TOPIC 2. UNDERSTANDING OUR CHILDREN

Preface:

Please note that this Topic (**Understanding Our Children**) is based on material from the original Memory Project training programme. The ideas were built up with help from a group of Ugandan mothers living with HIV/Aids.This means that some of the language, examples and illustrations are geared to the culture of Uganda and the particular problems for families living with HIV/Aids.

But we believe that most of the basic ideas can be helpful for people living in other parts of the world and facing many different problems.

We hope you will find ways to adapt the ideas to fit the culture and the needs of your group and we shall be very pleased to hear from you about how you have managed to get the ideas across. We can then pass on your suggestions to other people who use this website. Please contact us via - **www.memorybooks.org.uk/feed-back-form**

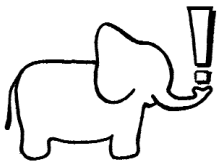
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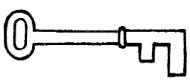
This is where you can get a picture of how the topic fits into the whole structure of the Memory Book training programme and what it aims to achieve with the group members.



When this icon appears at the beginning of each topic it describes how the topic is broken into sessions or group activities and provides a guide to the time to be spent on each session. Elsewhere this icon details what needs to be taught by the end of a particular session or activity



Elephants don't forget and you should not forget this important piece of information or idea.



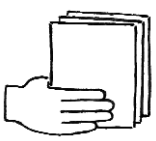
Key facts for the trainers/workshop leaders to get across during the session.



Guidance notes for trainer/leaders on how to run this session.



A story that draws a picture of a situation or explains a point or idea to the group.



Material/sheet to be given out to the group.

Background information for trainers/group leaders.



This topic is covered in two sessions:

Part A. CHILD DEVELOPMENT. This covers the different stages of child development and helps parents to know more about what sort of care children need and what children understand at different ages. Parents will be asked to share what they already know from their personal experience about the different characteristics, needs and problems of children as they grow and develop.

Part B. PARENTING. This will help parents answer the questions "What does it mean to be a parent?", "How can we improve the way we talk and listen to our children?", "What can we do to help our children cope in the future?"

When parents start to share information about their own childhood and the way they are bringing up their children, they will begin to realise how much child care knowledge they already have. When they feel more confident about themselves as parents, they will be able to "tune in" to how their own children may be feeling and they will become more confident about starting to talk openly with their children.

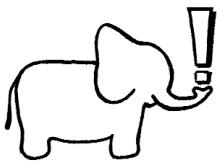
The information that comes out of these discussions will be familiar to most members of the group – and therefore it is non-threatening. BUT some of the parents may not have worked out how quickly their responsibilities change as children reach different ages and stages. They may not realise how much young children can understand when things are carefully explained to them.

Part A. Child development.



Aims of this session are to help members of the group to:

- Share what they already know about the way children grow and develop.
- Understand the different stages of child growth & development.
- Recognise the needs of a child at each stage of their development.
- Talk about the sort of problems children may have at each stage and parental responsibility to protect children.
- Think about how parenting needs to change as children grow up or circumstances change.



Important information for trainer/group leader.

BEWARE when discussing ideas on bringing up children that there may be differences between the laws of the country and the customary practices of some of the parents taking part in the workshop. Its important that parents can talk openly about what is usual in their family, community, clan or tribe without being criticised by people who think differently. For example in some areas girl children might be betrothed or married at a much younger age than is permitted under the official law. (In such cases, when parents are talking with or making plans for older children, they need to be clear with the child about which laws or practices they are applying.) In other families children are harshly treated and excluded from discussion of important family business. Or step children and orphans are treated differently to the natural children of the family.

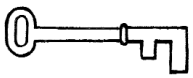
It is essential to say to the group that, although there are so many different beliefs and customs amongst families, there are some laws or rules relating to child care which apply to everyone. For example rules about the safety and care of young children and protection against sexual defilement are respected by all communities in the world.

Rights which are universally accepted are listed in the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Child. A short version is given below.

(These "rights" are not yet in place in all Communities - but it's something we should all be aiming for.)

MATERIALS needed for this session:

- Supply of newsprint and marker pens
- Paper and pens for workshop members who want to make notes
- Copy of the short form of the UN Declaration of the Rights of Children to hand out.



KEY FACTS for the trainer or group leader to get across:

- Most parents want to make a good job of being parents but some of the discussion may make them feel they have not done well enough.(e.g. they may realise they haven't really listened to what their children think or want to know.)
- Parents need encouragement, not to be made to feel ashamed.
- We can all learn to do things better.
- There is still time to change the way we talk and listen to our children.

