

# Families Make the Difference

Native-language parenting classes for refugee families

HANDBOOK FOR FACILITATOR



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### Introduction

Parents who have been forced to displace their families love their children as much as any other parent. But often, when these parents first arrive in Germany, their stressful life circumstances can make it more difficult for them to consistently fulfil their role as caring and attentive parents. Uncertainty surrounding their rights to remain in Germany, moving around a lot, financial difficulties and a lack of privacy in shared accommodation – combined with the loss of the family home and social network – can cause displaced people to feel hopeless and overwhelmed. Often, arriving in Germany will bring about a change in the established roles in the family, which can be a source of conflict. Navigating a new country and getting to grips with a new culture, with a whole new language to learn and new rules to follow, can be an exhausting experience, and presents a huge challenge for refugee families. Traumatic experiences that one or multiple members of the family may have gone through – perhaps in war or during their escape from the circumstances that caused them to flee their home – are another factor that can make the process more challenging.

To ensure that displaced children still get the attention and care they need for their development in spite of these difficult circumstances, it is important to help refugee parents to mobile their resources, improve their handling of stress and day-to-day challenges and support them in their caregiver role.

**"Families Make the Difference"** is an IRC Deutschland programme designed to provide this support to refugee parents and their children. The aim of the programme is to improve the participants' skills in parenting and stress management through parenting classes delivered in the native language. The sessions also provide a framework within which the parents taking part can support one another and discuss their experiences.

#### TARGET GROUP OF THE HANDBOOK

This handbook for facilitators serves as the basis for the "Families Make the Difference" parenting classes for parents of children aged 0–11. The handbook, which encompasses eight sessions, was compiled by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) based on scientific research into the effectiveness of parenting classes. It has already been used as the basis for parenting classes in 16 countries. To ensure that these native-language parenting classes meet the specific needs of parents who have sought refuge in Germany, the handbook has been carefully reviewed and adapted for Germany by IRC Deutschland.

#### STRUCTURE OF THE HANDBOOK

The first chapter of this handbook provides a brief overview of the work of the IRC and some introductory background information about our approach and the "Families Make the Difference" programme.

The second chapter provides more detailed information for facilitators. As well as explaining the role of the facilitators and the structure of the sessions, this chapter also contains information and tips on preparing for and delivering the parenting classes and discusses how to handle challenging situations that may arise during the sessions.

The third chapter of the handbook describes the structure and content of the individual sessions. The eight sessions are designed to run consecutively, with each session building on the preceding sessions. They cover topics such as handling stress, brain development in children, empathetic communication, force-free parenting methods and appropriate responses to "misbehaviour" from children, as well as the psychosocial needs of children, healthy eating and exercise and support available for families in Germany. The sessions are interactive and allow plenty of scope for the participating parents to discuss different approaches to parenting and to exchange information and tips. This structure is intended to ensure that the "Families Make the Difference" parenting classes not only give parents an opportunity to improve their skills in force-free parenting and stress handling, but also to support and encourage one another.

In the fourth chapter, the handbook looks at the concept of the parenting café held after every session and provides ideas on how it could be structured.

We hope that this handbook for parenting classes will help to strengthen and support refugee families and make their arrival in Germany a little easier. Mothers and fathers who have made the difficult decision to leave their home country, facing up to all the uncertainty and challenges that decision brings and in some cases even risking their lives to ensure that their children can grow up in safety in Germany, deserve our utmost respect and are a source of inspiration to us all.

We strive to continuously develop and improve what we do and are always keen to hear from and work with others, so we would welcome any feedback, comments or ideas from you. You can also contact us by email if you would like to find out more about our work in Germany or in other parts of the world.

Berlin, December 2019

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# **Chapter 1 – International Rescue Committee**

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) responds to major humanitarian crises all over the world, helping people whose lives have been destroyed by conflict and disaster to survive, recover and regain control of their future. The IRC was founded in 1933 after Albert Einstein called for support for refugees from the Third Reich. Since then, the organisation has established strong roots in Germany and, over the past 80 years, has developed to become a global humanitarian aid organisation with programmes in over 40 countries. In the USA, the IRC provides new homes to refugees in 26 cities. The IRC's work in Europe began in the form of an emergency aid programme in Greece in 2015 and was then expanded to the Balkans. In 2016, the IRC established a German head office in Berlin and a branch office in Bonn. Our aim is to make an active contribution to German humanitarian aid across the world, based on the knowledge and experience we have gained in our international refugee aid work and our ongoing research projects. We are active in virtually all of the German states, supporting regional institutions and civil organisations with a particular focus on education for displaced children and the protection of women, children and other vulnerable people, as well as promoting the integration of refugees in the employment market.

# 1.1 Our International Commitment to Child Protection

#### PROTECTION OF CHILDREN IN CRISIS REGIONS

All over the world, children fall victim to abuse, exploitation, neglect or other forms of violence. Often, children suffer such violence at the hands of the people who are meant to be caring for them. Around 60 percent of all children between two and fourteen years of age – totalling almost a billion young people worldwide – are victims of physical or verbal abuse inflicted by their parents or other caregivers in their home. Children in regions of crisis and conflict are at particularly high risk. In a study of 23 countries, most of which were affected by conflict, one in every five children was found to suffer severe physical violence.<sup>1</sup>

The IRC has consistently been one of the first NGOs to arrive on-location in areas where crisis and conflict is looming. We work continually to identify and protect children who are under threat of violence to prevent these experiences from affecting their physical and psychological development. We also create areas for play and learning, where children can access psychosocial support to help them come to terms with traumatic experiences and to promote

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Hidden in plain sight: A statistical analysis of violence against children, UNICEF, New York, 2014.

their social and emotional development. The IRC adopts a family-based approach to child protection and works with parents and other caregivers to provide a consistent, comprehensive and holistic package of support measures for children in crisis situations.

The IRC's child protection programmes are based on three basic principles:

- Children have a right to grow up in an environment that is free of violence and that enables them to develop to their full potential;
- Young people can play an active role in their own protection and development;
- Families, communities and government bodies play a critical role in caring for, supporting and protecting children.





In over 30 countries around the world – from Afghanistan to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and from Syria to Colombia – the IRC's child protection programmes ensure that children feel safe and are appropriately cared for, ideally within a family or family-like unit that promotes their physical, social, emotional, cognitive and economic wellbeing. We work with various parties to achieve this goal, including families, communities, social workers, wider society, government bodies and international organisations. All of our work is underpinned by in-depth research and impact analyses, and the IRC actively participates in the global discussion on effective child protection strategies.

#### PROTECTION OF CHILDREN IN THE UNITED STATES

Our commitment to people who have been forced to flee their homes in crisis situations is also the focal point of our work in the USA. In 26 cities, we work to ensure that refugees, asylum seekers and other migrants get access to the resources they need to start rebuilding their lives. Since 1975, the IRC has actively helped over 370,000 refugees from more than 119 countries to find a new home and establish new roots in the USA. The IRC is currently the largest non-religious organisation supporting refugees worldwide and in the USA. We understand that we have a duty of care not only towards the displaced people we are helping, but also towards the

society that is welcoming them. With this in mind, the IRC aims to improve living standards not just for those who have fled their home country, but also for others in need.

In the United States, IRC branches work to protect children from violence and neglect in a variety of ways. By ensuring that displaced children are attending and settling into school and their local neighbourhood, our IRC teams are helping to build support networks, combating discrimination and keeping refugees safe. By working closely with individual families, we can refer children and their relatives to specific support services – such as psychosocial support or particular health services – in line with their needs. In a number of our US branches, we also offer family advice sessions covering topics such as force-free parenting and healthy, equal relationships. Some of our branches also deliver a programme for unaccompanied minors, which provides guidance and support for 400 children each year.

#### PROTECTION OF CHILDREN IN GERMANY

The aim of our child protection work in Germany is to empower the immediate network of caregivers around displaced children so that parents and other caregivers, teachers and social workers are better placed to meet the specific protection needs of these children and are able to provide them with the care and support that they need.

In the past, IRC Deutschland has worked with various reception centres and shared accommodation providers, delivering training to employees to raise awareness of the specific protection needs of women and children and to help them create a more child-friendly environment in their accommodation. In two establishments, the IRC also assisted with location-specific risk assessments focusing on child protection.

Since 2019, IRC Deutschland has focused on supporting the people who are most central to the lives of displaced children: their parents. By offering courses to improve the parenting and stress management skills of refugee parents, we are helping to ensure that the stress that parents suffer does not have a negative impact on their children. Parents learn how they can use games and empathetic communication to promote their child's development and how to respond appropriately and without violence to "misbehaviour". They also explore the importance of a healthy diet and exercise for their children and find out how they can benefit from local support for families.

#### RESEARCH ON CHILD PROTECTION

In general, there has been little reliable research into the effectiveness of child protection measures in crisis regions. When designing their child protection programmes, humanitarian agencies often base their decisions on assumptions, experiences and intuition rather than on

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Throughout this handbook, we have deliberately placed the term "misbehaviour" (referring to unwanted behaviours in children such as whining, tantrums or breaking rules) in quotation marks. This decision reflects the fact that these kinds of behaviours are not "wrong" behaviours, but more the result of children's inherent natural need to push boundaries by breaking rules and to express negative feelings such as anger and disappointment.

facts or research findings, which can produce sub-optimal results and inefficient approaches. Precise research and impact analysis in the field of humanitarian aid are key objectives of our work. In partnership with international institutions such as *Harvard University*, *Duke University* and *Columbia University*, we develop and implement comprehensive research proposals. We share our results with others to improve the effectiveness of measures in crisis contexts, to shape political opinion and to lay the foundations for the development of best practices.

In accordance with these principles, our "Families Make the Difference" programme has been comprehensively evaluated and analysed for efficacy. In Burundi, Liberia and the border region between Thailand and Burma, we conducted randomised controlled studies that confirmed that the "Families Make the Difference" parenting classes held over a period of eight weeks led to a reduction in the use of all forms of violence against children by the participating parents. The studies also showed that the classes improved the parents' sense of wellbeing and their relationships with their children.<sup>3</sup>

Further studies and findings relating to our child protection programmes are being published all the time. 4

# 1.2 Our Approach

Our "Families Make the Difference" project is built around the finding that the direct and farreaching effects of toxic stress can be halted or reversed. Although neurological studies have shown that children exposed to extreme stress may suffer a physiological stress response that inhibits the development of their brain – affecting their physical and mental health, cognitive abilities, behaviour and social relationships.

Our approach is based on research that shows that a high level of parental care can cushion the negative effects of toxic stress and strengthen children's resilience. However, for adults who have themselves suffered traumatic experiences such as war and displacement, it can often be difficult to consistently fulfil the role of a caring and attentive parent. This is why it is important to mobilise the resources of refugee parents and help them improve their parenting skills, as well as their ability to cope with stress and everyday challenges.

<sup>4</sup> Further information on the IRC's research programme can be found at: <a href="https://airbel.rescue.org">https://airbel.rescue.org</a>. (As at: 04.11.2019)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Sim, Amanda, Parents make the difference: IRC research brief, IRC, November 2014. URL: https://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/document/705/parentsmakedifferencebrieffinal18nov14.pd f. As at: 04.11.2019).



Our concept for the "Families Make the Difference" (FMD) parenting classes aims to achieve exactly this, and was developed based on over three decades of research into the effectiveness of parental training programmes. The results showed that there are a number of key elements that must be communicated to improve parenting skills and effect behavioural change. These elements are reflected in the individual sessions of the "Families Make the Difference" parenting classes:

# Awareness of the Importance of a Caring, Non-Violent and Gender-Neutral Upbringing

When raising their children, most parents intuitively get most things right. But for a child to have a caring, force-free and gender-neutral upbringing, it is important that parents consciously take the time to reflect on their role and think about what kind of parent they are and how they want to raise their children. The "Families Make the Difference" concept looks at these questions and gives parents ample space to think about their own ideas of what a caring upbringing might look like and to discuss their views with other parents.

To ensure that both girls and boys enjoy the same development opportunities, parents must consider their own perceptions of gender roles and ask themselves how their parenting style is affected by these preconceived ideas. In our "Families Make the Difference" parenting classes, we provide information on gender-neutral parenting and help parents understand this topic without advocating specific parenting methods.

# 2 Strategies for Coping with Stress and the Strains of Everyday Life

Refugee parents are often under a great deal of stress. Uncertainty surrounding their rights to remain in Germany, a lack of privacy in shared accommodation and the loss of the family home

and social network, combined with a change in the established roles within the family, can cause parents to feel hopeless and overwhelmed. Children pick up on their parents' stress and often respond with new behaviours of their own, which places additional stress on the family. Neurological research has shown that, in contexts where families have been or are exposed to high levels of psychological stress, it is essential to look at the psychosocial needs of both the parents and the children to promote healthy parent/child relationships.



On the basis of this research, the "Families Make the Difference" parenting classes explain how important it is for parents to take time for themselves and their own needs and interests. Participants learn about and get an opportunity to discuss strategies for coping with stress, and we also introduce and try out various relaxation techniques.

### Understanding the Impact of Toxic Stress on the Brain Development of Children

Children who have experienced being displaced may have been exposed to life-threatening situations in their home countries or when making their escape, and are likely to have witnessed war and violence first-hand. The loss of family members and their familiar environment and social network are additional psychological stressors for children. Severe stress that endures at a high level for long periods of time is referred to as "toxic stress". When children are exposed to "toxic stress" for long periods of time, their brain development can be affected.

In the "Families Make the Difference" parenting classes, parents learn about this topic and discuss as a group how they can support their children to reduce and overcome these stressors and to process stressful experiences.

# Ideas for Positive, Development-Enhancing Interactions between Parents and Children

Equipping parents with the skills and ideas they need to engage in positive interactions with their children is one of the most effective components of parenting classes. Research has demonstrated that encouraging parents to give their children positive attention, show affection and give praise reduces aggression and "misbehaviour" in children and young people and increases the perceived self-efficacy of the parents.

With this in mind, group brainstorming sessions and discussions of ideas for positive parent/child interactions are a key focus of our "Families Make the Difference" parenting classes. The parents also discuss and practise various games that promote the social, physical, cognitive and emotional development of children in different age groups and that they can play together with their children.

Appropriate Responses on Children's "Misbehaviour"

Rules give children structure and a feeling of security; when rules are in place, they know what is expected of them. However, it is important that parents enforce rules in an appropriate way and respond to any breaking of rules or other unwanted behaviours from their children in a force-free manner. Research has shown that severe physical and verbal punishments have a negative impact on children's social-emotional development and their physical and mental wellbeing.

- In our "Families Make the Difference" classes, we discuss force-free and appropriate methods and strategies for dealing with children's "misbehaviour" and practise these techniques in roleplays.
- 6 Knowledge and Skills for Empathetic Communication with Children

When parents communicate with their children in an empathetic way, they listen actively and encourage their children to process and express their feelings. Empathetic communication ensures that children feel appreciated and understood, and reduces their need to express frustration and anger through unwanted behaviours. It also helps them to develop the skills they need to resolve problems independently.

- In our "Families Make the Difference" classes, parents learn how to respond sensitively to their children's feelings so that they can communicate with them in a loving and appreciative way. Parents also learn how important it is to talk to their children about their fears and stressful experiences to enable them to offload the psychological burden.
- Awareness of the Importance of a Healthy diet and Lifestyle for the Development of Children

A healthy diet and an active lifestyle are very important aspects of a child's development. A healthy diet isn't just about what children eat and how much, but also how, when and with whom they eat. Eating and shared mealtimes have a huge impact on the psychological wellbeing of both children and adults.

In the "Families Make the Difference" parenting classes, parents reflect on the eating habits of their families and discuss what a healthy diet looks like; they also acquire ideas and tips for cost-effective and appealing alternatives to unhealthy foods. We also

look at the risks associated with mobile phone use by children and discuss ideas to promote an active lifestyle in children.



# 8

#### Knowledge of Support Offers Available to Families in Germany

As a consequence of fleeing to a new country, many refugee families lose not only their home, but also their entire social network. In situations where they could previously rely on help from family and friends, parents may now often find themselves alone, which can leave them feeling overwhelmed. Often, displaced parents are not used to asking for the support that is available to them and doing so can make them feel uncomfortable. Many will find it very difficult to admit that they need help and to seek out the relevant support. To compound the problem, in many cases parents do not know what they are entitled to and are not aware of the structure and availability of support packages in Germany.



Our "Families Make the Difference" parenting classes aim to overcome these challenges by informing parents of the support available to them in Germany and to encourage them to take advantage of this external support if they find themselves in a difficult situation.



# Chapter 2 – Information for Course Instructors

#### 2.1 The Role of the Course Instructors

"Families Make the Difference" facilitators are people who have direct experience of migration and can act as a "bridge" between German culture and the culture of their home country. Their role is not only to deliver the content outlined in the course handbook, but also to ensure that there is scope for reflection within the course and to initiate and moderate discussions. The participating parents should be encouraged to share their own knowledge and ideas about parenting in a new environment with the group. In each session, there should be a strong focus on the exchange of knowledge and experience among the participants.

Throughout the course, the facilitators must remember that they are not and cannot act as social workers for the participating parents. If the parents need support beyond that which can be provided in the framework of the parenting classes, the facilitators should help them to seek out professional advice. This is especially important in cases of physical violence against women and children or where there is a mental health issue. To assist in such scenarios, facilitators have access to a detailed list of contact information for organisations that provide specialist support, and can refer parents to these organisations.

Facilitators receive a week's training from IRC Deutschland, during which they learn about the contents and structure of the individual sessions, the games and activities and the relevant moderation techniques. The IRC team is available to support the facilitators throughout the course and will put the facilitators in touch with one another so that they can discuss their experiences and share advice. Facilitators can also get in touch with the IRC Deutschland team for support at any time.

# 2.2 The Structure and Presentation of the Course Units

The "Families Make the Difference" course handbook is comprised of eight sessions. Each of the sessions is summarised on the first page to provide an overview of the individual activities and the learning content, including the duration of each element, the materials required and the details of any specific preparatory steps that the facilitator must complete. Throughout the course, facilitators are expected to stick closely to the content of the "Families Make the Difference" course handbook and the learning content. The subsequent pages set out the information that is imparted to the parents, along with games and exercises to be used as warm-ups or to further illustrate the learning content. Each session follows the same structure:

- 1. Welcoming the parents, brief review of previous session, discussion of the "homework" and introduction to the topics to be covered in this session
- 2. An opening activity (e.g. a game, song or activity to start the session)
- 3. Presentation and discussion of new content, group exercises and videos to explain the topics covered
- 4. "Homework" for next week
- 5. Feedback from participants and closing activity

The "SAY >" sections in this handbook indicate exactly what facilitators can say to communicate the learning content. Facilitators should view these phrases as suggestions and are free to adapt the words to suit their own presentation style and the group dynamic. However, they should also ensure that they don't leave any relevant content out and that all of the important information is communicated to the parents.

# 2.3 Preparation of the Course Units

Facilitators are required to use the course handbook to carefully prepare each session to ensure that all of the content is appropriately covered and that the session runs smoothly. Following completion of their training, facilitators should read the "Families Make the Difference" course handbook carefully and familiarise themselves with the contents of each session. If any questions arise, facilitators should contact the IRC Deutschland team well in advance of the course to avoid any misunderstandings.

To prepare for each individual session, facilitators should always read through the relevant information again and acquire and prepare the materials required for the session.

# 2.4 Implementation of the Course Units

#### 1. Creating a Positive Environment

The "Families Make the Difference" parenting classes should be a safe space for parents to learn and acquire practical skills while also having fun, making new friends and sharing their worries and hopes for the future. For the classes to be a success, it is crucial that the parents enjoy the sessions and feel comfortable from the outset. With this in mind, facilitators should make a special effort to create a friendly and welcoming atmosphere and establish mutual trust within the group. During the course, facilitators should strive to get to know the parents a little better and remember their family background and other details about each person. They should try to understand the specific situation of each participant as well as possible so that they can,

in turn, understand the challenges each parent faces in everyday life and in raising their children. It is important that facilitators understand the needs of each parent and win their trust.

#### 2. Welcoming of the Participants and Introduction of the Topic

The first impression that participants form at the start of a session will affect how the rest of that session goes – and the impact can be either positive or negative. With this in mind, facilitators should always start each session off on a positive note by welcoming the parents and asking them how they are. Ask the participants how their week has been and encourage them to share a positive story. Their story can be based on the topic covered in the previous session (e.g. a positive interaction with their child, a good discussion about the course content with another person or successful completion of the "homework") or might simply be a personal story about a success or a positive experience that the person wishes to share with the other participants. However, no-one should be forced to share anything. The facilitators should then thank the participants for sharing their personal experiences and stories.

#### 3. Opening Activity

For almost all of the sessions, the course handbook includes a suggested activity to open the session and get the participants engaged. Some of the activities are designed to act as a good introduction to the topics to be covered in the session, while others are simply warm-up games that parents can use for motivation at home. If there are no particular opening activities suggested for a session, the facilitators can propose their own exercises and games or ask the parents if they know of any games or exercises that they would like to introduce to the group. The opening activities should be a fun introduction to the session and help the participants to relax in the environment.

#### 4. Presentation of the Course Contents

The "Families Make the Difference" course handbook uses a participatory, active approach to learning to ensure that parents are actively involved in the sessions. The information is presented using questions, discussions, games and practical activities. The approach is based on the principle that the parents will learn most effectively when they actively participate in the sessions rather than passively listen to information. This section describes some of the key techniques associated with this approach.

#### a) Questions and Discussions

Facilitators must ensure that their own verbal contributions do not take up too much of the sessions, even though there is a lot of content to cover in some parts. The parents should constantly be encouraged to ask questions, contribute their own ideas, share their experiences and discuss the course content. Facilitators should use examples to explain the content and ask questions to check the participants' understanding and to encourage them to repeat key points in their own words. The handbook contains a number of questions designed to promote engaging discussion and active participation from the parents.

#### b) Group Work and Working in Pairs

Working in pairs or in small groups requires all of the parents to actively take part in discussions, which promotes active listening and improves the participants' communication skills and engagement with the content.

Facilitators are free to choose how they wish to split the participants up into groups or pairs for the various exercises. They can allow the participants to choose their partner/groups themselves, but should ensure that the same people do not always choose to work together. Participants who are related should ideally work in separate groups, as family dynamics may prevent some people from sharing their experiences openly and freely.

During group work, the facilitators should move around the room and help the pairs/groups, answer questions, ask questions to encourage further discussion and, where necessary, take part in individual discussions. After the exercise, the pairs/groups can be asked to present the topics and ideas they have discussed to the rest of the group.

#### c) Games and Exercises

The course handbook contains a number of suggestions for games that are designed to make the atmosphere of the sessions more fun and relaxed and that the parents can play at home with their children. The facilitators can also come up with their own games and activities or ask the parents if they know of any games or warm-up/icebreaker exercises that they would like to share with the group. In all activities, it is important that all participants understand and are comfortable with the exercise. Activities that involve the participants touching one another should only be used if the participants agree. No-one should be pressurised into participating in any of the activities. The facilitator must ensure that the participants do not feel uncomfortable if they lose a game or if they misunderstand an instruction. It is a good idea to briefly discuss the participants' responses and feelings after each exercise. This gives the parents an opportunity to reflect on the exercise and to decide whether they found the game or exercise helpful. Follow-up discussions after exercises and activities can also help to improve communication within the group and promote mutual learning among the participants. The facilitator can initiate follow-up discussions by putting an open question – such as "Would anyone like to share their thoughts on the exercise?" – to the group.

#### d) Roleplays

Roleplays are particularly effective when participants need to acquire and practise new skills. This handbook contains a number of roleplays that will help parents to practise new communication techniques, games and responses to "misbehaviour" by taking on different

roles and adopting different perspectives. If the children are nearby or in the room, the parents can practise the exercises with their own children.

When introducing roleplays, facilitators should:

- Ask the parents if any of them would like to volunteer for a roleplay in front of the group. Praise any parents who volunteer to take part!
- Give the parents a clear description of their role and what is expected of them.
- Tell the participants before you begin that the roleplay may be stopped at any point to give further instructions.
- Explain the skills that the roleplay is designed to develop and demonstrate.
- Involve the entire group in the roleplay by getting the other parents to make suggestions as to what the roleplay parent could say or do in the situation in question.
- Bring the roleplay to a natural close if the exercise isn't going as planned and ensure that no blame is placed on the parents.
- After the roleplay, discuss the exercise with the parents. Ask the roleplayers how they felt in their roles and ask the parents watching for their feedback.
- Give the participants detailed and descriptive praise.
- At the end of the exercise, repeat the purpose of the roleplay and the skills it aims to develop and demonstrate.

#### 5. Giving "Homework"

At the end of every session, the parents are set "homework" for the next week. The "homework" is based on the content covered during the session and usually involves asking the participants to practise the skills learnt during the course in interactions with their children. The "homework" is not mandatory, but should encourage the parents to think about the topics discussed during the session and to find ways to try out new games and activities with their children, to communicate with them in a new way or to respond differently to their behaviour. These experiences are discussed as a group at the start of the next session.

#### 6. Get Feedback about the Course Session

It is important that the parenting classes are fun for the participants and that the content reflects their needs and interests. With this in mind, facilitators should always ask the participants for feedback at the end of each session. Facilitators should encourage the parents to share their honest and constructive feedback. It is important that the parents feel that their comments are taken seriously and that their suggestions for improvement will be taken on board.

The following questions should be discussed with the participants at the end of each session:

- What did you like best?
- Do you have any unanswered questions?
- Which elements of the session were helpful and which were not?

• Do you have any comments or suggestions as to how the session could be improved?



When asking for feedback, facilitators should be aware that some of the participants will feel more comfortable than others sharing their opinions in front of the rest of the group. Some participants may need a little longer to develop sufficient trust in the other group members and the facilitator to feel able to share their feedback. For participants who would rather provide feedback anonymously, there should also be an option to write down feedback and place it in a feedback box from which feedback is subsequently collected and evaluated. Participants should also have the option of contacting the IRC Deutschland team directly with their feedback.

#### 7. Checking Attendance

At the end of each session, the facilitator should record the attendance of each participant. Ask the participants to write their name on the attendance list and sign it. The records should also indicate whether each parent brought their children along to the course and/or whether the offer of childcare was taken up.

#### 8. Outlook about the Next Course Session

Each session should conclude with a look ahead to the next session. This ensures that the parents know what is coming in the next session and how they will benefit from coming back next week.

#### 9. Closing Activity

At the end of each session, the participants should come together for a group closing activity. Unlike the opening activity, which varies every session, it is a good idea to always close the sessions with the same closing activity. This ritual creates a feeling of connection and solidarity between the participants and ensures that they leave the session on a positive note:

The parents stand in a circle and hold hands. The facilitator squeezes the hand of the person to their right. This person does the same and the action is repeated by each person until the "squeeze" returns to the starting point. During the activity, the parents should think about happy memories while they are passing on the "squeeze" to the person on their right. The exercise can be performed with the eyes open. Once complete, all participants take a deep breath and the action is repeated again. If all participants feel comfortable doing so, they can close their eyes for the exercise.

On completion of the activity, the facilitator should thank the parents for participating in the session and wish them a nice rest of the day or week.

#### 10. Parents' Café at the End of the Course Session

After each session, there should be an opportunity for the parents to continue their discussions from the course for another hour in a more informal setting. This informal exchange, which is referred to as the "parenting café", is intended to help the parents get to know one another and to build relationships and networks for mutual everyday support. The parenting café is described in further detail in chapter 4 of this handbook.

#### 11. Documentation of the Course Sessions

At the end of every session, facilitators are asked to record all of the completed activities in a questionnaire and to document all of the information covered and discussions held during the session. If activities were not completed or were interrupted, the reasons for this must be noted down. The feedback provided by the participants at the end of each session should also be documented and passed to the IRC. The facilitator should also make notes on the engagement and participation of the parents. This ensures that the content, games and exercises in the sessions properly reflect the needs and interests of the participants; where this is not the case, the course handbook can be modified accordingly.

### 2.5 Handling Difficult Situations

During the sessions, situations may arise that are difficult for the facilitator to handle. Heated discussions and arguments between participants, stressful situations discussed by the participants and disclosures about violence or admissions of violence against children or partners can all be challenging for the group and the facilitator to deal with.

#### Disruptive or Inappropriate Behaviour by Individual Participants

Given the sensitive nature of some of the course content, facilitators should keep an eye on the dynamic between participants and monitor the behaviour of individuals within the group. If there are signs that certain individuals are disrupting or dominating the discussion and/or causing others to feel uncomfortable or withdraw, facilitators should respond to prevent any disruptive or inappropriate behaviour. Discussing the issue with individuals after the session

can help to clarify the situation and avoid any misunderstandings, and provides an opportunity to address inappropriate behaviour.

#### **Controversial Discussions**

Parents may have different opinions as to what good parenting looks like, and discussions around this topic may become heated. While facilitators should encourage discussions between participants, they should also always ensure that these discussions remain respectful, balanced and constructive. If individual participants dominate the discussion with their views and refuse to let others speak or intimidate or denigrate others, the discussion must be interrupted or, if necessary, ended. When intervening in this way, facilitators should always act decisively but respectfully. Thank all the participants for the discussion and bring it to a close if needed. A lack of time can be used as an excuse to end a discussion if required.

#### Disclosure of Own Experiences of Violence by Participants

Many of the course participants will have lived through traumatic experiences in their home countries and during their journey to a new life, and violence often features in their story. During the sessions, parents may talk about their own experiences of violence. If this happens, it is important to let them speak and to acknowledge their experiences but also to remember that the parenting classes are not therapy sessions.

The tips below may help you to respond sensitively to disclosures of violence and to handle the situation in an appropriate manner:

- Listen in a quiet and friendly way, showing empathy and respect
- Do not prompt or push the person, and do not ask questions or comment on the story they are sharing.
- If the person shares their experience of violence with you in private, assure them that you won't tell anyone else; if the person shares their story with the whole group, ask everyone to maintain confidentiality. Assure the person that neither you nor the other course participants will share the story with others.
- Praise the person for having the courage to share their experience and offer them the opportunity to talk to you about it again after the session if they want to.
- In a separate discussion, encourage the person to seek external help and support, without putting any pressure on them to do so. Bear the boundaries of your role in mind and try to avoid the person sharing a lot of detailed information with you. Relaying an experience of violence over and over can bring the trauma back to the surface. Do not aim to help the person yourself; refer them to a specialist support service with staff who are professionally trained to help.

- Give the person all of the relevant information on the support services available in the local area and explain how these services can help. Give them time to think about what you have told them and assure them that support will be waiting for them when they are ready.
- If the person agrees, you can pass their contact details to the appropriate specialists (e.g. a social worker in the refugee accommodation) who can help the person and ensure that they get the professional support they need.

Facilitators should bear in mind that they are not sufficiently qualified to provide psychological support to people who have suffered violence. Discussions with the facilitator may cause the trauma to resurface and this must be avoided. Facilitators should clearly communicate that they cannot provide the right type of support in these kinds of situations. However, you can help the person access the relevant professional support.

#### Disclosure of (own) Use of Violence against Children (by participants or others)

During the sessions, participants may talk about past instances where they have used violence against children or have learnt that their partner has been violent to their children. In this context, the definition of violence extends beyond physical and sexual violence to also include psychological/emotional abuse (e.g. denigrating, degrading comments) and neglect of parental responsibilities.

If one of the participants discloses an instance of domestic violence against children to you, they are demonstrating a huge amount of trust in the group and the facilitator. Respond with care and respect to the person's story, particularly if the person is condemning the act of violence. Under no circumstances should the group be allowed to judge or condemn the act. Facilitators should respond to these disclosures in a similar way to other disclosures of violence: Praise the person for being open and offer to talk to them about their experiences after the session, and use this discussion as an opportunity to point them towards further support services for parents.

The tips below may help you to respond sensitively to disclosures of violence against children and to handle the situation in an appropriate manner:

- Listen in a quiet and friendly way, showing empathy and respect, and do not judge the person.
- Assure the person that you won't tell anyone else and ask the other participants to maintain confidentiality.
- Thank the person for sharing their story with you or with the group and emphasise that the purpose of the parenting classes is to help the parents learn about force-free parenting and acquire the skills they need to handle "misbehaviour" in a non-violent way.
- Highlight the negative impact that violence has on children:

- o If in doubt, the child will be obedient, but only out of fear of violence. The child does not learn why its behaviour was wrong. In turn, this can produce other "misbehaviours", such as lying and retaliation.
- By using violence as a form of discipline, parents are demonstrating to their children that violence is an acceptable way to deal with frustration. This can cause children to resort to more aggressive behaviours in interactions with their peers or siblings.
- Ohildren who continuously experience violence at the hands of their parents can suffer toxic stress responses that may have a negative impact on their brain development. These responses can destroy existing neuron connections in the brain. In the long term, toxic stress can damage a child's ability to learn new skills.
- Emphasise that there are other non-violent ways of responding to children's "misbehaviour" and disciplining them. These other techniques are covered in the course and will be discussed and practised in detail.
- If the person is not receptive to your points, discuss the matter with them again at the end of the session. In a one-to-one conversation, aim to find out whether violence against children is a frequent occurrence in the family and whether there is any reason to suspect that the children's wellbeing may be at risk. However, do not jeopardise the relationship of trust you have established with the person.
- Offer your support and emphasise that the parenting classes have been developed specifically to support parents who may sometimes feel overwhelmed by their responsibilities as a parent and who are, for this reason, sometimes unable to adopt a force-free approach. In the conversation, make it clear that the use of violence against children is prohibited in Germany. Parents in Germany do not have the right to use physical violence against their children; even the lightest of smacks is against the law.
- Assure the person that you know that they and their partner love their children and only want the best for them. Tell the person about the support services that are available for parents who feel overwhelmed by their parental responsibilities or who are themselves going through a period of extreme stress. Encourage the person to take advantage of external support.
- If the situation the person describes raises suspicions that a child may be at risk, follow the steps below. This is particularly important if the violence described is severe, involving acts such as sexual abuse, burns, cuts, hitting a child with an object, withdrawal of food or locking up a child for an extended period of time.

#### **Suspicions of Child Endangerment**

If a facilitator has reason to believe that a child may be at risk following a disclosure of violence towards children by a participant or as a result of other signs or observations, they should take decisive action as soon as possible to prevent harm or risk to the child. The facilitator must also ensure that their relationship of trust with the parent involved is maintained.

Facilitators are not legally obliged to take action or report suspicions of children being at risk to child protection services or to the police unless they are employed by a German child protection service and are obliged to act under §§8a and b, Book VIII of the German Social Code (SGB VIII). However, if facilitators have a suspicion that a child could be at risk, they must immediately report this suspicion to the IRC Deutschland team to discuss the matter. A joint decision will then be made as to how to proceed and at which point child protection services should be informed.

#### Child protection services' duty to protect under §\$8a and b SGB VIIII

Parents have a duty to ensure the wellbeing of their children. However, under §§ 8a and b of the German Social Code, Book VIII and article 6 of the German constitution, this responsibility is also shared by employees of governmental child and young person protection agencies in Germany. Employees of these protection agencies are not obliged to report all suspicions of children at risk to child protection services immediately, but they are required to involve a colleague or manager. The employee must discuss their suspicions with the colleague or manager and then jointly assess the risk based on the child protection guidelines. In particularly serious cases, employees are required to involve a child protection expert. Furthermore, the parents or caregivers of the child who is potentially at risk must also be involved in determining the next steps. Employees of the child and young person protection agencies should do everything they can to encourage parents/caregivers to access external support. Only if the parents refuse this support, or if the support available is not adequate to minimise the risk to the child, are employees obliged to inform child protection services. If a child is at risk of serious and immediate harm, child protection services must be informed immediately. The duty to act under §8a of the German Social Code, Book VIII does not encompass any duty to inform the police. There may be consequences under employment law if people who are required to act under §8a SGB VIII fail to fulfil their responsibilities.

### 2.6 Childcare

Childcare should be offered for the duration of all parenting classes so that the participants don't have to worry about who will look after their child while they attend the sessions. Ideally, the children should be looked after in a nearby room so that the parents can regularly check on their children. If parents have babies or very young children who they cannot or do not wish to place in childcare, they can bring their child with them to the session; the baby can either sit on their lap or lie down next to them. Facilitators should bear in mind that the presence of babies or children bursting into the room may disrupt the course. This is not a major issue, and should not be a source of stress for facilitators. If necessary, facilitators can schedule short breaks for parents to check on and care for their children. The sessions should be flexible and

structured in a way that ensures the parents feel comfortable and know that their children are well cared for. Depending on the type of activity and the age of the children, some exercises and games also provide an opportunity for children to get involved in the sessions.



# **Chapter 3 – Course Sessions**

# **Course Session 1: The Concept of Caring Parenting**

The first session is designed to enable the participants and facilitator to get to know one another and to provide an introduction to the concept of caring, force-free and gender-neutral parenting. The participants discuss their hopes and expectations for the parenting classes and work together to compile the rules for participation in the sessions.

Timetable	Time
Welcome and Introduction	20 min.
Parents' Hopes and Goals	10 min.
Overview of the Course Units	15 min.
Group Rules	15 min.
What is Caring Parenting?	20 min.
Sex vs. Gender	20 min.
Homework	5 min.
Feedback and Closing	10 min.

#### **Duration:**

1 hour 55 minutes

#### **Materials:**

- Course documentation
- Copies of the course calendar
- Image/emotion cards for the introductions, if applicable
- "Sex vs gender" cards and sticky tape

#### Welcome and Introduction

**Time:** 20 minutes **Structure:** In pairs

#### **Welcome the Parents**

#### SAY

"I'm really pleased you're here today for the first of our eight sessions on parenting and stress management. The information and content we'll be discussing in the course is based on biological and sociological research carried out all over the world. The sessions are interactive and I want to encourage everyone to share their skills and knowledge so that we can all learn from each other."

Introduce yourself and say a little bit about your background and the topic of the first session.

#### SAY

"In this session, we'll be focusing on getting to know one another and sharing our hopes and expectations for these parenting classes. We'll agree on a few rules that we'll follow during the course and we'll start to think about caring parenting and why it is important that all children, both girls and boys, grow up in a loving and supportive environment."

- Explain that participation in the course is voluntary and that no-one is obliged to answer questions if they don't want to. Emphasise that the parenting classes should be a safe space where parents can express themselves freely and where everything they say will be kept confidential.
- Ask the parents to briefly introduce themselves with their names.
- Put the parents into pairs. Ask them to spend around 10 minutes asking one another about
  - Themselves
  - The place they come from and where they live now
  - How many children they have and their names and ages
  - Interesting details about their lives, such as jobs, hobbies, favourite food or pets.
- After the exercise, ask each parent to introduce the person they were paired with. The parents should share what they learnt about the other person with the rest of the group, providing as much detail as possible.

#### NOTE>

If you know of any other introductory exercises that you feel are more suitable, feel free to use your alternative exercise instead. If you have any picture/emotion cards, you can also use these for the introductions. It is important to allow sufficient time for the participants to get to know one another to establish trust between you and the parents and among the group.

#### ATTENTION>

Do not put any pressure on participants to share information about themselves. They do not have to answer all of the questions. Make sure that all of the parents feel comfortable with the exercise.

#### Parents' Hopes and Goals

**Time:** 10 minutes **Structure:** The entire group



Ask the parents why they decided to take part in the course. What would they like to learn? What kind of qualities would they like to develop as parents?

#### **Examples**:

- -Be a patient mother/father
- -Want their children to feel loved
- -Be a good listener
- -Be able to handle their children's anger or "misbehaviour" appropriately



Ask the parents what their wishes and hopes are for their children.

#### Examples:

- -I want my child to make friends at school.
- -I want my children to get along and play together nicely.
- -I want my child to learn how to speak German and our native language.



Ask the parents if they have any fears or worries about taking part in these parenting classes.

**NOTE** > A hope is <u>not</u> a statement such as: "I want my child to become a doctor".

**ATTENTION** > Acknowledge the parents' concerns and emphasise that this is a safe space for discussion, where everyone can share their experiences and learn from the experiences of the other participants.

#### **Overview of the Course Sessions**

**Time:** 15 minutes **Structure:** The entire group

#### **Explain the following to the parents:**

- The course is comprised of eight sessions and the participants are encouraged to attend <u>all</u> of the sessions. The topics discussed in each session are linked and each session builds on the information covered previously. If parents miss a session, they may miss out on important information that they will need to understand the rest of the course. Their efforts and commitment to the course are very much appreciated.
- Each session lasts between 1.5 and 2 hours. After each session, the parents can attend the parenting café.
- At the final session, participants who have regularly attended the course will receive a certificate.
- The sessions are designed for set groups of participants. After the first session, no further participants should join the group. This will promote confidentiality and establish trust within the group. If other people express an interest in the sessions, they are welcome to join the next course. The participants are encouraged:
- To support one another outside of the sessions.
- To share their ideas and feelings.
- To encourage one another to try out and practise new parenting techniques.
- To tell other parents about the sessions and what they have learnt.
- Hand out the course calendar showing the dates of each session. Ask the parents to let you know if they cannot attend a particular session in advance where possible.
- Provide a brief overview of each session and explain to the parents what each session is about and what they will learn. Ask the parents if they think that any topics have been missed. Note these down and speak to the project manager to determine whether and how any of the parents' suggestions can be incorporated into the sessions. Tell the parents that the course is intended to meet their needs and that their opinions are valued.
- Encourage them to start their own WhatsApp group to exchange information, ask questions, support one another and stay in touch throughout the week.

Ask the parents if they have any questions.

#### **Group Rules**

**Time:** 15 minutes **Structure:** The entire group

- Explain to the parents that, whenever you are working in a group, it is a good idea to agree some ground rules as to how you will collaborate and treat one another to ensure that everyone in the group feels comfortable.
- Ask the parents what rules they think are important to ensure that the course is a success and that all participants feel comfortable.
- Note down the agreed suggestions on a flipchart or ask one of the participants to help you write them down.

#### **ALTERNATIVE**

If any of the participants are unable to read or write, stand in a circle instead and get the parents to agree on the rules verbally. For each rule suggested, the participants move a step forward if they agree with the suggestion or stay where they are if they do not agree.

#### Examples for Rules:

- Punctuality and attendance
- Mutual respect (for the different skills, experiences, background and views of the other participants, as well as different learning speeds)
- Allowing one another to speak and listening to others
- Staying on topic and remaining objective (not letting discussions get out of hand and veer off topic)
- Treating the course materials and classroom with respect
- Asking enough questions (there's no such thing as a stupid question)
- Each participant will learn new skills and apply what they have learnt at their own pace. It is important to respect the different experiences and learning processes of the other members of the group. Confidentiality (information shared within the group will not be passed on to anyone outside the group)
- Ask the parents to think about what confidentiality means. Explain that the skills, tips and approaches acquired in this course can be shared with others who have not attended the course. However, the parents should never share information about the other participants and their experiences, or pass their names or other personal data to third parties.

#### What is Caring Parenting?

**Time:** 20 minutes **Structure:** The entire group



Show the parents the picture: "Playing with children". Ask the parents what they can see in the picture. How do they think the children feel? How do they think the parents feel? What does caring parenting mean to them?

Picture:\_"Playing with children"

Enlarged versions of the pictures are provided on page 148.





#### **SAY:**

"In this first session, we are going to discuss the concept of caring parenting. Caring parenting is all about how you can promote the healthy growth and development of your children by spending time with them, praising them and showing them affection. Caring parenting is dependable, encouraging, loving and appreciative and can result in happier parent/child relationships."



Split the parents into three groups and get the groups to sit in different areas of the room to make the session feel more relaxed. Assign each group one of the following phrases:

- 1) Dependable parenting;
- 2) Encouraging parenting;
- 3) Loving and appreciative parenting



Ask the parents to discuss the phrase they have been given in their groups. What does the phrase mean? Can they give an example? Ask the parents to discuss examples of how they experienced this kind of parenting *in their childhoods* (e.g. we ate together every evening at the same time; my father taught me how to repair bikes; my mother always asked me how I was feeling...).



# If the groups need some help, provide them with the definitions of the phrases to aid understanding:

#### -Dependable Parenting:

Children know what is expected of them. There are clear rules and an everyday routine in place at home, which promotes feelings of transparency, control and security.

#### -Encouraging Parenting:

Parents engage with their children and promote the development of physical and cognitive abilities.

#### -Loving and Appreciative Parenting:

Parents show their children love and affection; they communicate empathetically, respond to their children's needs and refrain from violence.



Bring the group back together after 5 to 7 minutes and ask one person from each group to share the example that they think best demonstrates the meaning of the phrase.

#### ATTENTION >

Focus on positives today. In this first session, you should not explore painful memories of abuse, neglect, violence or physical punishment. It is important that the parents have a positive experience in their first session. We want to emphasise how they can put their children on the path to healthy development!



Ask the parents what they do to help their children grow up healthy and happy. How do they parent in a loving way? Why is this so important?

#### Examples:

- -Talking to and listening to their children, responding to their needs
- -Hugging/cuddling their children
- -Giving their children opportunities to learn new things and develop new skills
- -Making sure that their children are clean, healthy and well nourished
- -Setting a good example for their children

#### ATTENTION >

The parents should provide real-life examples and build on the examples and ideas about parenting that have already been discussed. Focus on the positives!

#### Sex vs. Gender

**Time:** 20 minutes **Structure:** The entire group

Hang up three sheets of flipchart paper around the room, labelled with the headings "Men/boys", "Women/girls" and "Both".

- Hand out cards labelled with the following words to the participants:
  - -Penis
  - -Testicles
  - -Breastfeeding
  - -Pregnancy
  - -Menstruation
  - -Vagina
  - -Ovaries
  - -Cooking
  - -Cycling
  - -Cleaning
  - -Childcare
  - -Going to school
  - -Earning money
- Add in further cards labelled with your own choices of words to make the exercise more complex.
- Ask the parents to walk over to the flipcharts and place the cards under the appropriate headings. (They should place words that only relate to men and boys under the heading "Men/boys", words that only relate to women and girls under "Women/girls" and words that relate to both men and women under "Both".)

#### NOTE >

There should only be words that relate to biological differences between men and women under the "Men/boys" and "Women/girls" headings. All other words relating to individual abilities should be placed in the "Both" category. If the parents place specific professions or abilities under "Men/boys" or "Women/girls", initiate a discussion and highlight some examples that challenge their assumptions. Ask whether there are biological reasons why one gender cannot carry out a specific task.

Depending on how open the group seems to be, you can also add words that could trigger controversial discussions, such as jobs that are typically carried out by men or women (e.g. "Pilot", "Soldier" or "Kindergarten teacher"), or activities and behaviours that are typically thought of as masculine or feminine (such as "Repairing furniture", "Wearing dresses", "Painting nails" or "Crying"). You can also ask the parents to come up with their own words

for the exercise. They should write these words down on cards and place them in the middle of the group. The group then works together to assign the words to the relevant categories.

#### ATTENTION >

Remember that this is the first session and you don't yet know the group all that well. In the first session, there should be no heated debate that could result in arguments. If you are concerned that either you or the parents may feel uncomfortable during the exercise, it's best to stick to the less "controversial" words!

Men	Women	Both
Penis	Breastfeeding	Cooking
Testicles	Pregnancy	Cycling
Beard	Menstruation	Cleaning
	Vagina	Childcare
	Ovaries	Going to school
		Earning money
		etc.



"Sex" means the physical and biological differences between women and men. Women and men have different body parts because they are two different sexes: Male and female.

"Gender" means the social and cultural differences between women and men. In virtually all countries and cultures, there are differences between the social status of women/girls and that of men/boys. Society also has different expectations of how women/girls and men/boys will behave and what kinds of jobs they will do.

The idea of gender roles and responsibilities can, to some extent, be helpful, because people know what is expected of them. On the other hand, defining a person as a particular gender and putting them in a box with all of the societal expectations associated with that gender can restrict their ability to use their talents and skills and to make decisions. The differences in social status between women and men also increase the risk of women and girls suffering violence and abuse.



Ask the parents about the expectations placed on girls and boys in their culture. Do they agree with these expectations and preconceived roles? Why or why not? How does the German culture differ in terms of its expectations of girls and boys (and women and men)? Do they find these differences surprising? Confusing? **Upsetting?** 

### SAY

Every culture creates gender roles. Often, boys and girls are brought up to adjust to these gender roles. Parents will frequently treat and parent boys and girls in different ways. Boys get more opportunities for learning, sport and taking responsibility, while girls get fewer of these kinds of chances. Boys are often told by their parents that they should stop crying because in their culture, boys are expected not to cry. Boys are often thought of as strong and may even be encouraged by their parents to fight with other boys. Girls, on the other hand, are more frequently reprimanded if they get dirty, speak loudly or express their opinion. This type of parenting, combined with social expectations, prevents both girls and boys from expressing themselves and achieving their full potential. This is why it is important to be aware of gender roles and to understand how they can affect our decisions as parents and the lives of our daughters and sons.



Remind the parents that girls and boys should be parented in the same way. Explain that, in many German families, girls are encouraged to express their opinions, play the same sports as boys, do well at school and undertake professional training or go to university. For boys, it's acceptable to play with dolls and many families also encourage boys to cook and clean. In some cities, there are childcare providers who specialise in gender-neutral childcare.

### ATTENTION >

If the discussion surrounding gender norms becomes heated, please ensure that the group dynamic remains calm and respectful. Remember that the purpose of the parenting classes is not to convince parents to change their way of thinking or to make them feel judged. The discussions are there to provide the parents with new information and to prompt them to think about their beliefs and behaviours.

### Homework

**Time:** 5 minutes **Structure:** The entire group



### SAY

As this is the first session, the homework is really easy. Between now and the next session, try to spend lots of time with your children and enjoy this time. Talk to your children, listen to them and tell them that you love them.

### Feedback and Closing

**Time:** 10 minutes **Structure:** The entire group

Ask the parents to share their feedback on the session. What did you like best? Do you have any unanswered questions? Which elements of the session were helpful and which were not? Do you have any comments or suggestions as to how the session could be improved?

- Ask the parents to write their name on the attendance list to record their attendance.
- **Explain** what topics will be covered in the next session. Say:

In the next session, we'll talk about the stress you may experience as a parent and discuss some strategies that can help you cope with this stress. Being a parent is not easy. And it can be even harder if you've left your home country and are trying to get used to a new environment. We'll talk about these challenges together and discuss practical ways to relax and find time for yourself.

- Get the group to do the closing activity (passing on positive energy and positive thoughts in a circle).
- Thank the parents for coming and for participating in the session. Invite the parents to stay for the "parenting café" and to chat to the other participants over a cup of tea and a snack.

### NOTE >

The concept and structure of the parenting café is described in further detail in chapter 4 of this handbook. This chapter also includes ideas, activities and exercises that you can try out during the parenting café.

# **Course Session 2: Stress Management and Relaxation**

In this session, the participants will discuss their own psychosocial and emotional needs and the stress that they are exposed to as parents in a new environment. They will learn how their own stress can negatively impact their children and how they can counteract these negative effects. The participants will also discuss various stress management strategies and practise relaxation techniques together.

Timetable	Time
Welcome and Introduction	5 min.
Exercise: Tension and Relaxation	10 min.
The Social and Emotional Needs of Parents	30 min.
The Effects of Parental Stress on Children	10 min.
Relaxation Techniques	30 min.
Homework	5 min.
Feedback and Closing	10 min.

### **Duration:**

1 hour 40 minutes

### **Materials:**

- Course Documentation
- Handout "Relaxation Techniques"

### **Welcome and Introduction**

**Time:** 5 minutes **Structure:** The entire group

- Welcome the parents and ask them how they and their families are doing.
- Ask the parents if they have any questions on the last session.
- Ask the parents if any of them would like to share a positive experience from the past week.
- Ask the parents to share how they have spent time with their children over the past week and how it made them feel.
- Introduce the topic for today's session. Say:

Being a parent to young children can be stressful and tiring. For people who have fled their home country and find themselves in a new environment with a completely different culture, parenting can be an even bigger challenge. Today we're going to talk about the sources of stress you may be confronted with and learn some practical techniques and activities that might help you cope with stress.

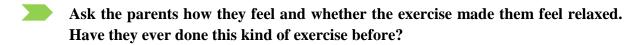
### **Exercise: Tension and Relaxation**

**Time:** 10 minutes **Structure:** The entire group

- Introduce the exercise as a practice from yoga that is suitable for people of all ages, including young children. The participants should have their hands free for this exercise. If parents have their babies on their laps, they should place them on the floor briefly so that their hands are free for the exercise.
- Ask the parents to close their eyes, find a comfortable position and sit still for one minute. The parents should sit up with their back as straight as possible, with the head level and facing forwards.
- Ask the parents to breathe in and out deeply and slowly and to try to relax. Speak in a quiet voice.

### SAY

- -Scrunch up your toes and then relax them, noticing the warmth of your feet.
- -Tense up the muscles in your legs and knees, then allow them to relax completely, feeling the heat in your legs.
- -Tighten your bottom then relax, allowing the heat to warm up your chair.
- -Tense up your stomach muscles and release, feeling the warmth radiating from your tummy.
- -Notice your chest rising and falling, and relax to release the heat. Shrug your shoulders up to your ears, then relax from your shoulders and down your back, feeling the heat spreading down.
- -Tighten your arms then release, allowing the heat to flow from your fingertips.
- -Notice how the heat rises up your throat and around your head. Your entire body feels warm and relaxed.
- -Now bring your focus back to the group. Wiggle your fingers and toes.
- -Make small circles with your wrists. Stretch up with your arms then give them a shake.
- -If your eyes are closed, open them slowly and gently.



### The Social and Emotional Needs of Parents

**Time:** 30 minutes **Structure:** The entire group, small groups

Ask the parents to think about some of the feelings they have experienced since they arrived in Germany. Some of these feelings may be positive, while others may be negative or stressful. Ask whether anyone wants to share their experiences of negative feelings and stress with the group.

### ATTENTION >

Give the parents some scope to talk about their experiences, but don't spend too much time focusing on negative feelings and experiences. Remind the group of the agreement to maintain confidentiality and allow the parents the option to write their experiences down if they wish, rather than sharing them with the group.



Show empathy and let the parents know that you understand that they all had to leave their familiar environment, homes, jobs and communities to seek protection in Germany. Living in shared accommodation and in an unfamiliar environment can be very stressful. Privacy is limited and tensions can easily build. With babies and young children in tow, adapting to life in a new place is an even bigger challenge. If the baby cries a lot or the children misbehave or regularly have

tantrums, all of this increases stress and can cause parents to quickly lose their patience.

### SAY

It's normal to feel more stressed than you usually do in this new situation. All of these changes and challenges can affect your psychological health and wellbeing. Stress can manifest in physical and psychological ways. Physical and psychological responses to stress are completely normal and do not mean that there is something wrong with you.

Explain that everyone experiences stress to different degrees when something stressful occurs, and people respond to stress very differently. There is a huge range of responses and feelings that people may experience. Some people only experience a very mild stress response, while others experience something much more severe. The way a person responds to stress depends on a lot of different factors, including the type of event they are experiencing and the support they get from others, as well as the person's sex, age, physical and mental health and cultural traditions and background.

### NOTE >

Some of the people participating in the course may have experienced (gender-based) violence (particularly women). These people usually require more specific support. Try to address this topic sensitively so that survivors of gender-based violence get the help and support they need.

# SAY

Not all problems can be solved by reducing your stress levels and doing relaxation exercises. Some of you may have lived through violent experiences that continue to trouble you. In this kinds of situations, it is normal to be sad and to not want to go out, and it can take a lot of strength to take part in a course like this one. But, given time, it is possible to enjoy life again even after experiencing violence. Often, it can help to share your story with another person and talk about your experiences of violence. Many women who have experienced violence are reluctant to talk about their experiences, even though doing so could help them process what happened to them. If you would like to find out more about the support available to you, particularly for women who have been victims of violence, please come and talk to me after the session.

You should target this message primarily at the women in the group, as violence towards women is much more common than violence towards men. Have some information ready for anyone who wants to know more about specific support for women who have suffered violence.

### SAY

There are three types of stress: positive stress, tolerable stress and toxic stress. These stress categories apply to both adults and children.

Use the flipchart to draw the diagram below to explain the different types of stress.



A **positive stress response** is a normal and important aspect of healthy development. Positive stress causes the heart rate to rise for a short time and triggers the release of small amounts of stress hormones. This kind of stress improves performance. We can concentrate better and work faster, which enables us to get on top of challenging situations. The kinds of situations that may trigger a positive stress response are taking an exam, delivering a presentation or multitasking.

A **tolerable stress response** activates the body's warning systems. This kind of response is triggered by stressful events that endure for a longer period of time, such as the loss of a loved one, a natural disaster or a severe injury.

A **toxic stress response** can occur when a person is exposed to severe, frequent and/or long-term stress, such as physical or emotional abuse, other forms of violence and/or long-lasting and life-threatening poverty, without any positive and supportive relationships in place to help the person cope with and recover from stress.

### SAY

Stress is an important and essential part of life. But we must learn to distinguish between healthy stress, which helps us to survive, and toxic stress, which places so much strain on the body that it becomes damaging and develops into a problem for us and for the people around us. If we can develop an awareness of our stress levels, we are better placed to cope.

- Split the parents into four small groups and give each group a sheet of flipchart paper and a marker pen. Assign each group one of the following categories:
  - 1.) Physical
  - 2.) Emotional
  - 3.) Mental
  - 4.) Behaviour-orientated

### SAY

You have five minutes to work in your groups to list as many signs of stress you can think of for the category you have been assigned. After five minutes, put the paper down on the floor and ask the groups to spend another five minutes walking around looking at the other groups' lists and adding anything they think was overlooked to the other categories.

SIGNS OF STRESS		
PHYSICAL	EMOTIONAL	
<ul> <li>Sleep problems</li> </ul>	Severe fluctuations in mood (feeling	
• Tummy ache, nausea or	happy one minute and sad the next)	
diarrhoea	• Feeling of being "overly emotional"	
• Fast heart rate	Short temper	
• Severe fatigue	• Anger	
<ul> <li>Trembling muscles and tension</li> </ul>	• Feeling demotivated, loss of hope	
<ul> <li>Back and neck pain</li> </ul>	Depression and general feeling of	
<ul> <li>Headaches</li> </ul>	sadness	
• Inability to relax and recuperate	<ul> <li>Lack of trust in others</li> </ul>	
<ul> <li>Missed periods in women</li> </ul>	• Anxiety	
• Frequent illness	• Lack of emotion/feeling of emptiness	
<ul> <li>Weight gain or loss</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Disassociation and loss of sense of</li> </ul>	
	connection	
	<ul> <li>Increasingly negative attitude</li> </ul>	
	towards life	
	• Loss of meaning (doubting existence	
	of or feeling angry with god)	

MENTAL	BEHAVIOUR-ORIENTATED
Difficulty concentrating	Taking risks (e.g. driving carelessly)
<ul> <li>Confusion</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Eating too much or not enough</li> </ul>
<ul> <li>Forgetfulness</li> </ul>	Smoking more
<ul> <li>Difficulties making decisions</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Loss of energy</li> </ul>
<ul> <li>Dreams or nightmares</li> </ul>	Feeling tense
<ul> <li>Intrusive and unwanted thoughts</li> </ul>	Sense of unease
	<ul> <li>Aggression and verbal outbursts</li> </ul>
	Alcohol consumption or drug use
	• Compulsive behaviours (e.g. nail-biting)
	or nervous ticks
	Withdrawal and isolation

- Distribute copies of the <u>"Signs of stress"</u> handout. Add any missing signs to the flipcharts.
- Ask the parents why it is important to recognise the signs of stress. Does stress manifest differently for men and women? How?
- SAY

It is important to recognise the signs of stress so that we can work out whether our behaviour and the feelings we are experiencing are the product of the stress and challenges we are facing. This knowledge can help us to manage our stress more effectively without judging ourselves and to seek out support when we need it.

### The Effects of Parental Stress on children

**Time:** 10 minutes **Structure:** The entire group

Ask the parents if they think that a person's stress levels can affect the people around them. If so, how?

## SAY

Parental stress has an impact on the entire family. If the parents feel calm and relaxed, it is more likely that children and partners will also feel relaxed. If the parents feel stressed, it is more likely that the entire family will feel stressed.

Explain how the stress of a parent will affect the child. If their mother or father is stressed and unhappy, children will pick up on this. Often, children respond to their parents' stress by "misbehaving", by crying a lot or developing anxieties.

These responses can make the parents feel even more stressed and unhappy – and the whole thing becomes a vicious cycle!

- Ask the group if anyone has ever experienced this.
- Draw this diagram on a flipchart to summarise the idea:



### NOTE>

You can use the metaphor of a sponge and explain that children are like sponges; they soak up the emotions and feelings of their parents.

### SAY

Children can sense when their parents are stressed. They eavesdrop when their parents are talking about adult things. Depending on how much of the conversation the child understands, or how worried and anxious their parents' voices sound, this can cause stress and anxiety in the children, too.

No-one can be happy and relaxed all of the time. You have experienced some terrible things, and the new environment you're now living in will also be presenting you with lots of new challenges. Parents are allowed to feel sad, stressed or annoyed and shouldn't blame themselves for the "misbehaviour" of their children. However, there are ways to deal with stress in a manner that prevents it from having a negative impact on the family. These techniques will help to create a more positive atmosphere in the home.

We're going to discuss some of the ways you can handle stress to feel calmer. But sometimes, stress can be so severe that it affects our sleep and our day-to-day lives. In these kinds of situations, it's a good idea to call on someone you trust for additional support. There is no shame in asking for help; in fact, it takes a great deal of strength to admit that you need some support. It also shows that we understand how our stress can negatively affect our children. If you'd like more information on the support that's available, don't hesitate to come and talk to me after the session.

### NOTE >

Ensure that you can refer participants to the relevant providers for specialist psychosocial support if they need it.

# **Relaxation Techniques**

**Time:** 30 minutes **Structure:** The entire group



### SAY

One way of dealing with stressful situations is to try to maintain a daily routine, such as regular mealtimes as a family and going to bed and getting up at the same time. These routines help children feel safe, protected and stable.

Ask the parents if they know of and use any other relaxation techniques. Which activities help them and their children to relax and feel better?

### NOTE >

It might be a good idea to ask all the parents about their relaxation techniques in turn. This way, you can make sure that everyone gets a chance to speak and contribute.



Write the answers down on the flipchart.

### Examples:

- Reading
- Writing down problems
- Drinking or eating something they enjoy
- Meeting friends, distraction
- Talking to someone they trust
- Praying
- Singing, dancing
- Listening to music
- Playing sport
- Getting involved in community activities
- Walking/exploring nature
- Looking at streams or rivers
- Sorting things out/tidying up
- Crying, letting out emotions
- Physical contact, hugs and massages
- Wellness
- Using relaxation techniques

# SAY

There are relaxation techniques that you can do alone or with small children on your lap. If your children are old enough, you can try to get them involved in using the relaxation techniques with you. If they are still babies, just hold and cuddle them while you do the exercise. There are lots of different types of relaxation technique, so let's try some of them out so that you can see which work best for you.

### **Deep Breathing**



- This technique is the most effective and simplest way to relax. Breathing deeply increases the amount of oxygen flowing around your body, which brings your heart rate down and promotes a sense of calmness and relaxation. It works in a similar way to the exercise we did at the beginning of the session.
- Breathe in deeply ten times, inhaling right down into your belly
- Notice how your belly moves up and down with each breath
- Breathe in deeply...then sigh the breath out



Ask the parents how they feel doing this exercise.

### **A Minute of Mindfulness**



### SAY

- Taking a moment to be mindful will help you concentrate and focus your attention on your surroundings rather than chasing after your thoughts. It also helps your brain perform better and will reduce your heart rate and blood pressure.
- This is a simple exercise that you can do at any time throughout the day.
- Take some time to try it out. Look at your watch and take note of the time.
- For the next 60 seconds, your only job is to focus all your attention on your breath.
- Even though you're only spending a minute on the task, it can feel like an eternity. Keep your eyes open and breathe normally.
- Try to prevent your thoughts from drifting (because they almost certainly will) and bring your attention back to your breath each time you notice your mind wandering.
- Bear in mind that this mindfulness exercise isn't meant to be a personal challenge. You can't fail when you do this.
- Use this exercise multiple times a day to focus your mind and bring yourself back to the present moment.
- Ask the parents if they managed to concentrate on their breath during the exercise. What thoughts did they have during the exercise? Were they able to experience any sense of physical relaxation?

# **Writing**



### SAY

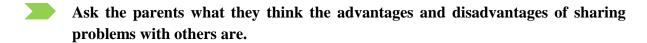
Another way of coping with stressful events and negative memories is to write them down. Spelling and grammar don't matter. The most important thing is to record all of the details of the stressful situation or event. You can also document positive experiences. We won't do this exercise now, but you can try it out at home to see if it helps you.

### **Talking**



### SAY

Like writing, talking can help people cope with stressful events or negative memories. Sharing problems with others can help to reduce stress and will provide you with valuable emotional support.



### **Examples of Advantages:**

- Makes me feel better
- I can let the problem go
- Helps me to sort my thoughts and work out what happened
- I can find out whether others have been through the same or similar things
- The other person can offer specific advice and support

### **Examples of Disadvantages:**

- The other person might not take the person with the problem seriously
- You might not know how to express yourself or find the right words
- Sometimes you might not have anyone to talk to
- It can be difficult to talk about your feelings; you might annoy other people
- A lack of trust; problems could be disclosed to others.



### **SAY**

Sometimes, it can be difficult to talk about problems or to share them with people who have their own issues to contend with or who you might not know very well. Even though it's hard, it usually helps if you can trust the person you are talking to. Some people might find it easier to share their thoughts with someone they know very well, while others prefer to talk to a stranger or a person who is not part of their community. It would be great if you, as a group of parents, could all listen to and support one another and share your thoughts and ideas and the challenges you face every day with the other members of the group. Of course, if you don't want to do that, no-one is going to force you. The support you give one another could also be more practical; perhaps you could

help one another organise childcare. This would give all of you a little more time to dedicate to yourselves.

- Explain that everyone needs to make time to look after themselves. They might do so by spending a little time with friends, watching a film, reading a book or magazine or simply by taking half an hour to sit in the sun with a cup of tea or coffee without being disturbed. Sometimes, it can be difficult to find this time, but we are all able to cope with stress more effectively if we can manage to spend a few minutes a day enjoying something just for us, and being grateful for the things in our lives that are going well.
- Remind the parents that how they feel physically has an impact on their emotions and thoughts, and that their emotions and thoughts also affect how they feel physically. It is helpful to create a sense of peace and calm in the body if you want to create a sense of peace and calm in the mind and the same is true in reverse. The breathing exercises, talking to others and writing down thoughts can all help us to break out of the stress cycle and calm your body and mind.
- Distribute the <u>"Relaxation techniques"</u> handout, which contains further exercises and instructions for putting together your own "toolkit" (covered in chapter 4, "Parenting café"). The parents can take the printed information on these activities home with them so that they can try the exercises out there. Alternatively, you might try out the exercises together as a group in the "parenting café".

### Homework

**Time:** 5 minutes **Structure:** The entire group



### SAY

For your homework this week, I'd like to encourage you to try out and practise one of the relaxation techniques we've discussed at least once a day. If you think of other activities and techniques to help you reduce your stress levels, please try them out and share your experiences with the group next week.

### Feedback and Closing

**Time:** 10 minutes **Structure:** The entire group



### Ask the parents to share their feedback on the session. Ask:

- What did you like best?
- Do you have any unanswered questions?

- Which elements of the session were helpful and which were not?
- Do you have any comments or suggestions as to how the session could be improved?
- Ask the parents to write their name on the attendance list to record their attendance.
- **Explain** what topics will be covered in the next session. Say:

In the next session, we'll talk about how children's brains develop and what you as a parent can do to support the positive development of your child's brain.

- Get the group to do the closing activity (passing on positive energy and positive thoughts in a circle).
- Thank the parents for coming and for participating in the session. Invite the parents to stay for the "parenting café" and to chat to the other participants over a cup of tea and a snack. Chapter 4 of this handbook provides ideas for the "parenting café".

# **Course Session 3: Brain Development in Children**

In this session, the participants learn how children's brains develop and why severe and longlasting stress (also known as toxic stress) can have a negative impact on brain development in children. They will learn what parents can do to prevent toxic stress in children and how they can promote brain development in their children in a positive way.

Timetable	Time
Welcome and Introduction	10 min.
The Story of the Two Lions	10 min.
The Amazing Brain	20 min.
Game: Ming-Mang-Mong	10 min.
The Amazing Brain (continued)	30 min.
Showing Affection and	15 min.
Attention	
Homework	5 min.
Feedback and Closing	10 min.

### **Duration:**

1 hour 50 minutes

### **Materials**

- Course documentation
- Flipchart and marker pens

### **Welcome and Introduction**

**Time:** 10 minutes **Structure:** The entire group

- Welcome the parents and ask them how they and their families are doing.
- Ask the parents if they have any questions on the last session.
- Ask the parents if any of them would like to share a positive experience from the past week.
- Ask the parents to report back on the relaxation techniques they've tried out over the past week and what their experiences of them were. Did the exercises help them to cope with stress more effectively? Were they able to find sufficient time for themselves over the past week?
- Introduce the topic for today's session:
- SAY

Today, we're going to talk about how children's brains develop and what you as a parent can do to support the positive development of your child's brain.

### The Story of the Two Lions

**Time:** 10 minutes **Structure:** The entire group

# Read the following story to the group:

An old man is telling his grandson all about life. "There's a fight going on inside me", he tells the young boy. "It's a terrible fight between two lions. One of the lions is evil, and he only has evil traits: Anger, violence, jealousy, impatience, envy, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lying, false pride and egoism".

The old man continues: "The other lion is good and he has good traits: Joy, peace, love, hope, laughter, a love of colour, music and dance, intelligence, placidity, tenderness, respect, forgiveness, happiness, friendship, security, friendliness, generosity, truth, compassion and belief".

The old man then says to the boy: "The same fight is happening inside of you and inside of every other person".

The grandson thinks for a moment then asks his grandfather: "Which lion is going to win?" The old man looks at the child, smiles and says: "The one you feed".



Ask the parents what they think the message of the story is. How could the story relate to the topic of "brain development in children"?

### Example of an answer:

A child is born with the potential to develop both negative and positive personality traits. The traits that are encouraged (or "fed", like in the story) are the ones that will come to the fore. If parents set a good example and encourage positive traits and behaviours in their children, the pathways in the brain responsible for these behaviours will become stronger than the others.



Ask the parents what skills their children need to grow up into happy and healthy adults.

### Example of answers:

- The ability to be friendly and respectful with other people, animals and the environment
- The ability to learn new things and to question what they believe or are told
- The ability to take responsibility for members of the family or community
- The ability to show an interest in others and demonstrate empathy



When parents create a loving and caring atmosphere for their children to grow up in, they are supporting their children in the process of healthy, positive brain growth. When parents are aggressive or use physical or verbal violence against their children, or if the children do not feel safe at home and don't know what to expect, they can experience a toxic stress response. These kinds of stress responses can have a negative impact on brain development. We will explore this idea in more detail in today's session. We'll also be discussing how parents can support their children in acquiring the skills and abilities they need to become happy and healthy adults in all future sessions.

### The Amazing Brain

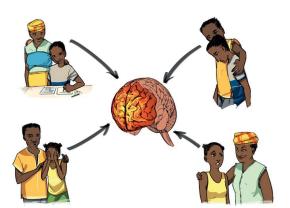
**Time:** 20 minutes **Structure:** The entire group



### Show the parents the "Brain development" pictures.

Enlarged versions of the pictures are provided on page 149.





Ask the parents what is happening in the pictures. How are the parents in the pictures supporting their children's brain development? Do boys' and girls' brains develop in the same way? Why or why not?

### Example of answers:

- 1. Picture: Top left-hand corner a father comforting a crying baby
- 1. Picture: Top right-hand corner a mother tickling her baby
- 2. Picture: Bottom left-hand corner a father comforting his child
- 2. Picture: Bottom right-hand corner a mother listening to her child

### NOTE >

The aim of this exercise is to get the parents engaged in a discussion about how their parenting skills and practices are directly linked to their child's brain development.



### **SAY**

The brain starts growing while a baby is still in its mother's womb and ends at around 26 years of age. When do you think the brain does most of its growing? The brain develops at the fastest rate in the first years of life. 90% of your brain structure is formed by the time you reach the age of five! However, this does not mean that nothing of any consequence happens after this point. The brain continues to progress through

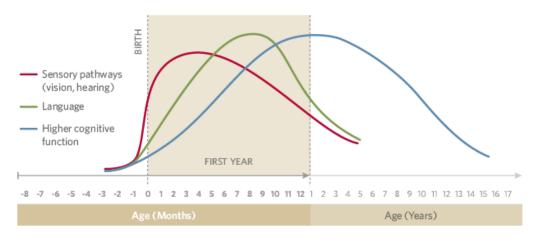
important developmental milestones until early adulthood. This is why it is important that parents encourage positive brain development at all developmental stages and ages.



# Show the parents the "Brain development" graph and try to pick out the most important points.

An enlarged version of the graph is provided on page 150.

# Human Brain Development



Source: Nelson, C. (2000). From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.



### SAY

This graph shows that the sensory abilities – the senses of sight, sound, smell and taste – and language ability primarily develop in the early years of a child's life.

However, the brain is only fully formed when a person reaches their mid-twenties. The various parts of the brain develop and mature at different speeds.

The part of the brain that controls impulses and allows us to make good decisions is the last part to mature. This part of the brain is known as the prefrontal cortex, and it controls the "executive function". This function allows us to plan, to concentrate, to remember instructions and to multitask.

The most important foundations for adult life and future learning are laid in early childhood. By training your child's brain to learn during the early years of their life, you are laying the foundations for all future learning processes.

The development of a child is influenced by a variety of factors. These factors include the child's genes (what it inherits from its parents), the physical and social environment

(the family and the community), diet and activities (games, education and leisure activities) and often also spiritual, religious or traditional cultural beliefs.

Early-life development is largely influenced by the child's immediate environment, which is comprised of the parents, siblings and other close relatives and which later expands to include teachers, friends and other persons with whom the child interacts directly.

Parents play a critical role in supporting the healthy development of their children. You all already have the knowledge and skills required to put your child on the path to healthy brain development: All you need to do is talk to them, play with them and show them love and affection.



### SAY

Research has shown that children are born with the fundamental building blocks for learning and memory. The brain of a newborn baby has over 100 billion neurons! Imagine a village with a billion small houses, separated by tall bushes and long grass and with no paths between the individual homes (there are no relationships between people, no shared memories, no community...). This is a little bit like the newborn brain before the synapses form connections between the neurons. Boys and girls all have the capacity to learn and be intelligent, to be friendly, to be gentle and kind-natured: It all depends on how their development is shaped by their parents and their community.

### **DEFINITIONS >**

**Neurons:** Neurons are nerve cells in the brain that specialise in routing and processing signals. They control all of our behaviour, emotions, dreams, feelings and our personality by judging what we perceive.

**Synapses:** Synapses are the links that connect the neurons (nerve cells) in the brain. Their role is to transfer signals and convey messages between the nerve cells.

**Cognitive functions**: The functions of the human brain that are associated with perception, learning, memory and thinking – or the human ability to understand and process information.

**Senses:** The ability to take in stimuli via specialised sensory organs (in humans: eyes, ears, nose, tongue). The human senses are sight, sound, smell and taste.

**Motor skills:** The ability of the human body to move in certain ways using the muscles. There are two groups of motor skills. The gross motor skills encompass larger movements of the arms, legs, feet or the entire body (crawling, running, jumping), while the fine motor skills are

made up of smaller actions such as gripping an object between the thumb and the finger or using the lips and tongue to taste things. The two sets of skills usually develop at the same time.

**Behaviour control:** The ability to respond in a less emotional and aggressive way when in a stressful situation, and instead to take time to respond appropriately.

### **Game: Ming-Mang-Mong**

**Time:** 10 minutes **Structure:** The entire group



### SAY

Games are good fun for children and their parents and are a great way to train the brain and reduce stress.



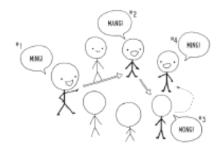
### Ask the group to form a small circle.

- Ask one person to start the game by looking directly at another person, pointing at them and saying "Ming!"
- The person who receives the "Ming!" then looks at someone else, points to the person and says "Mang!"
- The person who receives the "Mang!" then looks at someone else, points to the person and says "Mong!"
- The person who received the "Mong!" does nothing.
- The person to the right of the person who received the "Mong!" starts the round again by looking at and pointing to someone and saying "Ming!"

### SAY

Remember to clearly look at and point directly towards the person you choose!

Play the Ming-Mang-Mong game in continuous rounds. Start slow then increase the pace. If a person misses their cue or makes a mistake, they are out and must return to their seats. Play until just five participants remain. These five people have won the game. Get everyone to give them a round of applause



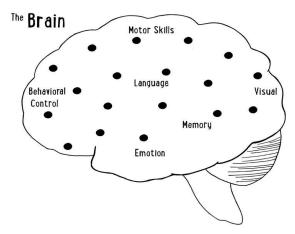
### **The Amazing Brain (continued)**

**Time:** 30 minutes **Structure:** The entire group

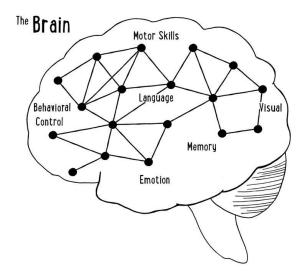


# Show the parents the pictures of the brain below to help them understand brain development in children.

Enlarged versions of all the pictures are provided on pages 151 - 155.



Picture 1: The brain with neurons

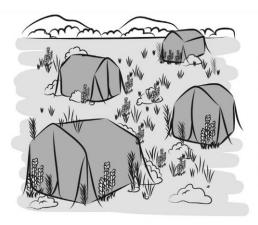


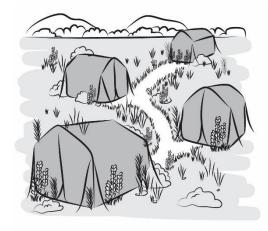
Picture 2: The brain with synapse connections

### SAY >

Various parts of the brain contain nerve cells known as neurons. As a child's brain develops, connections form between these neurons, enabling them to communicate with one another. These connections are called "synapses". The synapses work like circuits, and they are what enables us to speak, think, walk, catch a ball, learn new things, trust other people and control our emotions. They are like electrical cables; when they are connected to the power, they enable us to switch on the lights. As we use the synapses between our neurons over and over again, they become more powerful – just like our muscles when we go to the gym.

# Show the parents the "Paths in the village" pictures.

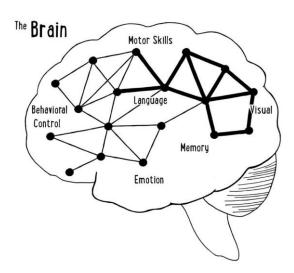




### SAY

Think back to the example of a village we talked about earlier. The synapses in the brain are like paths between the houses. The paths that are used the most get wider and are easy to spot, while the paths that only get used infrequently or not at all quickly become overgrown again. The brain works in the same way.

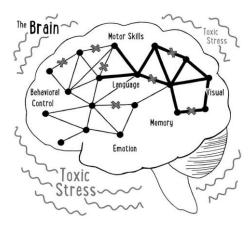
### Show the parents these pictures of the brain:



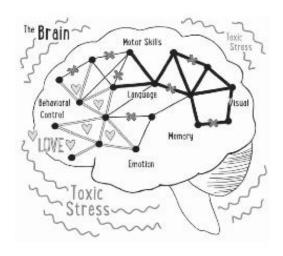
Picture 3: The brain with strong connections as a result of love and affection

### SAY >

In a safe and predictable environment with positive and dependable relationships with adults, a child's brain can develop in a healthy way and form strong synapses. The more support, encouragement, love and affection children receive, the more brain cells join up and activate within their brains.



Picture 4: The connections in the brain are destroyed by toxic stress and experiences of violence



Picture 5: The connections in the brain are renewed by loving, caring and predictable relationships

### SAY >

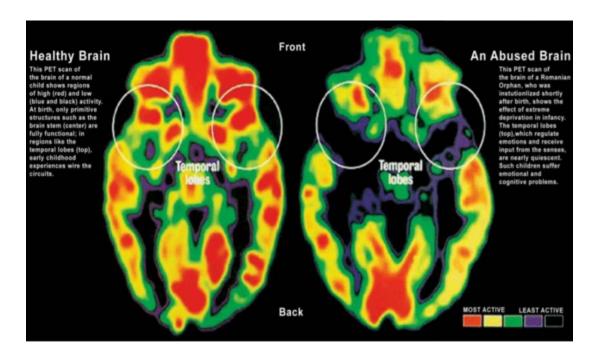
When children are exposed to severe stress for long periods of time, their brain development can be affected. This type of stress, which is also referred to as toxic stress, can cause the connections between the nerve cells to die out. These lost connections may mean that it is harder for the child to learn and concentrate and to make friends; it may also result in behavioural problems and a loss of hope and confidence. Children can also suffer permanent physical and psychological damage.

### SAY >

However, the damaging consequences of toxic stress can be stopped or reversed if children get the opportunity to play and learn in a safe and consistent environment, with caring adults by their side. The more love, care and positive attention parents give their children, the stronger the connections between the neurons. Even if a child has lived through some very stressful loving experiences, the and caring environment in which it grows up can boost its resilience and ensure that the brain and body still develop in a healthy way.

### Show the parents the picture: "Brain scan".

An enlarged version of the scan is provided on page 156.



### SAY

These pictures of the brain were captured using high-tech scanners that use the latest technology to provide incredibly detailed images. In this example, we're looking at the brain from above. The colours show activity in specific regions of the brain: Red areas are very active, green areas are moderately active and black areas are completely inactive. The image on the left shows the brain of a child who has grown up with loving and caring parents. The image on the right shows the brain of an orphan who grew up without parents and suffered abuse, neglect and violence for an extended period of time.

# Ask the parents what they notice about these pictures. How do the two scans differ?

### SAY >

The images show that the brain of the child who grew up with loving and caring parents is much more active than the brain of the child who grew up experiencing abuse and neglect and without parents to care for him or her.

### **Showing Affection and Attention**

**Time:** 15 minutes **Structure:** The entire group, in small groups

- Ask the parents about a time when they received affection or attention from another person. They might recall an instance within their own family, or from a relative, friend or at work. How did it feel?
- Ask the parents when they last consciously gave affection or attention to their children or other people in their lives.
- Engage the parents in a discussion about the various ways to show children affection.

### Example answers:

- Hugging their child
- Saying "I love you" to their child
- Giving their child a high-five or using another physical gesture of affection
- Telling their child that they are happy he or she is part of the family

### SAY

Affection and attention support healthy and positive brain development in children. This is why it is so important that parents give their children lots of affection and attention.

### Homework

**Time:** 5 minutes **Structure:** The entire group



### SAY

In this session, you've learnt about the process of brain development and the different factors that can help or hinder the development of a child's brain. Over the next week, make a conscious effort to show your child affection and to give them some dedicated attention, perhaps by playing together. This is a really important way to promote the positive development of your child's brain!

### Feedback and Closing

**Time:** 10 minutes **Structure:** The entire group

- Ask the parents to share their feedback on the session. What did you like best? Do you have any unanswered questions? Which elements of the session were helpful and which were not? Do you have any comments or suggestions as to how the session could be improved?
- Ask the parents to write their name on the attendance list to record their attendance.
- **Explain** what topics will be covered in the next session:
- In the next session, we'll talk about the developmental stages that a child goes through and how parents can actively promote their child's development through games and playful activities.
- Get the group to do the closing activity (passing on positive energy and positive thoughts in a circle).
- Thank the parents for coming and for participating in the session. Invite the parents to stay for the "parenting café" and to chat to the other participants over a cup of tea and a snack. Chapter 4 of this handbook provides ideas for the "parenting café".

# **Session 4: Child-Friendly Playing and Learning**

In this session, the participants will learn more about the development of babies and children and how targeted play and praise promotes children's social, physical, cognitive and emotional development. The participants will discuss games that promote learning and general development in children and get a chance to try out some games that they can play with their children at home.

**Duration:** 2 hours

### **Materials:**

• Course documentation

• Video: Interacting to promote development

• Video: Spending time together

• Copies of "Developmental Milestones" handout.

Timetable	Time
Welcome and Introduction	10 min.
How Infants and Toddlers develop	15 min.
Serve and Return	20 min.
Game: DOBA DOBA!	10 min.
Practice Positive Interactions	20 min.
Child-Friendly Playing	20 min.
Support in School	10 min.
Homework	5 min.
Feedback and Closing	10 min.

### **Welcome and Introduction**

**Time:** 10 minutes **Structure:** The entire group

- Welcome the parents and ask them how they and their families are doing.
- Ask the parents if they have any questions on the last session.
- Ask the parents if any of them would like to share a positive experience from the past week.
- Ask the parents to share what they have been doing with their children over the past week to show affection and attention and promote brain development.
- Introduce the topic for today's session:
- SAY

Today we're going to talk about how babies and children develop and how you can use play to promote healthy development in your children.

### NOTE >

To practise child-friendly play as a way to promote positive development, this session introduces lots of different games, which participants will get a chance to discuss and try out. If the children are nearby and the parents want to, they can practise some of the activities with their children. Encourage the parents during the exercise and give them positive feedback. Offer support if the parents have difficulty with the games and exercises.

### **How Infants and Toddlers develop**

**Time:** 15 minutes **Structure:** Small groups

SAY

The key to healthy growth and development in children is positive interaction with the people in the child's environment. There are four aspects of development that children work through in childhood and early childhood:

- Social development
- Physical development
- Cognitive development
- Emotional development
- Put the parents into four groups. Assign one of these four developmental areas to each group and ask them to discuss it and come up with examples of behaviours

or skills that children develop in this area. Then ask each group to share and discuss their examples with the whole group.

### NOTE >

If the parents have children of different ages, ask them to think about examples for developmental steps at different ages.

### Examples for social development

- Sharing with friends or siblings and taking turns
- Building relationships and friendships with other children
- Greeting and saying goodbye to parents and other family members
- Increasing independence
- Participating in discussions with adults

### Examples for physical development

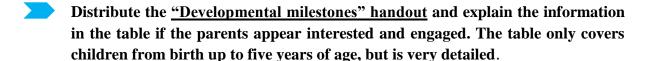
- Physical growth
- Learning to reach and hold things
- Learning to stand, walk and run
- Throwing or kicking a ball
- The ability to link a (complex) sequence of movements

### Examples for cognitive development

- Learning words and numbers
- Learning to solve problems
- Learning to write and count
- Learning to concentrate for an extended period of time

### Examples for emotional development

- Learning words to express emotions
- Learning how to control emotions and express them securely
- Learning how to handle difficult emotions
- Learning to read other people's emotions and respond appropriately



### ATTENTION >

All children develop at a different pace. Parents should try not to compare their children to others of the same age too much. If parents are worried about their children's development, they should discuss their concerns with a paediatrician.

### **Serve and Return**

**Time:** 20 minutes **Structure:** The entire group



### SAY

One way to promote brain development is to demonstrate positive behaviours. Children are more proficient at learning from what they see rather than from what they hear. If parents demonstrate polite, friendly and engaged behaviours, they will promote these same behaviours in their children. If children are simply told that they should be calm and hard-working, but their parents are violent or aggressive, the children are likely to follow the example they set rather than what they say. Children are like sponges: They are constantly observing and soaking up everything around them. For children (and adults, too), actions often speak louder than words.

- Play the "Interacting to promote development" video.
- Ask the parents what is happening in the video. Why is it important to play with children and explain things to them? How do they think the children in the video feel? Why is it important that girls feel just as appreciated and loved as boys?
- SAY

There are lots of ways to support and promote brain development in young children. Boys and girls have the same ability and need to learn and to develop to their full potential. "Serve and return" is a way for parents to interact with their babies to promote the healthy development of their child's brain. If a baby or small child babbles, makes gestures or cries and the parents respond with eye contact, words or a cuddle, the child's brain builds and strengthens the neuron pathways that support communication skills and social abilities.

Show the parents the pictures: <u>"Serve and return" and "Active engagement with</u> children"

Enlarged versions of both pictures are provided on page 157.





# Ask the parents what they can see in the pictures.

### SAY

Do you remember how, in the last session, we talked about how neurons join up and form—connections in the brain? Babies and young children communicate with those around them—with sounds, gestures and facial expressions. Parents who respond to these signals with their own noises, gestures and facial expressions help their children to form these basic neuron connections, particularly in the first few years of life. The brain also contains some special neurons known as "mirror neurons". These neurons are located in the region of the brain that is responsible for movement. But mirror neurons are only activated when certain movements or facial expressions are observed in others—they reflect the gestures and feelings of the other person in the child's own brain. When you repeat the expressions and gestures of your children, you strengthen these neurons and the child's foundations for developing empathy and compassion.

Talking to and playing with children is a crucial part of a healthy parent-child relationship and strengthens the bond between parents and their children. From the moment a child is born, they are learning from the people around them. Speaking to children in a quiet voice in full sentences can help them learn language and expand their vocabulary, which will help to prepare them for school and support the learning they do in the classroom. Parents can also help their children to acquire communication skills by using words to describe emotions. For example, a parent could say to a child: "You're angry because I have taken away the pot you were drumming on. Let's play with this ball instead".

Ask the parents if they have noticed any differences in the communication skills of their children who are the same sex or between boys and girls. If they have, what are the differences? How do parents in Germany communicate with their children?

### SAY

The way parents speak to their children and the words they use affect the way children communicate later in life. For example, without you even noticing it, a tougher and stricter style of communication and upbringing will affect the way they communicate with others later. This is why it is so important to speak to and interact with boys and girls in the same way, so that they can develop equally. That said, all children are different. Some may need more time or more encouragement than others.

### NOTE >

One of the best times to talk to babies is during mealtimes. Babies are generally wide awake while they are being fed, so they are ready for interaction and open to learning. Even as children get older, shared mealtimes are a good opportunity for parents to spend some time with their children. Parents should sit down with their children and eat with them. The topics discussed at mealtimes should be positive. This ensures that joint mealtimes are a pleasant experience for everyone and helps children feel assured that they are an important part of the family! Parents can use joint mealtimes to promote positive behaviours and to strengthen their relationships with their children.

### **Game: DOBA DOBA!**

**Time:** 10 minutes **Structure:** The entire group

**NOTE** > In this game, the parents must follow what you say and not what you do.



### Ask the parents:

- To stretch their arms out in front of them when you say "DO"
- To stretch their arms above their heads when you say "DOBA"
- To stretch their arms out to the sides when you say "DOBA-DOBA"



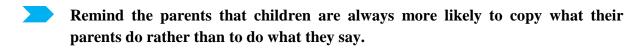
Practice this multiple times by combining the right arm movements with the right words. Then start to combine the arm movements with the "wrong" words, for example by saying "DO" and stretching your arms to the sides or by saying "DOBA-DOBA" and stretching your arms out in front of you. Some of the participants will copy what you do rather than base their movements on what you say. These people are out of the game and must sit down. Play until just one participant remains! The winner becomes the "DOBA master" and gives the instructions in the next round.

### **ALTERNATIVE >**

You can change the name of "DOBA-DOBA" to something else that is more appropriate for your group if you need to. If you think this game may be too complicated, you can play a simpler version. Tell the participants to follow your verbal instructions and not your actions. If they perform an action that you do without giving a verbal instruction, they must sit down.

### Example:

- You say "both hands up" and raise both hands
- You then say "sit down" and sit down
- You then say "both hands down" but lift your hands instead!



### **Practice Positive Interactions**

**Time:** 20 minutes **Structure:** The entire group



All of your children are different ages, so we're going to look at a number of games that you can play with your children depending on their age and developmental stage.

- Ask the parents what kinds of games they play with their children or whether they have any ideas for games that parents can play with children in different age groups.
- As a group, collect ideas for games that parents can play with children of different ages.

### **ALTERNATIVE >**

For the games, you could also divide the group up into sub-groups based on the ages of each participant's children. The idea is to give parents an opportunity to share tips on games and to learn from one another. Parents with older children can draw on their experience to tell the group about the games they played with their children when they were younger. The parents can also think about the games they would have liked to play as children!

If the parents are struggling to come up with ideas for games, here are a few suggestions: (All descriptions for the games mentioned below are provided in the "Games Ideas" handout.)

# 3–5 years old 1–3 years old Babies (<1 year old)

### **GAMES:**

- Talking to and singing to the baby during dressing, feeding or bath time.
- Let the baby touch different things, such as fabrics, grass or large smooth rocks, and explain what each material is.
- Help the baby to sit up or stand up and jump
- Encourage the baby to play with objects like balls

### **EXAMPLE:**

- "Serve and return"

### **GAMES:**

- Running, walking and dancing with children
- Singing songs, reading books and telling stories
- Throwing a ball back and forth
- Stacking objects
- Encourage the child to describe things it sees or ask the child questions about what it is doing, for example about the food it is eating

### **EXAMPLE:**

- "Show me something blue"

### **GAMES:**

- Drawing, playdough, crafts
- Playing with dolls/cuddly toys
- Combining or sorting objects (e.g. sorting a pile of rocks by size or doing a puzzle)
- Telling stories or getting the children to tell stories
- Playing hide and seek

### **EXAMPLE:**

- "I spy" adaptation

### **GAMES:**

- Board games
- Concentration, memory and puzzle games
- Vocabulary games e.g. "A to Z relay" and "Our cat"
- Putting on shows, dressing up or other games that involve roleplay
- Reading, reading out loud or writing stories
- Various sports with specific sports equipment

### **EXAMPLE:**

- "Categories"
- Together with the parents, choose one or more games and play a few rounds as a group.
- Ask the parents how these games help to promote healthy brain development.
- SAY

6-11 years old

Older children should also be encouraged to play games that improve their vocabulary and word choices. "Telling stories" is a good example of a game that promotes

linguistic ability in children. In this game, children are encouraged to come up with an entire story based on some pictures or a few introductory sentences. Parents can help their children through the process by asking questions (e.g. "And what happens next?"). The "Telling stories" game can also be played while you're out shopping, when you're cooking or on the way to school. Answering specific questions from parents and repeating the story back to them are very effective ways for a child to enhance their vocabulary. These kinds of games improve children's reading and writing skills and will help them do better at school.

Show the parents the picture "Telling stories" and ask them if they have any experience of this game.

You can find the picture in large format on p.158.



### NOTE >

Children who can communicate confidently and comfortably in their native language learn additional languages more quickly and easily. Furthermore, children who have lots of conversations with their parents and siblings at an early age find it easier to understand new ideas. So playing games that promote linguistic ability in the native language pays off!

### **Child-Friendly Playing**

**Time:** 20 minutes Structure: Parents in pairs or with their children

Show the video: "Spending Time Together"

Ask the parents what is happening in the video. How do the parents in the video feel? And how do the children feel? What are the children learning? Why is it important to give both girls and boys opportunities to play?

Explain that girls and boys develop in the same way. However, in many cultures, girls often get less time and fewer opportunities to play because they are expected to assume more responsibility for household tasks. Emphasise how important it is for girls to get the same opportunities and the same amount of time to play as boys, because both sexes have the same needs and their brains develop in the same way.

### SAY

We're now going to look at how games become even more fun for children when they can initiate them themselves and receive praise for doing so. Children get the most enjoyment from play when they can choose what to play and when and their parents follow their lead. For example, a five-year-old child might not be interested in drawing the letters that spell their name; they might want to draw an elephant or a cat instead.

- Explain that child-friendly play promotes fun and learning even before a child can speak or walk.
- Write the most important points about child-friendly play down on a flipchart while explaining each idea:
  - Sit down with your child and interact with them on their level.
  - Follow your child's lead. Look out for non-verbal cues to work out if your child is getting tired, angry, bored etc.
  - