



SUPPORTING CHILDREN WHO HAVE GONE THROUGH DIFFICULT EXPERIENCES

Manual For Humanitarian Aid & Development Workers



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WHO HAVE GONE
THROUGH DIFFICULT
EXPERIENCES**

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Plan International is an independent development and humanitarian organization that advances children's rights and equality for girls.

We believe in the power and potential of every child, but they are often suppressed by poverty, violence, exclusion and discrimination, and it's the girls who are most affected.

Working together with children, young people, our supporters and partners, we strive for a just world, tackling the root causes of the challenges facing girls and all vulnerable children.

We support children's rights from birth until they reach adulthood and enable children to prepare for – and respond to – crises and adversity. We drive changes in practice and policy at local, national and global levels using our reach, experience and knowledge.

Plan International has been building powerful partnerships for children for over 80 years, and are now active in more than 75 countries.

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FOREWORD

Emergencies can have devastating effects on children's lives, putting them at increased risk of abuse, neglect and psychosocial distress. Plan International believes that education in emergencies is crucial to maintaining a sense of normalcy in the lives of children, providing them with a supportive environment, and equipping them with the skills and knowledge they need to plan their future. For that purpose, it is vital for the wellbeing of children and their education outcomes that schools and learning centers constitute safe and inclusive spaces. Teachers and other education personnel are the main contributors to the realization of such spaces.

This manual was written for those who work with children who have been through difficult situations. It goes beyond classroom safeguarding and provides teachers and education personnel with simple tools that they can use during learning sessions to better understand children, increase their focus, enhance their wellbeing and bring routine and hope to their days.

We dedicate this manual to all the children, and to all the remarkable people supporting them.

Marianne Samaha
Plan International Lebanon – Program Director

INTRODUCTION

This manual is written for humanitarian aid & development workers, education personnel, parents, caregivers and everyone else who is blessed to be working with children who have experienced extremely stressful situations.

The content of this manual will help you create a warm, safe and nurturing atmosphere that is supportive to the children's well-being and conducive to their creativity and growth.

It is in such an environment that children will be able to recover from and resolve the difficult events they had experienced and transform them into positive life-long lessons.

We hope this manual will empower you in the great work you are doing for yourself, for the children and for humanity.

Ana Dora Novak, Author & Trainer

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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OF **YOURSELF**
FIRST

1. TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF FIRST

Regularly taking care of ourselves is the first step to offering help to children. It enables us to be physically and psychologically stable and in a good mood. We can only take care of others after we have already taken good care of ourselves.

When we are at peace with ourselves, and confident in our own skin, our work and presence are beneficial for the children we work with.

When you are in a good mood and energized, your presence is radiant and affects the children like a ray of sunshine - it helps them feel better and overcome difficult experiences.



When you are tired, hungry, and in a bad mood, or if you are dealing with personal problems, your mood has a discouraging impact and the children you work with can become difficult.



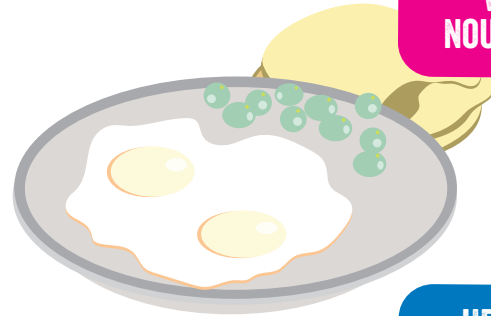
THAT'S WHY

Take care of yourself, starting with your basic needs. When working with children make sure you are always:

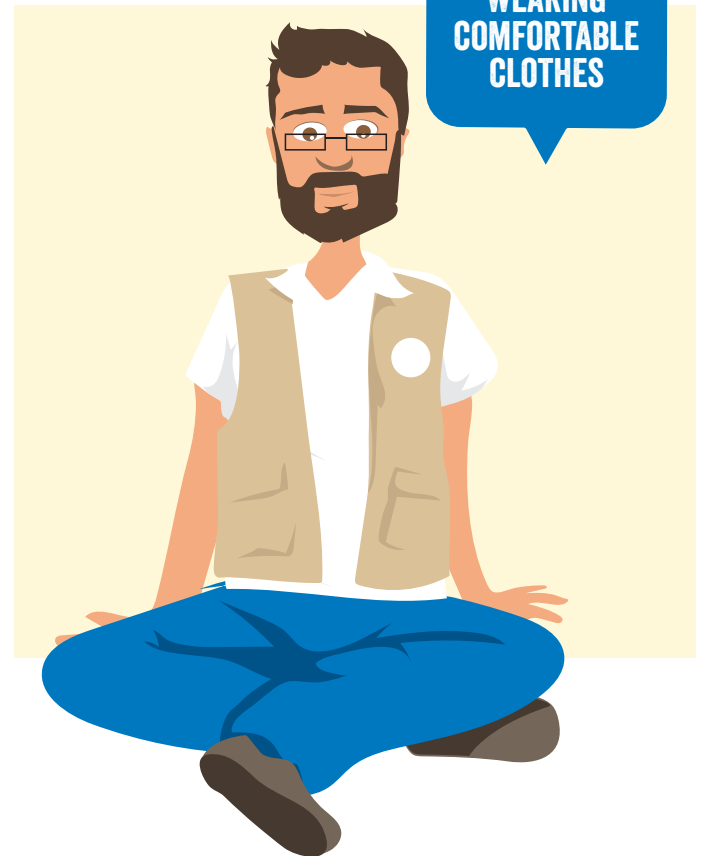
WELL-RESTED



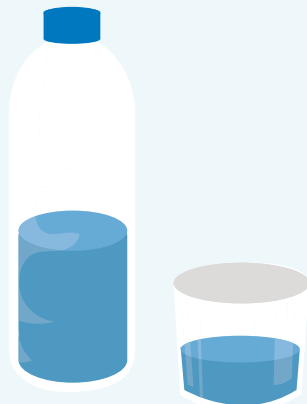
FULL AND WELL NOURISHED



HEALTHY AND WEARING COMFORTABLE CLOTHES



HYDRATED



Partake in your favorite hobbies that make you happy and engage in activities that energize you in your free time.



Be fully present whenever you are working with children. Leave the worries and problems connected to your personal life at home. This is the only way you can create the most rewarding experience for yourself and the children.



At home, enjoy the life that you have. Leave your worries about taking care of children and their life at work.



2. THE **PRESENT** AND THE PAINFUL PAST

2. THE PRESENT AND THE PAINFUL PAST

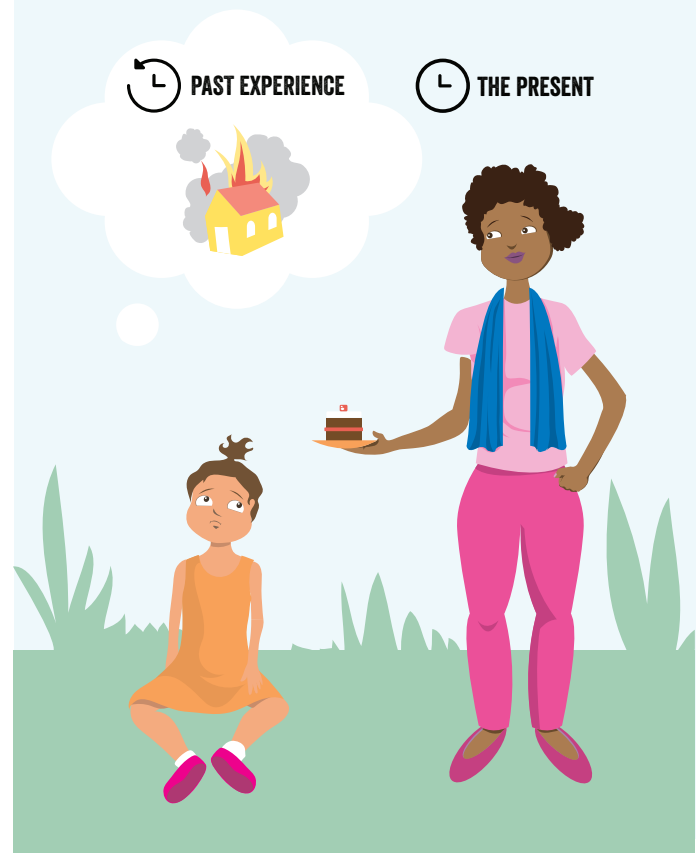
Difficult circumstances and life experiences affect both adults and children. Such experiences can cause psychological trauma that affects our and/or a child's wellbeing, behavior, and growth process.

The children you work with have gone through or are still going through difficult experiences. Some may be more affected by those experiences than others.

Treat every child individually, because everyone's experiences are subjective! Sisters from the same family can have completely different coping skills and abilities when facing difficult experiences. The same event can be hurtful for one and not stressful for another.



Painful experiences become imprinted in our mind. The more difficult experiences we have and the more painful they are, the more of our attention they draw to themselves.



How can you tell that a child's focus is directed more towards their painful past than the present?

THE CHILD:

- Isolates themselves from other children.
- Behaves and responds irrationally.
- Has unexplained fears.
- Has memory problems, memory loss.
- Has a lowered capacity for logical thinking and other cognitive skills.
- Behaves either too seriously or too immaturely for their age.
- Doesn't communicate or has sudden outbursts of inconsolable crying.
- Pretends that they are alright although they are not.
- Is aggressive towards themselves and their surroundings.
- Is overly attached to the people around them.
- Begins to wet their bed (again).
- Has a weak immune system.
- Is often sick.
- Has unexplained pains (such as headaches etc.)
- Avoids eye contact

All these are the symptoms of psychological trauma. We have listed a few, but there are many more. It is possible to tell whether a child is affected by their painful past or not by the way they behave, so it is important to observe and listen to the children closely.





3. HELPING A CHILD THROUGH PSYCHOLOGICAL RECOVERY

3. HELPING A CHILD THROUGH PSYCHOLOGICAL RECOVERY

Experiencing difficult circumstances can cause psychological trauma. We can help a child recover in many ways. One of the ways is to divert the child's focus away from the painful past and shift it to the present.

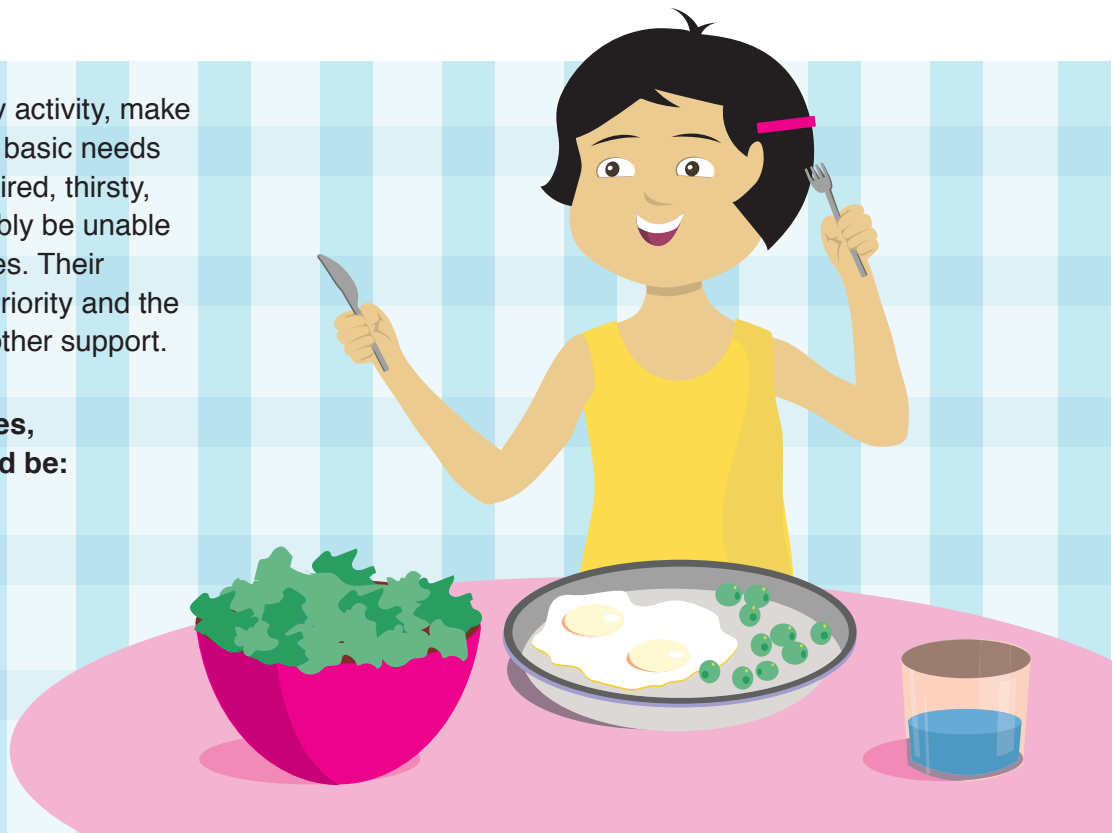
By shifting the child's focus, their present becomes more real than their painful past. By doing so, we help a child to create new beautiful memories and build a better future that is not affected by their past.

We can shift a child's focus with different activities. We can carry out these activities individually with the child who needs them, or with the entire group of children. The activities also cultivate a sense of belonging, connection, acceptance, and safety which are also important for recovery.

Before you start any activity, make sure that the child's basic needs are met. A hungry, tired, thirsty, sick child will probably be unable to follow the activities. Their basic needs are a priority and the foundation for any other support.

**During the activities,
the children should be:**

- Well-Rested,
- Healthy,
- Fed,
- Hydrated.



The activities should be fun. That is how you ensure that the children will be happy and excited to participate. By being included in these activities, the children will gradually shift their focus on the present moment.

**COLD, COLD,
WARM, HOT!**



Once the children focus their attention on the present moment, away from their painful past experiences, they will feel a sense of relief. This way their past has less negative influence on their thoughts, emotions and behaviour.



Regularly engaging in activities that shift one's focus to the present moment contributes to the children's better general wellbeing, easier learning, and better participation in your intervention. It can even help diminish or get rid of certain symptoms of psychological trauma. Plan these activities as part of your intervention. Do them every day with children, you will notice the progress fast.

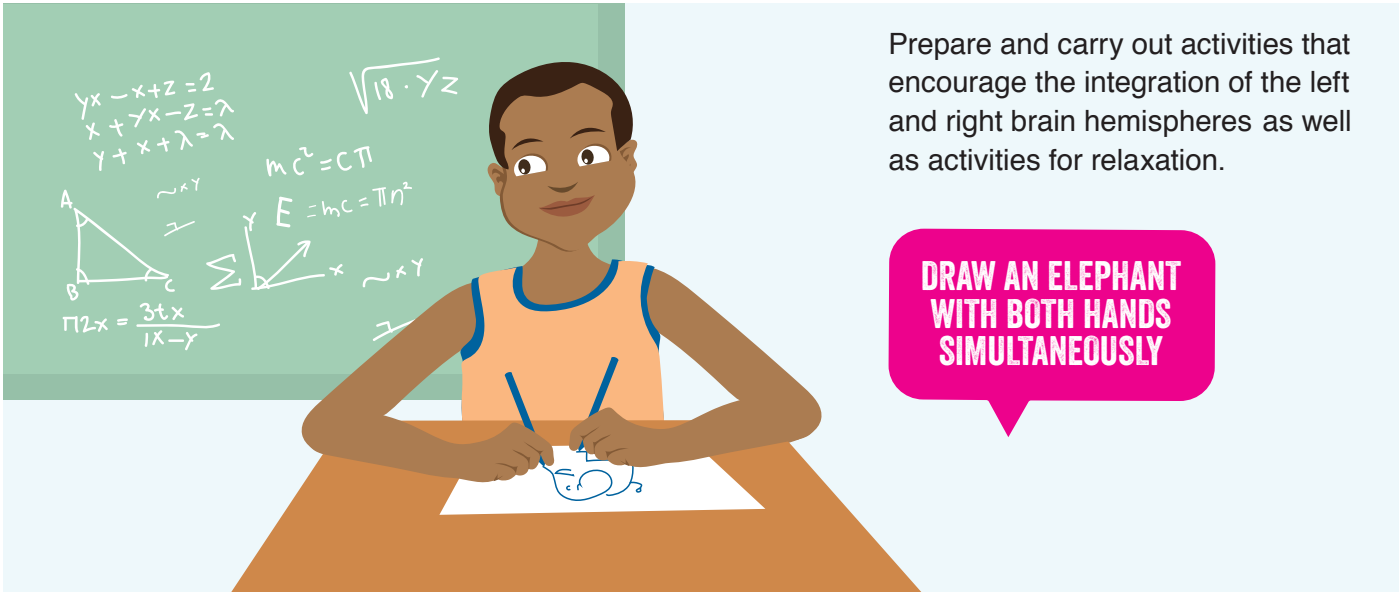


Organize sport activities. Sweating contributes to physical wellbeing and health. A strenuous physical activity shifts focus from the past to the present, because it takes a lot of our attention and effort to perform.



