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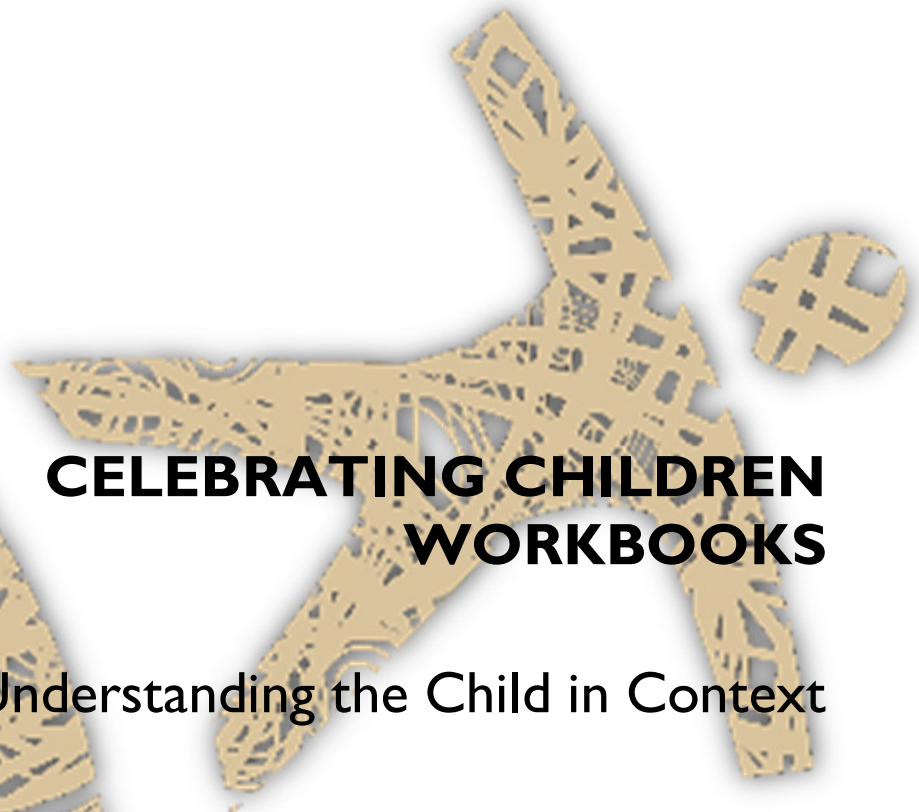
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Viva Equip PEOPLE



CELEBRATING CHILDREN WORKBOOKS

One: Understanding the Child in Context

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Thanks also to Jennifer Orona for all the hard work that went into bringing this project to life.

These workbooks have been written by a number of authors who have generously donated their time and expertise. Viva is pleased for you to use these workbooks to equip people caring for children at risk. Please do acknowledge authors and Viva if using these workbooks for training. Knowing how Viva's publications are used helps us to improve the quality of future publications. Please do give feedback on this through the registration and evaluation forms.

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Introduction

Welcome to the first of the workbooks in the Celebrating Children series. In this workbook we will be looking at the important questions of how we a) understand a child and b) help that child to grow in the fullness of life that God intends. This workbook aims to introduce central themes and ideas as a foundation for the rest of the course and many topics will be developed in later modules.

We will be exploring four main perspectives, like four pieces of a jigsaw puzzle that come together to show a whole, complete picture.

In fact, the theme of the whole child is an important one that flows through the 4 parts of the workbook: in a holistic understanding of the child (part 1); in programmes that are able to take account of the whole picture of child and his context (part 2); in promoting holistic development of children (part 3); and in enabling the child able to enjoy the whole of life within a society that upholds her rights (part 4).

The vision that guides this workbook is one where more children are able to be all that God intends. This hope could be summarized in the journey from caterpillar to butterfly. It is a journey marked, undoubtedly, by vulnerability and uncertainty; but nevertheless, an amazing journey of transformation that is full of hope.



Our prayer is that by learning and putting the learning into practice, students using these workbooks will be better equipped to release beautiful butterflies!



By the end of this workbook you will be able to

- Give a critical and biblical description of children and childhood and make your work with them more holistic
- Understand the contexts within which children develop and your work engages with them
- Adapt your practice to promote healthy development of children of all ages
- Stand up for the rights of children more effectively

Part I Children and childhood

Introduction

The aim of Part I is to lay a foundation for improving the way we work with children, based on a fuller understanding of who they are and what is going on in their lives.

“Who is this child?”

Perhaps it is helpful to start by bringing to mind a particular child that you know – maybe your own child or a child that you are working with. As adults, we are used to having answers, to being wiser than children. This can lead us to assume – wrongly – that we understand him already.

We will begin in Lesson 1 by looking to see what the Bible tells us about children. This will be our measuring stick for assessing other ideas about children and childhood. Lessons 2 and 3 focus on gaining a holistic and critical understanding of what a child is and what childhood should mean and how that differs from the reality for many children. Before we move on, Lesson 4 gives us some ideas for enriching the way we listen to children so that we can see their world through their eyes.

“What makes me who I am?”

As we begin this journey of exploration of the child and her world, there is another journey that we will be undertaking at the same time. For each of us, there is another child in our mind who accompanies us in our ministry and our interaction with children. This is the child that each of us has been and where the roots of our current selves are hidden away. If we want to be free to understand the children that we meet and minister to, we need to recognize, understand, and maybe let go of, our own childhood and the impact that it has had – and perhaps continues to have on us.

Lesson 1: What does the Bible say about children?

Summary

- Key biblical themes and motifs
- Biblical attitude to children
- Introduction to the Understanding God's Heart for Children framework

As we try to understand what a child is and how we can understand children better, we must make sure we know what God's word tells us. Here are some key themes and ideas to keep in mind!

Children are precious because they are made in God's image

The foundation for everything else the Bible tells us about children and about how we should relate to them is very simple. As human beings, they are created by God in the image and likeness of God. For this reason, every child has dignity, identity and purpose. In fact, even before they are born, God relates to unborn children as precious individuals (Jer. 1:5; Psalm 139:13-16). Gender, social status, ethnic origin, capacities and achievements – all these things are irrelevant to the value and dignity of each child.

Children are born as spiritual beings

They don't have to wait to grow up before they can hear God, be used by God, be welcomed by God and understand the things of God.

Children are central to God's plans

Children are repeatedly mentioned in the Bible. They are certainly not an afterthought: all together, child and family-related words occur more than 8,000 times.²

God is serious about children

We can be sure that we need to be serious about children because God surely is! We hear Jesus say in Matthew 18:6 that "if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea." A millstone is a very large stone, and the person is to be thrown into the deepest part of the ocean – not a very pleasant thought!

¹ Workbook 4 will look in more detail at a biblical framework for understanding children and our mission to and with them.

² Zuck (1996), 13. The words "child" – 121 times; "children" - 448 times; "son" or "sons" - 2700 times; (not counting the references to Jesus as the son of God); "firstborn" - 100+ times; "boys" and "girls" - 196 times.) Furthermore, the Bible includes dozens of stories about children.

God is outraged at what is happening to children

“Scripture clearly shows that God is outraged about what is happening to children. Our own anger is but a pale reflection of God's own fury and indignation. . . . Over and over again God's warning throughout the Bible is ‘Don't touch my precious children!’ ”³

There are many references in Scripture describing God as the defender of the fatherless. There are nearly 30 passages in the Old Testament like this one from Psalm 82:3-4: “Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed. Rescue the weak and needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.” This shows he wants us to share his outrage and get involved.

Children are a model for Christian faith

In the New Testament too, Jesus' concern for children is always evident. Jesus said that whoever welcomes a child, welcomes him. When the disciples were arguing about who would be the greatest in the Kingdom, Jesus placed a child in the midst of them. He said that if people were not willing to become like that child, they wouldn't even get into the Kingdom – let alone have any place of prominence!

Understanding God's Heart for Children (UGHFC) is a biblical framework that helps us see better what the Bible says about children and what it means for us. In Workbook 4, we will explore this biblical framework in depth. For now, here are seven principles to help us to start thinking through what the Bible says about children and how we should respond to them.⁴

- 1 God creates every unique person as a child with dignity.*
- 2 Children need parental love in a broken world.*
- 3 God gives children as a gift to welcome and nurture.*
- 4 Society has a God-given responsibility for the well-being of children and families.*
- 5 Children are a promise of hope for every generation.*
- 6 God welcomes children fully into the family of faith.*
- 7 Children are essential to the mission of God.*

³ The Oxford Statement on Children at Risk was formulated in 1997 by a group of Christians involved in caring for needy children. It provides an initial biblical and philosophical rationale for Christians to care for children.

⁴ McConnell et al. (2007).

Case Study

Look at the four case studies of children affected by HIV/AIDS and for each one identify how which of the 7 statements of the Understanding God's Heart for Children framework is impacted:

Nomthandazo (12), South Africa⁵

At age 12 Nomthandazo's father passed away. Four years later, she lost her mother to AIDS. Soon after, Nomthandazo's younger brother also passed away. Nomthandazo and her sister were taken in by their aunt. Although Nomthandazo's aunt helped ensure that her basic needs (food shelter, medicine) were met, Nomthandazo had no one to turn to in order to cope with her loss and grief. Like many orphans, she felt that her future was bleak.

Mok (14), Thailand

When Mok was very young, he lost his mother to AIDS, and soon after, his father abandoned him to find work in another province in Thailand. Mok moved in with his grandmother. The two struggled to meet their basic needs.

Now 14 years old, Mok knows that he is HIV positive. Mok was forced to stop attending school due to poor health, stigmatization, and harassment.

Charles (13), Rwanda

Charles lost his father to AIDS in 2005, and a year later, he lost his mother. At just 13 years old, Charles was left to care for his four younger brothers. With nobody to care for them, Charles and his brothers were forced to beg neighbours for food to survive, and often spent two or three days without eating anything. The boys struggled to meet their basic needs of food, health and medicine.

Charles and his brothers eventually received some governmental assistance to grow manioc and beans, but this assistance was not enough to guarantee the children would not go hungry or malnourished.

John (12) and James (14), Uganda⁶

John (12) and James (14) lost their parents. When their father died their life changed dramatically, as their father was the family's only source of income. Mum was often sick and they had to nurse her. She died a year later and they were left on their own. A Christian organisation discovered John and James when they had reached a desperate state. Their home was in a terrible condition – the roof had large gaps where rain would get through. They were scavenging for food. For some reason they were not being given much support by their community.

⁵ The first 3 case studies are from http://www.worldaidsorphans.org/section/the_orphans_crisis/aids_orphans_stories

⁶ Tearfund, Footsteps 61 (2004).

How could the church and Christian organisations respond to these situations in the light of the biblical framework?

Exercises:

Fill in the blanks in the summary of the lesson:

If we want to understand what a _____ is, we must look at what _____ tells us. The Bible tells us children are _____ because they are made in the _____ and _____ of God. We see that children are born as _____; they don't have to wait to become _____ to be welcomed by God. In fact, children are central to _____. We also see that God is _____ about children and we should be too. He is _____ at what is _____ children. Finally we see that children are a model for the _____. To get into the _____ of God, we need to become like _____.

_____ is a useful theological framework for understanding how children are seen in the Bible.

Discussion Questions

1. In what ways is the view of children in your community similar to or different from the biblical view of children in this lesson? What about your own view of children?
2. What do Matthew 18 verses 5 and 6 suggest about the place of children in God's plans? How does this influence the way children are valued and treated in your home, church, organization?
3. List some ways in which children in your community are neglected or abused today.
4. Identify the tasks mentioned in these passages and give examples of how they can be applied to children in your context: Proverbs 31:8, 9; Deuteronomy 10:17-18; Lamentations 2:19
5. In what ways are children a model for the Christian faith? Why is this so important?

Lesson 2: What is a child?

Summary

- Introduce the concept of ‘holistic’ perspective on the child
- Understanding a child as a physical, moral, spiritual, cognitive, emotional, and social being

The Bible tells us that as a boy, Jesus grew in multiple dimensions: ‘wisdom, stature and favour with God and men’ (Luke 2:52). This is a picture of the healthy growth of a child. We call this perspective ‘**holistic**’ because it is about the child as a **whole** person.⁷

To gain a holistic understanding of a child, we need to recognise that they are made up of 5 interlinked dimensions. To help us remember, we can use our hand as a visual aid:

1. Physical (gender, age, health)

The physical development process will according to the environment and physical status of the child (e.g. gender, disability)

2. Social and emotional (status and given, relationships)

Children depend on their parents and caregivers for their sense of belonging security. They are shaped by relationships, and experiences of trust and love. Through relationships, children learn to understand, express, and regulate emotions as well

3. Mental (or cognitive, thinking, understanding, memory)

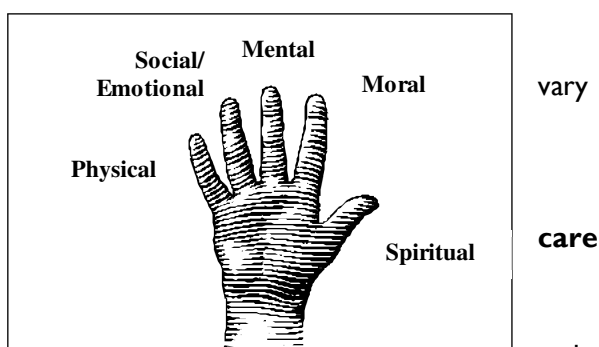
Children learn through formal and informal education, including play

4. Moral (Understanding right and wrong)

Children develop a conscience and are strongly affected by their family and relational context in their development

5. Spiritual

God has made each child in his own image so children are designed to know God and have relationship with him



Why is it important to have a holistic perspective?

When we pay attention only to part of what makes up the child, we miss out on a proper understanding of who he or she is. All children need the right support in order to develop in wholeness. So when we work with a child, we need to be thinking about each of these different dimensions, to help the child develop as a whole person.

⁷ The topic of holistic mission with children will be treated in depth in Workbook 4.

Spirituality is central

Because they are made in God’s image, children have spiritual qualities. Many of the children we encounter will already have had these qualities negatively affected by their experiences, so you may not see them clearly.

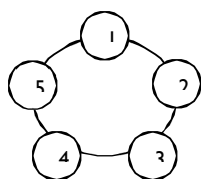
Children’s spiritual qualities include⁸:

Openness	Ability to be present	Uncomplicated
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To nature – children show a sense of awe and wonder To feelings – children tend to be direct, in touch with their feelings To others – children naturally tend to have an open, welcoming nature 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children tend to live in the here and now and think in concrete terms Children have a gift for perception – what we really mean, what we feel Children tend to accept things at face value, taking as much as is needed for a given time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children can find belief easy and uncomplicated, they do not need to analyse Children can find trust easy if they are brought up in a trustworthy environment Children have simple, basic emotional and physical needs

We often find that for the majority of children with whom we work, their spirituality has been damaged by their experiences and background. We see the effects of sin and a broken relationship with God influencing the way the child develops.

