination between the government departments most relevant to protecting children: Social Welfare, Health, Education and Justice. Non-government organisations, both local and international, will continue to play an important role in supplementing and supporting the efforts of governments.

The Study showed clearly that there was much secrecy and denial surrounding violence against children. People and communities did not want to “own” it, talk about it, admit it, and face up to it. Then of course it is very difficult to deal with something which “doesn’t exist”.

Breaking the wall of silence and denial surrounding particularly sexual violence, but also physical and humiliating punishment and abuse, is absolutely necessary to ending it. Here, religious and other respected leaders, perhaps also leading cultural and sports figures, can play important roles in co-operation with media. Research institutions need to have the issue of violence against children on their agenda, to obtain and spread reliable information and create healthy public debate and openness. The voices of children themselves are vital in ending violence.

In developing a child protection system, the knowledge and understanding about violence of everyone involved will have to be increased to make them ready for this task. It was clearly seen throughout the Study, and one of its main conclusions is that the main battle against violence will have to happen at community level where families and their children live.

This book is a contribution to supporting all those who are and will be involved in the huge but rewarding task ahead of learning to listen and act to end violence against children.

Who is this book for?

This book is firstly for child protection workers and staff in child rights organisations who are taking part in strengthening the national child protection systems. All those who in their professional roles are in frequent contact with children in their communities, and who have a special duty to care, protect, guide and teach children will of course also benefit from reading this book.

For example:

- Members of child protection committees, at village and/or district levels
- Government authorities with special obligations to children at local level
- Teachers, school inspectors, parent-teacher associations
- Social workers
- Health workers, including traditional midwives, working in communities, health posts and local hospitals
- Police, lawyers, judges; those working in criminal detention facilities where children may be kept.
- Personnel caring for children in children's homes, rehabilitation centres, shelters, refugee facilities
- Staff in local, national and international NGOs working for the rights of children, and who may be working with children in emergency situations
- Journalists who report on violence against children
- Mothers, fathers, siblings and other close caregivers with the responsibility of bringing up children

Discussion point

Are there sayings in your culture which relate to violence against children?

Discuss how the findings and recommendations of the UN Study relate to the realities in your community.

The family of four fundamentals in the fight to prevent and deal with violence against children

The fight against violence is greatly strengthened when all involved share a common understanding of the issues surrounding violence against children, and have developed, or are willing to do so, child-friendly attitudes and practices.

In this chapter, we will look at four themes, each of which is very important alone in protecting children against violence. When linked together, they form a solid foundation of essential basic knowledge to enable us to act on behalf of and with children.

But first we must ask:

Who is a child?

We all think we know who a child is; but ask this question in different cultures, to people in different roles, and you will get many answers.

A child can be understood in many ways.

Legal definition

According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, a child is any person under 18 years, unless the national age of majority is reached earlier.

National law may not name a general age defining who is a child, but may state ages at which young people can work, vote, join military service, drive, get married, consent to sexual activity, etc.

For the purpose of this book, based as it is on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, a child is any person under 18 years.

Cultural definition

Different cultures may have different understanding of who is a child –also when it comes to boys and girls. For example, girls are often said to have reached adulthood when they start to menstruate, and are then considered ready for marriage. Likewise boys when they reach a certain height and show signs of puberty, are ready to be initiated into the adult world. In some societies, unmarried males may be regarded as not fully adult, likewise persons with mental illness or intellectual handicaps.

Going back in history in many of our societies, there was no real recognition of “childhood” as a special period in human development, and a poor understanding of the needs of growing children.

Parental definition

To parents – their children are always children! A fact which can sometimes lead to conflict.

Biological definition

Since biologically childhood is associated with rapid growth and development, one could also say a child is a person who is still growing. Provided children are getting good nutrition, growth continues to about 17 years. The child's final height will be partly the result of genes and partly due to nutrition.

The child's own understanding

Children generally want to “be big” and be allowed to do what adults do, to have more freedom and control over their lives. Children often “negotiate” their way towards adulthood, and their developing capacities are often recognised by them being given increasingly responsible duties and tasks. In the UN Study however, children talked about being given work to do that was far too heavy for them, and also saw this as a kind of violence.

Although this book will use the definition of a child as a person under 18 years, in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, it is understood that how childhood is defined and understood in a national and cultural setting will always be significant for the issue of violence against children.

Discussion point

How is childhood legally defined in your country?

How are children and childhood understood culturally in your society?

How do the above factors either protect children or put them more at risk?

The family of fundamentals I: Child Rights

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which took ten years to develop with the participation of most nations, became in 1989 the international law for children, setting standards for the legal obligations of states towards the children of their nations. All states except the US and Somalia signed up to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and many are in the process of updating the national child law to agree with the Convention on the Rights of the Child standards.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child underlines that the State has the main responsibility to fulfil children's rights. It is the State that has to make sure that children are protected, educated and in good health. However, all persons working and caring for children also carry this obligation –both morally and legally.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child gives each girl and boy under 18 rights in all areas important for his or her development, health, education and protection –without

discrimination of any kind.

Although it is important for all those working with children to know about all the articles in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and their application in a particular context, in this book we are focusing on Article 19, which, put simply, says :

Governments shall take all steps necessary, legal, administrative, social and educational, to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.

Furthermore, the Article says that Governments should establish social programmes to provide necessary support for the child and those who have the care of the child, as well as other forms of prevention. These programmes should also concern themselves with the identification, reporting, referral, investigation, treatment and follow-up of child maltreatment. Such programmes should also help the child to get justice.

Article 39 gives every child a right to be helped to recover from violence of any kinds, as well as injuries from accidents (the right to rehabilitation).

A full range of other articles which work together to protect children can be found in Annex 2.

For child rights to be effective in preventing violence against children in communities, children themselves have to be aware of their rights to be protected; they need to be taught in school, and discussed with children and their parents. In Africa, the African Charter on the Rights and Obligations of Children is also an important document to know and discuss with children.

Community workers with an obligation to protect children, and who know the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, immediately have a very useful tool which gives them the authority to act on behalf of children and, when necessary, to see that legal action is taken.

Discussion point

To what degree is the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child reflected in your national law? What do national laws say about sexual abuse, physical punishment and other forms of violence against children?

What can be defined as “protection articles” in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child?

The family of fundamentals 2: Child development

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child builds on the right to development, since all the Articles in some way or another support child development. In this chapter, we will briefly discuss child development as the amazing, complex process each human being goes through in his or her unique way as one grows from a tiny beginning in mother’s womb to

adulthood. A huge amount of knowledge about the developing child has been built up through research, particularly from the last century, and mostly from western countries. More research is needed from all parts of the world to better understand how cultural and social contexts influence development. Much knowledge also exists in the minds and memories of parents all over the world, who are close observers of developing children every day.

Some of the main findings are summarised here:

- Child development is a result of the child’s genetic inheritance interacting in many different ways, some of which are still not understood, with the environment children grow up in. By “environment” is meant factors influencing child development such as quality of care and nurturing from parents and caregivers and access to sufficient amounts of the right kinds of foods; and good health.
- The period between conception and the first three years of life is the most important developmental period during which the child grows rapidly and develops many skills. For example, vision, hearing, smell, taste and touch –all needed to explore and learn about the small world they live in, and develop new skills. The brains of children are already made ready to learn any language – and when their close caregivers start to communicate with them, they begin to learn the language they will most probably grow up with. The wonder of language development is such that children by three years can begin to make sentences they have never heard before.
- The main development and workings of the growing brain happen during the first three years. It has been shown that there is a direct connection between the child’s early experiences and how the brain functions. In other words, the actual quality of interaction between babies and caregivers is of fundamental importance for the developing brain. When babies are given loving care, played with, talked with, held close, comforted when distressed, fed when hungry, all this means that the caregiver is picking up the “in tune with” the baby. This kind of parenting helps the brain to develop in the best way possible.
- Babies are social from birth. They are soon able to focus their eyes on mother, and even from birth they start to smile (very shortly to begin with). They can recognise and respond to their mother’s voice; they know the smell of her milk from that of other mothers; they cry and make noises to draw her attention. This social behaviour also draws in others in the family if they too are “mothering” baby. Babies can therefore influence their social environment as well as this influencing them –it is a two-way effect.
- Because the first three years in life is the period when the cells of the body are dividing very rapidly, babies are dependent on good conditions –i.e. good care, nutrition and health – to keep up this rapid growth, especially of the main organs such as the brain, liver and kidneys.
- Babies and small children form close emotional bonds with their primary caregivers, now known to be very important both for their survival as infants and also for their social and emotional development throughout life. In these first relationships, children learn to trust.
- An important job for parents is to find the right balance, under very different circumstances, in letting the child explore and learn from his/her environment, and at the same time protecting their child from danger.

Development continues to be about exploring, learning and refining skills, and physical growth. From about three years, children start to be able to remember. Children all over the world are able to sit up, crawl, stand and walk in this order, although the actual age they can do these things varies. As the child grows his/her ability for social relationships becomes increasingly important. Children from early on become aware of themselves as “boys” and “girls” and become curious about their physical differences, and start to ask questions about this.

Child development beyond the first three years continues to be dependent on good quality relationships between the child and those responsible for his/her care and guidance; parents, relatives; older siblings; teachers, and other significant persons in the life of the child.

Children during their school-age years continue to develop their social abilities, now also outside the family. Play and sports help them develop both social and physical skills. They also develop their intellectual abilities – solving problems, understanding, learning, memorising, and creating ideas. Children in difficult circumstances try to use these abilities to cope with their lives as best as they can, and they are now becoming less dependent on their parents. Physical growth continues to be rapid, and children will continue to grow if they are getting proper nutrition. If not, their growth will become stunted.

Although for some time, children have known what is “right and wrong” behaviour, during this time children will begin to even further develop their morality, and evaluate that of others. They will take some decisions and make choices about their own standards of behaviour.

Children of about 11 –12 onwards move into the age of sexual maturation under the influence of substances in the blood called hormones, which “steer” the developments that take place in the body and mind at this time. It is hormones which cause the development of the sexual organs, and prepare children for becoming parents themselves one day. Hormones also affect the emotional life, and teenagers’ moods can swing up and down, confusing parents. Children during this stage are between child-and-adulthood. Society sometimes treats them as children and does not listen to them, sometimes as adults –and recruits them as soldiers into adult wars. This can be very frustrating –and dangerous – for these young persons. This is also the age of dreams about one’s future life, which, depending on where you live and your parent’s circumstances, may or may not be fulfilled. It is the time of life when children still very much need adult guidance, but also need and want to find out about life for themselves.

The family group however, although very vital to normal child development, does not live in isolation from circumstances outside the family which will also have also a great influence on the development of the children. Families react to these circumstances in many different ways. For example, although social norms may say that a girl should not go to school, some families decide that their daughter should get this chance.

Here are some main factors, positive and negative, which will directly or indirectly affect child development:

- Traditional beliefs and practices
- Whether families are living in rural or town settings

- Poverty and poor nutrition
- Poor health in the family; alcohol/drug dependence in parents; size of family
- Level of education of parents/caregivers
- War and displacement; natural disasters
- Being separated from parents and family
- Loss of parents; living with relatives who do not want you
- Upbringing in overcrowded and understaffed institutions
- Access to continued education
- Experience of violence in childhood

Whether or not a child has contact with a supportive person throughout childhood, somebody he/she can trust and confide in and ask for guidance is of overall importance for a child's resilience and ability to heal trauma.

Discussion points

How is child development understood and described in your culture?

How aware are parents about the way their parenting affects the development of their child?

What main factors in your community affect the development of children positively or negatively – boys and girls?

The family of fundamentals 3: Child protection

“All acts of violence are expressions of power over others”

Most parents do their best to protect children from all kinds of harm as they grow up. For example:

- They try to protect children from accidents happening in and about the home – from burning, poisoning, getting hurt, falling from heights.
- They vaccinate their children against diseases; and may use mosquito nets
- They try to keep them clean, and the home clean to reduce infections
- They provide when they can warm clothes against cold
- They advise their children on how to avoid getting HIV positive

Parents also go to great lengths to protect their children during wars and natural disasters.

All the above efforts are acts of protection. However, and in this book, when Save the Children talks about protection they mean:

Measures and structures to prevent and respond to abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence affecting children”“

“Measures” could mean:

- Laws which protect children
- Capacity building of persons working to protect children
- Child protection policies –that is, that all those working in services providing for children have to sign a paper promising that they will never abuse or exploit children
- Creating awareness of violence against children and rights, and all kinds of activities at community level which help prevent violence

“Structures” is a system of inter-related components and services and could mean the interaction between organised children, adult professionals and institutions, for instance:

- Child protection committees
- Child rights groups
- Child-friendly courts – where children involved in cases of violence are interviewed and treated in respect of their rights and in ways which recognise that they are children

The *aim* of child protection as defined above is to make sure in every way possible that everybody knows about the child’s right to be protected as laid down in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and to take all kinds of actions to make that a reality.