Organize creative activities: arts and crafts, artistic activities, singing, and dancing...

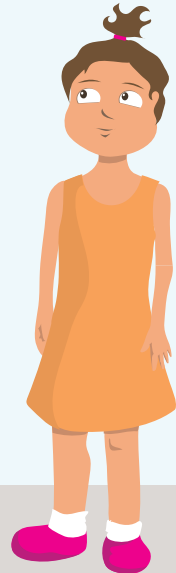
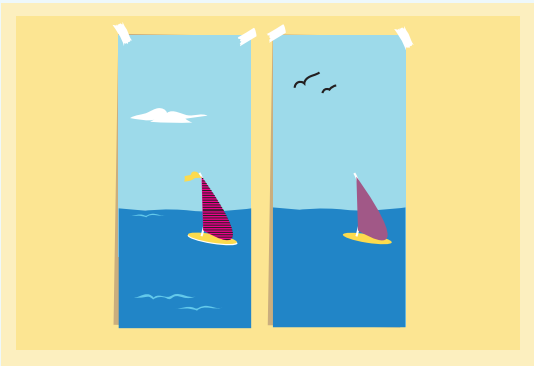




Prepare and carry out activities that encourage the integration of the left and right brain hemispheres as well as activities for relaxation.

DRAW AN ELEPHANT WITH BOTH HANDS SIMULTANEOUSLY

Prepare and carry out activities that encourage sharp and focused observation skills and strengthen cognitive abilities. Such activities demand from us a lot of attention, that takes our thoughts away from the painful past.



FIND THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TWO IMAGES

Prepare and carry out activities that require the children to perceive and experience their surroundings with all their senses (through listening, touching, and observing their environment). This helps the children focus their attention on the space around them, meaning they are focused on the present situation.



When you notice that the children have started giggling, laughing, and that their mood has improved, this means that they have shifted their focus from their painful past to the present moment. Congratulations!





**4.SUDDEN
IRRATIONAL
BEHAVIOUR**

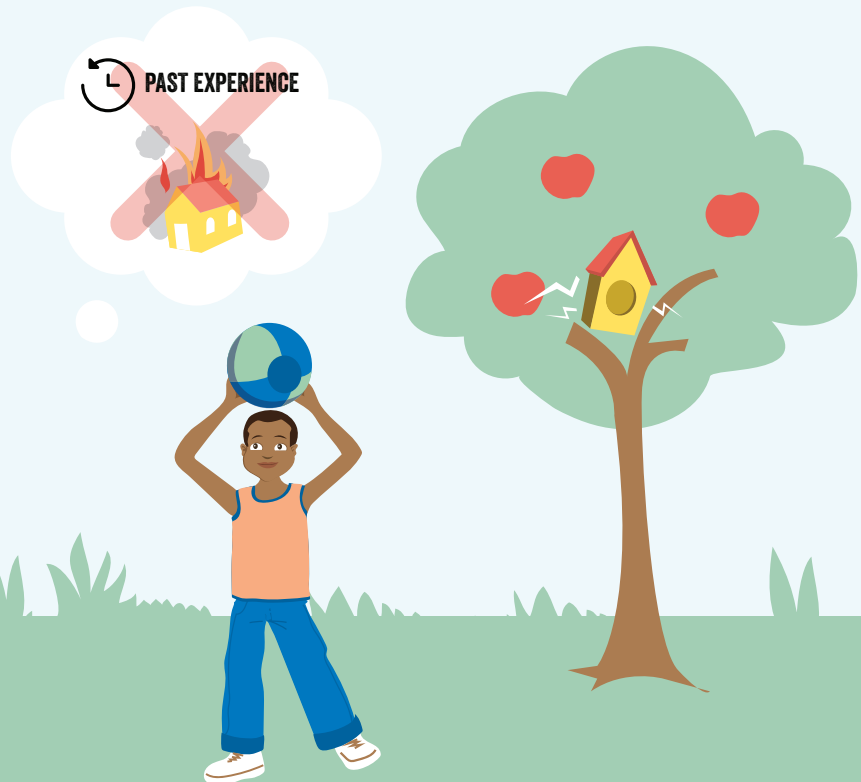
4. SUDDEN IRRATIONAL BEHAVIOUR

Painful experiences are the cause behind the psychological trauma. They affect a child's behavior, which can become irrational as a result of that.

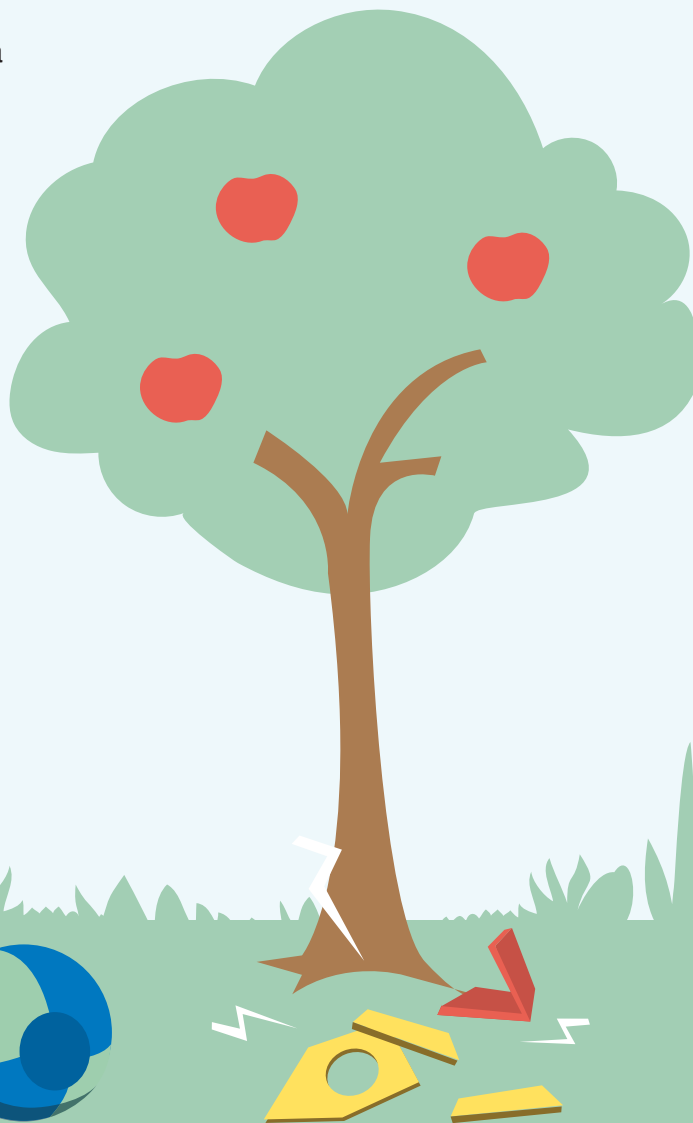
A child can behave completely normally in certain moments. When a child's focus is in the present moment, the signs of their traumatic experiences are minimal or nonexistent. But a child's behavior can suddenly change to irrational, when their focus shifts to past painful experience. Their behavior can suddenly become harmful, aggressive, frightened, distanced, insensitive, rebellious, apathetic, and so on.

Seek understanding and solutions and do not judge the child because of such behavior.

It can happen that an event, object, sound (or any other impression from the environment) can remind a child of their painful past. These objects, events, sounds (or another impression from the environment) are called triggers of psychological trauma or simply triggers.



Triggers of psychological trauma can suddenly shift a child's focus to a past painful experience and cause a resurfacing of psychological trauma to a minor or major degree.



Painful past is a collection of unresolved issues. The resolving healing process can happen spontaneously or with the help of a mental health professional. When these issues are resolved, then they will no longer be triggered.



You will recognize the resurfacing of a child's trauma by sudden changes in behavior such as:

- Outbursts of inconsolable crying,
- Aggressive behavior,
- Sudden petrification,
- Irrational behavior,
- Emotional or mental confusion,
- Sudden tendency towards isolation,
- Fear of survival,
- Flashbacks,
- Over dramatization of the situation,
- The symptoms of psychological trauma might become more apparent and so on.

Don't ask a child why they are crying, why they are upset, or which of their traumatic experiences have resurfaced, often they do not have answer to these questions.

Allow them to experience and express whatever emotions they want. Saying that, if a child starts to act aggressively and damaging to themselves or others, take the action that will prevent that. This is part of you controlling the situation. Create a sense of security, acceptance, and love. If you wish to hug or caress the child, ask them for permission first.

MENTAL HEALTH FOR CHILDREN

HOW DO YOU FEEL AFTER AN HOUR
OF US PLAYING TOGETHER AND
TALKING TO ONE ANOTHER?

RELAXED



If you realize that, regardless of your efforts, the child is not participating in the activities, often experiences the resurfacing of painful past experiences, and shows clear signs of psychological trauma, seek professional mental health help for the child!

The mental health professional will help the child resolve and recover their painful past experiences and focus their attention on the present situation.



5. COMMUNICATION

5. COMMUNICATION

Communication connects us, unites us, and is crucial for constructive work with children. Good communication creates a sense of security and connection for both children and adults.

Approach the child with an open and accepting attitude. Be patient, innovative, and persistent in your attempts of communication, yet not intrusive.

A way to establish a connection is by finding things that you and the child have in common.

OH! LOOK! WE ARE BOTH WEARING A PINK SHIRT TODAY!





The more the things you and the child have in common, the greater the trust formed between you will be. You will feel more comfortable with one another and you will approve one another more strongly.



If there is not enough trust between you and the child, this can lead to misunderstandings and the failure to follow rules and respect each other's needs. Without trust there can be no approval.



When you are feeling shy or when you do not know how to address the child, simply smile in a relaxed, genuine way, and look them in the eyes. This will create a feeling of kindness and openness. The communication between you and the child will be established spontaneously.



If the child doesn't react to your actions, kindly and gently persist. Continue with your activities. When the child is ready and when they establish enough trust, they will respond and approach you.



Before you establish physical contact with a child, ask them for their permission. Respect their answer. Sudden touches can trigger uncomfortable or painful past experiences of violence.

CAN I GIVE YOU A HUG?



Sometimes, children will give you nonverbal consent for physical contact such as hugging you first or grabbing you by the hand.



Some children will trust you and share their painful and difficult experiences with you. Listen to them calmly and openly. Believe their stories and recollections even if they seem unbelievable. The children are sharing their subjective experiences and your reactions will help build your mutual acceptance and trust. Make sure that you and the child feel comfortable during the conversation.



Respond to the story positively.

THANK YOU FOR SHARING YOUR EXPERIENCES WITH ME. YOUR TRUST MEANS A LOT TO ME.

FIND ME WHENEVER YOU NEED TO TALK.



Listen to the child. Your task is to be by their side and to encourage them to find constructive solutions and carry them out.

I ADMIRE YOUR STRENGTH TO BE SO BRAVE AND SUCH A GREAT STUDENT, IN SPITE OF EVERYTHING THAT YOU HAVE EXPERIENCED.



If you wish to help a child, ask them for permission first. Respect their answer.

DO YOU WANT ME TO TALK TO YOUR UNCLE?

OKAY, TELL ME IF YOU CHANGE YOUR MIND.

NO

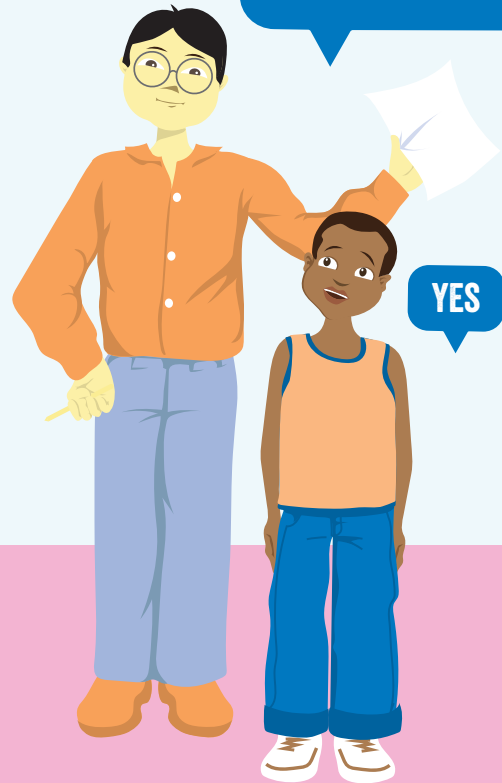


You can give advice based on your personal experiences.

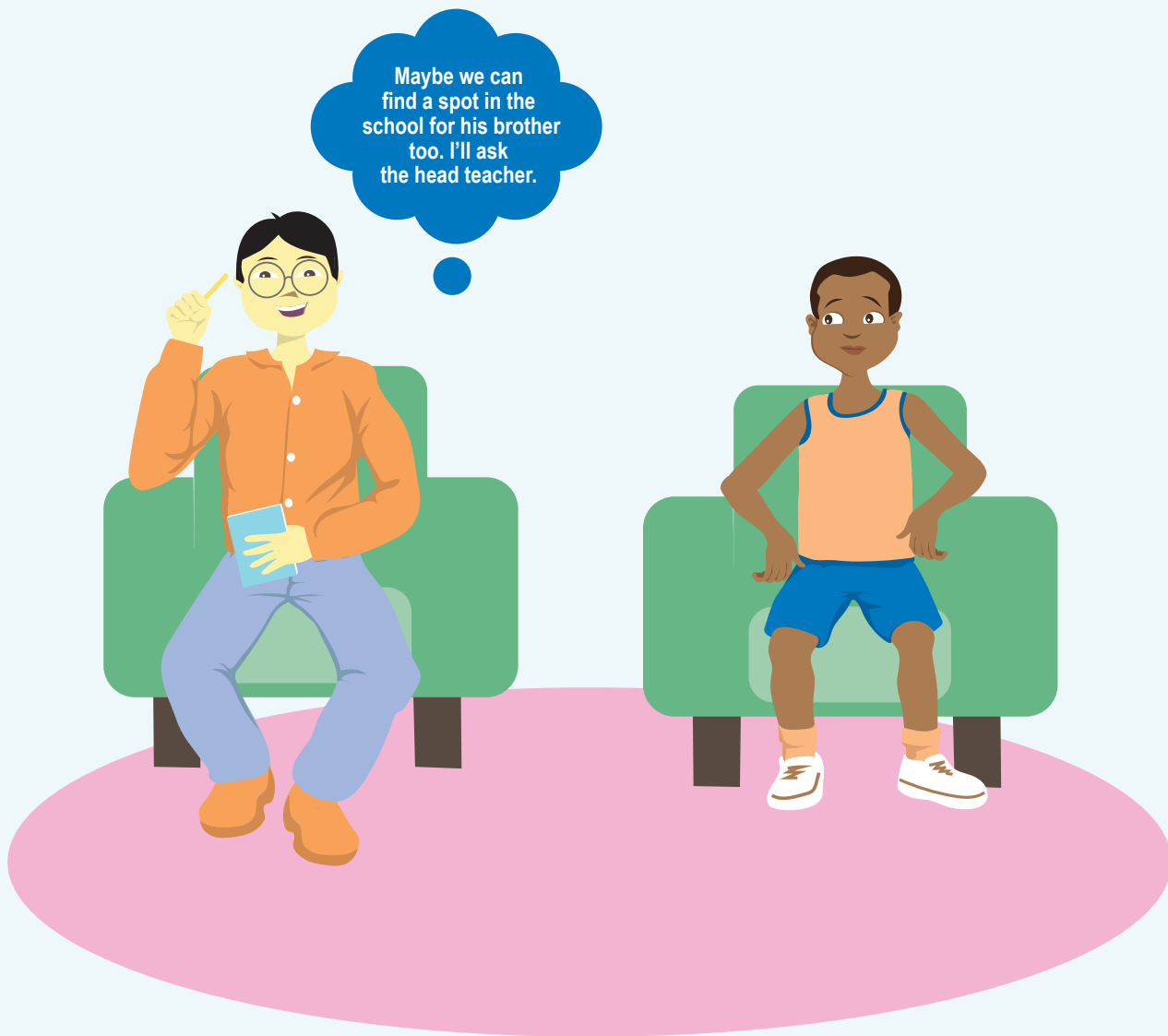
WHEN I WAS YOUNG, MY DAD DIED TOO. I WROTE HIM A LETTER AND THAT REALLY HELPED ME TO FEEL BETTER AND CLOSER TO HIM.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO WRITE A LETTER TO YOUR DAD ABOUT WHAT IS GOING ON IN YOUR LIFE NOW AND WHAT YOU ARE FEELING?

