

Psychosocial Support for Children during COVID-19

An education in emergencies training workshop for teachers

Participant's Handbook



**FOOD FOR
THE HUNGRY**

VIVA
together for children

Welcome!

This training workshop is designed to equip teachers and school administrators to care for students effectively and ensure that they receive the psychosocial support they need in order to cope with crisis and return to school during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.



This training refers to the companion resource guide created for this workshop: 'Resource Guide: Psychosocial support activities in the classroom' which you should also have a copy of.

Key resources used in this training module:

- ARC: Foundation Module on Psychosocial Support
- IFRC and Save the Children Denmark, The Children's Resilience Programme: Psychosocial support in and out of school
- IRC, Creating Healing Classrooms: Guide for Teachers and Teacher Educators
- INEE, Teachers in Crisis Contexts Working Group (TICCWG), Training for Primary School Teachers in Crisis Contexts package
- INEE, Guidance Note on Teaching and Learning
- IASC, Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings
- Headington Institute, www.headington-institute.org
- Mentally Healthy Schools, [Resource toolkits and activities](#)
- Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families, [Coronavirus Support](#)
- Save the Children, Protect a Generation: The impact of COVID-10 on children's lives

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PART 1: INTRODUCTION TO PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

SESSION 1: Understanding the impact of emergencies on children

Learning objective: Know some of the key ways children respond to emergencies and be able to link this with experiences of the current crisis

- What has been the impact for children of Covid-19, and the impact for them of being out of school?
- How does this compare with what you have seen in your communities?



Understanding the impact of emergencies on children

0-2 years	3-5 years	6-12 years	13-18 years
<p>Because of the importance of attachment and the relationship with the primary caregiver, the reaction of surrounding adults is key to determining the impact of the crisis on babies and infants. Disruption of attachment is very significant.</p> <p>Babies and infants may express fear at parting from their caregiver. They may be withdrawn, clingy, unsettled, irritable and emotional. They may cry more than usual.</p> <p>Even though small children do not have words to describe an event or their feelings, they can retain memories of particular sights, sounds or smells.</p>	<p>Pre-school children often feel helpless and powerless after a crisis.</p> <p>Development may go backwards—children may lose skills they had developed (e.g. toilet training or speech).</p> <p>Children may express fear of being separated from their caregiver, may revert to bedwetting or fear of the dark.</p> <p>Play activities may involve re-enacting aspects of the events of the crisis. Some children show signs of denial and withdrawal.</p>	<p>Children are able to understand the meaning of the loss of loved ones and may feel guilt at surviving when others did not, or anger that the event was not prevented.</p> <p>Children may have flashbacks of what happened, or may want to talk about the event all the time.</p> <p>Children may appear moody or ‘difficult’ as they deal with their feelings and what has happened. They may become more aggressive or more withdrawn.</p>	<p>Children may feel frustrated that they are unable to change their circumstances or what happened. They may take on adult roles without enough capacity or support.</p> <p>Identity and belonging are important so they may be more easily targeted for recruitment into the armed forces.</p> <p>Responses can be similar to adults and adolescents may experience isolation, irritation, rejection of rules and aggressive behaviour. Some display risk-taking behaviour such as alcohol or drug abuse, or self-harm. Others become fearful.</p>

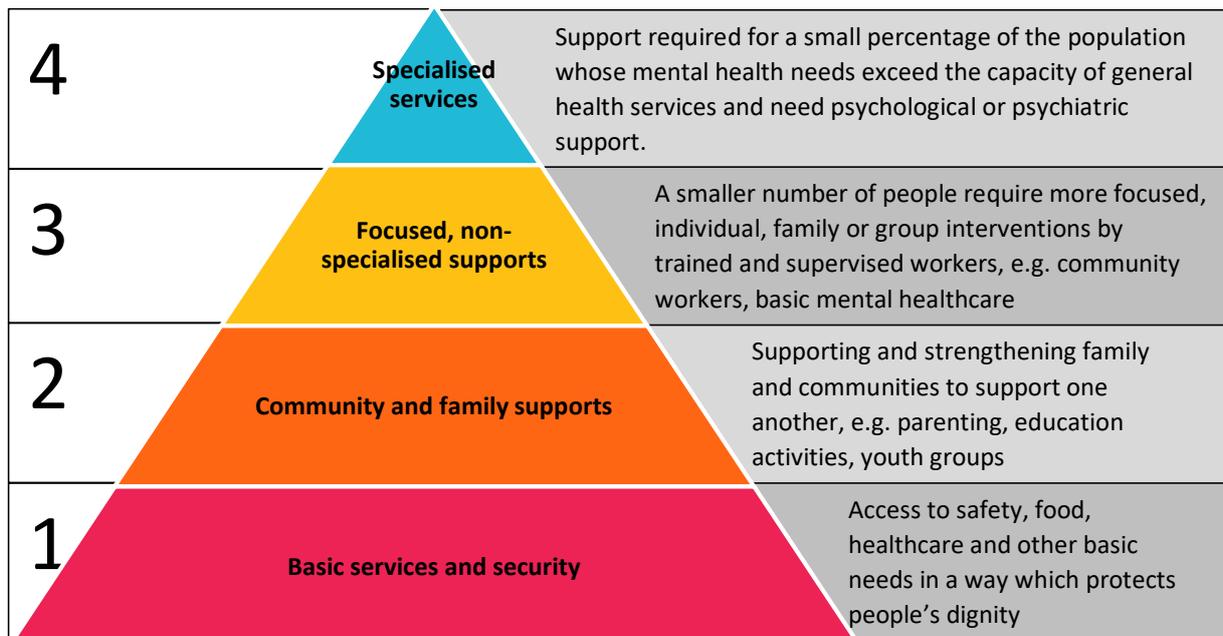
Session 2: What is Psychosocial Support?