A parent on one of the early Memory Project Courses cried out loud because she realised during the discussions that she had never stopped to really listen to her child. The next day she came back to the course and told her colleagues "Last night I put down my housework. I listened to my daughter. We became like friends and now we can begin to talk about things that matter."



CASE STUDY 1



How to run this session:

⇨ Start the session with one of the warm-up activities given in the section on "Icebreakers for starting the day" from the "Ideas for Workshop Leaders" document.

⇨ Tell parents that they are going to spend time talking in small groups about three of the ways that children change and develop as they grow up.The questions are

(a) What are the different physical characteristics of children in early, middle and late childhood?
(b) What are the changing needs of children in early, middle and late childhood?
(c) What sort of problems do children face in early, middle and late childhood.

⇨ Divide the parents into three groups. Ask each group to take responsibility to discuss these questions for one of the age groups. (Early childhood covers 0-2 years, Middle childhood covers 3 -12 years, Late childhood covers 13-18 years).

⇨ Set a time limit, depending how much time you have. IF you have plenty of time you may want to ask each group to discuss at least two of the age groups.

⇨ Finally bring the three groups together to form one large group, to share their ideas.

⇨ Below you will find checklists covering each of the questions and the different age groups. KEEP an eye on these lists so you can fill in any gaps when the parents give their feedback. You can also add new ideas to the lists that come from the parents.

⇨ Use the case study, or tell your own stories, at suitable times during the session, to help the parents to "take in" really important points, eg. about their ability to change their relationship with their children.

⇨ Be ready to support parents who are at risk of being humiliated because of their style of parenting or cultural differences. You don't have to agree with them, but they have the right to say how it is in their family. See information in the box on page 2.



CHECK LISTS

Physical characteristics of Early childhood. (0 – 2)



- New born babies are helpless and depend on parent or carer.
- Babies soon learn to recognise mother's face and voice.
- When babies get attention they soon learn to smile, make baby noises, which usually gets them more attention!
- This is stage of rapid language development.
- Movement develops quickly and gradually gets more co-ordinated.
- Babies start to play with objects, often putting them in the mouth.
- Babies don't know what is dangerous to them so they are not afraid of things that could hurt them – vehicles, animals, fire.
- There is rapid mental and physical growth.
- The child is angry or sad if mother or carer goes out of sight.
- Strange faces or voices frighten the child.
- Young babies make their needs known through crying. Later on they grab what they want or have a tantrum if they can't get it!
- A child of two can begin to understand if you explain something carefully such as "Mummy is ill, we must be quiet so she can sleep." Or "Mummy is going out. She will come back when it is dark."
- Add new ideas to the list.....

Physical characteristics of middle childhood. (3 – 12)



- Language is developing very fast.
- Children start to think things out, to understand what is happening around them.
- They are eager to learn through playing and at school.
- They begin to understand the difference between reality and imagination.
- They are very energetic; never still.
- They easily make friendships with other children of their age and want to go out to play without adult supervision.
- They begin to know difference between right and wrong.
- They can be brave and put up with problems eg. pain, hunger.
- Parents are very important and influential and they want to please them.
- They love to imitate what they see elders doing eg. Cooking, digging, looking after younger children.
- They begin to understand the idea of death, that people are ill, may die; that people will be sad and mourn.
- School aged children start to compare themselves and their possessions with other children. They can be very demanding.
- All children of this age want to do well and and are very happy when they are praised. Building up their confidence is very important.
- They want freedom to play around the neighbourhood.
- They can take on jobs around the house and compound. But they are still to young to have full responsibility for younger children.
- They want parents to listen to them, take an interest in everything they do.
- Add new ideas to the list.....



Physical characteristics of late childhood. (13 – 18)

- Rapid growth and major body changes such as menstruation, growing breasts, beards, hips, pimples etc.
- Conflicting emotions due to hormonal changes - sociable and helpful one minute, shy and stubborn the next.
- They are developing their own identity and want their voices to be heard and their ideas to be taken seriously.
- They may become secretive – you don't always know where they are or who they are with.
- Interest in boy/girl friends builds up.
- This is a time when they may get set with problem behaviour from earlier years – telling lies, being lazy…..Or, with help from sympathetic family, they may develop into helpful, open young people.
- They may start "testing the boundaries" - coming home late, dressing up, using jargon used by peers.
- Family bonds loosen. They want more independence.
- Friendship with people their own age becomes more important. They worry about being left out or not taken seriously by their peer group.
- As they become more independent they are faced with all the social pressures to get involved in sexual relationships, drink alcohol, experiment with drugs.
- They can become bored with school or work and be tempted to drop out.
- Add new ideas to the list.