YES



Before you suggest a possible solution to the child, make sure that you can carry it out. Unfulfilled promises are harmful for the child because they increase their feeling of instability, unpredictably and distrust.



When we are working with a child from a different culture than our own, patient communication is even more important.

What seems normal to you might be completely new for the child and vice versa.

Teach the children about your culture and learn about the habits and traditions of the child's culture as well.

TEACHER, I HAVE A COLD, CAN I HAVE SOME ORANGE JUICE? MY GRANDMA ALWAYS USED TO MAKE IT FOR ME WHEN I WAS SICK.

Hmmm, why orange juice? Doesn't he know that hot tea with lemon and honey is the best cure for a cold?



When you and the child don't speak the same language, smile, look them in the eyes, and allow establishing of non-verbal communication. You and the child will create your own unique way of communicating that will be only yours and consequently even more valuable.



The child will share as much about their experiences as they are ready to share. Don't pressure them with additional questions to satisfy your curiosity. By doing so, you can unintentionally trigger the child by certain painful past experiences that they are not ready to face at the given moment.

HOW DID YOUR FATHER DIE?

PAST EXPERIENCE

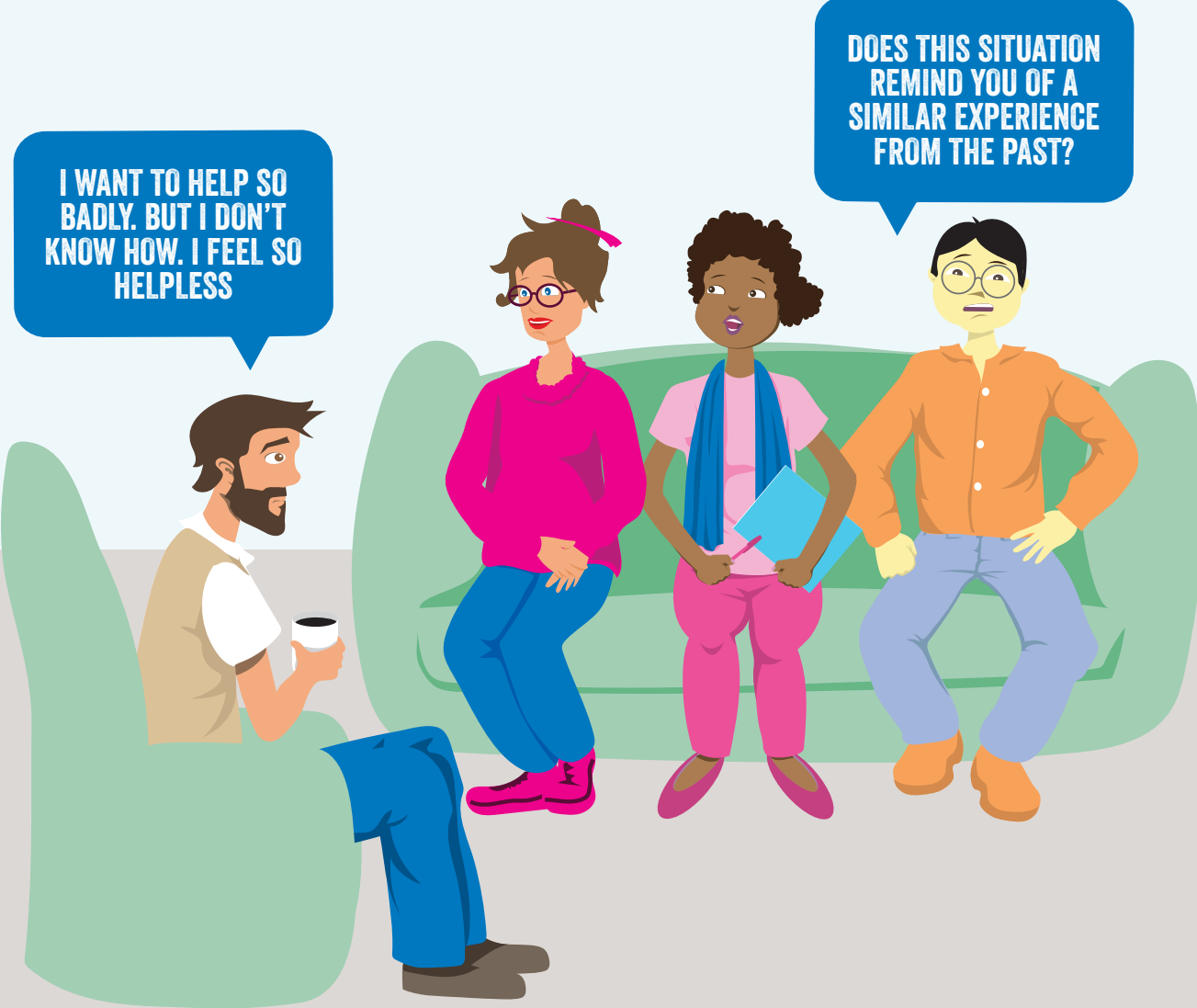


Respect the child's trust and privacy. Don't share their story with others, even your coworkers. Protect the child's personal data and the personal data of their family.

CAUTION: If we have reason to believe that the child is a victim of violence, we are required to act in accordance with the laws and regulations that govern such circumstances.



One's commitment to working with children who go through or have gone through difficult experiences can be a beautiful yet sometimes emotionally straining and stressful experience. Joining professionally guided individual or group supervisions can offer you psychological support and help you become psychologically stronger and more resilient



I WANT TO HELP SO BADLY. BUT I DON'T KNOW HOW. I FEEL SO HELPLESS

DOES THIS SITUATION REMIND YOU OF A SIMILAR EXPERIENCE FROM THE PAST?



**6. ORDER
AND DISCIPLINE**

6. ORDER AND DISCIPLINE

When working with children who experience or have experienced difficult things it is important to establish a predictable and healthy sense of order and discipline. These two elements have a calming effect on children. Because of difficult, unpredictable, and painful past experiences some children have lost their sense of stability. With order, predictability, and a healthy dose of discipline, at least in the time spent together, we can help the child reestablish a sense of stability. Stability will make a child feel safer and calmer therefore the child will be more present and less vulnerable to triggers.

So, it is important that we do our work according to a logical schedule. Tools we use in our work, should have its place. We have to be conscientious and consistent. We too have to follow the same rules that apply to the children.

We lead and raise children by example.

LET'S SING OUR
MORNING SONG.

Include everyday habits as well as repetitive activities and rituals in your work. This will create a sense of predictability therefore stability to children.



Maintain order and cleanliness in your environment/classroom. Take the time to clean up.



**AFTER PLAYING WE
ALWAYS PUT THE
TOYS BACK INTO THE
CLOSET.**

**YES, I WILL
DO THAT.**

Set logical rules that define the time you spend with the children. Explain to the children why every rule is necessary. Once the children understand the purpose of the rules, they will follow them more closely and more accurately. With proper instructions and through attentively supervised activities the children can set rules themselves as well.

T'S IMPORTANT THAT WE LISTEN TO ONE ANOTHER. THAT WAY WE CAN LEARN FROM ONE ANOTHER.

DURING CLASS WE SPEAK ONE AT A TIME, THE REST OF US HAVE TO LISTEN.

LET'S TRY THIS: ONE PERSON WILL SPEAK AND WE LISTEN TO THEM.

ROSY, WHAT DID YOU DO ON YOUR VACATION?

I VISITED MY GRANDMOTHER...

Check whether the children understand the rules the same way you do, and if they understand what is expected from them. Be aware of the fact that children who come from another culture might understand general rules that seem logical to you in a completely different way.