Child protection work is usually carried out by specially trained persons employed by the government run child protection services as part of social services. Child protection workers try to prevent and respond to violence of all kinds through working with families, children, health workers, schools, local police, religious leaders and community leaders in general. However, this depends on how far the development of such services has come in a particular country.

Child protection work is also about knowing who is at risk and where the risks come from. This means that communities wishing to protect their children need to work together with children themselves, to find these things out. Without a clear picture of risk, child protection will not work efficiently.

Any child protection programme has to deal with *discrimination* – treating some children differently than others because of who they are, what they look like, where they come from, their life situation, their sex – that is so common in many societies and is a major cause of violence against children, as well as many other violations of their rights. Children with disabilities, orphaned children, children with HIV/AIDS, children of certain ethnic or religious groups, street children – all are more exposed to violence than “other” children. Discrimination is so closely linked to violence that in the UN Study it was also seen as a form of violence.

Every country must find out how they best can use their resources to work with child protection both at national and community level while developing a child protection system.

The level of development of roads, transport, and buildings, the size and geographical nature of the country, the mixture of cultures and religions and many other factors have to be taken into account. In many countries, child protection work is carried out at village level by people who in their roles as teachers, health workers, social workers and community leaders form child protection committees to protect children from harm. These groups may refer children who need specialised help to more specialised child protection services at district level, or to NGO's who are working with child protection. Children's participation is also significant in many child protection committees, or children may construct parallel children's committees. Children's participation needs to be embedded in any form of community protection.

Because violence against children happens in children's social setting and also affects social relationships, as well as having effects on health, child protection is dependent on close co-operation among especially the social and health services. Many forms of violence are also criminal acts in many countries, so the justice system is also a partner in child protection.

The education sector is important for several reasons: teachers and school health and social workers are well-placed to both detect and prevent abusive behaviour in schools, but may also recognise children who are being abused outside school. The UN Study found that many children experience sexual abuse by teachers and older pupils; bullying and harassment are widespread, and include both verbal and physical abuse. Many schools have not yet abandoned the use of physical punishment of pupils, which often goes together with humiliating words or actions. In a more positive sense, schools can play a very important role in the fight against violence by teaching children and parents what violence is, and about the right of children to be protected, cared for and brought up without violence.

Close partnerships between child services, parents, children and communities, and non-government organisations are the key to protecting children from violence.

Discussion point

Do you see partnerships between child services, children and communities and non-governmental organisations being built in your community?

What more could be done in your community to organise protection for children?

Is there an overview in your community about who is most at risk from violence?

If not, how could this be done?

The family of fundamentals 4: Child participation

Under Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, children have the right to say what they think about all matters which affect their lives. The older the child, the more these opinions have to be taken into account by adults making decisions for the child.

The huge value of involving children actively and listening to their opinions, experiences and suggestions in developing our societies is becoming recognised. This is especially true in the area of violence. The UN Study was the first time in the history of the United Nations to involve children in such a world-wide study. Children could give their views and experiences freely in all the events of the Study.

It is from the children themselves that we as adults have been shown the true story of violence of all kinds in the everyday lives of boys and girls everywhere. For adults to accept that children themselves have an important role in fighting violence against them, we have to start “seeing” children in a different way. This means:

- Getting to know what children think and *already know* –which children often have not been given the opportunity to share with adults. We are often surprised by children’s thoughts about life and their ability to understand some things deeply.
- Recognising that children have many skills and talents and creative ways of thinking and working, all of which can be very useful in developing safer, non-violent communities which most of us want to live in.
- A big bonus: taking children seriously in this way is a great help to children who already have suffered violence-instead of just seeing them as helpless, sad victims. It turns around their bad feelings about themselves, restores trust in adults, and makes them feel they can do something.

Children working in partnership with adults give the best possible chance to create openness about the hidden subjects of sexual abuse, physical and humiliating violence, neglect and exploitation. Bringing these dark things out in the sunlight is the first step to destroying them. Communities have to be able to say: *Yes! This is happening amongst us! We have not wanted to see or understand; now we must open our eyes! And do something!*

Children do not in any way only see themselves as possible or actual “victims” of this violence; they have given strong messages that they want to be actors in ending it! This is very good news for adults –and should be embraced with open arms.

There are many examples worldwide of children taking action. Some of these are:

- Children’s organisations fighting for child rights
- Children engaging in global, regional and national decision making
- Children involved in public policy and governance discussion informing and influencing
- Child rights and peace clubs in villages for children in and out of school
- Children performing dramas which make adults aware of violence and how children experience this

- Children holding exhibitions about violence
- Children acting as members of child protection committees, village development committees or children's committees/parliaments

Children involved in such actions may be mixtures of children who themselves have been abused and exploited, and children who have not. This kind of empowerment, especially when it is supported and accepted by adults, is of great help to those who have lived through the humiliation and shame of abuse to lift their heads high and make some meaning out of their experiences.

However, it must always be kept in mind that reducing and dealing with violence in the community is always an adult responsibility which can never be delegated to children.

The main action areas for children in strengthening child protection are as follows:

- Activities in schools and villages such as dramas, debates and discussions to make people aware of violence, its causes and effects and what “our” village can do about it.
- Together with adults, identify local protection issues and possible solutions and referring possible cases to adults
- Being informed about how to protect themselves, who to go to for support, etc. and informing other children
- Being supported to form clubs, associations, etc. (right to association)
- Having access to effective complaints mechanisms/reporting procedures
- Being involved in public decision making (beyond consultation)
- Support to increase and enhance their life skills and resilience building
- Regular dialogue between children and adults (and community committees) to see how adults can meet their responsibilities to protect children
- Peer groups working with child rights may encourage and support other children to report violence they are suffering to trustworthy persons. Children can also teach other children how to protect themselves against violence.
- Children can help teachers and each other to create non-violent schools, to have codes of conduct, to stop bullying.
- They may carry out these activities as members of child protection committees (and other sorts of committees) or representatives of adult groups attending children's groups
- They may be part of consultative groups involved in guiding the establishment of national child protection systems, in developing new laws, and in monitoring and evaluation.

It is important that adults are prepared to listen to children, share information with them and respond to their concerns and suggestions. Children and adults also need to understand their different and respective roles in child protection – adults have ultimate responsibility for ensuring that appropriate action is taken in child protection issues.

Children should not:

- Be directly involved in handling actual cases of abuse
- Be involved in discussions in child protection committees about specific families
- Be involved in activities that are a burden to them – draw them away from school, etc.

In other words, children should not be involved in issues which require confidential handling and adult authority, responsibility and knowledge. When children are involved in the Child Protection Committee or similar structures, the committee must always keep in mind whether some activities could put children at risk of harm from community members, keeping in mind that the subject of sexual abuse and other kinds of violence is often very provoking.

Children’s role in the Child Protection Committee is important in discussing general approaches and ideas to reduce violence; in reporting what they have tried and discussing how effective it was/was not; in planning new activities; in guiding adults with the knowledge children have of the risks they face.

To sum up: Think of child rights, child development, child protection and child participation as a united “family” of ingredients in a good recipe to end violence against children, which everybody needs to eat and digest to nurture them for the fight against violence!

Discussion points

Think of the “recipe” of child rights, child development, child protection and child participation in the context of your community. How would you go about applying this in your setting?

What barriers are there or do you foresee in children involving themselves against violence? What advantages? Can you give examples of both?

How are children already involved in your community to protect children and how is this working?

How could children in your community be supported to fight against violence?

2 Understanding the different forms of violence: Sexual abuse, physical and verbal abuse and punishment, exploitation and neglect

In this chapter we will go deeper into the different forms of violence against children; we will try to understand – also through the eyes and minds of children how children experience violence, and how it affects their lives and development.

General points about violence against girls and boys:

- Violence against children by adults or older, stronger children always reflects differences in power of some sort –more strength, more authority, more intellectual ability, more cunning, more standing in the community, more wealth –always “more”. In relationships between parents/caregivers and teachers/children the *dependence* of children on these adults for love, care, a home, education, good school results, makes this category of adults even more powerful.
- Some adults use their power to exploit the dependence of children on them and gratify their own sexual needs and wishes and also to get rid of their own feelings of frustration and anger.
- Research on who carries out violent acts against children shows that it is most often people who children should be able to trust and depend on, and who are known to children: parents, caregivers, relatives, older siblings, teachers, neighbours, orphanage personnel, people in positions of authority in the community – like police or community leaders; also personnel in pre-schools and sports facilities for children.
- Most children experiencing violence in their homes are victims of more than one kind, and there also may be more than one person being violent to them.
- Physical punishment is often combined with harsh, unkind, humiliating words – which children often find more hurtful than the beatings and blows they get. Sexual abuse may be accompanied by both physical violence –and threats of this – and insulting language, which the abusing adult may use to make the child feel “a nothing”. These children may at the same time suffer neglect from their parents/caregivers – they are not fed, clothed, bathed properly, and may not be sent to school.
- Children can also be abusers of other children –usually those who are younger, or who can’t fight back, or a child who is harassed and bullied by many children at once at school. This type of violence may be well hidden from adults. It often happens when there are no adults around. Children affected by this abuse, which can be sexual, verbal insults and threats, physically violent attacks, and exclusion from social contact, are often terrified to tell teachers or parents of the violence because they believe in the threats of older children. Such violence can follow children

throughout their school years; it is a cause of drop out, and even suicide, and is very damaging.

- The effects of violence on child development, behaviour, social relationships and health is dependent on many factors, the main ones being:
 - The age at which the violence occurs;
 - *Who* is carrying out the violent acts; a close, trusted person? Or someone outside the family?
 - Whether this person is HIV positive;
 - How long the violence goes on;
 - Whether or not the child has other relationships which they can depend on for love and care;
 - The attitudes and behaviour of family, community, friends if and when the violence is exposed;
 - The personal resources of the child –their ability to “split off” the violence they are suffering from other parts of their lives; the ways and means they develop to at least reduce the violence; whether they are able to gain positive recognition for example at school, in sports and other areas.
- In general, however, growing up with violence as a part of their lives-and in particular sexual abuse by trusted, close persons, affects all parts of child development – the feelings, thoughts, memories, social skills, the ability to play and learn. It can turn a happy, sociable, playful, energetic little girl into a deeply depressed, withdrawn and suicidal young person.
- Violent acts are often committed by people who themselves have experienced abuse and lack of closeness and affection in their own childhoods. However, certainly not all persons who experience violence in their childhoods grow up to be violent themselves. Violence in the home is often a result of a parent being on alcohol abuse , or high on drugs, as pointed out during the UN Study by many children. Frustration, anger, feelings of powerlessness, hate, and despair in the abuser may be turned into a wish to hurt and humiliate others who can't fight back.

Specific forms of violence against children:

I. Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse includes all forms of sexual violence including incest, early and forced marriage, rape, involvement in pornography, and sexual slavery. Child sexual abuse may also include indecent touching or exposure, using sexually explicit language towards a child and showing pornographic material.

Who are the abusers? Where does it happen?

Firstly, it is important to say clearly that most adults do not sexually abuse children. Both men and women abuse boys and girls, although abuse by males is by far the most common. Girls are more often the victims of sexual abuse; however, abuse of boys is also frequent,

but less researched than that against girls, thus there is a knowledge gap. Girls (although this may vary in different cultures) tend to report sexual abuse more than boys.

Many studies, including the UN Study have found that most children are abused by someone they already know and trust and depend on; someone who has easy access to them, knows when they are likely to be alone, and knows their habits and personalities. This makes it easy for the abuser to plan and carry out the abuse. Abusers often exploit the dependency of the children they abuse: “*You eat my bread therefore you must pay me back in this way*”, “*You will not pass your exam unless you sleep with me*”.

Thus those who sexually abuse children are parents, grandparents, foster parents, relatives, older siblings, friend of the family, neighbours, personnel in children’s homes and teachers.

Children on the streets and living in child-headed households are frequently approached by men who try to exploit their poverty and hunger in exchange for sex. Children in various forms of detention, that is, in places where they are without the protection of their families: in jails, shelters, and rehabilitation centres may be abused by prison attendants and caregivers.