Needs of early childhood: (0 – 2)



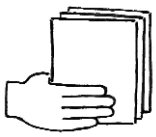
- All babies and toddlers need continuous love, care, protection.
- It's not safe to leave very young children unattended.
- Good feeding of balanced diet.
- Food and surroundings need to be clean to protect against disease.
- Health care and protection from malaria and other infections.
- SAFETY - protect crawling babies/ toddlers from fire, traffic, water.
- Encourage first words by talking directly to the child and responding to "babble".
- Encourage the child to start to move about, to play with objects.
- Socialising. Babies and toddlers like to be with other children and adults.
- Sleep.Babies and toddlers also need more peace and quiet than older children.
- Add new ideas to the list.

Needs of middle childhood (3 - 12)

- Gradually they need more freedom to move around with friends, walk to school etc. But never too far out of sight of adults or older children.
- Encouragement to learn new skills, take a part in household activities, to become an important part of the family.
- Support to go to school and interest of parents/older children in what they are trying to learn.
- Help to be aware of physical dangers (traffic, deep water, fire).
- Sensible information from parents/carers about dangers of child abductors, defilement, thieves and how to stay safe.
- Encouraging pride in appearance.
- Encouraging them to take care of own health – eat keep clean, rest.
- LISTENING TO THE CHILD, giving them time to talk about things that are important to them.
- ANSWERING QUESTIONS HONESTLY.
- Add new ideas to the list.

Needs of late childhood: (13 – 18)

- Teenagers need more Independence – privacy, time with own friends, freedom to come and go within reason.
- Love and understanding as they struggle with teenage mood swings.
- Guidance about their responsibilities at home, for younger children and in the community
- OPEN DISCUSSION about important family business – taking them into your confidence.
- LISTENING TO THEIR POINT OF VIEW, THEIR CONCERNS
- Honest information about the dangers in the outside world – unwanted sexual attention, risk of sexually transmitted diseases, getting in with the wrong company.
- Encouragement to take responsibility for their own health.
- Encouragement to study/work/plan their future
- Passing on skills and important information about the family.
- Give them important information about the family and passing on skills and knowledge.
- Add new ideas to the list.



Problems of early childhood: (0 – 2)

- Slow growth because of lack of food or unhealthy conditions.
- Injury or death through accidents eg. falling into fire, falling in water, traffic accident.
- Physical abuses or neglect by parents/guardians or caretakers.
- Poor mental development because of lack of time or interest by parents or carers. The child gives up trying to get attention.
- Untreated illness or infection because of lack of medical care
- Slow physical development because child has not been encouraged to learn, play, explore.
- Add new ideas to the list.



Problems of middle childhood. (3 – 12)

- Slow growth and development because they don't get enough food and attention.
- Lack of confidence because parents and older children don't give encouragement and praise. They fear they will never be good at anything.
- Risk of accidents because they don't understand the dangers or are expected to do more than reasonable at their age.
- Confusion because adults don't explain what is happening in the family (illness, moving to a new place, no money for school fees.)
- They could be frightened by the natural stages of puberty which haven't been carefully explained to them (starting to menstruate, bodily changes, emotional ups and downs.)
- They could easily bel led astray by older children or abductors because they don't understand what is happening.
- Misbehaviour or running away from home because they are unhappy or feel neglected
- They are defiled and don't dare to speak about it.
- They haven't learnt how to ask questions or talk to their parents or carers about serious problems – so they go without information that they need.
- Add new ideas to the list.

Problems of older childhood. (13 – 18)

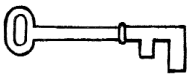
- Misguided – led astray – by their peers.
- Fearing that they will never succeed in anything. This can lead to depression, suicidal attempts etc.
- Unable to say NO to unwanted sexual relationship.
- Dropping out of school or work because of boredom, lack of confidence or temptation of other activities.
- Becoming pregnant or catching sexually transmitted disease because of lack of knowledge of contraception and protection.
- Desperate for clothes, possessions and therefore temptation to steal.
- Refusing to talk openly to parents/carers.
- Feeling that parents/carers don't love them.
- Resentment over having to take responsibilities in the family.
- Feeling left out of family discussions and decisions.
- Add new ideas to the list.