A typical secular way to think about the 5 dimensions of the child is as 5 equal elements (see diagram 1). As Christians, we have a different perspective that sees the spiritual dimension touching all of the other parts of life (diagram 2).

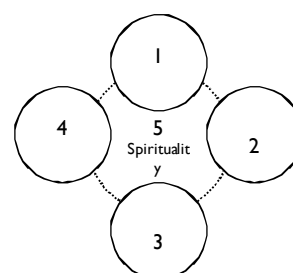
Diagram 1



We also see that there is an influence that can break through effects from all the other dimensions of a child’s life and transform them. That effect is the love of God. God’s love can bring healing and hope to even the most hopeless situation. Each one of us has an opportunity to come alongside children

who have been damaged and show God’s compassion through our own love and practical care.

Diagram 2



Case Study: How holistic is your work?

On the next page you will find a tool that you can use to think about the impact your project, church or organisation is having on the holistic development of children by considering the following 5 areas: physical, emotional, developmental, spiritual, and empowerment. This will be the case study for this lesson.

⁸ Copsey (2003), 9

Read the description in each box and think about the impact your work has on the children you care for. For each area answer:

- **High** if this is something that you do all or most the time.
- **Medium** if this is something that you do sometimes or occasionally, but it is not the main effect of your work.
- **Low** if this is not something you do very much or at all.

At the end, note down any **changes** you think you should make and the **steps** you can take to get there. NB: Although any one project will not be able to meet all these needs, it may give you some ideas for caring for children in a more holistic way.

1. Physical ⁹	Provision	Shelter	Health
	We provide children with daily access to clean drinking water, suitable clothing, nutritional food and good sanitation	We provide a suitable environment for children that gives them adequate shelter, security and enjoyment such that they feel part of it. They know about security risks and how to avoid them.	We make sure children have access to the right medical care and attention to help them remain healthy or live comfortably
2 Social/ Emotional	Self-identity	Formal relationship	Family
	We build up the self-esteem of children and restore their sense of identity through love and attention. Where relevant we also help them restore their legal identity	We ensure that children have good relationships with care-workers that help them trust and pursue other good relationships. We also help children to build friendships with good people in the community and get involved in healthy interests and relationships	If possible, we help children find opportunities to live within a family, building bonds with their own or substitute family at their pace with access to help to solve conflicts or find healing
3. Spiritual	Salvation	Love	Transformation
	We explain the gospel to children and how it provides freedom for their lives if this is possible in our context	We show children the love of God and if we can, we tell them how much he loves them	If possible, we give children access to the Bible and help them learn about Jesus. If they receive Christ, we encourage them to pray, share their faith, do good works and understand who the Holy Spirit is
4. C	Education & play	Guidance & loving discipline	Work & opportunities

⁹ This self-assessment is from Viva's Quality Improvement System. Note that in addition to the 5 dimensions of a child, it also includes empowerment, which will be developed more in Workbook 2.

	We provide children with opportunities to learn and play that will help them develop appropriately and explore life	We discipline and guide children in a loving way that does not harm them but helps them make good choices in life and respect others	We make sure that children are not exploited through work, but are given opportunities to learn useful work skills and to experience work as an interesting and rewarding activity
5. Empowerment	Access to information	Participation	Influence
	We share with children information that is relevant to them in an open and transparent way, with an opportunity for them to ask questions	Children are comfortable stating their opinions and asking questions. We encourage their participation in a safe and conducive environment	Children who are of appropriate age and understanding are given an opportunity to influence decisions that affect their lives. Their views are elicited and taken into account when decisions are made

Exercises:

Fill in the blanks in the summary of the lesson:

A _____ perspective on the child is about seeing the child as a whole person. This involves _____ interlinked dimensions: _____, _____, _____, _____ and _____. We can use our _____ to remind of all these dimensions. A holistic perspective is important so that we do not miss out on a proper understanding of who he or she is as a whole person.

Children have _____ qualities because they are made in _____. We may not see these clearly because they are damaged by their _____. _____ and a broken relationship with _____ influence a child’s development. As Christians we see spirituality as _____ and touching all the other parts of life. God’s _____ can also _____ a child’s life and bring hope even in the most hopeless situation as we show compassion through our own practical care.

Discussion questions:

1. What are the benefits of seeing a child holistically? What are the risks of not taking account of the whole child? How does this relate to your work?
2. Think of a child living in difficult circumstances (e.g. a street child, a child whose parents have died from AIDS, a refugee, etc.). How is each of the 5 dimensions affected by the child’s situation? How are they linked?
3. What evidence would you give to support the idea that the child’s spirituality influences every other area of their development from a Christian perspective?
4. Look at the table with some characteristics of children’s spirituality. In your context, what factors promote and protect this spirituality? What factors damage it?
5. How can you nurture the spirituality of children connected with your family, church or organisation?

Lesson 3: What is childhood?

Summary

- Definition of childhood
- How does culture affect ideas of childhood
- Transition to adulthood

What is childhood?

People from different contexts and traditions debate what childhood means and what it should be characterized by; at the same time, there are certainly very different experiences of what childhood is actually like. Nevertheless, many would agree that childhood should be a time when children are kept safe and cared for.

UNICEF sees childhood as “the time for children to be in school and at play, to grow strong and confident with the love and encouragement of their family and an extended community of caring adults. It is a precious time in which children should live free from fear, safe from violence and protected from abuse and exploitation. As such, childhood means much more than just the space between birth and the attainment of adulthood. It refers to the state and condition of a child’s life, to the quality of those years.”¹⁰

This is an ideal of childhood (that some would see as a Western idea), however it is not the experience of many children in the world today.

When is childhood?

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a child as a person below the age of 18, unless the laws of a particular country set the age for adulthood below the age of 18. In the UNCRC and national laws, children are afforded special rights.¹¹ The State and families have particular responsibilities to care for children to protect them from the risk of harm.

However, we must bear in mind that

- There is not a clear dividing line between childhood and adulthood. The teenage years and early twenties are a time of transition
- Throughout a child’s growth and development, her capacities for decision-making and assuming responsibility as part of her family and community evolve as she matures. The degree of maturity will vary from child to child
- National laws and guidelines recognise that childhood is a time of change and transition by setting different minimum ages for different circumstances in order to balance the need for protection with the evolving capacities of children to take responsibility

¹⁰ UNICEF, (2005).

¹¹ See Part 4 of this workbook for more information on children’s rights and the UNCRC.

- While children can be vulnerable and need protection, they are also able to influence their surroundings and have views on decisions that affect them that need to be taken into account

Families and other adults working with children must balance the duty to protect and act in their best interest on the one hand with the need to recognise the degree of maturity of an individual child and give freedom and responsibility that matches the child's maturity.

Experiences of childhood

While people may agree with the ideal of what childhood *should* be like, the reality is often very different. In practice, views of what childhood means and what it should look like vary greatly due to factors including personal experiences in childhood, cultural, social, political and economic influences. It is important for those who work with children to identify the positive and negative preconceptions they have about childhood and the ways in which these ideas may influence the way we relate to and work with children.

1. Personal experiences

Your own experiences as a child have had a big impact on who you are today. Things that happen in childhood may stay with us for the rest of our life. It is a very important time.

The way you react to children now will reflect your own experiences to some extent. Someone who was physically punished as a child might think it is a good way to discipline their own children; someone who experienced unconditional love and felt secure will probably find it more natural to behave in the same way. Especially if you suffered trauma or particular difficulties as a child, you need to be aware of the impact of those experiences and memories on how you feel about the children you have contact with and how you respond to their situations.¹²

2. Culture

The traditions, rituals and beliefs of our communities have a big impact on how children are valued and cared for. The idea of childhood as a time for play, for example, is a fairly recent Western invention. In many cultures, especially agricultural communities, children are expected to take their place as part of the family work force, caring for younger brothers and sisters and learning adult responsibilities.¹³

Of course, cultures are constantly changing to accommodate new ideas – some positive and some negative. Nevertheless, some traditional attitudes and customs can be harmful to children.¹⁴ In India, for example, national legislation designed to protect children has not eradicated practices that are deeply rooted in community traditions, such as child labour and child marriage. These traditions are perpetuated by poverty and inequality and they harm children.¹⁵

¹² These issues will be covered in Workbook 8.

¹³ Copsy, (2003).

¹⁴ Please refer to Workbook 6 for more on this important topic.

¹⁵ Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India, Definition of a Child.

Case Study

Here are five images of childhood from five different continents. Which, if any, of these is closest to your own picture of what a child is? Which best represents your own childhood? Is there a difference?

USHA

Usha is ten. She has been ill and has left school after just two years. Her auntie is teaching her to become a tailor. She cares for her two younger sisters and helps the family with their work. Her mother washes clothes and Usha fetches the water. After they have been ironed and washed, she delivers them and collects the money.

YASUKO

Yasuko is four. She attends the local kindergarten where she wears a little yellow hat, a uniform and carries a school bag like all the other children. She practices her violin for an hour each day, enthusiastically supported by her mother. Building character is important in the Kobayashi household and Yasuko is brought up to respect discipline, tradition and the value of hard work.

DAVID

David is eight. His family was caught in anti-government guerrilla warfare. He saw his father, mother and baby sister brutally killed as he hid in the bush. He ran away and was found by an aunt and uncle who had managed to escape. Together they fled across the border to a refugee camp, which already houses some 3000 people.

DEBBIE

Debbie is eleven. She has long blond hair, a mountain bike, wears designer clothes and has her own pony, which she rides most days. She lives in a large, four-bedroom house in the suburbs of a city. Her mother is a teacher and her father runs a business. Debbie is soon to get treatment by an orthodontist so her front teeth will look perfectly level. It will cost her parents in the region of £4000.

RAOUL

Raoul is thirteen. He has been living on the streets since he was eight. He never knew his mother and when his father died suddenly of a heart attack, he was left with no family and nowhere to live. He took a bus to the big city where he slept in a doorway. He met up with other street children and quickly became wise in the art of street survival, mingling with petty criminals, drug pushers and pimps. He has recently found his way to a refuge for street children, which is the only caring community he has ever known.

Exercises:

Fill in the blanks in the summary of the lesson:

There are _____ about what childhood means and what it should be like. There are also very different _____ of childhood. Many people would agree that it is a time when children should be _____ and _____. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a child as _____. However, there is not a clear dividing line between childhood and _____. There is a _____. Families and other adults working with children must balance their duty to _____ with the need to _____ their growing _____ and _____. Views of childhood are strongly influenced by _____ and _____.

Discussion questions:

1. In the community you work or live in, what words do adults use to talk about children? Are they positive / negative? How do you feel about these words?
2. What stages of childhood are celebrated in the community you work in? How are they celebrated?
3. When do children become adults in your context? Biologically? Legally? Culturally (i.e. when does the community expect a child to behave like an adult)? Are there any ceremonies associated with this change (or transition) from child to adult?
4. How do you recognise and respond to the growing capacities and maturity of children and youth in your family, church or organisation?
5. How have your own experiences as a child influenced the way you think about children and childhood today? How does that affect your work with children?

Exercise

This exercise will help us think about how childhood is changing in our society and culture. In a small group, discuss and explore assumptions and beliefs about children and childhood.

What does each generation think about childhood? Think about childhood from three different perspectives:

1. Our parents'/elders' perspective
2. Our own perspective
3. The perspective of children today.

How do you think each group describes childhood? What does each group expect from it, or understand by it? Is there any difference in the way each group thinks about girl children and boy children?

Lesson 4: How do children describe themselves?

Summary

- Introduce the importance of listening to the voices of children themselves
- How do children describe themselves?
- How can we find out about them?

Children should be given the opportunity to express themselves and describe themselves. In fact it is every child's right to communicate and have her views taken into account. There are many others reasons why we should listen carefully to children. If we really want to know and understand a child, we need to enter her world the best we can. We need to be very careful not to assume we know what a child is thinking or feeling without asking. However, as adults there are many barriers that stop us seeing the world through a child's eyes.

One powerful way of learning more about children is to give them the opportunity to draw and describe themselves. When this method is used, it reveals so much about the children that surprises even experienced carers.

Method

Give children a large piece of paper divided into three sections. Ask them to draw:

- a) Me in the past b) Me now c) Me in the future

Then together with the pictures, ask the child to describe 'their story' to you, or to another trusted worker.