A newly-employed matron in an orphanage which was established to look after orphan girls soon understood that something wrong was going on. Every week-end the owner of the orphanage would arrive in his big car and take away about six of the girls – different ones every time. She noticed that when they came back, they looked very unhappy. She was approached by one of the girls who complained of a vaginal discharge. In the conversation around this, the girl told that for several years now, they were being regularly used by the manager to have sex with his friends – who paid him for this. They were threatened that they would be thrown back on the streets if they said anything, or lose their places at school. The matron reported the matter to social services, and upon investigation, the whole place was shut down, and children placed in another home, or reunified with surviving parents. Donors from abroad, who had supported the home, and even sat on its board, were shocked by what had happened. They had not suspected anything.

In some countries, girls reported that they were sexually harassed by men and boys in their community on streets, buses and public places. This usually was in the form of touching and passing indecent remarks.

Another group of sexual offenders against children are *paedophiles*, the name given to men who prefer children rather than adults as sexual partners. They tend to seek out jobs where they naturally come in contact with children: teachers, sports club leaders, priests –all of whom are normally respected and trusted people. In these positions the paedophile may abuse many children, boys and girls, threatening them to keep silent. Paedophiles will often “groom” children for some time before the sexual abuse starts– that is, try to make friends with them and gain their trust by paying them special attention, giving them gifts and special favours.

There may be national differences regarding where the main threat of sexual abuse comes from, and also between rural and town/city areas. Violence against children in homes, communities, refugee camps and shelters is an increased risk in times of war and also natural disasters, when the safety networks of family and community are torn apart.

Why do people sexually abuse children?

The majority of adults who abuse children are not paedophiles. There is limited research on “why” in developing countries, and in western countries, the research carried out shows that there in general does not seem to be a special type of personality who is a typical sexual abuser. However, it would seem that adults who abuse children have often themselves been neglected and abused in their families, and have grown up without close, affectionate relationships.

Some cultural beliefs and traditional practice may lead to abuse. There is said to be a belief in many parts of Africa that having sex with a virgin (who will almost certainly be a young girl), will cure HIV/AIDS this has been supposed to have led to many rapes of children, but research is needed to find out to what degree this is really true. Child marriages, leading to premature, forced sexual relations between the child and her adult husband is a common form of violence against children. This often reflects differences between rural peoples and national lawmakers in what a “child” is. Traditionally in many societies, a girl is an adult woman when she menstruates, even if she is 11 years old. She is then in the eyes of the community ready for marriage. To suggest that this is a violent act would be met with disbelief. National law may say, however, that the age of sexual consent is 16 or even 18.

As we know, alcohol and drug abuse can, in certain circumstances, make people do things they would not normally do, and are also often associated with violent behaviour. Children in the UN Study often mentioned alcohol in connection with the violence they suffered in the home setting.

Rape has always been used as a weapon of war by the warring parties. This is now recognised internationally as a war crime. It has played a terrible part in all the wars of our time, and has not spared children. Perhaps rape under these circumstances of hatred and violence is of the most aggressive damaging type of sexual abuse, mentally and physically, and the psychosocial consequences of these acts are very severe. It is often carried out by several men, and can go on for a long time. This form of sexual abuse is very often accompanied by threats of killing the victim and in fact often ends in death.

2. Physical abuse and punishment

“I feel like leaving home and staying with someone who cares about children”.

Physical abuse involves the use of violent physical force so as to cause actual or likely physical injury or suffering, (e.g. hitting, shaking, burning, female genital mutilation, torture.)

Physical violence towards children may be carried out for several reasons:

- The most common is the use of physical violence (beating, smacking, slapping, burning, kicking, twisting arms –children themselves can give many more examples) to punish children. This happens in varying degrees all over the world, usually by parents, other caregivers, employers, teachers, to punish children for acts they have committed which parents and others see as bad behaviour. Or, for refusing to carry out orders, for doing something in the wrong way, or not fast enough.

- Adults explain their violence as necessary to teach children the “right way to behave.” They see this as their duty and right as parents and others who have a part in bringing up children. Parents strongly resist any interference in the way they bring up their children.
- Punishment may happen immediately after the child has done something wrong, as a spontaneous, angry act from a parent, or happen long after – for example if a child admits to past wrongdoing, or a mother tells father of the child’s “naughtiness” when he comes home from work.
- At other times, physical violence against children are acts of intended cruelty to children who have not done anything “wrong”, but who adults dislike, who remind them of disturbing things, who they see as burdens. Among this group are children who suffer discrimination for one or another reason.
- Sometimes adults unintentionally cause harm by carrying out violent acts against children, not realising their own strength and how harmful this can be. An example of this would be fathers, or at times mothers, shaking young babies violently to make them stop crying, especially at night when their sleep is being disturbed. This can cause bleeding into the brain and brain damage, sometimes death.

“James” was a 10-year-old boy who was paralysed in both legs, and had an extensively scarred face due to a burning accident when he was a child. Both his parents died of AIDS and he was taken into care by his uncle. Tragically, his uncle, instead of giving him the care he so badly needed, began to use daily physical violence towards him, kicking him in the legs (“why have you useless legs!”), pushing him to the ground when he tried to pull himself up, denying him food. The cruel behaviour seemed to increase as time went on. The aunt was too fearful to stop her husband, but neighbours eventually reported the matter and with police intervention the boy was brought to a rehabilitation centre. By that time he was near death, but slowly recovered after a year of good, affectionate care.

Adults admit that they may hit their children when in fact the anger and frustration they feel has nothing to do with their children’s actual behaviour. They may feel despair due to poverty, helplessness; they may be exhausted, frightened or not know about alternatives to punishment.

3. Emotional or psychological abuse

Emotional or psychological abuse includes humiliating and degrading treatment such as bad name-calling, constant criticism, belittling, persistent shaming, solitary confinement and isolation.

Many children interviewed in the UN Study talked about how words continued to hurt them long after the pain of physical abuse had gone. They remembered adults screaming and shouting very hurtful, humiliating, insulting words, often as part of physical and other forms of violence. Words born out of anger, helplessness, hate, frustration, fear, self-disgust and shame. Words usually spoken when adults are emotionally roused and possibly

drunk. Words which may drive children from their homes, and which are difficult to take back once spoken. Such words can make children feel terrified, the younger they are, the more they believe in the threats – they will be killed, thrown out, abandoned.

Sometimes the words can be spoken coldly, cruelly, they are carefully chosen to hurt, and make children feel worthless and shamed, but they can also lead children to feel deep anger and hatred.

There is no doubt that children experience these words as a form of violence often much worse and more painful and harmful than the physical pain. It is difficult to remember pain; but words can be remembered for the rest of one's life, returning like unwelcome visitors to disturb and distress.

4. Exploitation

Child exploitation refers to the use of children for someone else's advantage, gratification or profit often resulting in unjust, cruel and harmful treatment of the child. These activities are to the detriment of the child's physical or mental health, education, moral or social-emotional development. It covers situations of manipulation, misuse, abuse, victimization, oppression or ill-treatment.

There are two main forms of child exploitation that are recognised:

Sexual exploitation: the abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust for sexual purposes; this includes profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the exploitation of another as well as personal sexual gratification.

Examples: Child prostitution, trafficking of children for sexual abuse and exploitation, child pornography, sexual slavery.

Economic exploitation of a child: the use of the child in work or other activities for the benefit of others. This includes, but is not limited to, child labour.

Economic exploitation implies the idea of a certain gain or profit through the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services. This material interest has an impact on the economy of a certain unit, be it the State, the community or the family.

Examples: Child domestic work, child soldiers and the recruitment and involvement of children in armed conflict, child bondage, the use of children from criminal activities including the sale and distribution of narcotics, the involvement of children in any harmful or hazardous work.

5. Neglect

Neglect is defined as: deliberately, or through carelessness or negligence, failing to provide for, or secure for a child, their rights to physical safety and development.

Neglect is sometimes called the 'passive' form of abuse in that it relates to the failure to carry out some key aspect of the care and protection of children which results in significant impairment of the child's health or development including a failure to thrive emotionally and socially.

Evidence is usually needed of persistent or severe neglect (repeated failures or a failure that is in itself so serious that it severely endangers the child).

Examples: Neglect includes abandonment, the failure to properly supervise and protect children from harm as much as is feasible, the deliberate failure to carry out important aspects of care which results or is likely to result in harm to the child. The deliberate failure to provide medical care or carelessly exposing a child to harm can, for example, amount to neglect.

Parents and caregivers neglect a child when they fail to take care of the child's basic needs for healthy development, such as affection, adequate and healthy food, cleanliness, clothes, educational needs, medical care, sufficient rest and recreation. Neglect can obviously have serious effects on a child's health and development, and, particularly in the case of babies and small children, be fatal.

Parents/caregivers can neglect a child on purpose; either as a way of punishing the child, or even trying to rid themselves of a child who is seen as a burden. But children can suffer neglect due to chronic illness, including mental illness, in parents, or because of dire poverty.

Children can also suffer from neglect as a whole group, with terrible effects:

Even though it was very cold in winter, the institution did not provide any heating or warm clothes for the children. Babies and young children, sharing a small cot between three, were kept inside all the time. They were never picked up and cuddled, talked with, or comforted. They spent long hours lying in wet and dirty beds. They had no playthings, and even when babies were fed, a nurse put the bottle in the baby's mouth and left it. It was no wonder that many died after some time.

Discussion points

Is sexual abuse defined as a crime in your country by people and by the law?

Do you feel that emotional abuse and neglect is less important than physical and sexual abuse?

Save the Children has worked a lot to combat physical and psychological punishment. Are there groups in your region active in this field? Is it a right priority to focus on this form of violence?

3 The effects of violence against children: how violence affects child development, health and well-being

Violence steals trust, self-esteem, and gnaws away the vitality of childhood; it corrupts, maims, kills, and destroys children, and undermines our societies.

In other words, violence harms children. Harm is defined as: the result of the exploitation, violence, abuse and neglect of children and can take many forms, including impacts on children's physical, emotional and behavioural development, their general health, their family and social relationships, their self-esteem, their educational attainment and their aspirations.

In some context, the term 'significant harm' is used within the protection system to determine the threshold of harm required before intervention by protection services can be undertaken. This approach seeks to balance the potential risk posed to the child facing the protection issue with the real risks that may come with the intervention itself.

General effects of violence against children

In the following general overview, the focus is mostly on violence in the home, carried out against the child by the persons most close to the child, and who children are dependent on. This is such a betrayal of trust, a loss of love, that the consequences on the development of the child are usually much more serious than sudden, unexpected violence in the community setting –although this can also have life-long consequences.

Trust

Growing up in violent homes seriously affects the most basic and necessary human capacity for the development of normal healthy relationships throughout life – the ability to trust in others. From birth, a baby depends on her closest caregivers for loving care, which she/he learns to expect day and night, and which will ensure her/his survival and development. In this way, the baby soon learns to trust in the carer that she/he will be fed and comforted when she/he is hungry and cries, she/he will be made comfortable again when she/he has soiled herself, she will be soothed when she has pain. These ongoing, everyday interactions between child and caregiver develop into the child's first experience with close human relationships, and a close bond forms. Trust and love are close companions in the child's life, and children have no choice but to put their lives in the hands of the adults caring for them.

Growing up in a non-violent, caring family allows children to experience and learn to believe in others, and to be able to form close relationships with others without anxiety or

doubt. The ability to trust others continues to be the basis of forming close relationships throughout adult life.

Self-esteem: how children feel about themselves

All forms of violence in the home affect the way children feel about themselves. When children are told by their caregivers that they are bad, ugly, stupid, worthless, and not wanted, they begin to believe these things about themselves, and feel that in some way they deserve the treatment they are being given. As children get older, they begin to question what the adults are doing and saying to them; they ask themselves why their lives should be made so miserable, and begin to compare themselves with how other children are treated. Nevertheless, their confidence in themselves can already have been badly shaken, and this can continue in their adult lives, affecting both their personal lives and their performance in the workplace. It can also affect the way they behave as parents, and leave them with a constant, unhappy feeling of being not-good-enough persons who are not able to get on in life.

Fear and anxiety

Children who grow up under the shadow of violence often feel constant anxiety and fear: fear of the pain, the anger, the bad words, the humiliation, above all of not being loved or liked. Their minds become filled with thoughts of what has happened and what might happen, and they often develop all kinds of coping behaviours to try and reduce their anxiety. Some of these behaviours may get them into more trouble with parents, teachers and friends, who may not understand why the child is acting in this strange way. Fearfulness in relation to certain persons can over time grow into a general anxiety of being together with others, and as an adult this may seriously affect one's ability to work, to move freely around, and to function well socially.

The feeling of being different

This applies especially to children who have been sexually abused. Partly due to the sexual experiences at a young age, and the secret world they have had to live in, and perhaps still do as adults, many survivors of incest talk about this state of "feeling different". It is as if they can't connect properly with others' lives and experiences; as if they live in a different world. This is a lonely place to be, but in some ways it also protects the person from being emotionally "drowned" by their experiences. This can also happen to people who have experienced other types of trauma – that is, experiences which are life-threatening and also shatter one's own image of oneself and the world. Thus torture survivors and soldiers returning from war may express this same "strangeness".

Shame and guilt

All forms of violence will at some point make children feel shame (feelings connected to the judgement of others) and guilt (feelings which come of your own sense of right and wrong) as soon as they are old enough to have such feelings. Abusers often make children feel responsible for what is happening to them; "if only I worked harder, were more respectful, more honest, more obedient, did better at school, did not behave badly, I would not have to be punished in this way".

Sexual abuse is especially connected to shame and perceived disgrace of the family and lost honour of the girl and family. The abused girl is seen to have brought shame to not only herself but her whole family through the loss of her virginity. It is only a small step from here to the girl herself being blamed for the most dreadful violation of her rights to be protected. In this way, whole societies overlook the responsibility of the abuser for the acts.

Damage to life and health, and changing life pathways

All violence has the potential to cause serious physical harm, sometimes permanent disability, and death. Infection with HIV is always a risk in sexual abuse, as is also infection with sexually transmitted diseases, which can cause infertility in later life.

Tragically, violence in childhood can greatly influence the life pathways of children from being a promising journey, to one into an ever-increasing circle of more abuse, violence and exploitation.

Many do survive and live positive lives

Up until now, there has been a lot of discussion about the harm violence causes. However, with help and support of trustworthy people, and getting the opportunity to use their own resources, many children can free themselves from violence and its effects, and live happy, meaningful lives both in the remainder of their childhood and as adults. That does not mean that they may not carry the scars of what has happened deep within them; but it means they have developed the will to live in spite of what happened – this is their victory over their tormentors. Some children through a fortunate combination of personal resources and favourable external circumstances show considerable resilience (i.e. the capacity to overcome adversity) – these are usually children who have good social ability, are intelligent and adaptable in a positive sense.

The specific consequences of sexual abuse:

Because sexual abuse is one of the most damaging forms of violence against children, it will be discussed in more detail. The effects of abuse on the developing child depend on a number of factors listed here:

- **The relationship of the abuser to the child**

The closer the relationship, the greater the betrayal of trust and the more this will affect the child's feelings, ways of thinking and social relations.

- **The age of the child when the abuse occurred**

The younger the child, the more serious the damage to the development of the child both in terms of harm both to body and mind.

- **The length of time the abuse lasted**

The longer the abuse went on for, the more damage to the child. Sometimes the abuse begins in early childhood, and continues throughout childhood. It is not uncommon for children who are abused at home to later on be exploited commercially outside the home.

- **The type of sexual abuse**

The most damaging both in a physical and mental way is when sexual intercourse is forced on the child. This can be in the form of vaginal, anal or oral intercourse.

- **The degree of secrecy of the abuse**

The more the abuser forces secrecy of the abusive relationship on the child, often by threatening the child about things they know the child fears most, but also by “buying” secrecy with gifts, money and other “payments”, the more the child feels totally isolated and trapped.

- **The sex of the child**

There is evidence to show that boys who are sexually abused are equally at risk of developing serious effects on their development, but may escape the huge stigmatisation and condemnation which girls may receive from society. They naturally also escape *pregnancy*.

- **Whether physical force was used, or threats of physical violence**

The use of physical violence in connection with the sexual acts greatly increases the terror and horror of them in the child, and the psychological effects of the situation. Threats of violence also produce high anxiety and compliance in children.

- **The use of verbal abuse**

Some abusers use verbal insults to humiliate and get control over the child. Again, these serve to increase the psychological harm caused by the abuse. Some abusers tell the child that “Nobody will ever believe you if you tell,” making the child feel more alone than ever.

- **Whether the child was also neglected at the same time.**

A sexually abused teenager who also suffers from general neglect, and who is isolated from others, is indeed in great danger of taking her own life, or dying due to infection which nobody tries to help her with.

- **The cultural and social setting the abuse took place in**

The attitudes to and the status of women; the degree of openness about sexual matters, and practices concerning marriage and other such factors can play a big role in how a girl who has been sexually abused is helped, accepted and eventually able to live a normal life in her society. Understanding, support, protection and encouragement in other words, the fulfilment of her rights, as against accusation, rejection, and abandonment – will have huge significance in influencing the short and long-term consequences of sexual abuse.

- **The consequences of exposure of the abuse**

These will be very important for recovery. If the exposure led to rejection, condemnation and abandonment on the part of family and friends, all of which are a real risk, then the child will be extremely vulnerable and the only hope is that there are services which are functioning well enough to help her further –that someone is able to offer support and believes in her. If the girl is pregnant, the effects of rejection will be even more disastrous. Support of the mother is particularly important at this time. Another important factor identified is whether or not the

abuser(s) admit to their actions. The continued support of a friend, a teacher, a sister, an aunt, can be life-saving at this time.

- **The resilience of the child**

Like all other persons, children vary in their ability to stand up to and tackle stress when things go wrong in life. As mentioned, some children have a positive combination of personal abilities and characteristics which, together with supportive factors in their environment, help the child to overcome distressing events and circumstances in their lives. However, this resilience is not a constant capacity; it can be broken down by ill health, death of a loved one and other traumatic happenings. All action to support children should be designed to strengthen their resilience.

Learn to “read” children and the “language” of distress. How you might recognise that children of different age groups are signalling distress:

Children suffering violence in their lives, including sexual abuse, may not show any outward signs of their inner turmoil and confusion. However, many do so, but the way in which they signal their distress and their attempts to cope with what they are going through are not only specific to violence –they are general signs that “something is wrong”. For example, many of the “signs and symptoms” mentioned below you can meet in children who are living in a conflict zone, or who have experienced a natural disaster. Boys and girls as they get older may also react differently.

Children show their distress through age-specific behaviours and the following gives a general overview of what may be expected, while keeping in mind that children are unique individuals who also mature at different rates. Thus one child’s reactions may be different to another’s.

1. Babies and small children feeling anxiety

Children up to 4-5 years of age are generally not able to understand that what is happening to them is unusual or wrong in any way, although this gradually dawns on the child as they reach school age. When children are not able to understand that the sexual abuse or other violence committed against them is wrong, they are also unable to feel guilt or shame about the abuse itself. Small children, who cannot conceive of an adult, especially one they trust, doing wrong things, often explain the pain and discomfort they experience as punishment for their own bad behaviour. If only they could be good –then this would stop.

They will react of course to eventual pain and discomfort by crying and screaming; and may show fear towards the person (s) who regularly cause the pain by pushing that person away, and trying to hide from them if they can crawl or walk. As they develop language they may start to say “no”. Even if small children don’t understand what is being said, from birth they react to the tone of the voice. If the person committing the violent acts is using harsh language and causing pain small children will begin to show anxiety.

This will typically be shown through increased separation anxiety –that is the child will refuse to be separated from and will cling to, for example, mother, older siblings, to the pre-school teacher –afraid to leave what they experience as a “safe place”. They may also “shadow” persons who they feel attached to and safe with -following them around everywhere.

In this age range, children also show distress through disturbances in their biological functions: eating, sleeping, bowel and bladder control.

Children who have developed language and control over bowls and bladder may go backwards instead of forwards in their development. They may start to talk in baby talk, and behave like a baby; they may start to wet and soil themselves. Often adults understand these distress signs as the child being naughty, which may result in punishment – so increasing the distress of the child. In cultures where this is the norm, children may show fear of sleeping alone; around 4-5 years, children may wake up with nightmares.

One must also think about what is happening in the family at the time the violent acts are being committed, since violence in the family affects all family members and the relationships among them. Let’s say a father or stepfather is abusing a very young child. There is a strong likelihood that mother may also be treated violently by her husband, or at least that there is a poor relationship between them. This may be making the mother feel very depressed, which in turn also affects the growth of close emotional bonds between mother and baby/small child. Here one can see a “vicious cycle” being established, which could lead to the child being both abused and neglected.

As children in the 2-5 age group begin to master language –and with it the ability to draw what they are experiencing (drawing being also a kind of language) – they may start to tell others of their experience of violence, whether it is happening in the home environment or in a nursery setting or elsewhere. Although children in this age group may have been threatened by the abuser not to tell, or told that “we have a secret playtime together”, they have difficulty in keeping secrets. However, they still do not fully realise that the adult is doing wrong.

A problem facing young children is that they have limited language to describe sexual acts- but they may express them in their play, and in their drawings. However, they may talk about being afraid or being hit: “daddy’s angry with me”, “daddy put his (whatever the word used locally to describe the penis) in me –it hurts”; “my older brother tries to lie on top of me –he squashes me”. They may not be actually trying to get help –the play and drawings may just reflect their experiences in their daily lives, as is natural for small children.

As part of normal development, children of this age may show curiosity about each other’s sexual organs. They may want to touch and explore them. It is important to see the difference between this type of natural play and children imitating in their play sexual activities they only could know about if they have seen adults engaged in sexual intercourse or if an older person has sexually abused them.

Although as mentioned above, most of the distress signals described here are general, sexual abuse has some specific symptoms and signs. One of these is sexualised behaviour,

seen in many but by no means all children who are being sexually abused. In small children, one may see them expressing physical affection –cuddling, caressing –in ways which have a sexual content. They may try to touch adults’ private parts in ways which suggest sexual experiences.

Physical signs and symptoms which may alert one to sexual abuse and physical violence are:

- Sexual abuse can often cause sexually transmitted disease in children if the abuser is infected, for example gonorrhoea, syphilis, HIV infection. Accordingly, the child may show a general failure to thrive due to an undiscovered infection, or show clear signs of infection such as fever and pain in the genital area. The discovery of a vaginal or anal discharge signalling sexually transmitted disease in children of all ages should always alert one to the possibility of sexual abuse. HIV infection can of course be transmitted by a HIV+ mother during pregnancy, birth and breastfeeding, as can gonorrhoea (but usually an eye infection). Syphilis can also be transmitted by an infected mother, (congenital syphilis), but this has different effects on the child than when it is a primary infection due to sexual abuse.
- Other physical effects of sexual abuse depend on what kind of abuse. Touching the genitalia leaves no marks; attempts at penetration will cause tears in the vagina, genital area and anus, as well as the hymen –the thin tissue at the opening of the vagina. There may also be bleeding from this area. There may also be bruises on the child’s arms and legs if the abuser used force to hold the child down. There could also be redness, soreness and infection around the mouth if oral sex has been performed on the child.
- Children who are experiencing physical violence may show a wide range of signs and symptoms, such as burn marks, whipping marks on the back/buttocks; pain and stiffness in their joints due to them being pulled and twisted. Shaking babies violently may lead to bleeding in the brain with death as a consequence or permanent brain damage with serious consequences to development.
- Neglect of children in this age group, in particular babies, can be life-threatening, given the ever-present link between malnutrition, poor hygiene and killer diseases such as infections of the lungs and intestines causing diarrhoea. Neglect may be suspected when during health controls or visits to the home by health workers, babies and young children show signs of failing to thrive: they are weepy and irritable; they look thin, sickly, and are not growing, and have weight loss. They are not developing as they should. There are of course many causes for this, deliberate neglect only being one, and the total family circumstances need to be assessed in each case. Alcohol abuse, illness –physical or mental health problems combined with dire poverty are clear risk factors for child neglect.
- Neglect of older children, often combined with physical and humiliating punishment, cause thousands of children to leave home every year for the streets.

2. Primary school age children starting to realise wrongdoings

- The important factor in this age group is that the children now begin to realise that what is being done to them –especially in regard to sexual abuse –either at home, by a caregiver in charge of them, or at school, is a wrongdoing by an adult. They begin to know that this is a shameful act, and begin themselves to feel guilt and shame for being involved in it. They still may blame themselves, however, for the situation they have come into.
- Physical violence is in a somewhat different category, since physical punishment in the home, in shelters, institutions and schools, and in the workplace is still so common place in many societies around the world that adults may view this as “normal.” From the UN Study we know that children all over the world have clearly said they want all kinds of physical violence against them to stop. Thus, there appears to be a huge gap between the way adults view their own behaviour, and children’s experiences. Nevertheless, children will not feel the same guilt and shame as in sexual abuse since physical violence does not carry the same “taboo” and stigma.
- Violence in their lives will begin to affect the way children perform at school. A first “symptom” may be the child withdrawing in class, not doing his/her homework, failing in exams, even dropping out of school. The child may seem very tired, look unhappy, and if also neglected, be thin, poorly clothed and dirty. An empathetic, trained teacher may approach such a child by finding an opportunity to talk with her/him privately: “I’ve noticed that you don’t look happy these days, and you seem to be having some problems with your school work. I wonder if there’s anything wrong? If there is, please tell me and maybe we can together put things right again”. Unfortunately, too many teachers may instead punish the child, verbally and physically, so pushing the child into even deeper darkness.
- This is also the age in which children start to care about what others feel about them. If they are being sexually, verbally, or physically abused at home or any other place, they are often unable to feel confident and good about themselves. On the contrary, they feel guilt, shame, they see themselves as bad, and may also feel that others can “see” that they are being abused.
- These feelings, which children don’t easily share with others, may be expressed in what others will see as “bad” or “strange” behaviour. Angry, aggressive, restless behaviour, getting into trouble and conflicts with others constantly may be a small schoolboy’s way of “signalling” that things have gone wrong in his life. Girls may react in a different way – become withdrawn, anxious and fearful. Both may have difficulty with friendships at school, and they may also to a greater degree than others be bullied, rejected, left out in the cold by other children. They may be the ones who are humiliated and picked on by the teacher before the whole class. In this way, as so often, cycles of violence are established.
- These cycles of violence are dangerous cycles which are very urgent to break before they become established– with life-long consequences for the child.
- Physical effects of violence, including sexual abuse, may also of course be seen in this age group, including infections, even AIDS due to earlier HIV infection. Children may complain of headaches, stomach aches, ear aches and hearing difficulties (from being boxed on the ears). Some types of sexual abuse may cause difficulties in

walking, and violent rape can cause tears (fistula) between the birth passage and rectum or bladder causing incontinence of faeces and urine. Although children in this age group have an understanding that they are being abused, they still have difficulty in telling anybody, since they often believe in threats the abusers are making, and they know little about what may happen to them. This makes them feel powerless and helpless.

The BIG LESSON HERE: When children are showing changed or “difficult” behaviour; or becoming silent, and not taking part in play anymore, ask yourself why this should be. There is always a reason, and it might be something to do with violence. Never be tempted to add to the child’s problems by behaving in a rejecting, angry way, or by punishing the child.

3. Adolescents’ trauma linked to attitudes

As children become adolescents, their reactions to the psychological trauma of sexual abuse in particular become more linked to the attitudes in the society they are living in. Shame and self-disgust are common feelings, and in combination with hopelessness, stigmatisation and loneliness, often lead to thoughts of taking one’s own life, as well as actual suicide attempts. They become fully aware, if the abuse is being carried out by a parent or some other close relative, of the huge betrayal of trust. This can seriously affect their ability to form trusting relationships with others on a general level, and cause girls to view all men with suspicion.

M., a girl of 14 living in a shelter for children, who had been abused at home, began to develop fainting fits in school. They were quite dramatic and drew a lot of attention and sympathy from teacher and the class at first. She would suddenly faint about three times a day, lie unconscious thrashing about on the floor for a few minutes and then “wake up” again. The shelter administration had her admitted to hospital on the suspicion of epilepsy. Medical investigation showed no signs of this, however. Upon return to school, the fits continued, but teacher and class were becoming more impatient with her. She was sent back to the shelter instead. After some time, M. finally plucked up the courage to tell her best friend that she was being sexually abused by one of the staff at the centre. Her friend went to the shelter management, who fortunately believed M, and the abuser was dealt with. Now that M. was feeling safe again, the fainting fits completely disappeared—they no longer had a function – and she could start to pick up on her life with the support of the teacher, her friend and the shelter manager.

In this age group, their low self-esteem may cause children being sexually abused and systematically violated to do destructive things to themselves, such as cutting themselves or starving themselves (in some societies). They may run away from home or drop out of school, and become involved with street gangs and develop self-destructive behaviour such as drug and alcohol abuse. They may also become involved in commercial sexual abuse. Studies have in fact shown that many boys and girls living on the streets of large cities and being exploited, have been abused and neglected at home.

“Distress signals” in girls being sexually abused are often determined by the social and cultural environment they live in. In general, the more stigma and taboo are attached to sexual matters, the more “strange” the symptoms become. For example, they could be

fainting fits, hysterical attacks, psychotic episodes, or physical symptoms such as paralysis of part of the body.

Adolescents are also at an age where they realise that they might get some help if only they could find someone to confide in who would believe and support them. Some start to take an active responsibility for their own lives and decide to free themselves from their abusers –not easy, since the abuser may come with even more horrifying threats of what might happen if the abuse is revealed.

The longer-term developmental effects of sexual abuse are dependent on the factors mentioned previously, but in general relate to difficulties in establishing intimate relationships with the opposite sex; loss of trust in general of others due to the early, continued betrayal of trust in the case of incest; continued generalised anxiety –for example after violent rape.

Recent long-term studies of those surviving childhood sexual abuse and violence in the United States have shown significant effects on health and life expectancy. The effect of violence on long-term life pathways will be different according to the socio-cultural environment –and of course the availability of good help. A critical point is when a child decides to leave home (or is thrown out of home) in the context of violence in the home and drifts onto the streets. From there it will be a long way back.

Discussion points:

Trust is important for children's development. How is "trust" a significant factor for children in your community?

How is it possible to live a positive life after having experienced grave forms of violence? Give examples from the community.

What can adults do to understand difficult behaviour from children? Is there always a reason for this kind of behaviour?

4 Talking with and listening to children who have experienced violence

How to help children who you suspect are being abused, or who come and ask for your help? Or when somebody else tells you?

Dealing with a situation of sexual abuse or other forms of grave violence is complicated and often very difficult, and is perhaps a main reason why people who suspect what is happening don't want to get involved. When abuse is revealed it splits families, those working with the family and even communities. It is often very challenging to ensure that children are kept safe and handled well throughout the processes that follow. Things can easily go from bad to worse for the child. However, on the positive side, the abuse may be stopped and a child helped to take the first steps towards recovery. Meeting the child and family members with respect in every way is essential for a positive outcome, and those supporting need to discuss among themselves what "respect" means in their particular society. Finding a good, safe alternative placement for the child can be very difficult. Whatever they are told, children often feel it is in some way their fault that their family is going through such a bad time. If father is the abuser, and put in jail, the family often loses their main source of income, and children in the family may have to drop out of school in countries where there is no social security. Blame for these events may be put on the child.

In the following example, one is thinking about a child of about 8-9 years and beyond, who has confided in her teacher. For the sake of simplicity, the child in this example is a girl, but could easily be a boy.

- If a child asks to talk to you about something private, and reveals that she is being sexually abused or subjected to other forms of violence, be aware of the fact that the way you behave and act now will be very significant for that child –most likely for the rest of her/his life. It is a very solemn moment, in which respect for the child is all-important.
- Show the child that you are willing to listen to whatever she wants to tell you; try to find a quiet, private place where you can talk. Make sure you can't be disturbed by others –turn off your mobile phone if you have one!
- Make sure first that the child is not in need of acute medical attention, (rape, infection, wounds, burns, etc.). If that is the case, explain to the child why she should see the doctor. Since medical examination may have legal implications for the further handling of the case, this would mean the child would have to be further referred to the child protection services, if available. If you are for some reason short of time, tell this to the child and ask her if the conversation should wait until you have more time, or if you should start talking now and then make another appointment. Make

sure you don't say this in a way which could make the child feel rejected. Say something like: "I know you have something very important to tell me; I want to make sure I have enough time to go through this properly with you".

- If the child is very upset, spend time comforting and reassuring her.
- Let's say the child then starts to tell about being abused. Imagine yourself as some kind of "container" into which the child can "pour" her story. Your job is to receive it, hold it –the container is big enough to take it all. This kind of picture helps you to concentrate fully on what the child is saying. Let the child tell in her own words –try not to interrupt, except when you don't understand something. Say to the child: "I don't quite understand what you just said; can you please explain a bit more?" Confirm with the child: "Have I understood you properly?"
- Make sure the child knows that you believe what she is telling you; never make remarks which could make the child think otherwise – after all, she has put her trust in you. Remember, you are not taking a formal witness statement.
- Many children naturally start to cry when telling such painful things; stop, comfort the child, praise her for her bravery in sharing her secret; respect her tears. Don't try to hurry things along –let her take time to compose herself. Try to resist crying yourself – the child needs you to be a steady container, needs your full concentration and strength.
- If the child becomes very upset, ask her if she would like a pause –perhaps take something to eat and drink; go together for a short walk. Sometimes, a child will ask to continue the conversation tomorrow –do your absolute best to follow this up.
- Help the child share feelings about the abuse as well as telling about what happened. If you feel you have a good contact with the child (this is especially for those entering or in their teens) let them know that you know that sometimes children even think about taking their own lives in such a situation; has this thought come to her? She make share that yes, she has often thought about this and even tried it. Say to the child that this is something she can talk to you about.

If a family member is the abuser, take care not to express negative opinions of parents or siblings, focus rather on the act(s) itself.

- Ask the child if she has shared her secret with anybody else. Try to explore why she chose you and what she expects/wants you to do, and what made her decide to break the silence.
- The child may ask you not to tell anybody else about the abuse.
- Say honestly to the child that you will not say anything at the moment, but as an adult in the community (a child protection worker, a teacher, a health worker, an NGO worker), it is your duty to help the child find a good solution and bring the abuse to a stop. However, this is something you and she must work with first. She can rely on you that if anybody else should be told, she will already know about it. And that you will find out how she can be safe beforehand.
- Let the child know that you will stand by her fully throughout this process.
- Say to the child that the next conversation you have with her should be about what

can be done to help her; she then may feel better about receiving help.

- Ask the child if she has found any ways to avoid being abused, and encourage her in these. If possible –add on other suggestions that may work.
- Try to end the conversation on a positive note of encouragement and hope. Say to the child that she has taken a huge step forward in taking control over her own life. Emphasise that none of what happened to her was in any way her fault; the person who has abused her has the full responsibility.
- NEVER leave a child crying or very depressed. Remember, a child could commit suicide after such a conversation, especially if in some way you have given her the idea that there is nothing to be done. Try to bring the conversation over to more ordinary subjects. Ask her about other aspects of her life: school, friends, hobbies, sports. Before the child leaves you, ask her how she is feeling now.
- Give the child if possible your telephone number, or make sure how and when she can contact you easily. Make sure the child knows exactly when the next conversation can take place, which should be as soon as possible.
- Never give the child promises you can't keep. Resist the urge to give the child any material things –this could just complicate your relationship with her.
- This “next conversation” should be very soon. Start by once more praising the child for her courage. Ask the child if she has thought about the conversation you have had, and if there is anything she wants to say or ask about it. Assure her that you have kept your confidence.
- Perhaps there were some more things the child wanted to say from last time? Or new things that have happened or that she has thought of?

Give the child time to talk about these thoughts.

- Ask the child if she remembers what you said last time about her getting help. Proceed to explain to her –using drawings if necessary, what and who might be able to help her further. Share openly with the child what you have to do: orientate the Head Teacher, who will contact the child protection services. Try to be with the child during the first interview with the social worker so you can support her. In the further processes (medical examinations, police involvement, and court proceedings) the child should always be accompanied by someone she knows and trusts. Every effort should be made to continue to treat the child with respect and in keeping with her rights.

Discussion points

Meeting the child and family with respect is important for children having experienced violence. How do you define respect in your cultural setting? Are children and adults met with respect?

Will people in your community believe a girl or a boy who tells about grave sexual or other forms of violence?

Name people with responsible jobs such as nurses, teachers, police, etc. who have protected and followed up cases of violence against children

5 Helping children cope with violence – some basic approaches and actions to heal and empower

In this example, one is thinking about girls and boys who have either been violated and abused in the home environment or been rescued from commercial exploitation, and who are now in the relative safety of a temporary shelter or some other form of an institution for children. They will often have suffered from many forms of violence.

Since helping children deal with and overcome the effects of violence requires a *holistic* approach taking care of their rights and development, it is assumed that those of school age may be going to school every day, and perhaps others will be offered vocational training of some sort. These activities are very important for strengthening resilience and hope for the future. However, in addition there is the task of tackling the effects of the violence itself. It is also assumed that the children are living in the shelter/home for a temporary period, until it is possible for them to either go home or continue their lives elsewhere. It is also assumed that their health needs have been attended to.

