

Church of Sweden actalliance

Content of the Training session

Objectives of the session:

- To create the common understanding of children/teachers psychosocial needs in emergencies
- To point out and evaluate tools and approaches possibly used in schools of in Nepal to meet psychosocial needs of children
- To introduce the community based psychosocial support concept

Topics to be covered:

1. Community based psychosocial: What is this?
2. Psychosocial needs of children in emergencies; based on the child development stages
3. Psychological tools to express emotions: what are objectives, how to use, limitations, examples
4. Normal process of recovery: main stages, reactions, needed support
5. Referral cases: what are main signs for referral, different kind of mental health and psychological support

1. Community based psychosocial support¹

The Concept of Psychosocial Support

The concept of 'psychosocial support' is something that is relatively new. In the 1990s, mental health experts responding to emergencies in varying cultures realized that the medical model of individual needs is both impractical and harmful in emergencies. Most people in a given culture will cope with emergencies with little or no help from the outside if their community and family relationships can be supported.

This is Community-based Psychosocial Support

A community provides a physical environment and foundation for safety, living, work, education and health-service. But it also furnishes a social and psychological foundation for individuals and families. This function of the community becomes obvious in emergency situations.

¹ Source: Community Based Psychosocial support. Training manual. Church of Sweden/Act Alliance. http://actalliance.org/resources/policies-and-guidelines/psychosocial/CBPS_training_manual.pdf/view

Psychosocial support adds mental and social dimensions to the traditional concept of humanitarian aid. Our understanding of psychosocial support is built on the knowledge and awareness of the need to provide psychological and social support to people involved in disaster situations. To meet the needs of people during traumatic experiences, it is essential to create venues where people can meet and share experiences and spiritual life.

Psychosocial support is community based. It is not individual psychotherapy. This work is facilitated through the efforts of the affected population and by working with existing programs whenever possible. It is about helping communities to regain their connections, their voice, their wisdom and resources so that they can decide about their future. Through psychosocial support, communities determine their common goals so that they can care for their own people.

Using Appropriate Psychosocial Terms

It is commonplace for aid agencies, the media and advocacy networks to reflect on the psychological consequences of disasters as this assists them to communicate the overall human impact of the crisis to others. While it remains essential that such messages are not diluted, the ways we communicate these concerns to others, and the terminologies we use, can either help or hinder the dignity and respect of children, adults, families and communities affected by the disaster.

When communicating with non-specialists, terminology should be used in ways that are:

- Understandable and non-clinical.
- Normalising of common reactions to extremely challenging situations.
- Reflective and reinforcing of the ability of people to deal with and overcome difficult situations.
- Acknowledging and strengthening of existing social support mechanisms within families and communities.
- Reflective of the collective and structural nature of causes and responses to distress.
- Empowering and do not lead to stigmatisation of people in distress.

Choosing proper terms

Examples of recommended terms (✓)	Examples terms to be avoided (X)
Distress, anguish, tormented, or overwhelmed Psychological and social problems. Alternatives include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Emotional and social problems - Emotional and developmental problems (for children) - Can also add descriptions such as ‘severe or serious’ emotional and social problems 	Trauma

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Problems can also be replaced by similar words such as 'effects, difficulties, reactions' etc. □ <i>If possible, it is good to explain that most people will be extremely upset, but a small minority will have extreme reactions where they are unable to function</i> 	
Terrifying/life-threatening/horrific events / devastation	Traumatic events
Distress or stress □ Psychological and social effects of emergencies	Trauma
Reactions to difficult situations Signs of distress □ Problems	Symptoms
Distressed children or adults (with normal reactions to the emergency/disaster) Severely distressed children or adults (with extreme or severe reactions to the emergency)	Traumatized children or Traumatized adults
Mental illness or disorder Note: this should only be used for the minority of population with a confirmed mental disorder, not for □ the vast majority with normal reactions	Crazy/Mad
Structured activities, community social support etc Note: This refers to psychosocial supports provided by communities or focused non-specialized supports, not specialized services	Therapy/Counselling/Treatment
Survivors	Victims

Families and Communities Moderate the Effects of Disastrous Situations

People live in networks of people composed of families, communities and cultures. Families teach their children, protect their members and comfort and sustain each other. Their importance in the lives of people is paramount. Communities and cultures support the function of families through providing for common needs such as education. They organize the formation of new families through traditions of marriage, land ownership and economic systems. Families, communities and cultures are the means through which human relationships are organized.