Advantages

The act of drawing is a normal part of play for children and it is usually a fun, positive activity. Drawing therefore is a really helpful tool for helping children to talk about themselves, their feelings and events that they might find it hard to understand or describe. Using a combination of drawing and telling has many advantages, compared to just asking a child to explain, as you can see in the table:

Just describing	Drawing and telling
Children's vocabulary is restricted according to their age and abilities	All children, including young children and children with special needs can take part
Children may not find it easy to articulate opinions and feelings	Children can express ideas through drawing for which they did not have words
Children may feel intimidated by adults and therefore not tell them things	Drawing is fun for children and adults, which may help children to relax and concentrate their thoughts
Children may not have time to collect their thoughts	Drawing can help children to remember things. It may help them to arrange and organize ideas and tell their story

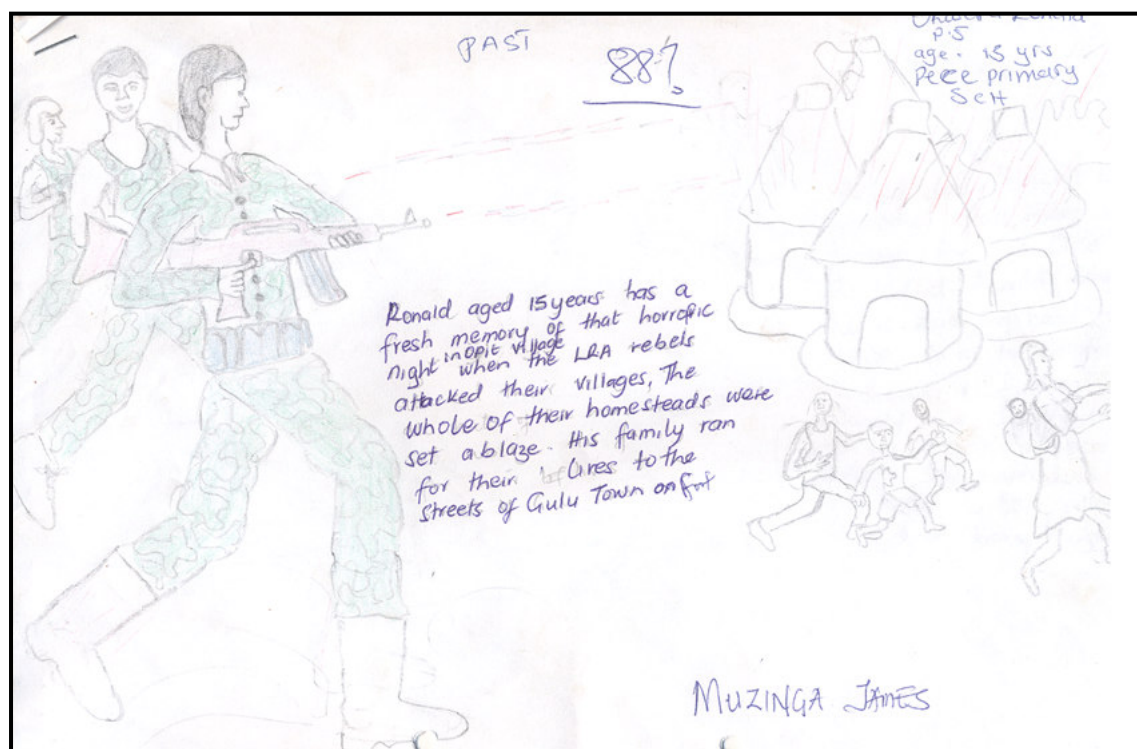
Things to bear in mind

Of course you need to take care in understanding what the child is communicating. Children could invent things in their pictures; or it is possible that you will misunderstand why the child has drawn something. It is important to take time to understand what the child is communicating about her pictures, via listening and open-ended questions.¹⁶

In the case of traumatized children (for example through sexual abuse), art may enable them to communicate things they are unwilling or unable to talk about. Some people find that being able to confront and express traumatic feelings through art can bring some relief and help the healing process. In situations of conflict, drawing may help children deal with some of the tensions they are experiencing.

*"I have tried this with former child soldiers, children who had been sexually exploited and children who had been in orphanages. The results were exciting and gave new insights to staff that had worked with the children for years. It once again demonstrated to me the importance of listening to children."*¹⁷

Here is an example of a picture that a 15 year-old boy drew about his past, revealing his memory of a traumatic experience.



¹⁶ For more on how to listen to children and why it is important, see Workbook 2.

¹⁷ This lesson is a summary of Miles (2003a). For more depth, see also this article on using the method with child soldiers: <http://chc.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/4/4/137>

Case Study

Draw-Tell technique

Draw-and-Tell is a technique that can be used with children from a wide variety of backgrounds.

Basically, if you ask a child to tell you about something that recently happened e.g. as a visit to see a fire-engine then a child of five years might tell you in one or two sentences.

However, if you ask them to draw a picture of the visit and then either write about it or explain what they have drawn it can be a very effective way of helping them to describe their experience in what is likely to be far more sentences with a more elaborate description. This may be partly because it is more fun to draw but also because they can focus their attention elsewhere and not be in the uncomfortable position of talking directly to an adult which is rare outside of the parent-child and teacher-child situations.

The Draw-Tell technique can be used when asking children how they think a program could be improved e.g. asking them to draw a picture of the improvements they would like to see in the orphanage they are living in or the program they are part of. You may be surprised about the suggestions they come up with. When we did this exercise, children suggested a basketball match and a separate small building for guests. The first suggestion was easily put into practice. The second suggestion took a little longer (!) but it demonstrated how much the children appreciated visitors. This was good to know for future planning.

Exercises:

Fill in the blanks in the summary of the lesson:

Children should be given the opportunity to **express** themselves and **describe** themselves. In fact, it is their _____. Also if we want to really understand a child we need to _____ the best we can, but there are many _____ that stop adults seeing the world through a child's eyes. One way of learning about children is by giving children the opportunity first to _____ and then _____ themselves. This method has many advantages compared to just asking a child to _____ his story. Of course, it is still important to take care to understand what the child is communicating via _____ and _____. Art may enable _____ children to communicate things they are unwilling or unable to talk about. The results can _____ even experienced carers.

Discussion questions

1. What sort of barriers do you think stop adults from seeing the world through the eyes of a child? Can you think of an example from your experience?
2. Why is drawing a helpful tool for adults to learn about a child's story?
3. What could make it difficult for a child to tell his story in words?
4. What are risks of using a draw and tell methodology? What cautions do adults need to be aware of to avoid them?
5. How could it benefit your work to understand children's stories in this way?

Part 2: Children in Context

In the second part of this workbook we will focus on understanding the context within which each child grows and develops. The aim is to provide a better understanding of the many and complex factors that contribute to the child's identity and wellbeing. Indeed, we cannot understand a child apart from her context.

Lessons 5 and 6 look at different kinds of factors that impact childhood. Lesson 5 introduces a helpful model that identifies different settings that affect a child's life from the family and close community right up to systems and institutions, and highlights links between them. Lesson 6 concentrates on global trends that create a context for children's lives. Understanding the child's context in these ways will allow us to ensure that our programmes and interventions target all the appropriate levels, which will help them to be more effective.

Lessons 7 and 8 focus on the family. Lesson 7 explains – using Scripture and secular experience – why the family is so important as the primary setting for children to grow in. It emphasises the need to support parents and families in the face of many threats. Lesson 8 introduces good practice in care for children who do not have the care of their own family. Again, it emphasises the importance of a family setting for good development.

Lesson 5: How can we understand a child's context better?

Summary

- Introduce Bronfenbrenner's ecology of childhood model
- Introduce idea of different levels of intervention

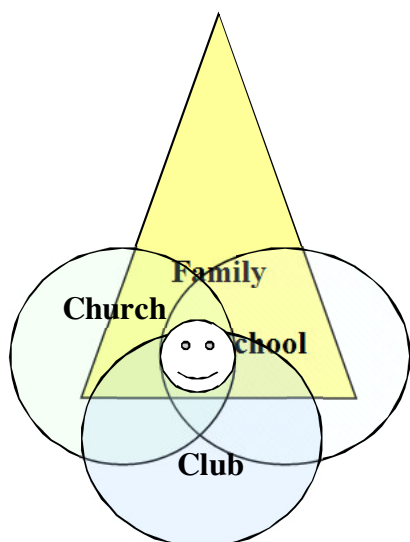
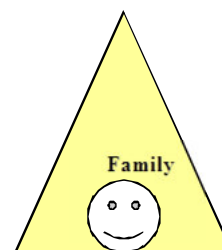
We are continuing to think about the answer to the question, 'Who is this child?' In this lesson we will consider the child in context and see how this influences our understanding of the needs of a child and our interventions to meet those needs.

A child does not exist in isolation. Each child is born to a mother, within a family of some kind. Children are most strongly influenced by their experiences in the family. They are also part of a community, which includes school, groups of peers and many other immediate situations. Children are also affected by wider social and political issues like poverty, famine, war, and economic crises, and finally, by their cultural context and values. If we want to understand a child, we need to understand the different contexts or 'settings' that he is involved in.

Let's start by thinking about different kinds of context that influence a child. For each, try to think of an example from your own childhood and how it influenced your experiences:

Situations where the child has direct personal contact and interaction

The first, most basic settings for a child are situations where he or she has direct personal contact and interaction. For a young child this is mainly the home environment with parents and siblings, or a family substitute. Later, it could be the school environment with teachers and peers. The activities run for children in a church could form another setting.



Links between settings where the child participates directly

Of course, the settings we have just identified influence each other. It is helpful to think about the links between settings in which the child directly participates. For example, the child's home situation might affect whether he goes to school and how well he gets on with peers. A parent talking to the child's teacher also creates a link between home and school that can support the child's education. It is good for a child if there is a supportive network of links around him and his direct family that are committed to his welfare.

Settings that the child does not experience directly

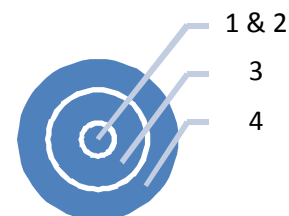
The child is also linked to and affected by all sorts of settings that he does not experience directly. For example, the mother's work environment could influence her behaviour at home, and therefore the quality of care he receives. Other factors could include parents' faith, community and friends.

The way society is structured and functions

Finally, the child is also affected by the way society is structured and functions, including general patterns of ideology and the way social institutions are organised in his society. So for example, working hours and rates of pay in a society can influence parents' working hours and stress levels; this in turn will affect the child's home life. Political instability can force the family to leave its home, which will affect the child's experiences. Cultural values, norms and traditions are also important.

American psychologist **Urie Bronfenbrenner** helped to make these contexts and the way they influence the life of a child clear in a model he called the ‘ecology of development’ (1979). It is like a map of the child’s context. Each system is ‘nested’ inside the next as the diagram shows. Bronfenbrenner’s names for these four levels are:

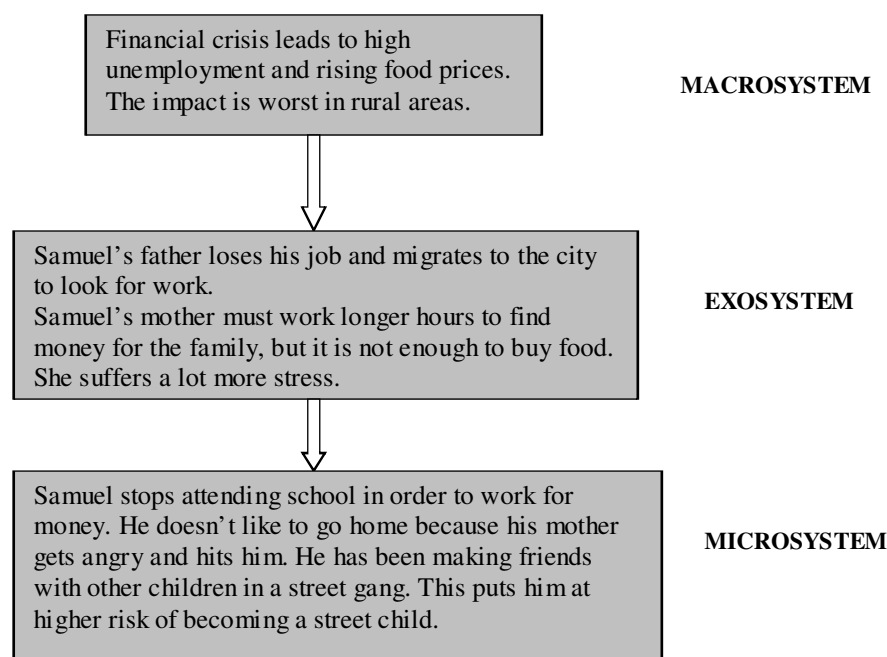
- 1) **Microsystems** these are the situations where the child has direct personal contact and interaction
- 2) **Mesosystem** this is made up of the links between settings where the child participates directly
- 3) **Exosystem** this is made up of settings that affect the child but that the child does not experience directly
- 4) **Macrosystem** this is the way society is structured and functions



How does understanding the child’s context help us to intervene holistically?

Bronfenbrenner’s model helps us to see that a decision or change in the macrosystem may influence the exosystem. In turn, the microsystem of the child is affected.

Here is an example for a working child, who is at risk of becoming a street child.



To think of a different example, if we see a problem in one of the microsystems of a child we work with, we should try to understand the mesosystem of links between her different microsystems. For example, if Sunny is struggling to concentrate at school, we should look to see what is happening at home – maybe her parents are fighting and she is worried about them; or if Jamal suddenly seems angry and resentful at home, we could look to see what is happening in his peer group – maybe he is being bullied.

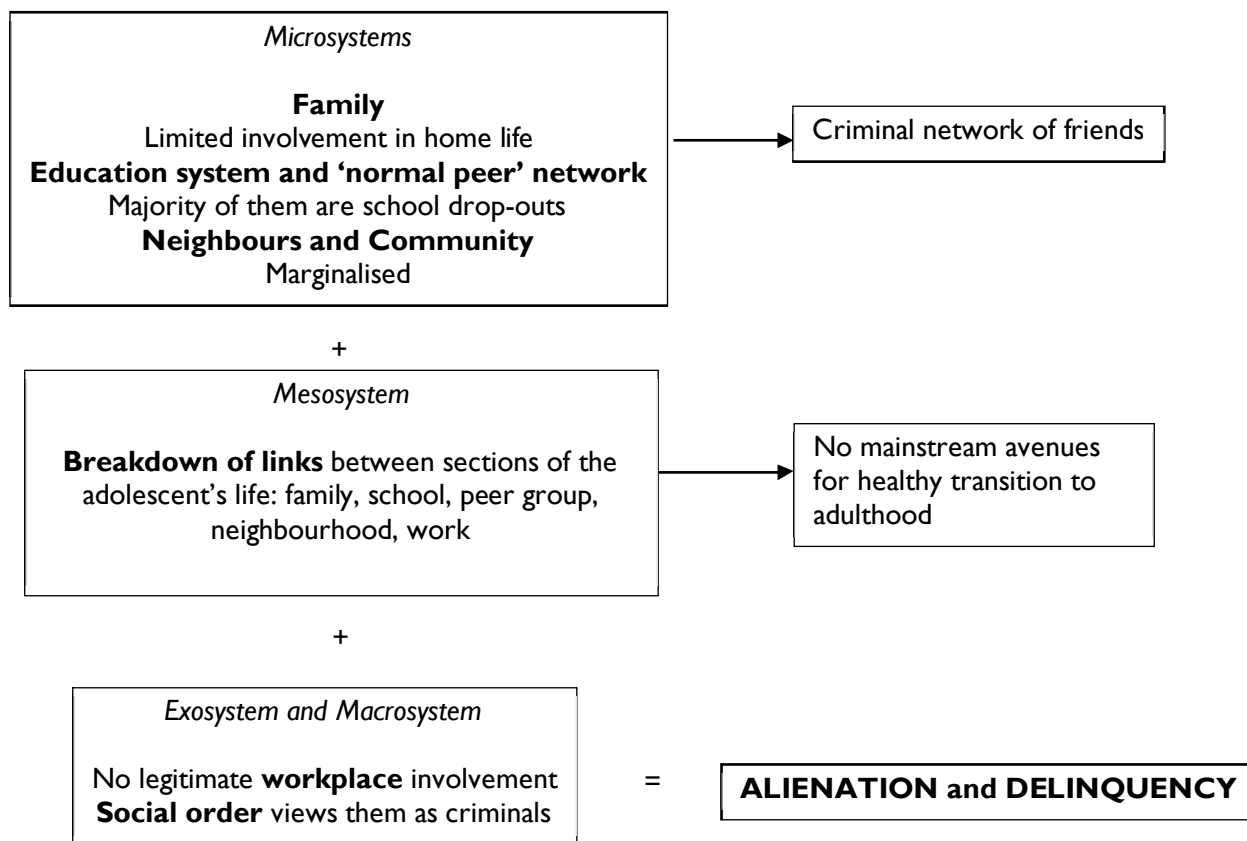
When we see a child who is suffering from the effects of poverty, we should ask questions about what factors in the exosystem and macrosystem are contributing to the problem we have seen. Another question would be to ask what needs to change in the macrosystem to prevent the problem recurring. In this way, recognising the many contexts a child lives in can help us care for him in a more holistic and effective way in the longer term.