Learning objective: Understand what psychosocial support is and how it can be a helpful way to frame supportive practices in education

What is psychosocial support?



The IASC psychosocial support pyramid



Session 3: Encouraging resilience in education programmes

Learning objective: Understand the concept of resilience and how resilience can be supported by working with risk factors and protective factors

Identifying psychosocial support that enables children to cope



Group work: Think of a child who has been through a difficult situation or suffered extreme stress and has seemed to 'bounce back' or been able to recover.

Try to identify together what some of the factors were in this child's life which have enabled them to recover. These might be characteristics of the child (their personality or abilities) or factors external to the child such as their family environment or their community. What are some of the things that helped the child to cope?

Use this conversation to begin a list of 'coping factors' or things which can help a child to overcome difficult circumstances.

What is 'resilience'?



Risk factors and protective factors

Risk factors

- Difficult or frightening experiences
- Lack of understanding of what has happened
- Loss of family home, friends, or caregivers
- Loss of self-respect and self-confidence
- Poor living conditions or lack of access to basic services like healthcare
- Poor diet and nutrition
- Lack of opportunities for education and play
- Excessive burden of paid or unpaid work
- Uncertainty about the future
- Disability
- A hostile environment (e.g. racism or discrimination)

Protective factors

- Self-esteem, self-confidence, and communication skills
- Can think through and process events and look to the future
- Can express themselves through play, arts, games, community rituals
- Positive parenting and carers who respond to the child's emotional needs
- Positive family environment that provides love, support and discipline
- Can express feelings and anxieties to adults who listen to them
- Friends who are good role models and a source of fun and acceptance
- Able to maintain normal family life, religious practices, language
- A positive school experience where teachers are supportive
- Part of a strong community where children are active members



Group work: Choose one of these factors. How could education actors or teachers work to build up this protective factor through education programmes?



Homework

Reflect on the risk factors and protective factors, and identify one which you would like to work on more as a school or education project.

Think about the steps you would take to put this idea into practice.

PART 2: INTEGRATING PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT IN EDUCATION

SESSION 1: Psychosocial support in the classroom

Learning objective: Understand how to adjust teaching and learning to provide psychosocial support, and how to integrate targeted PSS activities in the classroom



Think about: A good teacher

Think of someone you remember as a ‘good teacher’ in your own life. It could be a schoolteacher, Sunday School teacher, or someone else who taught you in an informal way—a parent or family member, for example. What was it that made them ‘good’?

How can we show children that we value them?

- Greeting children by name
- Showing an interest in each child and their interests
- Noticing when a child seems disturbed, upset, worried or concerned
- Give children a sense of self-worth by providing encouragement, recognition and praise
- Giving encouragement for trying
- Finding something positive to say about each child every day
- Trusting them with responsibilities
- Show respect and empathy for each child, and encourage all of the children to do the same for one another
- Accept the children for who they are and do not condemn, reject or laugh at them

Creating a supportive environment in the classroom

1) Create a routine

2) Realistic Expectations

3) Restoring Connections

Other ways to provide support:

- Provide choices
- Focus on strengths and positives
- Connect with parents
- Create 'safe spaces' in real-life classrooms

(These ideas are summarized in the Psychosocial Support Activities Resource Guide, page 3)

Including specific psychosocial support activities in learning

See the Psychosocial Support Activities Resource Guide, pages 6-12

As a teacher, you can select and create activities which specifically target risk and protective factors you have identified as priorities, and include activities which link with the situation of your children.

The resource guide includes a section with some suggested activities in these key areas:

- Expressing feelings and emotions
- Understanding what has happened and being able to think positively about the future
- Building self-esteem and self-confidence
- Cooperation and learning how to have positive relationships with others

SESSION 2: Supporting children who are struggling

Learning objective: Know how to recognise the signs that a child may need further support, and what steps to take when they are not able to cope



What are the signs that show us that a child is not coping well?

Some common signs of psychosocial distress we might observe in the classroom are:

- An inability to complete simple school assignments, difficulty concentrating
- Always looking sad, never smiling, or crying often
- Acting withdrawn or not reacting to games or other fun activities
- A noticeable change in behaviour or personality
- Not having many friends
- Constant preoccupation with violence, death and killing (including killing themselves)
- Persistent, aggressive behaviour with peers or teachers, either physically or verbally
- Disruptive behaviour in class, such as non-stop questions or arguments
- Frequent absences from school
- Constant physical complaints, including headaches, stomach aches or dizziness

What can we do when children continue to be severely distressed?

The level and causes of distress in some children are such that they will not go away no matter how much psychosocial support and other responses schools and teachers can give.

- If children continue to show a high level of distress after you have tried all of the things suggested here, discuss the situation with the child's family. Ask for their permission to refer the child to services that specialise in helping children in distress.
- If your school does not have a referral system in place, immediately discuss the importance of a referral system with the school principal. If necessary, help the principal identify appropriate services or trained personnel.
- Once a referral policy is in place, make sure that all teachers know it. The families of highly distressed children must be contacted before making any referral to outside services.

If there are any doubts about the recovery of a child, seek advice from a supervisor or a professional expert. This may include seeking further advice from or sharing information with relevant individuals or organizations. If a child changes significantly, and shows no signs of improvement, seek professional help.

SESSION 3: Teacher Wellbeing

Learning objective: Recognise the importance of teachers taking care of their own wellbeing, and identify practical strategies for this



Is it important to take care of our own wellbeing as teachers? What happens when we don't?



What strategies do you already have for taking care of your own wellbeing?

Looking at the suggestions on the following page:



Which of these are you already good at?



Which are more challenging for you?



Which would you choose to try to work on in the coming days?

See the Psychosocial Support Activities Resource Guide, page 13, for suggestions for moments of calm for teachers

See the Psychosocial Support Activities Resource Guide, page 14, for a template for a wellbeing plan

Thinking and perspective:

- Gratitude – set aside a few minutes each day to reflect on a few things you're thankful for
- Accept uncertainty and keep things in perspective – we are living through uncertain times so all we can do is focus on those things we can control and what we can do
- Recognise that your feelings are normal and ok. The emotions you are feeling right now (anger, sadness, fear) are normal responses to an abnormal situation.
- Write down worries to give yourself some space; you might also try analysing evidence for and against the worry and seeing if you can problem solve them.
- Be reasonable with your expectations of yourself, and at the beginning of your workday, be clear about what you want to achieve today and what your key priorities are

Physical wellbeing:

- Establish a routine
- Eating a healthy diet
- Get enough sleep
- Regular exercise can lift your mood and increase your energy levels. It doesn't have to be strenuous and you can pick something you enjoy so you will be able to stick with it! For example, going for a walk during your day, or doing stretches in the morning.

Social connections:

Building and maintaining positive relationships with people can be an important part of wellbeing. It is disorienting to be so removed from those we love. It is also strange to be away from colleagues.

- Maintain social connections – e.g. phoning a friend or relative, arranging to speak with a colleague or friend
- Think about who energises you and reach out to them for a conversation. Limit time with those who don't.
- Think about who you can support and get in touch with them as well.
- Find ways to support one another as educators such as through peer support groups or a buddy system

Self-care:

Find some moment in the day when you do something that is just for yourself:

- Engage in a spiritual practice. This could be prayer, spending time in nature, or engaging in meaningful contributions to others.
- Make time to do something that will allow your brain to calm: prayer, cooking, gardening
- Be kind to yourself – talk to yourself as you would a friend
- Be creative - music, art, writing, growing plants, cooking a new recipe
- Talk about or write down your feelings. Expressing how you feel will mean you have a choice about what to do with that feeling: suppressing it will mean that the feeling can overwhelm you.
- Take breaks and set boundaries around working hours and work communication

Action planning

Ask each participant to take a few minutes to reflect on the complete training and fill in the action plan in their training notes.

What are three or four key actions you will take over the next month to put this training into practice? How will you know you have achieved it?

What	When	Who	How will I know when it's been achieved?