Here are some suggestions on how to proceed to communicate and help the children – well knowing that the issues and circumstances may be different from country to country. However, as humans, we all share many of the same concerns. If they are primary school children, it would be a good idea to work separately with them. A mixture of group and individual work is ideal. The “talking” part of the healing work here is called “supporting conversations” to differentiate this from “therapy” which a psychologist might give.

Participatory methods activate and empower children

All sessions should use participatory methods which activate and empower the children. Drawing body maps; group discussions; drama; different kinds of artwork;

Children should participate in developing a list of topics which are important for them to discuss, and also what they hope to gain from the sessions. The sessions might start with an orientation with the children on child rights and child development expressed in child-friendly language and using methods suitable for children. What do the children know already? The rights-based approach of the centre could be used to make clear which of these rights the centre is trying to fulfil, and what needs to be strengthened. Get ideas from the children! For example, maybe the centre/institution is making sure all go to school, and also has a staff who is committed to a child protection policy, since children have the right to protection. Go through the policy with the children – is it good enough? Child development sessions should also be combined with the children’s own experiences; also, as the children become more comfortable, one can talk in general terms of the effects of violence on child development, while always emphasising hope. Here participatory methods such as body mapping, drawing a “river of my life” can be helpful.

This first session should make children comfortable with a workshop approach, working in groups, speaking their minds.

In the next session, the children –divided into groups according to age and gender, are asked to help design a programme for their own recovery and learning. To help the process along, management could make a framework which includes:

- Rules for safe and good living in our shelter –what should be in a child protection policy? What other rules should be made?
- Troubling things they want to share: how should this be done? Discussion in groups? Individual conversations? Both? How often?
- Daily activities, such as going to school, helping in the home, watching TV, etc. (how do they help; what helps best?)
- Contact with family members –how should this be?
- Play, sports and recreation (how do they help?) –what helps best?
- Spiritual and religious activities (how do they help?)
- Going home, leaving the shelter –worries and positive things
- Preparing for future life –dreams, expectations, and worries.

The group should then be asked: what other things should be part of the programme?

The third session should go through the whole programme once more, taking in the suggestions of the girls and boys, and the programme approved. The draft child protection policy should be discussed and approved. It should be written down quickly and everybody should have a copy.

Following this, suggestions which have arisen from discussions of items on the list should be followed up by management as soon as possible. Management should be open about the budget of the shelter and show how it is spent (trust).

The next stage is planning and carrying out a number of workshops based on the list of “troubled feelings and thoughts” the children have listed. These sessions should be mixtures of individual and group conversations, taking account of age.

Each child should be given an individual interview on arrival. It may be that some children do not know why they have been admitted to the shelter/institution; they may feel this is a punishment, or feel frightened and abandoned. Children who are already in the centre and who feel secure can help new arrivals to feel less anxious and alone. Every effort should be made to avoid children going around in a “no man’s land” of doubt and fear. Further planned talks should happen at regular intervals throughout the child’s stay, including the final one before leaving.

It is important to build the group conversations (small groups of 6-8) around what the children have presented as concerns. However, since the following themes are also frequently found in work with abused children, some of them may also be discussed:

The loss of trust in adults

Every effort should be made during the stay in the shelter to use the relationships between

staff and children and among children themselves to restore some trust. The shelter should also, if possible, help the children to get into contact with relatives at home whom they trust.

“Feeling damaged, spoilt”

Discussions around this theme could explore where these ideas come from, and link it to discrimination of women and girls in general (that is, lift it from a personal to a general level). For boys issues around masculinity could be discussed.

Help the girls and boys to decide they refuse to let themselves be discriminated in this way. Find out culturally appropriate ways to change this image of themselves, and ways to fight it when it pulls them down. What is the *opposite* of feeling “damaged”? “spoilt”? “less of a man”? Is it “I’m a person with rights! I’m OK!” ?

Getting rid of monsters

Here the groups could agree that monsters shared are monsters made into little ones or may disappear altogether. Don’t let them hide in you and grow bigger!! Share them; look at them; ask others what they think about them.

In this session, children get an opportunity to share their greatest fears and worries, including suicidal thoughts. Use drawing, drama, and writing. Make a radio programme together, or a video film.

Monsters could include:

- “Flashbacks” – sudden memories of rape and violence
- Fear that the abuser and exploiter might turn up at any moment
- Fear of the thoughts one has about taking one’s own life
- Fear that nobody in the family will love you anymore
- Fear that “everyone” is able to guess that one has been abused and exploited
- Fear that you will have a bad future, you will never get married, have a child, get a job, etc.

Encourage children to support each other through this session, and also make sure adults are standing by to support children who need it.

Guilt and shame

These common feelings need to be discussed, but the group needs help to find where these kinds of feelings come from. This is the opportunity to discuss blame and responsibility for the violations of rights. Look again at the Articles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Is it reasonable to have such feelings?

Why did you have to tell the lies? Why could you not tell the truth? Why was the abuser and exploiter allowed to do the things he/she did? When children share these things together, they will see that many were in the same situation – a pattern starts to form. The facilitator should try to make that clear to the children.

Protecting myself and standing up for myself in the future

Sessions around this theme could include discussions about my strengths, what I have learnt from my experiences and in the shelter, what I would do next time I felt threatened – who I would ask for support.

Discussion points

Are there centres and institutions for children in your community (or in your country)?

Would you define them as child-friendly?

What should be the important elements in a participatory method to empower children?

6 Getting the act together: what communities can do to prevent violence against their children and help them when it occurs.

In this chapter we will present a model of what a community-based child protection system might look like. We will also discuss some main approaches and principles in the working of such a system.

It is recognised that although the following model is based on elements that need to be in place in any system, these points can only be used as a general guidance. The practice of child protection, apart from being based on the Convention of the Rights of the Child, has to be developed in the specific cultural, social, political, and historical setting in which people are living and working. This means that resources, possibilities, and priorities will be widely different from place to place.

Although the prevention of violence in society can be achieved through many pathways and has long- and short-term goals, dealing with children who have actually had violent acts committed on them always has to happen at an individual level.

The most important actions in protecting and helping a child, whatever the resources available:

Stop the violence being committed on a child

Make sure the child is safe

Treat serious wounds; comfort, calm, give hope

Treat the child at all times with respect; listen well and believe what he/she says; be confidential in handling the information; reassure and give comfort to the child and recognise his/her courage

Inform the child what will happen next.

Relieve the child of all blame for what happened

Follow up the child – do not abandon him/her, or let others do so

A model for a community-based child protection system

It is assumed that the system will be working in a particular geographic area, such as a district, sub-county or a municipality.

Let us take a district as a basis for the model and let us also call the main organising unit for a child protection committee. In real life around the world there are many different names for this main unit and they may also sort under very different Ministries and public offices.

In this model and example of some important guiding principles, it will be a District Child Protection Committee, which is likely to function under the Department of Social Affairs (or a similar department, perhaps including women and children). The District Child Protection Committee will have a mandate from the relevant Ministry and child protection body at national level, from which it also receives its budget.

The Committee members represent the most relevant authorities regarding child protection, i.e. health, social affairs, education and justice. Other members may include representatives of national and international NGOs working in the area, children's and youth groups, women's organisations, and organisations working with children with disabilities. According to the specific situation, there may be other groups represented. The meetings take place on a monthly basis, and are led by, for example, the Child Protection Officer. The Child Protection Officer also heads a small team of social and health workers who are able to respond quickly to cases of violence against children, referred from, for example, the Village Child Protection Committee or community-based organisations, children themselves, or other persons.

All members of the District Child Protection Committee have signed a pledge of confidentiality, and all have likewise signed a child protection policy developed through a participatory process by the members of the District Child Protection Committee.

The mandate given to the District Child Protection Committee may be something like this:

The mandate should clearly state that the District Child Protection Committee must carry out its work based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the laws on children of the particular country.

- The District Child Protection Committee is given the authority and responsibility to act in cases of violence against children, such as sexual abuse, severe physical abuse, severe neglect, exploitation of children for commercial purposes, and harm done to children through traditional practices. The District Child Protection Committee should handle severe cases which cannot be dealt with at village level, referred by the Village Child Protection Committee. The District Child Protection Committee may also receive referrals from the district capital, from residential facilities for children in the district, from parents and other members of the public. When handling specific cases, a small group of persons should be given the responsibility to handle and follow up the case and protect confidentiality.
- Actions must have as a main aim to stop the violent acts, and further protect and give the necessary help to children: medical, social, legal.
- Follow up of children who have been referred to, for example, district hospitals, "safe places", or legal services, must be carried out by members of the District Child Protection Committee under the leadership of the Child Protection Officer. The children must be followed up until their situation has become stable, and they are

reunited with their families (when Village level child protection may take over) or in alternative safe care (see chapter 5).

- Action must also include dealing with the abuser according to the law, and in ways which reduce the likelihood of new acts of violence towards children. Thus punishment could also include rehabilitation.
- The District Child Protection Committee, together with representatives of the Village Child Protection Committee, is mandated to develop, explore and evaluate approaches to increase the awareness of violence against children in the population.

The District Child Protection Committee should also be mandated to:

- Have an updated overview over, and co-ordinate resources in the district that are working with children. These could be both government and private sector services. A challenge would be to ensure that speedy assistance to children affected by violence reach out to all parts of the district.
- Collect data on violence against children and risk groups. Keep a (highly confidential) register of referred cases.
- Identify areas relating to violence against children –boys and girls – which require more research, and take steps to have that carried out. Make sure that children are involved in appropriate ways in any research carried out.
- Maintain an updated overview over all the schools, children’s homes and shelters, etc. in the district.
- Develop standards of child care and protection for public and private residential services for children in the district in cooperation with these, with inputs from children.
- Follow up to make sure that these standards are kept.
- Develop agendas and a plan for capacity building on child rights and child protection for all public and private children’s services in the district that can play a role in child protection, in consultation with them.
- Be responsible for developing and maintaining a good referral system.
- Contribute to the establishment of safe places for children who need emergency placements in their district.
- Develop annual plans, priorities and budgets.
- Secure the necessary resources for their work.
- Develop a monitoring and evaluation system for their work.

All in the District Child Protection Committee should be trained in the themes listed in this guide, as well as other relevant subjects specific to the area they are working in.

The District Child Protection Committee should, through media, information meetings, posters, and other appropriate means, inform the public of their work. Develop child-friendly materials so that children are also informed.

The District Child Protection Committee has formalised links with the central child protection authority at national level and reports to them.

The Village Child Protection Committee:

The following is a model of how a Village Child Protection Committee may look and function

- The Village Child Protection Committee membership should ideally be a mixture of representatives of the relevant government authorities and members chosen by the village. They should include a health worker, a social worker (where these are found in villages), a teacher, and a representative from the local police. They should also include a representative from a child rights club or similar organisation and a parent representative. Local and national organisations working for children may also be represented. Religious leaders and community leaders could also be members.
- It is vital that all members of the Village Child Protection Committee should have **clear roles** –these could also be written down. For example, teachers who are members could be responsible for reporting children who are abused in school; also, to undertake to initiate the work on violence against children and child rights in schools, in co-operation with other teachers.
- All members must have signed a vow of confidentiality and committed themselves to a child protection policy.
- The membership work is usually voluntary; however, there could be a small budget from the District Child Protection Committee to facilitate the work –e.g. travel to homes where children need help.
- Members should be asked to commit themselves to a certain period of work to ensure continuity of the work, and that the knowledge and skills of the Village Child Protection Committee are built up.
- The Village Child Protection Committee may also call upon other members of the community when discussing special issues.
- The Village Child Protection Committee must be working within a child rights framework, as well as national child law.

The mandate of the Village Child Protection Committee should be given by the District Child Protection Committee, and developed in co-operation with them. It should be realistic and focus on the most important issues regarding violence against children. It could be something like this:

- The Village Child Protection Committee’s main focus should be on prevention of all forms of violence against children through a selection of planned approaches which will increase the awareness of people on the rights of children to be protected from violence. The approaches should be designed to inform, inspire, create debate and discussion, but avoid blaming parents/caregivers, and antagonising them. On the contrary, every effort should be made to forge a strong alliance with parents to fight violence against children. Perhaps the “awareness” work could be given some good name in the local language to express the idea described at the beginning of this book: that when we get rid of violence against children, we will all be winners.