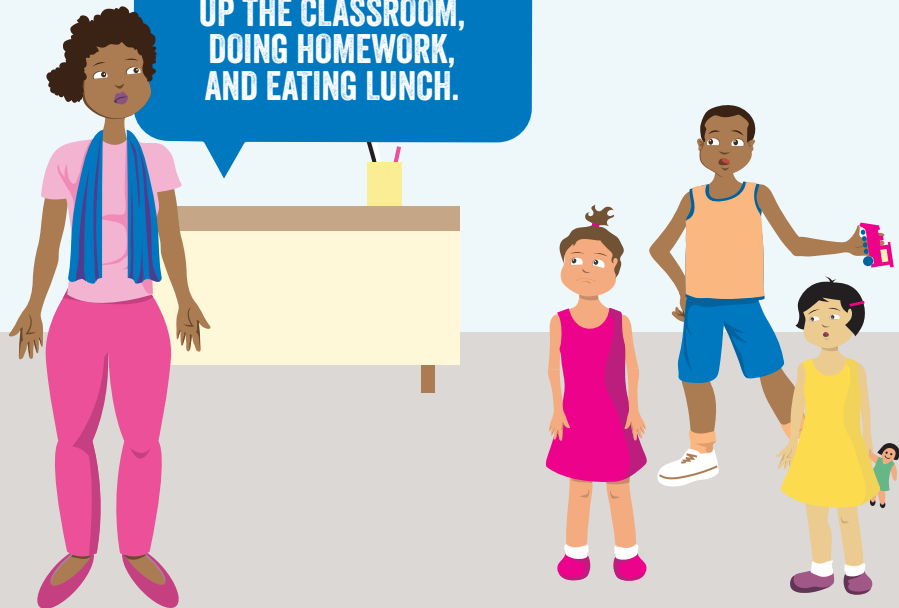
The rules should be short, clear, and easy to follow. Always follow the rules that you have set. That is the only way for the children to cultivate the feeling of predictability and stability.

WE WILL SPEND THE LAST HALF AN HOUR CLEANING UP THE CLASSROOM

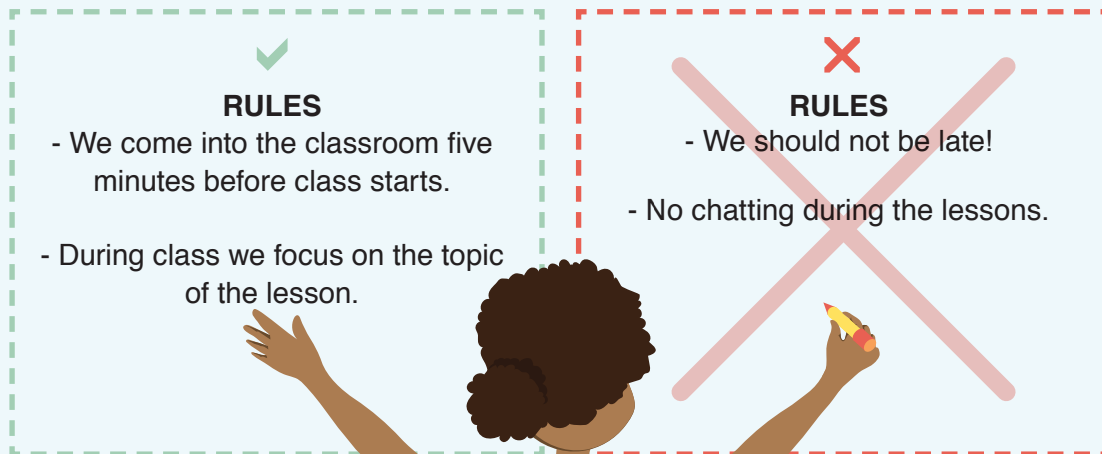


Unrealistic rules cannot always be followed. This creates stressful situations and awakens a feeling of instability in the children. Despite your best intentions the children can become restless and distrustful.

WE WILL SPEND THE LAST HALF AN HOUR CLEANING UP THE CLASSROOM, DOING HOMEWORK, AND EATING LUNCH.



Write down or draw the rules together with the children and hang them up someplace visible. Make sure that the rules are depicted in positive terms.



✓

RULES

- We come into the classroom five minutes before class starts.
- During class we focus on the topic of the lesson.

✗

RULES

- We should not be late!
- No chatting during the lessons.

Be patient if the children forget rules and instructions they agreed to. The reason behind it might be that they are overwhelmed by their painful past experiences . The activities you are doing and the agreements you have with the children are part of the present moment, while their mind can suddenly be fixated on their past. Be persistent and calmly repeat the rules and instructions again and again. Find a way to get the children’s attention focused on the present moment. Check whether the children have heard and understood you every time.



If you notice that the children are tired and unfocused when trying to solve a more difficult problem or perform serious tasks, take a break from teaching and carry out a fun and relaxing activity that will refocus the children's attention on the present moment. Then, resume working on more serious tasks.

**I SEE THAT
OUR FOCUS
IS SLIPPING.
LET'S SING A
SONG!**

PAST EXPERIENCE

PAST EXPERIENCE



Children have a shorter attention span than adults. When they are tired their focus can easily slip back to their painful past.

Be honest with yourself about your needs and respect them.

COME PLAY WITH US!

OKAY

I AM FEELING A LITTLE TIRED. I WANT TO REST A LITTLE BIT.



Be decisive, assertive, and strict when it is necessary.

GET OFF THE LADDER NOW!



Celebrate the children's achievements. Point them out and be happy with the child

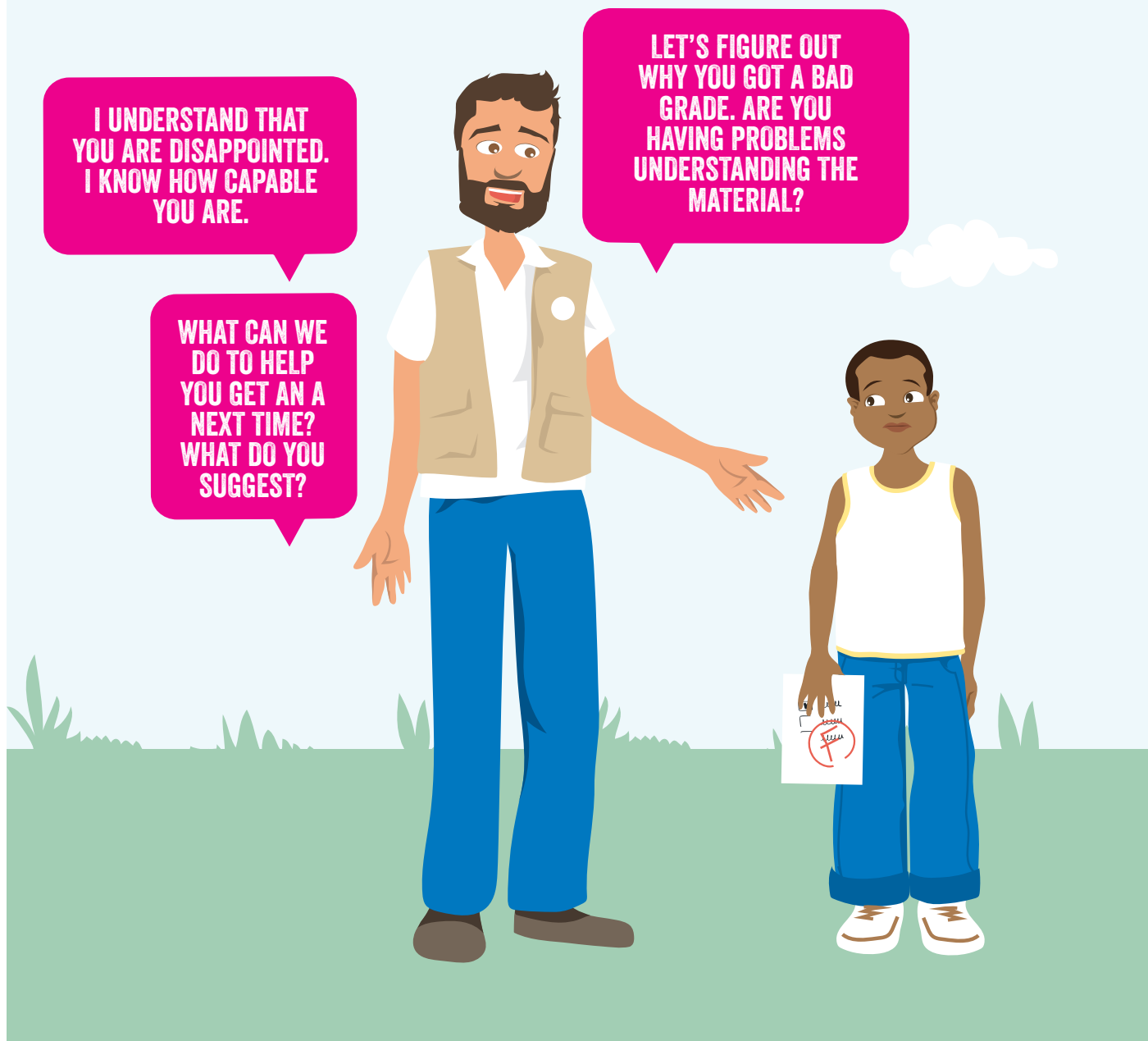


Allow mistakes and failure, these are normal parts of the learning process and development. Turn failure and mistakes into teaching moments.