When crises occur, it is the family that is the first resource for the affected population. The familiarity of family relationships provides great comfort in the face of danger. Children who remain within their families show fewer signs of stress and distress than children who are separated from their families. Families are better able to care for their elderly and disabled members than a program created by strangers.

Communities and cultures support the functioning of families in their midst. In

crises, it is the cultural understanding that helps persons make sense of the current events. Culture also provides a sense of belonging to a particular group, linking families and individual to a larger whole. There is a common language, history and beliefs. When all else is chaos, people know who they are and who are 'their people'.

Communities and culture bring people together to advocate for the needs of the people, providing a function that individuals cannot do themselves. Community leaders represent families and individuals to acquire needed help and supplies. Together, community members provide help for each other while families and markets and schools get reestablished. The very process of helping a neighbor heals some of the helplessness that is so common in disasters.

When Disasters Strike, Families and Communities Are Disrupted

Disasters wreck havoc in the lives of people. Normal family routines for income generation, childcare and support are not possible. Markets do not provide the supplies needed to continue daily life. Employment becomes disrupted. Community activities such as education, health care and protection for residents are not functioning.

At times, the problems are local such as flooding. Other times, the problems are elsewhere, but an influx of displaced people into the community disrupts the local community. Infrastructure such as roads, communication networks, hospitals, police and schools become overburdened or damaged, making them ineffective at serving the community members.

The community and family networks that provide support and care for people are disrupted and unable to function properly. Family members are separated, increasing fear and stress for all. The essential roles that people play in the family such as childcare or income producer are suddenly lost.

Extended family and neighbors that may help to fill in during times of stress are themselves stressed. Children, adults and the disabled who were previously supported and protected now become vulnerable. They are stretched at times beyond their ability to care for themselves in ways they have not done before.

As these disruptions spread to the wider community and over time, there is also a disruption which is often overlooked. Then communities and cultural groups are displaced, there is a chance that they will begin to lose the very characteristics that provide basic order and meaning to life. Burial, grief and mourning practices that support and comfort the living and the dead cannot be implemented. Spiritual practices that help comfort and give meaning to irrational events are lost in the confusion and disruption. Even the place, the location of the family and culture over generations can be lost, giving way to a sense of being disconnected.

Core Principles for Psychosocial Support

1. Human Rights and Equity
2. Participation
3. Do No Harm
4. Building on available resources and capacities
5. Integrated Support Systems
6. Multi-layered support

2. Psychosocial needs of children in emergencies

Often we look at the material needs and forget about social and psychological needs. It is essential that we think about ourselves and others as having all of these needs. Love and care is just as important for a child as proper feeding.²

Psychosocial care and support is about helping children, families and communities to improve their psychosocial wellbeing. It is about encouraging better relationships between people, and building a stronger sense of self and community. It is expressed through caring and respectful relationships that communicate understanding, tolerance and acceptance. It is about promoting everyday consistent care and support in the family, school and community.

In the emergency, psychosocial needs of children are not much different from the “normal” times, but personal resources they have are much lower. Another issue is that supportive structures which usually help children to meet their psychosocial needs (such as families, friends, communities) might be destroyed during emergencies.

Example: One of the most important way for children to overcome stress and get used to the situation is to play with other children. Children are not likely to explain their thoughts and feelings in talking, but in playing they naturally get this opportunity to adapt for new circumstances in their lives. But if during emergency the playground was destroyed and children afraid to go out from their shelters – they will lose an opportunity to play with each other and their level of stress will increase.

Age	Needs	Special needs in emergencies	Communication	Positive response
0-4	Parental care	Be close to parents Get emotional support Ensure safety	Crying Talking Touching Playing	Physical and emotional care Stay close Create the safe environment Reassure your presence
5-11	Values/Beliefs Play Recognition of feelings Friends Self awareness	Understand what happened Express feelings/thoughts Manage feelings Be close to family Play with friends Ensure safety	Questions to parents/teachers Showing accomplishment Interactions with friends/community Take small responsibilities (help younger siblings/friends, do household chores)	Build the understanding what happened Assist positive communication with friends Accept feelings and train how to manage them Give positive response to achievements Give small jobs and responsibilities Give guidance and limits with reasons
11-18	Values / Beliefs Identity	Rebuild the values and beliefs	Criticising and questioning	Explanations of values and belief from parents and others.

² Source: Handbook for teachers. AVSI, 2003.

<http://psychosocial.svenskakyrkan.se/default.aspx?di=67253>

	Freedom Independence Sense of belonging Recognition of feelings, thoughts	Sense of hope Build/rebuild plans for future Manage feelings (anger, sadness, grief)	Expressing new ideas and thoughts Questioning life and death Rebelling against authority Withdrawal from family.	Listening and understanding. Giving space and time to allow them their own thinking. Giving increased independence and responsibilities. Advising and helping when needed.☐ Positive interaction friends/community Continued love and support from the family (with a lot of patience. Role models
--	--	--	--	---

Circles of support

A wide range of supportive relationships are potentially available to children/learners. These cover a spectrum of informal and formal social interactions, from the care and support offered by caregivers, family members, friends, neighbours, educators, religious mentors, health workers and community members to the care and support offered by specialised psychological and social services, including the health services. One way to picture this continuum is to imagine that the learner is surrounded by different ‘circles of support’. Each of these circles offers opportunities to reinforce the wellbeing of the learner. Learners are best cared for by committed

and affectionate adults who occupy the innermost circle of support. When the care-giving capacity of this circle is broken, extended families need to fill the gap. When the circle of ☐care provided by relatives is broken, community initiatives need to fill the gap. When the circle of care provided by

the community is broken, external agencies need to step ☐in (Richter. 2006. p18).The collective efforts of different providers of PSS can strengthen each level of the learner’s “circle of support” and help prevent these circles from breaking down. In order to accomplish this, there may well be times when the learner and his/her caregivers will require the specialised care and support of professionals.

The ‘Circles of Support’ model to the right offers a good representation of all the different people and organisations involved in psychosocial care and support.³

In “normal” situation family is the main source which address children psychosocial needs. But during the emergency, then families might be destroyed, because of some family members died, or later, then mother or father have to go to another city to earn the money for the family, children remain without the support they need. It also may happened then parents are psychosocially affected themselves, and then they can not support their children.

In such cases the school and community becomes the most important resource for children there they can get support they needed. But it does not mean family becomes less important. The best way how school can work – is to involve families into supportive

³ Source: Mainstreaming Psychosocial care and support within the education sector. REPSSI, <http://psychosocial.svenskakyrkan.se/default.aspx?di=67252>

activities, because then both children and families will benefit from it.

3. Psychological tools to express emotions: what are objectives, how to use, limitations, examples

During emergencies and after the emergency events many feelings come to affected people. Feelings are our natural way to cope with emergencies - it gives us the opportunity to adapt to the new situation, to share, to release pain and many other benefits. By expressing one's feelings, thoughts and beliefs about emergency events a person can recover more effectively. All our feelings are important and natural, and there is no "bad" and "good" feelings.

But in many cultures it is not allowed to express feelings – especially "negative" feelings, such as anger, or fear. But if feelings are not expressed and held inside the person, after the long time these feelings can come out as loneliness, strange behavior, aggression and withdrawal.

In case then feelings expression is not allowed, people (children) may have need to be sure that their feelings will be accepted and respected. Sometimes, then their feelings are too strong, they need to be sure that the teacher/parent will help them to manage it.

If you want children to express their feelings you need to create the safe environment for that.

- Sometimes it is better to use techniques for feelings expression in small groups (5-7 children)
- If you talk about strong anger or fear – after expression feelings children may need some guidance how they can manage these feelings later.
- Monitor your own psychological condition to be sure that you can accept strong and painful feelings of others
- Establish rules in the class to protect those who want to express, such as: positive and supportive response, no blaming and punishment for sharing, etc.
- Do not push children to express. As long as they will feel safe in the class – they will do it.
-

Children often want to express thoughts and feelings but have difficulty verbalizing them. Teachers can provide different methods to encourage them to express.