PART B. PARENTING



Aims of this session are to help parents to:

- Remember and talk about how they were parented, both good and bad experiences.
- Identify what they are like as mother/father
- Think about what kind of parent they want to be and what they might to do differently in future.
- Talk about the particular responsibilities of parents with HIV/Aids.



KEY FACTS for you, as trainer or group leader, to get across to parents during this session:

- The way we were parented when we were children influences how we parent our own children.
- Our childhood experiences mixed with the experiences of our partner (husband or wife) means that we produce our own unique style of parenting.
- No parents are perfect - there is no such human being.
- No parents are all bad. Even if we sometimes get it wrong – we also often get it right.
- Even the best parents make mistakes – and children are usually very forgiving, especially if parents admit their mistake.
- Parenting needs to be "good enough" to protect children.
- We cant change the past but we can learn from it – and influence the future.
- Parents CAN build better relationships with their children.
- Even if parents are ill or face other serious problems, there are things they can do to encourage a good outcome for their children. For example:
  - Talking and listening to their children.
  - Explaining everyday things so children know what is expected of them.
  - Talking about problems and the future so children are prepared and less afraid of the unknown.

Case Study. Introduce this story, or your own stories, at a suitable point in the discussion to illustrate different types of parenting, how we can all make mistakes and have mixed up feelings.



CASE STUDY 2

Faith is cooking the evening meal while her toddler Maria is playing outside. Faith looks up from what she's doing but Maria is not in sight. She calls out for Maria – but there is no answer.

With some annoyance Faith leaves her cooking, goes to the door and shouts for Maria to come back at once. There is no response. Faith's annoyance now turns to irritation as she mutters "where can that child have got to."

Moments turn into minutes and there is still no sign of Maria. Faith is now struggling with feelings of both anger and worry. "Oh my god, something has happened," she says under her breath. As Faith continues to shout Maria's name her voice changes because her chest has begun to tighten with fear.

Faith starts searching around the village - and at last she spots Maria playing happily under a tree. She is flooded with relief, runs towards Maria, scooping her up in her arms. At the same time Faith remembers that she has left her cooking on the fire unattended. As a result she starts shouting and scolding Maria, smacking her hard on the legs, while at the same time hugging her close.

The surge of all these different feelings overwhelms Faith. As a result instead of feeling her mother's love and concern, Maria is at the receiving end of anger and rough handling.



How to run this session:

⇨ Explain the Aims of the session and introduce key points given above.

⇨ Ask parents to work in small groups (2 – 4 people that they feel comfortable with) to talk about **their own childhood experiences.**

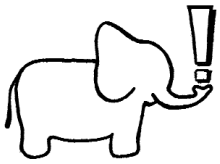
⇨ Next ask parents to talk about **themselves as parents** and what or who has influenced them.

⇨ Set time limits depending on how much time you have available. It is important that everyone has a chance to share their experiences in the small groups.

⇨ Bring the parents together to discuss:

- **Different types of parenting.**
- **Responsibilities of parents for children at different ages and stages.**
- **How roles and responsibilities in the family change when one parent is missing or has died.**

⇨ Be sure to encourage each person to contribute something to this feedback session.



(**Checklists for each of these subjects are given below.** When parents give their feedback make sure the main points are covered.

Please note that some of the checklist ideas are exaggerations – in order to make the point that there are many different ways of bringing up children. Parents will probably recognise parts of themselves in all the different categories. That is normal. If they feel they have too many characteristics of the careless parent or the harsh parent, remind them that there is always time to change!)

⇨ Finally, ask parents to go back into small groups to discuss and decide three things that they want to change for the better.

⇨ Close the session by reassuring parents that:

- *being OPEN with our children and doing our best to prepare them for the future, will help them to cope with problems ahead.*

- *we can all make some positive changes in the way we act as parents. It is never too late.*



Different types of parenting:

Easy-going parenting – careless parenting.

- The parent may be warm and well meaning but life is a bit of a muddle.
- Parents don't seem to notice or care what happens.
- The children do what they want; sometimes they are in danger.
- Children generally lack guidance about behaviour, don't go to school regularly.
- The home and children get neglected.
- Money is badly organised.
- There is not much discussion or planning for the future.
- Add new ideas to the list.