I UNDERSTAND THAT YOU ARE DISAPPOINTED. I KNOW HOW CAPABLE YOU ARE.

WHAT CAN WE DO TO HELP YOU GET AN A NEXT TIME? WHAT DO YOU SUGGEST?

LET'S FIGURE OUT WHY YOU GOT A BAD GRADE. ARE YOU HAVING PROBLEMS UNDERSTANDING THE MATERIAL?





7. RECIPROCALITY

7. RECIPROCITY

Offering help is very beneficial and should be balanced by receiving something in return. When we work with children, we offer them a lot of love and care, so the children feel an internal need to give us something in return. We should allow them to do so in their own way.

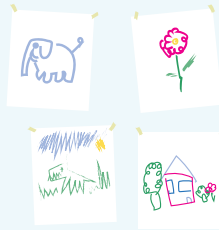
When there is no reciprocity in a relationship, a child feels incapable and unworthy. They might start rejecting your support and acting ungratefully.



Create opportunities for the children to contribute to their group, the class, and to their community with their talents. This way they will be able to express their gratitude for your help, care, and acceptance.



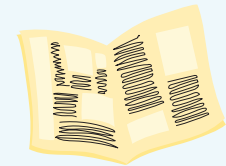
**PERFORMANCES,
POETRY, SKETCHES**



**DRAWING
EXHIBITION**



**COOKING
CLASS**



NEWSPAPER



**8.ACTIVITIES THAT
ENCOURAGE A
CHILD'S RECOVERY
AFTER TRAUMATIC
EXPERIENCES**

8. ACTIVITIES THAT ENCOURAGE A CHILD'S RECOVERY AFTER TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCES

1. INSTRUCTIONS ON HOW TO CARRY OUT ACTIVITIES

TRUST YOURSELF

We recommend that you try out these activities by yourself before carrying them out with children. You can do it in a group where you are one of the participants or individually - for example as an exercise in front of a mirror. This way you will feel more confident when instructing and leading children, have a better understanding of the children's reactions, and be able to judge which activity is the most suitable for a particular group more easily.

BEGINNING AND END

Before every activity, clearly announce the beginning of an activity and clearly state when an activity has finished. Together with the children, determine a sign for the beginning or end of an activity, for example **"One, two, three, go!"** at the beginning and three claps and an exclamation of **"Bravo, bravo, bravo!"** at the end. Using such or similar exclamations after every exercise will give the children a sense of order and rhythm, as well as

create a positive atmosphere and make the children feel praised.

THE OBJECTIVE OF THESE ACTIVITIES

The main objective of all these activities is to help the children relax, connect with one another, and stay more focused on the present moment. Allow the children to experience every activity in their own way, even if they don't carry it out the same way you would. Have fun with them. Further activities can be done in between classes or as an independent part of the intervention. If the activities will be used as an independent course, make sure to include some non-structured time in between activities so that the children get the chance to play freely as well. Free play helps children integrate the effects of the activities. If any of the children don't want to participate, don't force them.

Don't force anyone to participate. Even if nobody wants to participate, continue with the activities, even if you perform them alone, and have fun doing it. Sooner or later the children will join in. The more fun you have, the more interesting you will be, and the sooner others will join you.

2. ACTIVITIES FOR BEING PRESENT AND WAKEFUL

The objective of these activities: is to help children divert their focus to the present (physical) space through the use of their senses (touch, sight, smell, hearing, tasting). This encourages the children to shift their focus from their painful past experiences to the present time and present situation.

Effect: After these activities the children will be livelier in a positive way, better mood and more focused.

A piece of advice: The more often we perform these activities by ourselves and the more carefully we observe their effects on our behavior, the easier it will be for us to see the positive effects that the activities have on children.

HELLO, WORLD, I LOVE YOU

Summary: The leader announces the beginning of the activity.

The children are in a relaxed group. The leader gives the children instructions: **“Find a red object in the room, touch it and say hello to it.”** The children find a red object, for example a red cardigan, touch it, look at it and greet it with a **“Hello!”**. The leader continues: **“Find, touch, and say hello to a chair.”** The children run to the nearest chair, touch it, and greet it with a **“Hello!”**. With these instructions the leader is guiding the

children to touch, look at, and greet as many objects in the room. When the children touch and greet the objects surrounding them, they focus their attention on these objects. The objects exist in the here and now, so, by touching them, the children’s focus will start to shift to the present moment.

The leader can also use more abstract elements.

For example: **say hello to the sun, look at the sky and say hello to the sky, say hello to friendship, and so on.** When you notice positive changes in the children (relaxed body language, laughter, and a sparkle in their eye) you can finish the activity. At the end, the children should say hello to themselves using their name... And they should end the activity by hugging themselves.

Be creative and crafty when choosing the objects that the children should greet. Choose diverse elements so that the children don’t get bored.

If you wish to make the activity even more intense, have the children add **“I love you”** to their greeting. For example: **“Hello, wall, I love you!”** This will further improve the atmosphere and mood.

Finish the exercise with a positive exclamation.

PEG TOP

Summary: The leader announces the beginning of the activity.

The activity is performed in pairs. The first person in the pair spins around clockwise three times, then

spins the other way around three times as well then immediately stops. Now they have to describe the space and the objects around them as quickly as possible. The descriptions should go on for as long as it takes for the children's mood to improve. Then, switch roles.

Describing the current surroundings helps children focus on the present moment.

Finish the exercise with a positive exclamation.

WHAT DO I HEAR?

Summary: The leader announces the beginning of the activity.

Instruct the children to close their eyes and listen to their inhales and exhales. The children should be sitting or standing in a comfortable position with their eyes closed. These children who don't feel comfortable having their eyes closed can keep them open. Their eyes should be gently directed to the ground so that random events in the surrounding do not bother them or break their concentration. The children should listen to their inhales and exhales until they have inhaled and exhaled seven times. The children shouldn't count their inhales and exhales, they should only focus on listening. Then, ask the children to start listening to the sounds in their surroundings. Everyone should then quietly list everything they hear (singing, the rustling of wind, and so on.) The children should list as many sounds as possible, everything they can hear.

When the expressions on the children's faces

indicate that they have relaxed, you can gently finish the exercise.

3. ACTIVITIES FOR CONNECTING THE LEFT AND RIGHT SIDES OF THE BRAIN

The objective of these activities: is to encourage the integration of the brain's right and left hemispheres.

Effect: The children will be calmer and feel safer with themselves. They will be more focused on what is going on in class, more creative, more positive, and in a better mood. These activities encourage and improve mental clarity.

PLAYING AN INSTRUMENT

Summary: Playing an instrument and learning how to play an instrument is wonderful. It encourages artistic expression in children and, among other beneficial effects, also helps connect different parts of the brain.

Organize music lessons and give all children the chance to learn how to play an instrument, even those who seem to lack talent for it.

JUGGLING

Summary: Juggling is an incredibly fun activity which also encourages the integration of the brain and opens unlimited options for being artistic and expressing yourself. Organize juggling lessons. You

can learn how to juggle yourself and impart your knowledge on your children, or invite professional jugglers to teach them, or suggest to the children that they learn how to juggle themselves from internet sources under your supervision.

OPPOSITE WORLD

Summary: When you assign the children a text to read, give them one that is printed as an inverted mirror image for a change. Reading from the opposite direction then the children are used to will encourage the integration and connection to their left and right brain hemispheres.