Case Study

Here is an example of the use of Bronfenbrenner’s theory.¹⁸ The New York City Youth Violence Study (NYCYVS) involved interviews with 416 active violent offenders aged 16 to 24 from two disadvantaged and high-crime New York City neighbourhoods over the course of nearly three years (1995-1998).

Bronfenbrenner’s theory helps us to understand better how these youths become alienated and marginalized within their community, which contributes to their violent lifestyle.

In the case of the youths in the NYCVS study, their developmental context was characterized by many disadvantages of the inner-city: high poverty, limited access to health care, social resources and education opportunities, restricted employment opportunities, illegitimate jobs (i.e. drug dealing), high crime and violence, and drug abuse.



It is clear that Bronfenbrenner’s idea has a great deal of potential for application. In particular, it can help to lead to good programmatic and policy decisions—we must change as many levels of the environment as possible if we’re serious about making change in the lives of children.

¹⁸ Based on Erdem, Gizem., Wilkinson, Deanna and Collins, Tammy. "Understanding the Life Experiences of Violent Young Males from a Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological System Theory" Paper presented at the annual meeting of the AMERICAN SOCIETY OF CRIMINOLOGY, Atlanta Marriott Marquis, Atlanta, Georgia, Nov 13, 2007.

How can this analysis of the context of development of the violent youth help us to design policies and programmes that could help create a more positive outcome?

Exercises:

Fill in the blanks in the summary of the lesson:

A child does not exist in _____. If we want to understand a child we need to understand the different _____ or settings he is involved in. Children are most strongly influenced by their experiences in _____. They are also affected by wider _____ issues like poverty, famine, war and economic crises. They are influenced by their _____ and _____.

Urie Bronfenbrenner created a model that helps us understand the child's _____. He identified four systems: _____ are the situations where the child has direct personal contact and interaction; the Mesosystem is made up of the _____ between settings where the child participates directly. The Exosystem is made up of settings that affect the child but that the child does not _____ and the _____ is the way _____ is structured and functions. Understanding these different systems is important because it can help us to care for him in a more _____ and _____ way.

Discussion questions

1. What does it add to our understanding of a child to look at the different contexts he is involved in?
2. Think of an example of a child you have encountered where problems in one microsystem (e.g. home, school, peer group) had effects in another.
3. How do you think it could help a child's development for there to be strong and supportive links between his direct settings (e.g. family, school class and church project)? How much link is there between the projects you do with children and their home life?
4. How can Bronfenbrenner's model help us to support families at times of stress and difficulty?
5. What are the biggest factors at the level of the macrosystem and exosystem that affect the lives of the children you work with? What is your church or organisation doing to influence them in ways that promote children's welfare?

Lesson 6: What global factors affect childhood?

Summary

- Major global threats to childhood: poverty, armed conflict, HIV/AIDS
- Relationship of global trends with local context

We have seen that a child does not grow up in isolation. He experiences childhood within a context that is influenced by his family, community and the complex mix of cultural, political, economic and historical forces that shape them.

There are also important global issues that have a huge impact on the ability of children to thrive. It is important to understand these global challenges and to be aware how they impact children at the local level, in the places where we work.

At the beginning of 2010, UNICEF provides a snap-shot of the context of childhood for many children, which highlights significant issues:

*Children are suffering in many different places, and for a range of reasons. ... In 2009, large-scale and repeated **natural and man-made disasters** struck Southeast Asia, while **emergencies** in the Horn of Africa, Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Sudan intensified,” said Johnson. “Children are always among the most severely affected, and disasters put them at increased risk of **abuse and grave violations of their rights**, including sexual violence, killing and maiming, and forced recruitment into armed groups.*

*The ongoing global **financial crisis**, compounded by **unstable food prices**, is causing increases in poverty and malnutrition, and severely threatening progress that has been made for children in some developing countries. Children and women have been especially hard hit. In 2009 many more poor families were forced to cut meals and reduce the quality of their food intake. According to a report by the Food and Agriculture Organization in 2009, more than one billion people worldwide were **hungry** – a rise of at least 100 million since 2008.¹⁹*

Improvements

The big picture shows that thanks to greater worldwide cooperation, in recent decades there have been significant improvements in some important areas: reductions in child mortality rates, increased net primary school enrolment, greater gender equality in primary school attendance, lower numbers of orphans, and important strides in creating a protective environment for children.²⁰

Threats

However, in 2005 UNICEF also warned that these advances now appear at risk of reversal from three key threats: poverty, armed conflict and HIV/AIDS. Other threats to children’s survival and development persist because of poverty, armed conflict and HIV/AIDS.

¹⁹ UNICEF news report, 03 Feb 2010 http://www.unicef.org.uk/press/news_detail_full_story.asp?news_id=1464

²⁰ UNICEF (2005).

The UNICEF report on the *State of the World's Children in 2005* explains:

- **Poverty** is the root cause of high rates of child mortality and morbidity. The rights of over 1 billion children – more than half the children in developing countries – are violated when they are severely underserved by at least one or more of the basic goods and services that would allow them to survive, develop and thrive. One in five children in the developing world does not have access to safe water, and one in seven has no access whatsoever to essential health services. More than one in three children does not have adequate shelter, over 16 per cent of children under five lack adequate nutrition, and 13 per cent of all children have never been to school.
- **Armed conflict** As wars proliferate – and civilians become their main casualties – millions of children are growing up in families and communities torn apart by armed conflict. Many have been forced on to the front lines. Since 1990 conflicts have directly killed as many as 3.6 million people; tragically, more than 45 per cent of these are likely to have been children. Hundreds of thousands of children are caught up in conflict as soldiers; many are forced to become refugees or internally displaced persons, suffer sexual violence, abuse and exploitation, or are victims of explosive remnants of war.
- **HIV/AIDS** Worldwide, AIDS is already the leading cause of death for people aged 15 to 49; in 2003 alone, 2.9 million people died of AIDS and 4.8 million people were newly infected with the HIV virus. Over 90 per cent of people currently living with HIV/AIDS are in developing countries, and although the problem is most acute in Africa, prevalence rates are rising in other parts of the world. In sub-Saharan Africa, HIV/AIDS has led to increasing child mortality, dramatic reductions in life expectancy and millions of orphans.

Understanding the local impact of global trends

Poverty, conflict and HIV/AIDS are not the only factors which undermine childhood but they are certainly among the most significant, with profoundly damaging effects on a child's chances of survival after the early years of life. The damage caused by these threats lingers well beyond the years of childhood, and increases the likelihood that the next generation of children will be affected by the same threat. As damaging as these three major threats are by themselves, when two or even all three coincide, the impact on children's lives is devastating.²¹

These global trends work together with all sorts of local factors that could include religion, ideology and politics, unemployment, drugs, effects of climate change, recent history of war, disaster or other wide-scale traumatic events, high levels of unemployment and many others in ways that can create difficult circumstances for children.

²¹ UNICEF (2005).

Case Study²²

There are over 2,500 children living on the streets of major cities such as Cochabamba, La Paz and Santa Cruz. In addition, UNICEF estimates that 800,000 children work in Bolivia, which puts them at higher risk of taking to a life in the streets.

What factors lead children to live in the streets in Bolivia?

Poverty:

Large families mean that parents are often unable to look after all their children – UNICEF estimates that 20% of street children have left home because there was not enough to eat, and that 20% of street children have been abandoned by their parents.

Rural communities, coca growers in particular, are losing their livelihoods and so moving into the cities in the hope of making a living. The cities are unable to support the rapidly growing population, and so poverty persists.

Street children are likely to have come from areas of poor housing, with little access to running water or adequate sanitation. There is likely to be a lack of social services and affordable education. Their parents are likely to be unemployed and illiterate.

Violence:

Violence in the family is a serious problem in Bolivia. Domestic violence is widespread and often unreported – and when it is reported, results in only a few days in jail and a small fine. UNICEF estimates that 60% of street children in Bolivia have left home because of physical violence.

Understanding these factors that push children into the streets is an important part of the work of Christian projects that are part of the ‘Early Encounter Project’ in Bolivia. Projects are able to prevent ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors becoming too strong. By engaging with these underlying factors, they are tackling the problem at its root – while the child is still only at risk, rather than after a child has been living on the street for some time. One area that they focus on is on strengthening families and preventing domestic violence.

“During the past few years, we have seen great miracles, families who have been restored through the message their children have passed on to them. Children who have arrived to the project in very serious health conditions have recovered, parents who have met Christ and who have changed the way they treat their children, and children who have developed very useful future skills. All of this shows us that it’s God’s will for the work with the children in this area. God has put us right in this area of work to be a light. The fight is hard, but it is possible with God.” **Project Director of ‘Moisés’, Cochabamba, Bolivia**

²² Based on information from http://www.toybox.org.uk/why_there_are_street_children.html and http://www.toybox.org.uk/what_we_do.html

Exercises:

Fill in the blanks in the summary of the lesson:

There are important _____ issues that have a huge impact on the ability of children to _____. It is important to understand these global challenges and to be aware of how they impact children at the _____. There have been many significant _____ in some important areas. However these advances are _____ from _____ major threats: _____, _____ and _____. When two or three of these threats _____, the impact on children's lives is _____. These global trends work together with _____ in ways that can cause difficult circumstances for children.

Discussion questions

1. Can you identify effects on children in your context due to poverty, HIV/AIDS or armed conflict? Give some examples.
2. What are the most important current trends in your region and country that are affecting children? How is the government(s) responding to these trends? How can you best pray for them and engage with them regarding the changes that are likely to take place in the next 10 years?
3. Chose one trend and apply it to an organisation working with children in your country. How has it affected the way this organisation has developed?
4. Are there particular local factors related to history, ideology, politics, natural disasters, etc. that influence childhood in your context? How do these factors affect children's lives today?
5. Does the work of your community, church or organisation focus more on immediate needs and risks of children, or more on their underlying causes? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each approach?

Lesson 7: What is the importance of the family?

Summary

- The family is usually best context for a child's growth and development
- Understand what a family looks like (positive and negative)
- Factors that put families under strain
- Role and response of the church

“God’s design is for each child to be born to loving parents [...] within the covenant of marriage”²³

At its best, “the ‘family’ can be an institution in which God’s grace is experienced and people find nurture and healing, thereby growing as persons in their individuality, in their social relations and in their relations with God.”²⁴

This biblical perspective is echoed by secular research and experience. For example the Better Care Network states that “Families offer the best protection of children and are more likely to provide the conditions for healthy development. Children who have been separated from their families are more vulnerable to abuse, exploitation, and neglect.”²⁵

What is a family?

In reality, the ‘family’ comes in all sorts of shapes and sizes. The typical picture of the family in the Bible is an extended, interdependent family structure that has much in common with stable rural families in developing countries. In more developed countries we often see fragmenting nuclear families, typically 3-4 people living in their own house, often disconnected from extended family. This pattern is also apparent in bigger cities in developing countries. Families are separated from their extended families as they migrate to the cities and in many cases, husbands look for work in the city apart from their families, which leads to even more fragmentation of the family.

We need to be careful to separate the biblical principle of children’s need for parental love and nurture from cultural norms of how families ‘should’ be. Scripture teaches that families should be built on clear authority, love, respect, and loyalty. Obviously, “‘the family’ can become perverted by sin as people are disloyal, compete for power and neglect responsibilities.”²⁶ Scripture reminds us that families may be destroyed by fighting, rape, incest, adultery and murder – with effects far beyond the family itself. Another example where the cultural norm is far away from God’s design of the family is the patriarchal family, characterised by dominion and control over women and children. This model is common in many developing countries – sometimes even within the church.

Broken families put children at risk

The separation of children from their families can result from many causes, including the death of one or both parents, abandonment, displacement due to armed conflict, trafficking, or simply the

²³ McConnell et al (2007), 51.

²⁴ Miles (2003 b), 35.

²⁵ Better Care Network <http://www.crin.org/bcn/theme.asp?themeID=1000&pageID=1043>

²⁶ Miles (2003b), 35.

inability or unwillingness of the family to provide care. The roots of separation can also be found in behaviour problems, relationship difficulties, abuse, or neglect. Separation is also caused by larger systemic issues such as poverty, conflict, natural disaster, or HIV/AIDS. Children who are separated from their parents lose their basic sense of security, which disrupts normal growth and development. Prevention of separation from families, and the provision of services to maintain family unity, is therefore a priority.

What is the responsibility of the church?

Different cultures and societies have different family structures. While children can most benefit from being in a two-parent family, this is not always possible. Both the Old and New Testaments mention the responsibility to orphans/the fatherless. Being an orphan in ancient times meant deprivation of support, loss of legal standing and becoming vulnerable to those who would exploit the weak. (See Deuteronomy 10:18, Exodus 22:25-27, James 1:27.)

The difficulty for the church today is that there are so many children who do not fit neatly into the two-parent family structure. Some countries will have culturally appropriate ways of absorbing orphans or children whose parents cannot care for them – for example, the extended family or monasteries. In other situations, the loss of life may be so great (due to war, disaster and HIV/AIDS) that the community has limited capacity to absorb children who do not have both parents. In the next lesson, we will look at how to care for children without parental care.

- Sometimes children are brought up by only one parent because of divorce, desertion, domestic violence or unwed motherhood. It is important that we find out about their needs by asking them and then take responsibility as a church to support them.
- Similarly, orphans living as ‘child-headed households’ will need the love and support of adults, but may not need adults to take over. They too should be asked what they need. This does not imply that they necessarily know everything they need. The church has the responsibility to understand and support them, regardless of how well they express their needs.
- Where marriage relationships are fragile, if the church is able to support and strengthen the marriage it may enable relationships to be restored and prevents divorce and family breakdown. The church needs to find ways to address individualism and especially find ways to stop men from drifting away from families and parenthood.
- Similarly, where parent-child relationships are strained, supporting parents in a loving community may prevent child abuse and inter-generational violence.
- In general, the church needs to be a place of support, learning and encouragement for parents.