These methods are:

Drawing

For children drawing might be much easier way to express their feelings and thoughts than talking. By drawing they can better verbalize what they have inside.

Ask your students to draw. You may want to allow them to draw whatever is on their mind or give them a subject such as "my mood today", "my new house", "my family". This can be done as a whole class activity or in a smaller group of children who need special attention. Do not give suggestions how to draw – this is not the drawing lesson. It is very good if you can provide different means of drawing – paints, markers, color pencils, because it is encouraging, but it is not necessary.

Then children finish drawing – ask them some questions to encourage them to express.

“Tell me about your drawing.”

□ “What happened here?”

“Who is this in this drawing?”

“Where are you in this drawing?” “How did you feel then?” “How do you feel now?”

Do not give your own interpretation of the drawing: allow the student to explain. Acknowledge the value of their thoughts, feelings, and experiences, and show appreciation that they shared with you (and with others). If you don’t understand something, ask. Don’t assume your students have the same thoughts or feelings as you.

Games “body expression” elements

You may use various games then children shows something using their body language but not saying words. From the beginning it may include games then children show different animals, simple scenes and funny pitures. But later on you may include showing feelings (“show angry person”, “show said person”). Then you may ask children to talk:

“Then did you see person like this?”

“Why person might be angry/sad”?

“What you usually do then you are angry?”

“what other people can do to help you in this time?”

By this discussions you also help children to learn strategies to manage feelings.

Emotion	For what purpose this emotion is? How can you recognize it?	How to manage it?
Fear Need to be respected	Warning of a danger Protection Flight to avoid a threat	Find someone to be with, do not remain alone, ask for help Confront the fear while taking precautions, or with the support of someone
Anger Need to be respected	Mobilization of energy when faced with a threat, a difficulty, a frustration	Express physically, verbally, creatively, alone or with others (without injuring oneself, injuring others, causing fear or breaking something)
Joy Need to be recognized	Sharing, creating links Radiating happiness Energy and trust in other people	Accept and celebrate your achievements, be satisfied with your success and happiness Dare to share without fear of envy Reflect on the steps which brought joy Tell the people who count that

		you love them
Sadness Need to be comforted	Reaction when facing a loss Retreat, solitude Camouflage of a hidden anger	Dare to cry, dare to say that you are sad, without being ashamed Look for physical comfort (hug) and psychological comfort (an attentive and empathetic ear) Accept the things which which can not be changed

Normal process of recovery: main stages, reactions, needed support

After the emergency event person the natural process of healing and rebuilding the internal word of the person begins. It includes different stages of behavior and feelings which are very natural and all needed for rebuilding process. Each stage involves some particular feelings and reactions.

Children respond sensibly and appropriately to disasters, especially if they experience the protection, support, and stability of their parents and other trusted adults. Like adults, they show a wide range of symptoms in response to their distress.

Small children: Anxiety and fears are shown through increased difficulty separating from parents or other caretakers, fears of monsters, fear of "strangers". Children will often act out their worries, repeating stories over and over of funerals or traumas. At times children's play will be very restricted, or they may seem less interested in play than normal. Young children may also regress to behavior typical of younger ages, such as "forgetting" how to feed or dress themselves, or reverting to wearing diapers.

School-aged children: Regressive behavior (acting younger than their age) is very common following a difficult experience. Children of this age often talk or play out the traumatic event repeatedly, in either direct or symbolic ways. An increase of aggressive behavior and rebelliousness are quite common, as are increased worries. The loss of pets, prized possessions and people are especially difficult for these ages. Difficulties in school with memory, concentration, intrusive thoughts and avoidance are typical.

Teen years: Teens can provide positive contributions during emergencies, bringing skills and energy at a difficult time. They are also vulnerable to being overwhelmed, getting frustrated, angry or feeling guilty. The feelings of adolescents are often intense and teens may need support to manage these feelings. The risk of suicide is greater for teens than for other age groups. Peer relationships are very important. Acceptance from friends and the assurance that their feelings and fears are normal helps with the adjustment.

All children need the support and protection of parents and caring adults. Showing various signs described above is very normal and adults need to be patient to it. With providing emotional and social support most of these signs will decrease with the time.

