



Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies
Réseau Inter-Agences pour l'Éducation en Situations d'Urgence
La Red Interagencial para Educación en Situaciones de Emergencia

INEE Good Practice Guide: Training Teachers to meet Psychosocial Needs

Everyone living in an area of conflict is in some way affected by it. The majority of those affected by a conflict or disaster, experience low and medium-grade stress which influences how they feel, how they learn, their social interactions, and how they perceive the world. How and when they recover from the post-traumatic symptoms of crisis depends upon their natural resilience, experiences and the type of support they have following the crisis. To enhance the recovery, organizations initiate "psychosocial" programs to the needed support. Ideally, these programs should not stand by themselves but should be integrated into all services of humanitarian assistance.

Emergency education programs alone are the largest psychosocial intervention in an emergency as they establish a familiar learning environment, provide a regular schedule and instill a feeling of hope for the future. Everyone involved in providing education, especially teachers and school administrators, should receive an orientation in their role mitigating the psychological and social (hence psychosocial) impact on their students. Emergency education programs do not seek to provide professional counseling but rather seek to support the re-establishment of social connections and through interacting with others heal themselves.

Strategies

- **Emphasize normalcy**

It is important to emphasize that what people in crisis are experiencing after a traumatic event is a normal reaction to a very abnormal situation. They should be assured that the situation will improve. Giving students this simple explanation helps them understand and address their stress. Additionally, it is important that students be encouraged to re-establish "normal" patterns in their lives such as going to school, playing sports, and engaging in hobbies, as the normalcy of these activities mitigates the impact of the crisis.

- **Support good teaching and learning practices**

For educationalists, psychosocial work is nothing new since good teaching and learning practices are good psychosocial practices. Teachers should strive to create a comfortable supportive learning environment where students feel safe. For example, students in emergencies can have difficulty concentrating on lessons. Teachers can help the students concentrate by having well planned lessons with clear learning objectives, a clear beginning and an end, accompanied by a revision of what was learned, and appropriate teaching aids. Similarly, some students may be withdrawn because of the conflict, and hesitant to participate in class discussions. Teacher can address this by asking open-ended questions and calling on all students in the class.

- **Put a referral system into place**

Trainings should include how to screen students who may need additional care, and the review process for referral. This requires that the agencies providing the training investigate the local mental health system and what support it can provide. Emphasis on the identification of trauma symptoms must be approached cautiously as it can result in "labeling" individuals within the school and community.

- **Support the physical and psychosocial needs of teachers and facilitators**

Having also lived through the crisis, teachers and facilitators will have their own psychosocial and physical stress could lead to absenteeism, burn-out and desertion of the profession. Teachers should be encouraged to support each other and discuss strategies for assisting students.

Checklists

Assessment

- Has a psychosocial assessment been conducted?
- Did the assessment seek to identify the different types of traumatic events that a student had been exposed to?
- What symptoms do people attribute to the conflict? What assistance are they seeking for them? What assistance do they want?
- Who are the caregivers in the community? How can their role be enhanced?

Program Design

- Are program activities located in a safe area?
- Do the program activities occur at a regularly schedule time and place?
- How do teacher/facilitators handle students who have been severely affected by the crisis? Can they refer the student and their family to anyone for additional assistance?
- Are the schools connected with mental health activities in the community?
- How is the success of the program measured? Decrease in symptoms? Satisfaction of participants? Belief in hope for the future?
- Has the staff had any training psychosocial issues? What topics were covered? I.e. causes, symptoms, normalcy, stress relief techniques
- Given the social and political implications of the traumatic events, do staff maintain a code of confidentiality when students confide in them? Do they understand the importance of keeping confidential what students tell them? Are any records kept that should be confidential? If so, are they secure?
- Do the teachers/facilitators feel confident in providing psychosocial support? Are regular meeting held so that they can talk about the issues they are dealing with in school, and share solutions? Have teachers been coached on how to deal with their own stress?
- Are students being referred for specialized mental health assistance? Who provides the assistance? An NGO? A medical facility? A social service center? Are the students satisfied? How is this viewed in the community?
- Are activities targeted to one specific group? Such as child soldier or separated children? What steps have been taken to ensure that the targeted group feels included within the larger community? Is their integration planned? Are the joint sport, arts or cultural activities?

Resources

- **Psycho Social Support Handbook for Teachers and the Training Guide**

By Jeannie Annan, Lucia Castelli, Annie Devreux and Elena Locatelli, Associazione Volontari per il Servizio Internazionale (AVSI), 2003

- **Promoting Psychosocial Well-Being Among Children Affected by Armed Conflict and Displacement: Principles and Approaches.**

By International Save the Children Alliance

- **Helping Children Cope with the Stresses of War**

A Manual for Parents and Teachers by Mona Macksoud. ISBN: 92-806-2087-8 Available from UNICEF: http://www.unicef.org/publications/index_4398.html

- **The Refugee Experience: Psychosocial Training Manual, volumes 1 and 2**

Available online Refugee Studies Center, Oxford University

- **The Psychosocial Health of Relief Works: Some practical suggestions**

By Peter Salama, Medical Coordinator, Concern Worldwide

- **Psychosocial and Mental Health Programmes: Useful Resources and Information to Guide Interventions**

By Lauren McDonald. Available from the UNHCR website.