“We all realize that one of the most important ways to help children is by supporting their parents or primary caregivers. Supporting parents is important because the family has the most potential of any institution for providing for children’s basic needs and for shaping their moral and spiritual lives. Even though children are influenced by many other factors, parents are often still the primary shaping force (whether negative or positive) in a child’s development.”²⁷

²⁷ Bunge (2007), 53.

Case Study²⁸

Alfredo Mora Rojas, Regional Director for Viva Latin America writes,

“Carolina was born to a mother struggling desperately with a drug addiction. There seemed to be little hope for her future. But now things are different. Now she is happy, she is healthy, she is loved. Now she is mine.

There are more than 40 million children like my Carolina in Latin America: children who have been orphaned, abandoned, or born to families who simply cannot provide for their needs. So we have to say to ourselves: what can the Church do? We cannot just sit by and watch this problem as if it has nothing to do with us. So what is our part? And for us in Latin America, the answer to this question is Casa Viva!

Casa Viva is a fostering programme which works with local churches to find and support families who can take a child into their home. Casa Viva provides each family with training so they can know how to care for their new child, and, vitally, the whole church commits to help the family and the child. This means that instead of an orphanage where they are just another mouth to feed, children are surrounded by the love and support of the Christian community and are able to truly belong to a family.

So what is my role to play? I too am part of the Church.

What is my answer to the problem? Well for my family we decided it was right to join the Casa Viva programme. So back in 2006 that is what we did. My wife and I and our three children Jose Pablo (23) Daniella (20) and Andrea (13) were all together receiving the training to begin to foster a child, when there was an emergency call. A small baby, just six days old, was in the hospital all alone – her parents could not care for her and a family was needed to take her in. Initially it was supposed to be for just six months, and then it became a year. But soon it was clear that Carolina’s parents would never be able to help her and bring her up, and so we were able to officially adopt her and make her a part of our family forever. God has truly blessed us with this wonderful daughter!

There are still many children who need to be loved like Carolina, who need to know what it is like to belong to somebody. Through Casa Viva they can have this chance. Casa Viva is exciting because it is changing children’s lives in such a permanent way – through offering them the love and stability of a family they have a new freedom to grow emotionally, spiritually, intellectually, and physically. Casa Viva is not simply a foster programme: it is an entryway for children to a future filled with possibility.”

²⁸ Viva Annual Review (2009).

Exercises:

Fill in the blanks in the summary of the lesson:

The Bible teaches that it is God's design for children to be born to _____ within the covenant of _____. _____ research also states that _____ offer the best protection for children. Children _____ from their family are more vulnerable to _____, _____ and _____. We nevertheless need to be careful to separate the biblical principle of children's need for a family from _____ of how families 'should' be.

Children are _____ from their families for many reasons, including behaviour problems, relationship difficulties, abuse, or neglect, poverty, conflict, natural disaster, and HIV/AIDS. It is a _____ to prevent separation from families, and to provide services to maintain _____. The _____ has a responsibility to support those who are vulnerable. This will involve _____ to what they need and offering support. It can also be a place of _____, _____ and _____ for parents.

Discussion questions

1. What is the most common pattern for a family in your context? How does it relate the pattern of family life in the Bible?
2. What are the strengths of family life in your context and what are the weaknesses? What are the main threats to the family?
3. Why is a family usually the best place for a child to grow and develop?
4. What does your church or organisation do to prevent separation of families and to support children and their families? What could you do in addition?
5. How could you find out more about the needs of vulnerable families in your community?

Lesson 8: What about children without a family?

Summary

- The place of orphanages in care for orphans and vulnerable children
- Family and community-based alternatives
- Minimum standards of care
- The role of the church

As we have seen, the worldwide statistics paint a bleak picture for life as a child. There are far too many heartbreaking ways in which a child can become separated from their family, and many more tragic reasons why their families may no longer feel able to care for them.

Are orphanages the best solution?

Faced with the grim reality, it would be very easy to come to the conclusion that orphanages are the best, and in some cases only, answer to the problem of how to care for the world's orphans and vulnerable children. There is indeed no doubt that the Christian motivation for opening an orphanage comes from a God-given desire to see children loved and cared for, and the dedication and sacrifice this involves is to be commended.

However, over the years much research has been conducted on the effects of long term residential care on children. The results have provided the world with clear indicators of institutionalisation and its long-term, negative impact on children. It is now internationally recognised that care of children in orphanages and other forms of long term residential care is not in their best interests.²⁹

Family and community-based alternatives

Both the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Stockholm Declaration on Children and Residential Care, 2003, are guided by the principle that the best place for a child to develop and grow up to fulfil their potential is within a loving, supportive family, and that families should be provided with the necessary assistance and protection to fully carry out their responsibilities.³⁰

The Stockholm Declaration on Children and Residential Care was signed by the majority of the world's Governments in 2003. It states that:

- Family care and community care are the best option for the alternative care of children
- Residential care should be a last resort and a temporary solution
- Specific strategies and measures should be established to support parents to raise their own children and send them to school
- These strategies and measures should also be directed at families, relatives and communities caring for children where parental care is not possible, in order to avoid children being sent to live in orphanages.

²⁹ See for example, UNICEF (2003), Gudbrandsson (2004), 'Save the Children, (2009), and Carter, (2005).

³⁰ See Lesson 13 of this workbook on the UNCRC and <http://www.cyc-net.org/cyc-online/cycol-0903-stockholm.html> for more on the Stockholm declaration.

There are of course many situations in which living with relatives or in their community is not in the immediate best interests of the child, and therefore the best option is for short-term residential care. International guiding principles for best practice encourage that 'short-term' is the most important part of the phrase to understand, and that children should be found safe placements in community settings as soon as possible after their initial arrival at the centre.

Minimum standards for all care options

All forms of residential care should operate according to minimum standards, which should include guidelines for the basic requirements of care, covering children's needs in development, survival, protection and participation, as well as recognising that reintegration does not just describe the day when a child leaves but a whole process which starts on the day the child arrives.³¹

Community care options should also be regulated by minimum standards. All forms of care should closely monitor and evaluate the services offered on a regular basis, and every child reintegrated into a community placement should be regularly followed up, with each placement closely monitored and evaluated to ensure that it is as successful as it can be. Without this support, community care placements could start to fail as, in reality, all people are at risk of facing the same pressures as the child's own parents.

The challenge for the church

Supporting families in crisis is not the easiest option for positively impacting the lives of orphans and vulnerable children, and yet there are people around the world who are successfully making it happen. Christians are in a good position to offer services and support to those struggling to care for orphans and vulnerable children in their communities, such as poor families, single mothers, ageing grandparents, foster families and monks for example, to ensure that those children are not separated from their families or communities, but are cared for in the best possible way.

This is a challenge. There are many heart-rending situations which have no easy solutions. It will take innovation, courage and considerable effort to ensure that the capacity of families to become a protective environment for children is raised³², and that communities are mobilised to take responsibility for their most vulnerable members. But our God considers nothing to be impossible, and our strength lies in Him alone.

³¹ UK Government, (March 2002), Better Care Network, Tearfund & NSPCC (2003).

³² International Save the Children Alliance.

Case Study

Kolyan³³ is now 22. She does not remember her own parents, or why they made the decision not to care for her themselves. Her earliest memory is of those she refers to as her 'foster family', the mother and father and numerous children who she still loves, even now. As she grew up, she was required to work long hours in the family restaurant. Her foster parents became harsh and violent, until at the age of 13 she could take no more and, after abuse by a family member, she ran away.

After some time alone on the streets of the capital city, she was picked up by a child rights organisation and placed in an orphanage. She lived in the orphanage for four years; she returned to school, and studied computers and English. But she became very dependent on the services the orphanage provided and lost the ability to take responsibility for herself. The orphanage had to move to a new building, and the director announced that no-one aged 18 and above would be relocated with the rest, but needed to find themselves somewhere else to live. Kolyan was among the panicked young adults who didn't know what to do. One of the orphanage staff took pity on her, and invited her to live with her family. She has lived with this family ever since, but constantly worries about what will happen to her in the future.

How different her life could have been. What if her own mother had been identified as unable to care for her daughter, and offered support? What if someone had monitored how she was being cared for by the foster family, and evaluated her situation? What if she had been placed into a short term residential centre? What if the orphanage she was placed in was regulated by minimum standards of care?

Kolyan now has a job and is beginning to relearn self-reliance. Self-esteem and self-confidence will take much longer to return, but she is now getting the support she needs. Our challenge is to identify families at risk of crisis and support them, before their children suffer the consequences.

³³ Names have been changed to protect the young person's identity

Exercises

Fill in the gaps in the summary of the lesson:

There are many ways in which a child can become separated from their _____ and why families may no longer feel able to _____ for them. Faced with this reality, it would be easy to conclude that _____ are the best and sometimes _____ answer to the problem of how to care for the world's _____. However, research has shown that long-term residential care is not _____.

_____ has a long-term, negative impact on children. The Stockholm Declaration asserts that the best place for a child to develop and grow up to reach their full potential is within a _____, _____. Family and community care are the best option for the alternative care for children and residential care should be a _____ and _____ solution. All forms of residential care and community care should be regulated by _____.

_____ are in a good position to offer services and support to those struggling to care for orphans and vulnerable children in their communities, such as _____ families, _____ mothers, ageing _____, foster _____ and _____ for example, to ensure that those children are not separated from their families or communities, but are cared for in the best possible way.

Discussion Questions

1. How do the lives of orphans and vulnerable children living in an orphanage and those living in the community differ? (Consider all aspects of development, behaviour, living experience, education.)
2. What difficulties can children and young people living in an orphanage have?
3. Why are family-based and community-based care considered the best situations for a child to grow up in?
4. What would be your recommendations to include in a Reintegration Policy for an orphanage?
5. If you had children and were no longer able to look after them, how would you prefer them to be cared for?

Part 3: Children's development

Introduction

Part three aims to give an overview of key themes in children's development so that those who work with children understand what is going on in their lives at different times and are able to provide the best conditions for healthy development.

Lesson 9 provides a framework for thinking about child development and some overarching principles. Lesson 10 focuses on infants and young children, while lesson 12 looks at older children and adolescents. The crucial topic of attachment is discussed in lesson 11.

It is always important to think about the principles of child development in the light of your own cultural context and work out what it means to promote healthy development in accordance with the traditions of your community. There is not one single pattern of good child-rearing. At the same time, you should think carefully about the way children are nurtured and cared for in the place where you work to see whether it is always giving the best environment for children to thrive.

Lesson 9: Why do I need to understand child development?

Summary

- What is development?
- Introduction to important frameworks for understanding how children develop
- What all children need: some general principles for promoting children's development

What is child development?

Development is a process by which people become more mature and whole. It is an ongoing process that begins at conception and continues throughout a person's lifespan. It involves change in the physical, social, emotional, cognitive and spiritual dimensions as the child forms relationships and interacts in all the different settings we thought about in Lesson 5. Child development focuses on the crucial early stages of this journey, during childhood and adolescence, where the most rapid and profound changes take place that lay a foundation for the rest of life. It is important to understand child development because childhood is a time of such rapid change. Children are at risk if they do not receive the right kind of care and inputs at the right time. This can have a big impact, for example on physical growth, emotional security and intelligence.

What are developmental milestones?

We naturally think of a child's growth as height and weight. These are easy to measure to check that the child is growing in a healthy way. It is just as important to be aware that other aspects of a child's development can be measured too. From birth onwards, a child that is developing in a healthy way will reach recognisable 'milestones' in how he plays, learns, speaks and acts. Children usually move from one important point (or milestone) in their development to the next in a natural pattern. For example, most children say single words before they speak in sentences. But each child grows and gains skills at his or her own pace. It is common for a child to be ahead in one area, such as language, but a little behind in another. Therefore, although each child's developmental timetable will be a bit different, it is helpful to understand what sort of milestones to look out for, especially when you are working with young children.³⁴

A delay in any of these areas could be a sign of a developmental problem. The good news is, the earlier any delay is recognised the more you can do to help the child reach his full potential. This knowledge helps caregivers ask the right questions in their practices and formulate effective goals and objectives for ministry.

Although we will not concentrate on a child's spiritual development until workbook 4, as Christians, we are aware of an added dimension in child development. We want to see each child become all God has intended them to be. This includes the spiritual dimension of their life and their need to be right with God. We understand that they will not be whole and mature in the deepest sense without a restored relationship with God.³⁵

³⁴ See for example <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/milestones/index.html> in addition to resources specific to children in your region.

³⁵ This theme is developed more in Workbook 3 and Workbook 4.

What do all children need for healthy development?

Two things to keep in mind always when working with children that are in agreement with biblical wisdom and theories of child development:

- **Unconditional love** is the most important need of every child and the cornerstone of all child rearing
- The most important principle of child rearing (whether your own biological children or children in your care) is to **provide the best for the individual child** by meeting his needs. This means **listening** to the child and getting to know him as an individual.

CHILDREN LEARN WHAT THEY LIVE

Dorothy Law Nolte

*If a child lives with criticism,
he learns to condemn.
If a child lives with hostility,
he learns to fight.
If a child lives with fear,
he learns to be apprehensive.
If a child lives with pity,
he learns to feel sorry for himself.
If a child lives with ridicule,
he learns to be shy.
If a child lives with jealousy,
he learns what envy is.
If a child lives with shame,
he learns to feel guilty.
If a child lives with encouragement,
he learns to be confident.
If a child lives with tolerance,
he learns to be patient.
If a child lives with praise,
he learns to be appreciative.
If a child lives with acceptance,
he learns to love.
If a child lives with approval,
he learns to like himself.
If a child lives with recognition,
he learns that it is good to have a goal.
If a child lives with sharing,
he learns about generosity.
If a child lives with honesty and fairness,
he learns what truth and justice are.
If a child lives with security,
he learns to have faith in himself and in those about him.
If a child lives with friendliness,
he learns that the world is a nice place in which to live.
If you live with serenity,
your child will live with peace of mind.
With what is your child living?*

Case study³⁶

Understanding child development changed the way these two child-care workers work, by giving them new perspectives and confidence:

Martha

Martha was aware that much stigma and ignorance surrounds children with disability in her community, however her eyes were opened far more once she learnt more about child development and in particular about the needs of disabled children. After training in this area, Martha was visiting a village which was deep within the community. While walking, she saw a mentally disabled child tied to a tree by his grandparents. The child was naked.