Unaccompanied children, or children separated from their families, are at particular risk for long lasting difficulties. Separation from parents is without question the highest stress factor for children. Every effort should be made to quickly reunite children with their families. When parents are not present, children should be kept with siblings, grandparents or other familiar caring people in a stable situation where their needs can be met.⁴

Stage of the recovery process cycle	What happens	How to support
Difficult event or trauma	Difficult event or trauma which breaks the routine of life. Sometimes it even creates the threat to the life	
Shock. Denial	When a difficult event occurs in our lives at first we go through a state of shock. During this initial reaction to the event there may be shaking, rapid heartbeat, or even paralysis. This leads to denial: "I cannot believe this is happening. Everything seems unreal.	Be together Share experience Create safe space Encourage communication and peer support Give small tasks and responsibilities: something to do Provide emotional support Allow crying and sharing emotions
Protest. Blaming	The next stage is protest. The affected person may put blame for what has happened on somebody. Sometimes this blaming is irrational – the one can blame his family, community, everybody. A person may also start to bargain: "God, I will do anything if only you will stop this."	Protest usually is irrational, so try not to explain the one that he is not right and there is no need to blame. Focus on emotions (Anger) than on the question "who is guilty".
Anger. Revenge	The third stage is either anger or depression or both of them at different times. During	Anger needs to be accepted. Ensure children that their anger is normal and it is the

⁴ Community based psychosocial services in Humanitarian assistance. A facilitator's guide. Version 2, May 2005
www.svenskakyrkan.se/psychosocialservices

	anger the person may seek revenge: "Because they did this to me, I want to do something bad to them."	result of the difficult event they have passed through. Discuss and train possible ways to express anger, which will not hit others. Provide possibility for sport and active recreation – it helps to release the energy.
Sadness. Grief.	A person who is in depression lacks an interest in life: "It feels like nothing is worth doing anymore." One has no purpose and mistrusts others, often withdrawing and becoming lonely. The person no longer has hope that the future will be better.	Sadness needs to be shared. Provide emotional support, possibility to be sad, encourage traditional grieving ceremonies. To be sad it is the normal feeling and needs to be accepted and shared.
Reorganisation Hope Acceptance	Finally one reaches reorganisation and develops acceptance of the situation. Accepting does not mean one agrees with what has happened, but rather it is the capacity to live positively with what has happened. A person finds a new understanding and new meaning for life: "This is a terrible thing that I have been through, but I need to make the best of it and go on.»	Support reorganisation: Help to build the new routine, come back to the normal life-tasks. Discuss the future of children, draw pictures about their possible future. Find movies, tales and real stories about people who overcame difficult time in their lives. Look for examples of positive changes in their life after emergencies: new achievements, new goals.

5. Referral cases

In emergencies people are affected in different ways, and require different kind of support. The extent in which people are affected, depends on various factors, and not even directly related to the experience they have passed through. In families, siblings might have different reactions, in classes same age students usually demonstrate the whole variety of reactions.

It is common for people to continue to have emotional effects from trauma for quite some time after the event. New reactions may show up weeks later, as people begin to feel safe and life begins to return to normal. Research shows that after several months, as many as 50 percent of people are showing emotional effects related to the disaster. These effects gradually subside. However, after a year or two, there are still quite a number of people having some disaster-related distress. It is also common for reactions to come to the surface on anniversaries of the disaster or when the disaster memory is stirred by related events. Distressed memories may come back even ten or more years later for traumas such as war memories.

The majority of people do not need professional psychosocial and mental health support, of their families and communities providing them support and care, as it was described above. But in some cases it will not be enough. These cases may include:

- the person have seen or experienced very traumatic issues (stong violence, rape, observed the death or have being under the threat of death himself)
- the person had pre-existing mental health issues or disorders
- the person had pre-existing psychosocial issues: was excluded from the community, marginalized or discriminated

But even if these conditions do not present, sometimes people just reacting very seriously and need additional support.

The additional support required for the small percentage of the population who is suffering, despite the supports already mentioned, is intolerable and who may have significant difficulties in basic daily functioning.

In such cases teacher might need to encourage the family of the student and student himself, to seek for the professional mental health or psychological help. Teacher, together with health worker need to provide necessary information about place there such kind of support might be provided, and help the family to get it, if possible.