- The Village Child Protection Committee also has the authority to intervene in actual cases of violence against children or investigate suspected such cases, that is, certain members can approach families in their homes, if necessary accompanied by local police, to either remove a suspected abuser, or to help a child to safety –or both.
- The Village Child Protection Committee may also participate, for example with other community leaders/family members, in mediation between the child and perpetrator (s) if this is in the best interests of the child. Parents and guardians may also receive “warnings” to change violent behaviour or take care of neglect issues in order to safeguard the child.
- Adult members of the Village Child Protection Committee in their roles as teachers, health workers, NGO’s may be approached by children living with violence, or take the initiative to talk to children who they are concerned about. It is then very important that the Village Child Protection Committee have an agreed-upon procedure for the all-important first meeting with the child (see below).
- All members of the Village Child Protection Committee must know about the referral system in place and how and when to use it. Children may have to be referred for further investigation and treatment to higher-level services when:
 - they have suffered severe physical injuries, and or have severe infections for which adequate medication is not available at local level.
 - abortion is considered. This may be a consideration in certain countries for girls who are pregnant due to rape or incest.
 - children are severely affected psychologically and need a more specialised treatment (if available). This would include children who have tried to commit suicide or are considering it.
 - children have to be offered an alternative placement to their own homes for some time, and where no safe, acceptable alternatives are available in the village.
 - mediation and other measures the Village Child Protection Committee has tried do not work, and the child continues to be in a risky situation.
 - the abuse is being committed by a person of authority and standing in the local community–e.g. a head of police, a headmaster, the director of a children’s home; the head of a local/national/international NGO.
- The Village Child Protection Committee should also map risk groups in the village, (i.e. child-headed households) and make decisions on the best way to protect such groups. During such mapping, consultation with children from these groups should always take place, to listen to their particular problems and solutions.
- Adult members of the Village Child Protection Committee should themselves be Trusted Persons, and they should also undertake the identification of other Trusted Persons in the village, to whom children can safely report abuse, and know that their information will be handled confidentially, and that they will get help. These could be people, women and men, in women’s groups, teachers, health workers, certain community leaders. It is very important that children in the village support the selection of such people, and are made aware of them.
- Members of the Village Child Protection Committee should be obliged to qualify themselves for this work by undergoing training in relevant themes worked out in co-

operation with the District Child Protection Committee. National/international NGOs and national child rights institutions may be approached to assist with capacity building if they are seen to be competent.

- The Village Child Protection Committee has regular links with the District Child Protection Committee and may attend some of their meetings.
- The Village Child Protection Committee submits a written half-yearly/annual report on all the cases it has handled (anonymised), as well as on the initiatives it may have taken to prevent violence against children in the community.
- Each particular Village Child Protection Committee must have thought through what they should do if they have to remove a child from home to stop the violence. What are the realistic alternatives: is placement with a relative an option? Is there a small shelter which could offer a safe place? Can the suspected abuser be removed instead? What is in the best interests of the child?
- In situations where the abuser is also the breadwinner of the family, the Village Child Protection Committee in co-operation with other partners in the community, must have a plan for how the family can be supported to prevent a break-up of the family. This issue also needs to be discussed with the District Child Protection Committee.
- The Village Child Protection Committee must develop a follow-up plan for children who have, for example, reported abuse, received treatment and returned home. Or, children who are thought to be in an especially risky situation.
- The Village Child Protection Committee, who is on the front line, should take the initiative to suggest areas for further research, and take this up with the District Child Protection Committee.
- The Village Child Protection Committee is also well placed to ensure the participation of children in contributing to the overall goal of reducing violence against children in their village. However, this needs to be discussed and planned with children. Adults and children must find out together what children can –and cannot, or should not, do in practising child protection. What are children best at? Where do they make a better impact than adults can? What about the issue of parental consent for their participation in child protection?

Managing violence in communities: some approaches that make sense

Starting to tackle violence against children can often be overwhelming, especially at community level, when resources are far too small in comparison with the needs. A good plan is needed. In the following, suggestions are given on how both a District Child Protection Committee and a Village Child Protection Committee might need to think in order to cope.

Try to find out how to balance between prevention and response

The prevention of violence against children is obviously a priority –both from the point of view of protecting children from danger and suffering, and when resources are scarce.

“Prevention” is always a mix of actions which can, with good will, be taken in the short-term: as all schools stopping the use of physical punishment to discipline pupils, and long-term: e.g. attitude change.

Preventive actions also range from those that do not cost anything –i.e. adults simply stop using violent methods to control and punish children, to those which cost money and other resources.

Responding to violence against individual children is always costly in terms of personnel resources; there will also be vehicle and fuel costs; removing children to safe places, and the running of these, will also be a cost. Supporting families who lose the breadwinner adds further costs.

However, failing to respond to severe violence against children is unthinkable and a neglect of their rights, and will also have costs in terms of how that child will be able to contribute to society when an adult.

People involved in child protection, particularly at community level, are always faced with trying to achieve this balance, and many “burn out” in trying to do so.

Concentrate on a few main things at a time - start where the opportunities are bests and results are most likely - and set realistic goals.

A great help towards managing this balancing act, apart from having more of the resources needed, is that child protection committees at community level, and on the basis of information gathered from their local area, plan a few, realistic main short and longer-term preventive interventions divided between annual and, for example, three year plans. In other words, make priorities: what will be most achievable? What will have most effect? What approaches will work best? And what are most cost-effective?

Choose your partners carefully

A second issue is networking: carefully, choosing a selection of partners who will be committed on the longer term to be stakeholders to the plans, contribute to them and share responsibility for their fulfilment.

Partnership with children

Investing early on empowering children in the fight against violence is important. Children must be made aware of their rights to be protected, helped to build their capacity to advocate against violence and support their actions and ideas. If these things can be done in a well-planned and sustained way, then a very important process has started.

Integrate work against violence in all public and private services for children in the community

In other words: bring on board all who should be responsible and accountable to children. Naturally, the Ministry of Education should be fully responsible for building the capacity of teachers in using non-violent methods of discipline as part of creating positive school climates. Likewise, the Health sector should make sure that all their staff is trained on the issue of violence against children, and so on. However, the District Child Protection Committee and Village Child Protection Committee may have to join hands in reminding

them of this – perhaps a district conference on violence against children and how to approach it through the different actors could be a starting point?

Develop awareness and create alliances: get parents on your side!

Children are already mentioned as important allies; parents – and other caregivers – are, too. However, they need to be approached differently. In consultation with children and parents, the Village Child Protection Committee needs to find ways that do not make parents feel like they are being accused and undermined, but let them gradually understand the clear advantages of bringing up children with positive methods. Parents and caregivers also need the capacity to act when children in their neighbourhoods are being violently treated.

Be clear on ethical issues

It is not possible to tackle violence against children in communities without coming up against all kinds of problems, issues and questions in which people will have to try to do the most honest thing, the right thing, and act in just, moral, upright and honourable ways.

This is part of the whole accountability of the community towards their children –that they have trustworthy systems to rely on. Child protection systems and actors that have become corrupt in some way are in their nature damaging and prolong violence.

Example: A member of the Village Child Protection Committee was asked to investigate a rumour of child sexual abuse in a home deep in the countryside. On arrival, he was told by the father that the child could not be interviewed, and that the matter had already been settled. He was offered money not to take the matter any further, and to tell the Village Child Protection Committee that the rumours were untrue and that the child was perfectly safe. The Committee member could not resist the bribe, and anyway, he was planning to drop out of the committee soon.

Thus it is necessary for those engaged in organised child protection to carefully think through all ethical issues and how these can be developed into a code to guide the work so that it really can be a trustworthy protector of children and a support to families.

- Decide to make good and accurate documentation of the work of the Child Protection Committee. This will be a help in getting better funds and expanding services, as well as clearly showing the progress in different areas.
- Create space for learning from yourselves and others, particularly children. A plan to build capacity for all members in child protection systems is necessary to create confidence and competence, learn from mistakes, and do better work.

Take care of your compassion

The ability to really care and feel for children experiencing violence is a basic necessity for all working in child protection—but it can easily dry up in the daily frustrations people face, their personal concerns, and exhaustion through too much work.

Therefore: discuss ways of preventing people who are on the front-line becoming burnt out and losing their dedication to the work of protecting children. Keep in mind that they will need to listen to every child as if it was the first time they were hearing such a story.

Discussion point

What child protection system have we got now and how is it working? Where are the gaps and weakest points?

Are we being able to stop the worst cases of abuse?

Using the above model and Key Quality Elements in Annex 3, review in your district/ sub-county/municipality the status of your present arrangements.

7 What can parents and other caregivers do to stop violence?

Parents are farmers, nurses, teachers, builders and carpenters, police, politicians and presidents; they are even sometimes children themselves.

Parents are key people in changing the attitudes and practices passed on from one generation to the next, which have allowed violence to be used in bringing up and disciplining children. If all parents were convinced that non-violent upbringing is the best way, the world would take a giant step forward in ending violence against children!

As a parent:

- You can decide to break this chain and do things differently.
- You can question *why* you need to hit and humiliate your child to help him or her grow up to become a good person in society. Ask yourself what your child really learns from this approach.
- You should remember that children learn from the way their parents behave. How do you as parents solve conflicts between yourselves; how do you listen to each other and show love and respect to each other?
- You can decide to learn and practice other ways of teaching and guiding your children in right and wrong.
- You should show your children that you love them and care for their well-being by listening to them, playing with them, praising them when they have done well and making them feel good about themselves. All these things create the kind of loving respect between children and parents which leads to good co-operation between them.
- You can show your children your love and respect by explaining the way to do things, allowing them to ask questions and get proper answers; treating them as you would also like them to treat you and others.
- If you need to correct your child's behaviour, talk about what he did: "You should not have taken that pen because it didn't belong to you. The boy who owns the pen will be sad; let's go and put it back. Please, if you need a pen, come and ask me next time, don't take from others".
- Remember that children sometimes need to be corrected if they behave badly or do something dangerous. First, make sure the child understands that what he or she did was wrong and dangerous. So always talk with your child first to find this out. Usually, it is enough to explain to your child why he or she should not do that thing again; listen also to what your child thinks.

If your child keeps doing seriously wrong things such as stealing:

- Try to find out if there is a reason for this behaviour. Talk to your child and his teacher.
- If you feel he or she needs to be punished, find other ways of punishing him/her than hitting and beating, and saying hurting words like “You are a thief!” Perhaps he or she should not be allowed out to play, or not be allowed a visit from a friend. Never deny a child food or drink, or put them in scary places, or threaten to abandon them.
- Sometimes, getting help from others who the child knows and respects can help solve problems: ask his or her favourite uncle or aunt to have a talk with the child; or perhaps a teacher who he or she has a good relationship with.
- As your child grows older, learn to solve conflicts, as your child grows older. Negotiate with each other and reach agreements where both feel comfortable. This is very important learning for young people, which will help them through life.
- remember that violence against children, and in the home in general, is very often caused by a parent taking too much alcohol. If you feel that you have a problem with this, try and get help for yourself.

Parents can use their power for change outside the home:

- Through parent-teacher associations parents can demand that schools apply non-violent methods of disciplining children and create positive learning environments.
- Parents groups can get together with children’s clubs and support them in making the communities aware about violence against children and the right of children to be protected.
- Parents who practice non-violent upbringing can spread their experiences and ideas through local radio and community meetings to encourage others to do the same.

If your child has been the victim of violence by someone in the family or community:

- Believe what your child is telling you! Listen to her or him properly and try to get a clear picture of what has happened. Don’t abandon your child; support and stand by her or him! Your loving support at this crisis time will be the most important thing in helping your child recover.
- Comfort your child and get help to stop the violence. Make sure your child will be safe.
- Help your child get medical help if needed.

Discussion point

Parenting practices are often passed on from one generation to the next. Did you receive a child-friendly upbringing and what will you do to ensure your children a child-friendly and positive learning environment?

What can be done to encourage children to change wrong behaviour?

8 The most important things to think of when protecting children against violence in emergencies

Child protection interventions have to be part of every first phase and recovery follow-up during natural disasters and in conflict situations. It is thus necessary to work with and build on the capacity of national child protection systems, which includes inter-departmental cooperation, measures for ongoing public education, law reform, policy and guideline development and research and documentation.

There are many risks for children during natural disasters and in conflict situations such as family separation and recruitment into armed forces or armed groups. Sexual violence and exploitation are chronic risks to girls and boys (rape, molestation, trafficking, child labour and early marriage). In every emergency, boys and girls risk being physically harmed as civilians increasingly are becoming targets and victims of violence and risk being maimed or killed. The tremendous stress under which caregivers live can lead to disproportionate punishments of children. During emergencies, children are exposed to a variety of extreme circumstances, some of which are beyond their capacity to cope. It is now accepted that in meeting basic needs, such as food and shelter, it is essential to consider the emotional and developmental support of children. They recover from distressing experiences more quickly when supported by their family and community in a child-friendly environment.