Before learning about the needs of children, Martha would not have had the courage to talk to the grandparents about this. With her new knowledge, she knew that a child should not be treated in this way. She went to the house and started talking to the grandparents, advising them that it was not good to tie the child to the tree. They said that they found it hard to manage him and that he would take off his clothes because of his disability and they could not control this.

After talking to them, Martha went to the town and had clothes made for the child which fastened at the back – so he was not able to take them off. She also went back to the family and counselled them about how they could care for the child. Martha made several visits back to the family and worked with the child's grandparents on how to interact with the child in their care and how to understand his needs, enabling him to progress developmentally. The child still lives with his grandparents, but he is no longer tied up and neglected, but instead is seen as an important member of the family with a contribution to make.

Christine

Christine is a primary school teacher in Uganda. Before learning about child development, Christine had not realised that children could be involved in decision making. However when the headmistress at her school started to talk about designing new school uniforms, Christine decided to advocate that the teaching staff should listen to the views of the children about what colour the uniforms should be and what they should look like.

As a result, the children were involved in designing the uniforms, and their views, which were practical and helpful, were taken into account in the production of the uniform. The children preferred a cheerful, bright colour, which Christine new was also helpful for their mental stimulation. The children now wear the school uniform with a sense of pride, knowing that they were involved and consulted about its design.

³⁶ Names have been changed.

Exercises

Fill in the gaps in the summary of the lesson:

Development is a process by which people become more _____ and _____. It involves change in the _____, _____, _____, _____ and _____ dimensions. Child development lays a _____ for the rest of life. We can keep track of a child's development by paying attention to _____. A _____ in reaching milestones could be a sign of a developmental problem. Some important principles to keep in mind are that every child needs _____ love. Every child needs _____ that meets his _____, this means _____ to the child and getting to know him. Children learn on the basis of what they _____.

Discussion questions

1. Why is it important for parents and child-care workers to understand and promote healthy child development?
2. What are developmental milestones? Why are they helpful?
3. How can you monitor the development of children in your care in all 5 areas of growth? Can you suggest helpful tools or approaches?
4. Look at the poem by Dorothy Law Nolte. What principles of child-rearing does it teach?
5. Can you give any examples (from your own experience as an adult or a child) of how experiences in childhood affect attitudes and behaviour in later life?

Lesson 10: What are key issues for healthy development in infants and young children?

Summary

- Optimal conditions for development
- Risks

What are optimal conditions for development?

1. Relationships

The intelligence and healthy emotional development of the child seems to depend very much on the quality of the relationship between the child and his caretakers. This is true from the earliest days onwards.

- Caretakers need to be involved in the child's life. This includes showing the child emotional warmth and affection.
- Being involved also includes being sensitive to the child, knowing and understanding him, and responding to his needs in an adequate way.
- Cognitive capacities in the child are best developed in the context of an enduring and supportive relationship between the child and his caregivers.
- Caretakers should talk to and with the child. They should interact with him from birth, including smiling, talking, and loving eye contact.
- A child needs physical touch, holding, and soothing, in order to develop the ability to trust others in his environment, and to develop the ability to regulate his own emotions.

Although children are able to feel, express and understand a wide range of emotions from their early days, it is not until they are between the ages of 2 and 5 that they gradually learn how to manage their feelings. For example, a toddler may get mad and have a tantrum if a toy is taken away. As the child matures emotionally, he or she will learn to express anger in other ways.

A child learns emotional regulation in the context of a secure and loving relationship with a parent or caregiver. Young children over 2 years begin to develop moral emotions and to feel ashamed or guilty when they do something wrong. When bad things happen, young children may feel responsible for no logical reason. It is important for caregivers to be curious and accepting of a child's feelings, and to reassure a child by showing affection and love in addition to talking about feelings.

2. Stimulation

Children are born with very good capacities to perceive what is going on in their environment, using their eyes, ears and other senses. Infants learn and develop fast with stimulation, but they easily get bored with what they already know and crave new situations and things. To develop adequately, they need stimulation:

- The physical environment must be satisfying and a child needs to receive varied stimulation every day.

- The child should have play materials available, at least from 6 months of age and onwards.
- Young children particularly love colourful toys, to investigate them, to touch them and to see them move.

3. Play

Children learn by playing, not only motor coordination, but they will also generally and gradually become more competent, by learning from their experiences of exploring, adapting to and controlling their environment. Play has many benefits for physical, social, emotional and cognitive development. To stimulate development, children need play materials that encourage learning, such as blocks, shapes, and puzzles.

4. Exploration and mastery

Children love to explore their world. This curiosity is the basis for learning, now and throughout their lives. Children who have many chances to explore also develop a healthy sense of competence as they master new skills and solve problems on their own. For example, young children often feel proud of wiping up their own spills.

Children need ample opportunity to explore their environments and the natural world. Exploration in a safe context enables a child to learn about the world, and also to master skills in interacting with the context. It is important to engage with children during activities. Carers should praise the child's effort and not worry about the result or outcomes of projects. Give the child a variety of different things to play with, from games to building toys to puzzles and books. Other possibilities for exploring include the arts and reading books.³⁷

What are some of the main risks to healthy development?

During infancy, **brain structures** that will influence personality traits, intelligence, learning, coping with stress and other vital processes are being set in place. These physical structures are influenced by negative environmental conditions, including lack of stimulation, child abuse, or violence within the family. It is known that emotional and cognitive disruptions in the early lives of children have the potential to impair brain development.

Infants vary in **temperament**. Some infants are easy to handle while others are more challenging. For example, some children cry easily, are difficult to comfort and are very active while others are quiet, content and sleep much of the time. These differences may influence the care that they receive: infants with a difficult temperament are more likely to be treated harshly. If parents perceive their infant as difficult, they will be more likely to maltreat the child later on. However, for them to develop appropriately and without major behavioural problems, it is important to meet them with understanding, patience and consistency.

Newborn babies have very weak neck muscles that are not yet able to support their heads. If you **shake** a baby you can damage his brain and delay normal development. It is important that you never shake a newborn baby.

³⁷ <http://www.webmd.com/hw-popup/encourage-your-preschooler-to-explore>

It is important to make sure that the child's **environment is safe** so that they can enjoy exploring without too many risks. It is also important that a caregiver understands that a child will not understand risks, and will not intentionally put himself in danger. Children are often punished for making mistakes when they had no understanding of the harmful consequences.

Case Study³⁸

PEPE is a community based pre-school education programme, run by local Christian churches, with training and curriculum support from the PEPE-Network. They originated in Brazil but now operate in various different countries in South America and Africa. They benefit children from deprived communities who would otherwise not be able to afford pre-school education, and would therefore find it very difficult to enter the local education system with any chance of success.

The first PEPE began to meet the needs of preschool-aged children in one of the *favelas* (slums) of São Paulo, Brazil. Without books in their shacks, with parents often unable to read or write, with little sense of discipline or structure to their day, few social skills and little opportunity to develop fine motor coordination skills by participating in artistic activities at home, these children would have a hard time when they started school alongside more advantaged children.

The first PEPE class began in 1992 and had a big impact on the community and the church. PEPE soon became a model that other churches wanted to adopt. By 2006, over 6,000 children were in PEPEs in more than 11 different countries.

PEPE's founder explains that preschool input is so important for deprived children because:

- It intervenes in children's life experience at a moment when God has made them keen to learn
- Their world is defined primarily by the home and extended family, which are God's special provision for a child's development
- There is still relatively little negative peer group pressure
- The slum community is most sensitive to its God-ordained communal responsibility for its young and vulnerable members
- Preschool occurs before the child has been psychologically hindered by being wrongfully labelled as a 'failure' in society's first great testing system, school
- Families can experience contact with kingdom values through the active involvement of the local church in preschool programmes

The benefits for the children are educational, physical, psychological, social and spiritual.

³⁸ From http://www.pepe-network.org/english/Pepe_articles/basicinformation.html and Christine, (2007).

PEPE programme

Children enrolled on the Programme benefit from two years pre-school education (the two years before they go to school), usually when they are 4 and 5 years old. PEPEs run from Monday to Friday, either in the morning or in the afternoon. Each session lasts for approximately 3 hours.

PEPE's curriculum is based on the National Curriculum adopted in each country. All the activities are developed in an integrated way. They include: Language, Nature and Society, Music, Visual Arts, Religious Education, Movement and Mathematics.

Exercises

Fill in the gaps in the summary of the lesson:

The quality of _____ between a child and his caretakers seems to be very important for his _____ and healthy _____ development. A child learns _____ in the context of a secure and loving relationship with a parent or caregiver. It is important for a caregiver to _____ a child's feelings and to _____ a child by showing affection and love. For adequate cognitive development, children need _____. They get easily _____ with what they already know. Children learn through _____. Play has many other _____ for physical, social and emotional development. Children also need ample opportunity to _____ their environments and the natural world in a _____ context.

Some risks to infants and young children include _____ and an _____ environment. Infants with a difficult _____ are more likely to be treated harshly. Because brain structures are set in place during infancy, negative environmental conditions like lack of _____, _____ and _____ in the family can impair brain development.

Discussion questions

1. Explain why relationships are so important for healthy child development. What are essential features of good relationships for the young child?
2. In what situations could children fail to receive adequate affection and emotional warmth from committed caregivers? How can you, your church or organisation support these children and educate/support their carers?
3. How do ensure that children in your care are receiving adequate stimulation for their cognitive development?
4. Why is play important? Do all children in your context have opportunities for play?
5. How safe an environment does your home, church, organisation and community provide for children to explore and try out new skills? How could it be made safer?
6. Are there any changes that your church or organisation could make to promote children's development more effectively?

Lesson 11: What is the importance of attachment relationships for children's development?

Summary

- Attachment
- Implications

For normal emotional and psychological development, babies need a primary caregiver who responds quickly, consistently and lovingly to their demands, so they learn that their needs for food, clean nappies, pain relief, etc. will be met. This allows them to develop trust and attachment. Babies need to feel that their world is safe and secure. The baby has an internal cycle of need-rage-relief-trust, which needs to be completed hundreds and hundreds of times.³⁹ Babies also need a one-on-one interaction with a caring individual who will cuddle, play interactive games, sing and talk to them. They need to be touched, to receive and give smiles, and to get lots of eye contact from a loving caregiver. This consistent, constant, warm and often playful interaction with the caregiver is how a baby learns to receive and to give love. Successful attachment is also essential for the child's development of self-esteem and self-worth.⁴⁰

How attachment develops

The most well-known study of attachment formation was provided by a child psychiatrist called John Bowlby. He explained that the infant is born with the capacity to send out signals which adults are biologically predisposed to respond to. For example, when a baby cries, his parents, by nature, want to comfort him. The adults become attachment figures for the child.

Usually a child has several attachment figures, for example parents, siblings and grandparents. People not related to the child can be attachment figures for him, for example caretakers in a day-care centre or in an orphanage. It is crucial for a child to have at least one stable attachment figure, usually his mother.

The period from about 6-7 months to 24-30 months of age is when true attachment behaviour emerges. The infant has a strong preference for being close to his primary carer, usually his mother and protests when she leaves. When she is present, a securely-attached child will enjoy exploring his environment. From the beginning of the third year of life, there is a further development in the attachment relationship. Children start to understand that their parents also have certain wishes and needs and sometimes must give priority to other activities than the child's needs or wishes.

Attachment and infants' interactions with new people

Having a secure attachment relationship is necessary for developing social skills and self-confidence. Young children who feel confident in their caretakers enjoy exploring things. On the other hand, children who have less secure attachments explore less and worry more than their peers. Children who have experienced consistency and care from attachment figures will tend to form trusting relationships in the future. It will be much easier for a secure child with loving and caring parents to get well along with new people than for an insecure child.

³⁹ Attach China. <http://www.attach-china.org/>

⁴⁰ See also http://www.essex.ac.uk/armedcon/unit/projects/wwbc_guide/wwbc.chapter.1.english.pdf

Risks

Babies raised in institutions such as orphanages are at risk of attachment disorders. Often orphanages cannot provide the necessary level of one-on-one care. Babies are left for long hours alone in their cribs. With a ratio of one caregiver to perhaps ten or twenty babies she cannot attend to each infant when the baby cries from hunger, pain, discomfort or for attention. When she does not respond to crying, the babies never learn to trust that their demands will be met. Nor do they get the cuddling, baby games, baby talk, and other playful interaction they need. As a result, babies may give up trying to get their needs met, and feel only the emotions of rage, helplessness, fear and shame, never developing the trust and the sense that the world is safe and secure essential for successful attachment. Consequences for post-institutionalised children can be an inability to give and receive love, failure to develop the ability to form successful relationships, or accept responsibility for actions. They are typically angry, oppositional, defiant and do not trust others.

Abused and neglected children are also at great risk for not forming healthy attachments to anyone, which leads to problems in later life. A lack of reliable and affectionate attachment figures will lead to mistrust and insecurity in a child, and a host of possible emotional and behavioural problems.

Having at least one adult who is devoted to and loves a child unconditionally, who is prepared to accept and value that child for a long time is key to helping a child overcome the stress and trauma of abuse, abandonment and neglect.

Case Study⁴¹

Maria tells her six-year-old daughter, Faith, to pick up the napkin Faith has dropped. As Faith crosses her arms a sad and angry pout darkens her face. Maria says, "Faith, I told you to pick up the napkin and throw it away." Faith stomps over to the napkin, picks it up, and throws it away. Crying and whining, Faith stands with her back to Maria.

Faith was born to a teenage mother who was unable to care for her daughter. In the first few months, Faith's mother would leave her with different friends in the neighbourhood whenever she went out to work sometimes during the day time and sometimes at night. When Faith was 18 months old, her mother decided to follow a new boyfriend to the capital city to find better work. There was no way she could take Faith with her and she ended up in the care of an orphanage until she was adopted by Maria and her family about a year ago.

Faith, angry and unhappy, is exhibiting one of the subtle signs of attachment sensitivity that nearly all children adopted after six-months demonstrate.

Because of her mother's inconsistent care of her, Faith did not learn to trust and feel secure that her needs would be met. She experienced the trauma of abandonment and later, had to make another huge and frightening adjustment when she was adopted into her new family. These moves and disruptions are known to have profound effects on a child's emotional, interpersonal, cognitive, and behavioural development. Some of the signs you can see in Faith that she has attachment issues are avoiding comfort when her feelings are hurt, and finding it difficult to discuss angry or hurt feelings. She doesn't sleep well at night and she gets anxious about changes.