Strict parenting - harsh parenting

- The home may be well organised and children are not physically neglected. But there are not many warm feelings.
- Parents are often self centred or too busy to listen to the children.
- There are a lot of Dos and Don'ts and hard punishments.
- Children don't have a chance to ask questions or to express their feelings.
- Children are left out of discussion about important family business (eg. sickness, money worries although they need to know.
- Children may disagree and fight amongst themselves.
- Add new ideas to the list.

Responsible parenting – caring parenting.

- It is not a question of money. Very poor parents can be caring parents.
- Parents listen to what the children have to say.
- They discuss important family business with the children.
- They give helpful guidance and expect good behaviour so their children grow up to be responsible.
- They involve children in household activities depending on age.
- They encourage children to stay at school or stick at work.
- The children have pride in themselves and in their family.
- The family tries to work together as a team.
- Add new ideas to the list.



Now move on to consider in more detail ***the responsibilities of parents*** *for children at different stages and ages:*

In early childhood (0 – 2)

- Providing all the basic needs of children – food, comfort, clean surroundings.
- Making sure that children are only left with responsible people.
- Making sure that the home and surroundings are safe eg. keeping hot and poisonous substances out of reach of children.
- GIVING CHILDREN TIME, ATTENTION AND ENCOURAGEMENT.
- Add new ideas to the list.,,,

In Middle childhood (3 – 12)

- Encouraging them by praising and rewarding what they are good at.
- Telling them firmly when they have done something wrong – and always explaining WHY it is wrong.
- Always explaining what is going on, what will happen next.
- ALWAYS LISTENING TO THEIR NEEDS, FEARS, HOPES.
- Add new ideas to the list.,,,

In late childhood (13 – 18)

- Keeping communications open and honest.
- Reminding them about problems and challenges they are likely to meet as they get more independent.
- Sharing ideas with them about how they could cope with challenges and problems in the outside world (steering away from trouble, learning to be more assertive; finding reliable friends and sticking together.)
- Building up trust with the young person through love and understanding so they will feel safe to talk about their fears and problems.
- Guiding them sensitively especially in major decisions in their lives – don't bully them about school, work or marriage choices.
- Involving them in what happens at home. eg. make sure they understand about important family decisions and plans.
- Pass on knowledge and skills eg. about family income generating business, cultivation.
- Letting them share in family responsibilities. But make sure they still have time for their own life and socialising.
- Keep building up their self esteem. Praise works wonders!
- Add new ideas to the list.,,,



Now move on to consider ***how roles and responsibilities in the family change if there is sickness in the family or when one parent is missing or has died.***

Parents' roles, responsibilities and needs:

- Widows taking on father's role as well as their own so their workload increases.
- No partner to share the problems or decision making.
- Managing with less money coming in.
- Widowed fathers trying to be "mother" to children.
- Making secure school arrangements.
- Finding a relative or guardian who will take responsibility if anything happens to remaining parent.
- Making sure children know the plans for their future care and who they can trust if they need help.
- Making a will and registering ownership of property. Making sure important papers are in a safe place.
- Saving money for the children's future.
- Building work or making sure rented property is secure.
- Keeping up with work in the compound and growing crops for food.
- Keeping any family business going.
- Passing on knowledge and skills to older children.
- Making a Memory Book.
- All these responsibilities have to be handled by one parent who may be distressed, frightened, angry at being alone.
- In some cases the remaining parent may also be suffering ill health.
- Add new ideas to the list.

Children's roles, responsibilities and needs:

- An older child might have to become head of the household, taking responsibility for younger children.
- Taking on adult roles includes coping with money and property, paying school fees, keeping everyone in the family clean and fed.
- If one or both parents are sick, they need to know where to get help with medical care and information about risk of infection.
- They also need to know who they can trust to get advice about money, property, legal matters.
- In some families there is a risk of relatives seizing property when parent(s) die.
- They may feel very isolated and worried that people will avoid them because of illness in the family.
- Everyone in the family needs to be able to talk about their loss, changes in their daily life and fears about the future.
- Younger children who have lost their mother need practical help with everyday care as well as comforting and encouragement.
- Without parent(s) children will be less well supervised and need clear advice about how to protect themselves against abuse, theft of property, exploitation, risk of sexual harassment by teachers, sugar daddies.
- CHILDREN WHO ARE MANAGING ON THEIR OWN, OR WHOSE PARENT IS VERY SICK, NEED SUPPORT FROM RELIABLE RELATIVES, ELDERS OR COMMUNITY LEADERS.
- Add new ideas to the list.

End of topic 2