Three situations that pose risk to children and proposed action points:

1. The risk:

- Natural disasters and armed conflict always result in a number of children becoming separated from their families. Sometimes the parents have been killed, sometimes they are lost. These children are extremely vulnerable to all forms of exploitation and violence.

Action:

- A programme must be set up as soon as possible in co-operation with the local population and other appropriate agencies to find separated children and start to trace their family or relatives, so they can be re-united or placed in extended family care. Siblings must be kept together.
- If it is necessary to have a temporary shelter while tracing is going on, there must be staff trained in child protection looking after the children. Children themselves should also, with training, take part in monitoring the safety of such shelters. Avoid putting children in institutions.

- If it is not possible to find the family or relatives, temporary fostering arrangements may be considered if in the best interests of the child.
- All placements outside the family should, if possible, be followed up by community-based child protection arrangements.

2. The risk:

- During emergencies, large numbers of the population lose their homes and often have to move out of their communities to live in camps for refugees and internally displaced persons. They may stay under very poor conditions for years, or even for generations. Such conditions without hope or meaning affect how humans behave, and children are more at risk from violence, at home and in the community. Children are also at risk from some aid workers who take advantage of their vulnerable situation to abuse them, exchanging food for sex.

Action:

- Find out, together with children and members of the refugee community, where the risks are coming from and why.
- Establish child protection committees with girls and boys also as members, and train them in child protection and child rights.
- Organised learning either in temporary or established schools helps to protect children. All children should know of a trusted teacher at school to whom they can report violence against them.
- Help children set up child rights clubs to spread awareness of their rights
- Train camp staff, administrators, community leaders, police, health workers and teachers in child rights and protection
- Decide together with police, government representatives and community leaders, what procedures should be used to deal with those who abuse and exploit children.
- Set up child friendly spaces where children can play in safety under adult supervision.
- All the above action points also apply to communities affected by war or disaster in general.

3. The risk:

- During armed conflict, children are always at risk of violence from the soldiers or armed groups who are fighting each other. Not only from bullets, bombs and mines, but also forced recruitment, rape, detention and beatings as well as torture. Soldiers living in army camps near schools and refugee camps frequently try to exploit the poverty of young girls for sexual purposes, which puts the girls (and at times the soldiers) at risk of AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancy.

Action:

- Humanitarian agencies working in the area can, together with children and adults in the community, assess the risks to children, and on that basis try to make contact with army commanders/leaders of armed groups and demand that they uphold

children's rights.

- International and national NGOs can train army personnel on the Geneva conventions, child rights and child protection, and assist in developing codes of conduct for ground forces.
- Documentation can also be sent to national army headquarters, and to UN Monitoring and Reporting bodies.
- Schools, NGOs, children's clubs and parent groups can spread awareness among parents and children of the dangers of recruitment and association with soldiers.
- When feasible, child protection systems should be established or existing ones strengthened, and their development should continue throughout the conflict.

Remember: all the subjects we have discussed in this booklet about violence against children also apply during emergencies, only now populations will be more dependent on NGOs as many of the government structures will have broken down or not be working as before.

Discussion point

What are the most common forms of natural disasters or conflict situations in your country or region?

What is your suggestion for the protection and care of children in such situations?

ANNEX I

Overarching recommendations¹ of the United Nation's Study on Violence against Children, 2006.

The key message of the report of the UN Secretary General's Study on Violence against Children, submitted to the General Assembly in October 2006, is that "No violence against children is justifiable; all violence against children is preventable". The Study presented a comprehensive set of recommendations detailing necessary steps to prevent and respond to violence against children:

1. Strengthen national and local commitment and action
2. Prohibit all violence against children
3. Prioritize prevention
4. Promote non-violent values and awareness-raising
5. Enhance the capacity of all who work with and for children
6. Provide recovery and social reintegration services
7. Ensure participation of children
8. Create accessible and child-friendly reporting systems and services
9. Ensure accountability and end impunity¹⁰. Address the gender dimension of violence against children
10. Develop and implement systematic national data collection and research
11. Strengthen international commitment

Other recommendations cover regional and international follow-up, including the proposal that a Special Representative to the UN Secretary General on Violence against Children should be appointed.

The urgency of acting on the Study's recommendations is underlined throughout Professor Pinheiro's reports.

Three recommendations are singled out and time-bound goals set for them:

By 2007: integrating into national planning process measures to prevent and respond to violence against children, including the identification of a focal point, preferably at ministerial level;

By 2009: prohibiting all violence against children by law;

By 2009: initiating a process to develop reliable national data collection systems.

1. www.unviolencestudy.org

ANNEX 2

Standards related to protection of children¹

Key quality elements in programmes working with violence against and sexual abuse of children.

- The programme is based on an integrated understanding of Child Rights and Child Development and uses approaches which recognise the indivisibility of child rights and child development.
- The programme is based on, and guided by, needs assessments utilising participatory methodology, with major inputs from children. Projects have ongoing dialogue with communities, including children, on issues concerning child rights and development that lead to relevant interventions. Community understanding and approval is sought in following up groups of children needing special attention
- Children are participating actively in all phases of projects, including events, advocacy and other activities concerning them. Children are initiating their own activities.
- The programme addresses the rights and needs of children in all phases of development.
- The programme addresses the psychological and social aspects of child development as part of a holistic approach which seeks to address both the protection of the child and his/her overall development
- The programme addresses all the major issues affecting children through approaches which include projects, capacity building and advocacy
- The programme, through co-operation and mutual capacity building with appropriate partners, authorities, communities, other NGOs, is developing a sustainable child protection system.
- The programme recognises that trust from all stakeholders is its main capital, and invests continually in building and maintaining trust

Indicators could be:

- A Code of Conduct is utilised, emphasising child protection
- The programme is transparent in all its dealings and perceived as neutral by all
- Phase-out of projects is planned in ways which do not compromise trusting relationship with communities or endangered children
- The programme seeks to assist children without discrimination on any ground

1. Elizabeth Jareg and Turid Heiberg

- The work of the international organisations and their partners have a long-term perspective reflecting children's long-term development needs
- The programme has developed, together with children, their families and communities, a wide range of innovative activities to prevent and stop violence
- Facilities where children in critical situations and at risk can seek advice and help in safe surroundings are being actively utilised
- Efforts to free children from abusive and exploitative situations are ongoing and children are offered viable solutions
- The programme is making children aware of their rights to speak out and supports them to do so
- The programme has developed and is utilising mechanisms to report serious violations of children's rights to appropriate institutions and organisations
- The programme approaches psychosocial issues with sensitivity and understanding of the possibilities and limitations of the cultural, social and material context in which children live
- The programme, in co-operation with the legal system, is developing approaches to address justice for children in ways that fully respect the rights of children and consider their developmental capacities
- The programme is building competence in all professions, such as within the police, the medical and the social protection professions, to address children who have been abused, in ways that fully respect children's rights and development needs and do not endanger the child in any way
- Centre-based care is operating as part of a holistic programme which includes community based activities, and addresses the holistic needs of children, fully respecting their rights to development, protection and participation
- The programme is utilising mechanisms to prevent centre-based care becoming a permanent solution for children
- The programme creates regular opportunities for sharing of experiences and building consensus on good practice
- The programme has an ongoing research initiative exploring themes of relevance to the protection, development and integration of children. Research is carried out according to universally accepted ethical requirements mindful of issues of trust
- The programme has systematic, informative and varied documentation of all its components of a quality which allows it to be used in advocacy, training and information
- The programme demonstrates flexibility (staff/funding/implementation) to respond quickly to changing needs and situations
- The programme has examples of innovative thinking and a willingness to explore new approaches to strengthen children's rights and healthy development
- The programme is implementing an advocacy strategy, which includes short and

long-term goals, targets different levels and utilises actively all relevant opportunities

- Advocacy utilises well-founded documentation from projects and other sources and addresses the most central child rights and child development issues
- The programme has systematic, informative and varied documentation of all its activities of a quality which allows the material to be used in advocacy, training and information. Materials are also available in relevant languages
- The programme has a record-keeping system which safeguards confidentiality, both currently and in the future
- The programme is playing a role on behalf of children in important national and international fora, and can provide substantial information on children's needs leading to appropriate policies and action.
- The programme has a monitoring and evaluation system in place which can demonstrate progress in all the main issues affecting children

Key Quality Elements in a National Child Protection System

- The government is taking full responsibility for the initiation, leadership, accountability and resources related to the national child protection system
- The child protection system operates within a child rights framework at all administrative levels linked in ways which facilitate a national effort to protect children
- Children and young people are contributing actively to the development and implementation of the child protection system
- The different elements in the national approach to end violence against children are effectively interlinked and articulated as a common strategy, which proceeds apace.
- The child protection system has the ability to react urgently and compassionately in response to violence against children
- The child protection system is evolving through clearly defined and realistic goals understood by all actors
- Mechanisms are in place ensuring close contact between central and community levels, including civil society organisations
- Clear protocols and guidelines for procedures at all levels are in use
- The national child protection system has established internal as well as external monitoring and is able to learn from the insights this produces

ANNEX 3

Key child protection articles in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child are:

- 9 (family separation),
- 10 (family reunification across borders),
- 11 (illicit transfer of children),
- 16 (right to privacy, honour and reputation),
- 19 (protection from violence, injury, abuse, neglect, maltreatment or exploitation),
- 20 (alternative care),
- 21 (adoption),
- 22 (refugee children),
- 23 (disabled children),
- 24 (harmful practices),
- 25 (periodic review of alternative care),
- 32 (economic exploitation),
- 34 (sexual abuse and exploitation),
- 35 (abduction, sale or trafficking of children),
- 36 (other forms of exploitation),
- 37 (juvenile justice and protection from torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment),
- 38 (protection in armed conflict),
- 39 (recovery and reintegration)
- 40 (children in conflict with the law).

Articles that are not protection rights but represent important approaches to securing children's protection rights include Articles 5 (support for the parent, extended family and community); 7 (birth registration and protection of identity), 18 (parental responsibility), 26 (social security), 27 (adequate standard of living and social protection), 28 & 29 (education), and 31 (play and leisure). In addition, Articles 2 (non-discrimination), 3 (the best interests of the child), 4 (accountability), 6 (survival and development) and 12 (children's right to be heard) are all essential complements to the above articles.

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Strategies and tools for working with men and boys to end violence against girls, boys, women and other men. Save the Children and UNIFEM, 2005

Working with men and boys to promote gender equality and to end violence against boys and girls. Methods, strategies, tools and practices. A report of a workshop in Kathmandu March 2004. Save the Children, 2005. (A short version is also available.)

Boys for change – moving towards gender equality. Involving boys to end violence and discrimination. Save the Children, 2007

Listen and Act

Children have the right to be cared for and protected. Save the Children has therefore developed material for children to know their rights - and for child rights and frontline workers to know about child development and how to encourage, care and protect children.

1. Listening, Learning and Acting

Staff in Save the Children and Child Rights Workers wanting to know more about relevant measures to protect children will benefit from reading and using this book. The book discusses the consequences of violence, gives an update on the UN Study on Violence against Children and advice on how to act to promote the protection of children.

2. Protect the children!

This book is for frontline workers such as teachers, nurses, people working in shelter homes and institutions, members of protection committees and social workers — all those in direct contact with children, including parents. The book is easy to read and gives a background for understanding the child and practical advice on how to support the child.

3. Listendoll

This is an illustrated storybook for children from the age of four and upwards who have suffered trauma and a difficult life situation. It is the story of a doll who faces a terrible wind that blows her life apart. She is taken by a wise bird to the forest where the trees tell her a secret. “Bad things happen, they just do, but you are still you.” They teach her to listen in a new way that gives her strength and perspective. The story book may be accompanied by a doll made by young people as an income generating activity.

4. Safe You and Safe Me

This book is for children from seven years and upwards to learn about the types of violence faced by children around the world, and gives ideas on how they can protect themselves. The book encourages children to ask questions and state their opinions.

5 Equal You Equal Me

Through this book children from seven years can learn about the types of discrimination they may face in their daily lives and the many forms of discrimination faced by other children throughout the world.

Save the Children supported the UN in developing the UN Study on Violence against Children (2006) and is following up on the recommendations from the study. Studies and learning material have been developed in this process and they can be accessed at: www.rb.se/bookshop.