As Faith walks away to pout, Maria comes up behind her, scoops her up, and begins rocking her gently while crooning in Faith's ear. Maria sings songs and tells Faith she loves her and understands Faith is angry at being told what to do. Maria expresses sadness that Faith is so unhappy. At first Faith resists a bit, but she soon calms down and listens as Maria tells her how much she loves Faith. Faith is sensitive to feelings of rejection and abandonment that are evoked by her mother's displeasure, so Maria brings Faith closer to reassure her without words.

Maria is an experienced parent and she understands about Faith's issues with attachment. She needs all her parenting skill to provide a healing and protective way to correct Faith and help her to form a new, secure attachment with her new family.

Finally, Faith did what she was asked to do and praised for doing what was expected. In this manner, Faith experiences acceptance of who she is while becoming used to being part of the family.

⁴¹ Adapted from Becker-Weidman.

Exercises

Fill in the gaps in the summary of the lesson:

Babies need a primary care giver who responds _____, _____ and _____ to their demands for normal _____ and _____ development. This allows them to develop _____ and _____. Babies also need _____-_____-_____ interaction with a caring individual who will cuddle, play interactive games, sing and talk to them. Successful attachment is also essential for the child's development of _____-_____ and _____-_____. Usually a child has several attachment figures, for example parents, siblings and grandparents. It is crucial for a child to have _____ stable attachment figure, usually his _____.

Babies raised in institutions such as _____ are at risk of attachment disorders. Often orphanages cannot provide the necessary level of one-on-one care. Babies may _____ trying to get their needs met, and feel only the emotions of _____, _____, _____ and _____, never developing the _____ and the sense that the world is _____ essential for successful attachment. Consequences for post-institutionalised children can be an inability to give and receive _____, failure to develop the ability to form successful _____, or accept _____ for actions. Having at least one adult who is _____ and loves a child _____, who is prepared to accept and value that child for a _____ is key to helping a child overcome the stress and trauma of abuse, abandonment and neglect.

Discussion questions

1. What do babies need from their care-givers? Why is this so important?
2. What are the consequences if a baby is neglected and left to cry a lot?
3. What is attachment? What examples of attachment behaviour can you identify in young children that you know?
4. What sorts of children could be at risk of attachment disorders? What signs would you look for?
5. What implications does an understanding of attachment have for the way you interact with young children? Are there any changes you would like to introduce in your work, church or family?

Lesson 12: What are challenges of later childhood and adolescence?

Summary

- Self-esteem
- Peers
- Key areas of development for adolescents

What are important areas for healthy development?

1. Self-esteem

Self-esteem is the core belief a child will develop about herself. Healthy self-esteem helps a child to act responsibly, cooperate well with others, deal with difficulties, and have the confidence to try new things. Children of school age strive to 'fit in' at home, at school, and with their friends. Feeling successful in these areas builds children's self-confidence and self-concept, which helps them to manage and overcome future challenges.

Parents are usually the most significant influences on a child's self-esteem. It is important to promote a child's healthy self-esteem by initiating a cycle of belonging, learning, and contributing. A sense of belonging helps a child to participate in learning new things; learning makes a child feel confident in making contributions; making contributions helps secure a feeling of belonging.

Unhealthy self-esteem causes problems throughout life. Difficulties with other people, lack of confidence and possible mental health problems are some of the possible consequences of low self-esteem.

School issues are also important for good self-esteem. Poor concentration and memory problems, learning disabilities, worry and fear can affect school performance. Interruption of schooling or anxiety about school can also lead to poor performance and being labelled as a failure. This is very damaging for a child's self-esteem.

2. Peer relationships

From the age of around 6, friendship becomes increasingly important for children. By the time they reach adolescence, young people become more independent of their families, and friends often become important as a source of support and advice. This can be hard for parents to accept and can be a source of conflict. It is important for parents to stay involved with their adolescent children, and to continue to provide guidance and support during this time of development.

Peer issues to watch out for include bullying of other children and victimization by other children, isolation from peers leading to loneliness, joining gangs or negative groups of peers, engaging in risky or illegal behaviour, and substance abuse.

What are major challenges for adolescents?

Adolescence is a challenging and at times difficult period in most cultures. The best protection against distorted development during this phase is the good example, love, attention, acceptance and support of parents and other caregivers, and mentoring and guiding relationships with adults.

The adolescent is faced by a lot of changes that she needs to adapt to and integrate into her life in order to become one complete and balanced person. It is important for the adolescent to have the support and encouragement of adults in these essential life tasks.

These are the most important tasks⁴²:

1. Develop a satisfactory and realistic body image. For the adolescent it is important to communicate who she is through his choice of clothes, hair style and so on.
2. Develop increased independence from parents and adequate capacities for self-care. The adolescent will loosen dependence on parents, which sometimes involves conflicts. A gradual increase of responsibility prepares the young person for adult life.
3. Develop satisfying relationships outside the family. The adolescent will increasingly turn to peers for friendship, advice, support and intimacy.
4. Develop appropriate control over increased sexual interests. Falling in love is an important part of being an adolescent.
5. Develop a sense of identity. This is a complicated task that continues into adulthood. Some of the things the adolescent has to do are to develop a personal moral code, make plans for the future regarding vocation, and find out who she is and how she wants to relate to family, friends and other people.

Encouraging healthy development in adolescents

Some ways to promote healthy development⁴³:

Encourage mature thinking. Talk about current issues together.

Talk about sex and other adult issues in an open and natural way. Make this an ongoing conversation. It is best to begin this discussion before puberty so the child knows what to expect.

Talk about body image and self worth.

Talk with teenagers about drugs and alcohol.

Be ready to address a teen's concerns and problems by brainstorming different ways to solve problems, and discussing their possible outcomes.

Encourage community involvement (e.g. volunteering).

Good role models are essential.

Providing support and encouragement for parents of children of all ages is very important and a powerful way to promote healthy development for children. It is particularly important during the teenage years, where relationships often become more turbulent and the challenges facing parents and their teenage children can be significant.

⁴² Sanne, (2007).

⁴³ <http://children.webmd.com/tc/growth-and-development-ages-11-to-14-years-promoting-healthy-growth-and-development>

Case Study

Generation of Leaders Discovered (GOLD) Peer Education⁴⁴

GOLD is a Christ-centred programme established to respond pro-actively to the HIV crisis in Sub-Saharan Africa. Its peer education methodology builds on the influence that young people have with their peers in order to encourage youth to make informed choices and develop health-enhancing social norms. The vision of GOLD is to see a generation of young African leaders confronting the root issues of the AIDS and HIV pandemic, through uplifting their communities and imparting vision and purpose to present and future generations.

At the heart of the GOLD model is the belief that the message-giver is the strongest message. Adolescent peer educators are equipped and supported by skilled facilitators to fulfil the following four roles at varying levels of responsibility for both their peers and younger children.

- Role-modelling: Role-model health-enhancing behaviour;
- Education: Educate their peers in a structured manner;
- Recognition and Referral: Recognise youth in need of additional help and refer them for assistance;
- Community Upliftment: Advocating for resources and services for themselves and their peers; acts of service; and raising awareness of important issues affecting youth

Here are two stories of peer educators who have turned their lives around and are role-modelling positive behaviour change to their peers.

Thandi is a peer educator in a community where many of her peers are orphans. Orphans are exempt from paying school fees, but they have to prove their orphan status by providing a lot of documentation. Many of the orphans leave school as it is so difficult to get all the documentation. Thandi went around to all her orphaned peers to help them gather the documentation they needed to become exempt from paying school fees. Some of these children had already dropped out of school. As a result of her efforts to help her peers, her orphaned peers are back at school.

Lungile is a Senior Peer Educator and was part of a group of peer educators who did a lesson delivery about substance abuse during a school assembly. Afterwards, one of the learners approached her to tell her that he had a drug problem. At first Lungile thought the guy was kidding and she was afraid that he was offended that they were addressing the drug issue. After a while, she realised that he was serious. They chatted and she referred him to the rehab centre. She was so proud that the presentation could make such a difference to the learners.

GOLD Peer Education is about

- Unleashing the potential of young people to transform their lives and their communities. It's about restoring dignity, hope and vision.
- Young people realising their value and being empowered to make informed decisions about the challenges they face. It is about equipping influential young people to impact their peers through positive peer pressure.
- Transforming communities, one person at a time through teenagers.

⁴⁴ From <http://www.goldpe.org.za/index.php>

Exercises

Fill in the gaps in the summary of the lesson:

_____ - _____ is the core belief a child will develop about herself. Healthy self-esteem helps a child to act _____, _____ well with others, deal with _____, and have the _____ to try new things. _____ are usually the most significant influences on a child's self-esteem. Unhealthy self-esteem causes _____ throughout life. From the age of around 6, _____ becomes increasingly important for children. By the time they reach adolescence, young people become more _____ of their families, and friends often become important as a source of support and advice. _____ is a challenging and at times difficult period in most cultures. The best protection against distorted development during this phase is the good example, love, attention, acceptance and support of parents and other caregivers, and _____ and _____ with adults. Providing _____ for parents of children of all ages is very important and a powerful way to promote healthy development for children. It is particularly important during the _____ years, where relationships often become more turbulent and the challenges facing parents and their teenage children can be significant.

Discussion questions

1. Think of a child you know who has low self-esteem. What steps could you take to improve his or her self-esteem? What are the signs of his or her low self-esteem?
2. In what ways can peer groups influence a child or young person positively / negatively?
3. How could the positive influence of young people on each other be harnessed within your family, community, church or organisation?
4. What are the biggest risks facing older children and teens in your context?
5. How can your church or organisation support parents of teenagers? What are key messages that they need to hear?
6. Are there any changes that your church or organisation could make to promote the development of older children and teens more effectively?

Part 4: Child rights

Introduction

The final part of the workbook offers a different and complementary perspective on children and childhood by exploring the important question of children's rights. The aim is to give Christians working with children a sound basis for engaging with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and for using their understanding as a platform for standing up for the rights of children when these are denied.

Lesson 13 introduces the idea of children's rights in general and the CRC in particular. Lesson 14 looks at some misunderstandings about the CRC that have caused some Christians to be unnecessarily wary of it. Finally, lesson 15 introduces advocacy as an appropriate Christian response to situations where children's rights are not upheld.

Lesson 13: What are children's rights?

Summary

- What is the UNCRC and why is it important?

Another important perspective on children and childhood is to recognise that all children everywhere – without discrimination – have the same basic rights. These rights are spelt out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

What is the CRC and why does it matter?

The CRC is the most influential, powerful and respected secular document that promotes the welfare of children. This convention was ratified in the 1980s by all but 2 nations in the world, which means that national governments have committed themselves to protecting and upholding the rights of children included in the document and have agreed to hold themselves accountable before the international community.

The UN-CRC spells out that all children everywhere – without discrimination – have a right to survival, an opportunity for full development, protection from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation, and a right to participate fully in family, cultural and social life.

There are a total of 54 articles that spell out social, political, economic and cultural rights of children. The basic provisions of the convention are in three different categories.⁴⁵

- Protection (protecting children from harm)
- Provision (providing what children need for survival, growth and development)
- Participation (rights to participate in decisions made on their behalf)

Guiding principles of the Convention⁴⁶

Definition of the child (Article 1)

The Convention defines a 'child' as a person below the age of 18, unless the laws of a particular country set the legal age for adulthood younger. States are encouraged to review the age of majority if it is set below 18 and to increase the level of protection for all children under 18.

Non-discrimination (Article 2)

The Convention applies to all children, whatever their race, religion or abilities; whatever they think or say, whatever type of family they come from. It doesn't matter where children live, what language they speak, what their parents do, whether they are boys or girls, what their culture is, whether they have a disability or whether they are rich or poor. No child should be treated unfairly on any basis.

Best interests of the child (Article 3)

The best interests of children must be the primary concern in making decisions that may affect them. All adults should do what is best for children. When adults make decisions, they should think about how their decisions will affect children. This particularly applies to budget, policy and law makers.

Right to life, survival and development (Article 6)

Children have the right to live. Governments should ensure that children survive and develop healthily.

⁴⁵ Brewster (2008), 160-61.

⁴⁶ <http://www.crin.org/resources/treaties/CRC.asp?catName=International+Treaties&flag=legal&ID=6>

Respect for the views of the child (Article 12)

When adults are making decisions that affect children, children have the right to say what they think should happen and have their opinions taken into account.

Your own country will have its own Children's Act or other laws explaining what the rights of children are and how they will be upheld. You should make sure that you know what they are in your context.

Although some Christians have concerns about certain aspects of the CRC (as we will see in the next lesson), there is no doubt that it is a valuable tool for Christians and churches. It is a helpful framework for:

- Raising awareness
- Taking action
- Holding governments accountable to do their part (advocacy)⁴⁷

The CRC is for children!

Of course, the CRC is not just for adults. It is important to educate children about their rights and help them to understand what they mean. For one source of child-friendly resources on the CRC have a look at <http://www.tagd.org.uk/BeInformed/Rights/UNCRC.aspx>.

⁴⁷ See lesson 15.

Case Study: Meena Manch (Girls' Club) prevents child marriage⁴⁸



Meena is a loveable cartoon character conceived and created by UNICEF. She is an intelligent and smart young girl whose stories primarily illustrate issues relating to children, and are told in an entertaining and humorous fashion. Meena is widely recognised and appreciated in most South Asian countries, and is a successful advocacy and teaching tool for girls' and children's rights. The Meena figure has achieved remarkable popularity as she tackles important issues affecting children, and the threats to the rights of millions of girls in South Asia.⁴⁹

Vaishali district, Bihar

The Meena Manch (Girls' Club) established in Islampur school of Goraul block in Vaishali district is unique. The first decision in the first meeting of the Meena Manch was to enrol all out-of-school children. One year later the Meena Manch has 68 members, who are bold and confident. Apart from meeting regularly, the members perform street drama on different Meena stories for community mobilization.

The Meena Manch is a forum of school girls inspired by the animation series "Meena", produced by UNICEF to promote the value and rights of the girl child. Manches (Clubs) are set up in upper primary schools, and their activities include ensuring that girls enrol in school at the right age, attend school regularly, and complete primary education. They also help build awareness on issues related to education, health and nutrition, and water and sanitation at the community level.

Kanchan Kumari, Meena Manch leader narrated the story of how the Meena Manch members prevented child marriage of their 12 year-old friend Anju Kumari.