DRAW A PICTURE WITH BOTH HANDS

Draw a Picture with Both Hands Simultaneously

Summary: Announce the beginning of the activity.

Tell the children that it's time for drawing. This time you will not be drawing only with one hand but with both hands at the same time.

When the children finish their drawings, look at the together and laugh cheerfully. Some drawings will probably look extremely funny.

Announce the end of the activity.

THE RHYTHM OF THE BODY

Summary: This activity can be carried out in groups, pairs or individually. Take a piece of paper and draw three different symbols on them. Make

sure the symbols are big enough to be seen at a distance. For example: draw a circle, a triangle, and a square. Assign every symbol a sound that you can make with your body. For example: the circle = snap your fingers, the square = jump and clap your hands at the same time, triangle = say the sound "iiiiiiiiii" and crouch down at the same time. Next, draw these symbols in a sequence of your choosing.

For example:

Circle = snap your fingers

Square = jump and clap your hands at the same time

Triangle = say the sound "iiiiiiiiii" and crouch down at the same time



Hang the piece of paper on the wall and explain the meaning of each symbol to the participants. Make sure they understand which sound and movement belongs to which symbol. Decide who in the group will be the conductor. The conductor stands next to the paper and points at the symbols with their hands or a stick. The participants have to perform the movements and sounds the conductor points at.

The conductor should start out at a slow pace but continue instructing the “orchestra” faster and faster. The conductor can make up their own sequences of symbols. For example: they can move from left to right, right to left, up and down between the symbols.

Organize a competition between groups of children for this activity. Divide the children into as many groups as possible and then have all the groups perform the activity simultaneously. The group who is the fastest, the most synchronized, and makes the fewest mistakes wins. The children can add or create new symbols, sounds, and movements. Announce that the activity is finished. You can carry out this exercise individually as well. Write down a sequence of symbols on a piece of paper, place it before you, and play the sequence of sounds and movements. Invite your coworkers to join in on the activity, so that you can freshen up your mind from everyday worries and stress. The more different symbols you use, the harder this activity will be.

4. ACTIVITIES FOR CALMING DOWN AND RELAXING

The objective of these activities: The children and the leader shift their focus on positive and nice side of life despite their difficult circumstances.

Effect: After the activity the children will be calmer, more connected, and more ready to cooperate.

Performing these activities daily has a positive effect on overall mood.

To know: These activities often awaken very gentle feelings in the participants, who often wish to embrace each other at the end. Follow the wishes of the participants spontaneously. These activities positively impact the atmosphere in the group.

A piece of advice: These activities can be carried out in your free time as part of your self-care ritual, because regularly performing these activities also helps adults increase their energy levels and contributes to a better daily mood and elevated general wellbeing.

EXERCISING GRATEFULNESS

Summary: Announce the beginning of the activity.

The children should form a circle. The leader instructs the children to each list one thing that they are grateful for. If the number of children is very low, every child should list three things they are grateful for.

When everyone has had their turn, the leader finishes the exercise by praising the participants.

We can advise older children and parents going through a difficult time to perform the exercise individually by writing down or thinking of three things that happened throughout the day that they are grateful for. This exercise fosters a gentle yet strong recovery process.

MAGICAL FINGERS

Summary: Announce the beginning of the activity. The children should be sitting or standing in a comfortable position with their eyes closed. Those children who don't feel comfortable having their eyes closed can keep them open. Their eyes can stay gently focused on the ground in front of them. Press your thumb and index finger together like you often see in pictures of yogis meditating. While your fingers are joined, inhale and exhale once. Then, release your fingers and move on to gently pressing your thumb and middle finger together. Inhale and exhale once. Release your fingers. Now, gently press your thumb and ring finger together. Inhale. Exhale. Release your fingers. Gently press your thumb and little finger together. Inhale. Exhale. Continue this process with your other hand.

Gently finish the activity.

5. ACTIVITIES FOR STRENGTHENING COGNITIVE ABILITIES

The objective of these activities: Encouraging the development of cognitive abilities and being present in the moment here and now.

Effect: These activities improve mental clarity, presence, memory, logical thinking, and other cognitive abilities.

To know: Activities that encourage the development of cognitive processes also improve our presence in

the here and now. By observing our task, by thinking about it, and by analyzing it, we automatically shift out focus from thinking about past experiences to performing a present task.

A piece of advice: These activities should be adapted and customized to accommodate the children's abilities. Activities that are too difficult can have a discouraging effect on the children. This can stress the students out and can cause them to quit participating. It and can make them aggressive, depending on how they usually react to stress. If the activities are too easy the children could become bored. Too many too easy activities can also be too stressful for the children. Stress can cause the children's focus to slip from the present moment to their painful past experiences.

The activities should be difficult enough for the children to have to put effort into achieving the right result without exerting themselves too much (too much exertion equals stress). By achieving the right result the children will feel self-confident and motivated to face harder tasks. By adapting the tasks accordingly, we offer the children an opportunity for a gradual and constant development.

FIND THE DIFFERENCES

Summary: Announce the beginning of the activity.

Instruct the children to draw two identical drawings. Then, ask them to choose one drawing and to add five things to it that are different from the original drawing. These additions should be as unnoticeable as possible.

Every child should then be invited to show their two drawings to the whole group of children. The group of children should try to find the differences between the two drawings together.

This activity encourages observation and analyzing skills.

Announce that the activity is finished with a positive exclamation.

PUZZLES, CROSSWORDS, RIDDLES ...

Summary: Announce the beginning of the activity.

Instruct the children to make a crossword, a puzzle, and one riddle. Make sure that the tasks they create are solvable. Collect all the exercises and randomly distribute them among the children in the classroom. Then, instruct the children to solve them. After the children finish solving the puzzles, they should find the author of the exercise. Together they should talk and laugh about how they solved the task. Together the children should then create the hardest riddle for you. Solve the riddle in front of them in a fun and relaxed way.

Praise the children for the excellently performed activity and finish the activity with a positive exclamation.

6. ACTIVITIES FOR IMPROVING SELF CONFIDENCE AND COOPERATION IN GROUPS

The objective of these activities: Encouraging self-reflection, self-confidence, relaxation, creativity, and cooperation between participants.

Impact: After these activities the children will feel a sense of self-confidence, personal assertiveness, and a heightened sense of connectedness which encourage positive behavior and a feeling of security and safety.

LET'S INTRODUCE OURSELVES

Summary: The leader starts by saying their name. Then the leader writes their name in the air with their hand, their elbow, and any other part of the body, for example with their foot.

When the leader finishes with their gestures and words, they invite the participant next to them to do the same with their name. Afterwards, every participant says their name and writes it down in the air using a different part of their body.

We encourage the participants to write their names with as many different body parts as possible: with their hips, head, belly, heel, shoulder, and so on.

Be aware of the facial expressions and body language of the participants.

If any of the participants starts feeling uncomfortable, they should write down their

names with their hands or any other way they feel comfortable.

BECOMING AWARE OF OURSELVES

Summary: Every participant first thinks about what they are most proud of with themselves. They should write down what they are most proud of on a piece of paper.

Every participant should think about their short-term goals and their long-term goals by themselves. Write all your goals on a piece of paper.

Every participant should create a slogan for themselves (one that they would wish to have printed on a shirt or written in their e-mail signature and so on). The participants should say their slogans out loud. If they want to, they can also explain them to other participants.

If you have the possibility, you can print the slogans onto the shirts of participants or have them write down their own slogans on their shirts using textile paints.

I AM OKAY, YOU ARE OKAY, WE ARE OKAY

Summary: Instruct the children to form pairs.

Have one of the children say to the other:

“I like that I am... (then they say what they like about themselves)”

“I admire ... (then they add what they admire about the other person) **about you.”**

“I really enjoyed when we did... (then they add an experience or event that they liked to do) **together.”**
Then have the children change roles.

Repeat this process two times, then have the children change couples. The couples should be changed as often as possible, so that the children can think about as many positive traits and characteristics about themselves and their friends.

Gently finish the activity.

Often, the children will focus on complimenting outside appearances (such as hairstyles, clothes, and so on). Remind the children to mention personality traits as well.

You can carry out this activity individually as well, by imagining a loved one in your mind. You can also perform this activity with children that you do not get along with very well.

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