When Anju's school attendance became irregular, the Meena Manch members visited her house and learned about her impending marriage. Anju was very upset. Meena Manch members discussed the problem with her father. They explained to him that marriage before 18 years is a crime and early marriage will cause damage to her health. Her father agreed to delay the marriage but two months later he revived the proposal once again. On hearing this, the Meena Manch members and mothers of all Meena Manch members sat in front of Anju's house till her father promised to postpone her marriage until she completed 18 years.

12 year-old Ruby Kumari says that Meena Manch has taught her many good things. Earlier she was afraid to ask questions but now she is confident and can ask questions like Meena does in the stories.

Anju Kumari is shy but confident. Giggling she said that when her father had decided to get her married, she was unhappy because she wanted to study. When Meena Manch members approached her father, she gained the courage to speak and persuade him to delay her marriage. She is happy that she is back in school.

⁴⁸ http://www.unicef.org/india/children_corner_4118.htm

⁴⁹ For example, http://www.unicef.org/india/Rosa_meena_Let_us_go_to_school_together.pdf

Exercises

Fill in the gaps in the summary of the lesson:

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child recognises that _____ – without discrimination – have a right to _____, an _____ for full development, _____ from harmful influences, _____ and _____, and a right to _____ in family, cultural and social life. The CRC is the most influential, powerful and respected _____ that promotes the _____ of children. The basic provisions of the convention are in three different categories: _____, _____ and _____. The CRC is a valuable tool for _____ and _____. It is a helpful framework for: raising _____, taking _____ and holding governments accountable to do their part (_____).

Discussion questions

1. Do children need special rights?
2. What impact has the UN-CRC had on the laws of your country?
3. Do you think that your government effectively upholds the rights of children or are there gaps between legislation and reality? What are they?
4. Does the CRC influence the way your organisation or church views children and works with them? How could it help you be more effective?
5. Are the children you work with aware of their rights? How could you communicate with them about their rights? Would you have any concerns about doing so?
6. Which of their rights are children denied in your context? What about in your church or organisation?

Exercise

- Read the whole convention for yourself.
- Reflect on the different aspects of your work with children and see which of the rights of children they help to promote.

Lesson 14: What is a Christian perspective on child rights?

Summary

- What concerns do Christians have about the CRC?
- Is the CRC compatible with the Bible?

'The CRC features prominently in the majority of secular programs caring for children. Given this pervasiveness and given our commitment to encourage better care for children everywhere and at all times, Christian practitioners seeking to be well informed in the global arena of childcare and protection must be very familiar with the CRC.' Dan Brewster⁵⁰

As we saw last lesson, the CRC is a very useful tool for anyone who is working with children. In this lesson we will explore some questions about the CRC that help us understand it better and engage with it as Christians.

Do children need special rights?

Children need special rights because they are especially vulnerable and therefore require extra protection as well as special provision so that they can live and grow. Because they are children, they have no voting rights or status and are therefore much more vulnerable to exploitation and violence.

Some myths about the CRC

People have raised some concerns about the CRC that need to be thought through. Here are 4 principle myths that have concerned Christians.

Myth 1: The Bible doesn't talk about human rights. The idea is secular and self-centred.

The Bible actually provides a solid foundation for understanding rights: as the UGHFC framework says, 'God creates every unique person as a child with dignity.' This is the reason for making sure that all children are protected, provided for and able to participate.

A biblical view shows us that for God, people have rights because God holds us accountable to him for other people. So children's rights are not just something to demand and enforce, but something that adults have a serious responsibility to God to uphold. Look at Psalm 82:3, Proverbs 31:8 and Isaiah 10:1-2 for examples.

Myth 2: The CRC is anti-family and gives away too many parental rights to the State. It encourages children to rebel against their parents.

In fact, the Convention is careful to state that parents' responsibility for their children comes before the State. The Convention is strongly supportive of families. However, there are exceptional times when children need to be protected when the family is not working in their best interest and the State then takes responsibility for their welfare.

⁵⁰ Brewster (2008), 165.

The CRC does not mean that children can now tell their parents what to do. This Convention encourages adults to listen to the opinions of children and involve them in decision-making – it does not give children authority over adults. Obviously the Bible teaches that both parents and children have mutual responsibilities.

Myth 3: The CRC gives children responsibilities that they are not yet ready for. This could harm them.

The Convention recognises that the level of a child's participation in decisions must be appropriate to the child's level of maturity. Children's ability to form and express their opinions develops with age and most adults will naturally give the views of teenagers greater weight than those of a preschooler, whether in family, legal or administrative decisions.

Myth 4: Children's rights are not appropriate for some cultural settings, especially in Asia

Anyone seeking to implement the CRC must respect the culture of each family structure. It must be contextualized in each situation. At the same time the CRC must be taken seriously so that harmful cultural practices do not continue. There are also times when traditional structures are broken and the child loses his or her protection. The CRC then rises above the culture of the child to speak on his or her behalf.

What next?

These issues are important ones for Christians to think through and many Christians have found that virtually all of the articles in the CRC will find scriptural support.⁵¹ It is very important for Christians to know and understand the CRC so that we can engage with secular programmes caring for children and further our commitment to ensure better care for children everywhere at all times.

⁵¹ See Brewster (2008).

Case Study

In Cochabamba, Bolivia, Christians working with children at risk have been active in getting involved in debates on how to promote the rights of children at a time of major political change and upheaval in the country. A new constitution has been adopted that gives more regional autonomy. This constitution has identified children as a priority.

In October 2009, the first *Regional Public Policy Forum on Children and Youth* took place in Cochabamba with the participation of various different networks, including Viva Network Cochabamba (a network of Christian organisations and churches working with children at risk). The forum has been a space for analysing and reflecting on proposals related to the major changes in Bolivia's governance and public policies on children and youth.

Around 90 organisations (Christian and secular) concerned about children, youth and families got together to come up with joint proposals aimed at more holistic protection of children through the law. The organisations working together all saw that at this time there was a huge opportunity to make proposals that can really benefit children and youth. Some ideas included:

- Design of a family follow-up system that would allow early identification of high-risk families with the aim of avoiding abandonment, violence and mistreatment of children; that would help avoid family break-down and consequent street-life
- Design of models for values-based family care that promote holistic development and emotional stability of children
- Promotion of programmes aimed at reducing violence as a way of raising children, and promoting an up-bringing based on love and respect

The Christian projects involved in Viva Network Cochabamba saw this as a very special opportunity to get their voice heard, both in contributing to ideas for collaborations and seeking to give a Christian perspective on the ideas being raised. In this way they were able to share God's dream for the children and youth of Bolivia.

At the end of the forum, Viva Network Cochabamba got together with World Vision and organised its own discussions on public policy together. The idea was to look in detail at the suggestions from the main regional forum, and to generate more concrete proposals as a network from a Christian perspective, but that also take account of the legal framework of the new constitution. These proposals will now be promoted in all the different settings where Viva Network Cochabamba is active, especially with local and national authorities. The prayer of the network is that God will bless this first step towards greater public awareness and better policies for children and youth in Bolivia.

Exercises

Fill in the gaps in the summary of the lesson:

Children need special rights because they are especially _____ and therefore require extra _____ as well as special _____ so that they can live and grow. Because they are children, they have no _____ or _____ and are therefore much more vulnerable to exploitation and violence. Some Christians have been concerned that the Bible does not talk about human _____, that the CRC is anti-_____, that it gives children _____ they are not ready for, and that it is not _____ for some settings. However, these myths can be answered. Many Christians have found that virtually all of the articles in the CRC will find _____ support. It is very important for Christians to _____ and _____ the CRC so that we can engage with secular programmes caring for children and further our commitment to ensure _____ for children everywhere at all times.

Discussion questions

1. Do you agree that it is important for Christians to be aware of children's rights and able to engage with the CRC? Explain your answer.
2. Which of the myths about the CRC have you come across? Do any of them concern you now? Do you feel able to answer concerns about the CRC in a way that is consistent with what the Bible teaches?
3. How can we get the right balance between rights and responsibilities of children and adults and of families and the State? Make sure that you refer to the Bible and to the CRC in your answer.
4. In what sorts of situations would it be useful for you, your church or organization to be able to refer to the rights of children as set out in the CRC?

Lesson 15: What can the church do when the rights of children are not respected?⁵²

Summary

- God's concern for justice and the church's responsibility
- Introduction to advocacy: what, why and how

The CRC places official obligations on governments, parents, caregivers, others who represent society, and even on children themselves. These rights are all matters of 'basic needs' that society has a duty to provide, through provision of access and resources, and in conjunction with families. The Bible also makes it clear that this responsibility of society towards children is God-given.

When society fails to protect these rights, a challenge arises for the church. Promoting the rights of children is in many ways an expression of the mission of the church. God calls the church to stand in the gap. When children are failed by society, their communities and families, the church must speak and act with, and on, their behalf. (Take a look at Proverbs 31:8-9, Psalm 103:6, 140:12, Proverbs 31:8-9, Isaiah 1:17, 42:3-4, 58:6-7, 61:8, Ezekiel 22:28-30, Amos 5:23-24, Micah 6:8, Zechariah 7:8-10, Luke 10:25-37, 11:42, 18:1-8 and James 2:1-26 for starters.)

On the whole the church is very good at 'acting' and this is demonstrated many times over by the projects run by Christians who are simply responding to the needs they find on their doorsteps. The harder challenge for the church is 'speaking'.

What?

Speaking and acting on behalf of others who are vulnerable and oppressed is often referred to as 'advocacy'. Advocacy literally means speaking or pleading with, or on behalf of, another to bring about justice and to challenge the causes of injustice.

Some other explanations of advocacy include:

- Pleading for, defending or recommending an idea before other people
- Speaking up, drawing a community's attention to an important issue, and directing decision makers toward a solution
- Putting a problem on the agenda, providing a solution to that problem and building support for acting on both the problem and the solution
- Taking organised actions in order to influence decision makers
- An action directed at changing the policies, positions or programs of any type of institution

"Advocacy means standing up for others – often at our own expense. It is based on the fact that people have inherent worth and that God is just and righteous."⁵³

⁵² This lesson is based on Watson, (2007).

⁵³ Miles, (2003c), 93.

Why?

The main reason is the biblical mandate for advocacy. God is a God of justice and he wants to use his people to bring about justice. The Bible contains many examples of ordinary people who God used as advocates – Abraham, Moses, Nehemiah, Esther and, of course, Jesus, the supreme example of an advocate, pleading with God on our behalf (see 1 John 2:1). And God can use you and me in the same way.

How?

Advocacy work varies in complexity and urgency, but the key stages are generally the same and include: identifying the problem, gathering accurate information, developing a strategy, determining goals and objectives, and deciding how these will be monitored and evaluated.

When it comes to taking action, there are many methods to choose from including campaigning, working in coalitions and alliances, lobbying, using the media, praying and sharing stories of successful advocacy.

Whatever methods we choose, they must build the capacity of those affected by the problem, so they can become agents of change in their own right. This is also true of children and their parents.⁵⁴

Which issues?

Regarding children at risk, there are many issues about which the church needs to find its voice – including exploitative and dangerous labour, sexual exploitation and trafficking, child soldiers, education, HIV and AIDS, malnutrition, war and conflict. The list could go on and different issues will be urgent in different places and at different times.

⁵⁴ See Tearfund's advocacy toolkit – Gordon (2002) <http://tilz.tearfund.org/Publications/ROOTS/Advocacy+toolkit.htm>

Case Study⁵⁵

Thailand

Almost 80% of the HIV infected women in the Siam Care project tried to get rid of their children's vaccination records because 'HIV positive' was stamped in big letters on the front page. This told anyone who saw the book that the mother was HIV positive. The mothers wanted their privacy respected and did not want health personnel to know about their HIV infection through reading their children's vaccination books. Unfortunately, when the books were destroyed, important vaccination, child development, and health records were lost.

In August 2000 Siam-Care, together with CAR (Centre for Aids Rights) organised a meeting with other NGOs working with HIV-infected women to find out whether the problem existed elsewhere. It did and the information was documented. Together the NGOs came up with a new design for vaccination books, which did not state whether the mother was HIV positive.

Siam-Care and CAR then organised a seminar for representatives of the Ministry of Public Health and presented the problem and possible layouts for new vaccination books. The Ministry of Public Health appointed a committee (including NGOs) to look at a new vaccination book. In March 2001 a new vaccination book was produced, leaving out the mother's HIV status.

By uniting with other NGOs and preparing the case in depth, with well-researched and good information, real life stories and case studies, Siam Care was able to ensure that changes were made, even with a slow-working ministerial department.

Rwanda

African Evangelistic Enterprise (AEE) works with orphans whose parents have died of AIDS and child-headed households in the Kibungo Region in the east of Rwanda. They have two associations that operate through a sewing workshop and a carpentry shop where children are trained and sell their goods. The Rwandan Revenue Authority (RRA) is responsible for collecting taxes and they asked the associations to pay (which they could not afford) or close down. AEE, as a partner of these associations, used its size and contacts to arrange a meeting with the Ministry of Social Affairs.

At the meeting they explained that those working in the associations are either orphans or members of child-headed households and should therefore be treated in a more charitable way and exempted from paying taxes. The ministry agreed and said that all partners of AEE should be exempt due to the development work they are doing.

⁵⁵ Gordon (2002).

Exercises

Fill in the gaps in the summary of the lesson:

The CRC places official _____ on governments, parents, caregivers, others who represent society, and even on _____ themselves. The Bible makes it clear that this responsibility of society towards children is ____ - _____. When society fails to protect these rights, God calls the church to _____. Speaking and acting on behalf of others who are _____ and _____ is often referred to as 'advocacy'. Advocacy literally means _____ or _____ with, or _____, another to bring about _____ and to challenge the _____ of injustice. The key stages of advocacy work are: identifying the _____, _____ accurate information, developing a _____, determining _____ and _____, and deciding how these will be monitored and evaluated. When it comes to taking action, there are many methods to choose from including campaigning, working in coalitions and alliances, lobbying, using the media, praying and _____ of successful advocacy.

Discussion questions

1. Explain what advocacy is and why it is something Christians should be involved in to someone who is sceptical about it.
2. What are the issues in your context where society is failing to protect the rights of children? How are the church and other Christian organisations 'standing in the gap'?
3. The lesson says that the Church tends to be good at 'acting' on behalf of children, but less good at 'speaking' on their behalf? Is this true in your context? Why do you think this is? How could the church improve in advocacy?
4. Read the story of three young men: Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (Daniel 1:3-17 and 3:8-30). What does this passage teach us about 'speaking out' (advocacy) in terms of: a) preparation and b) risks? How does this story relate to your context?
5. What examples of successful advocacy are you aware of? Share these examples with others and work out what factors made them successful.

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Further Resources

See the Appendix to Workbook 2

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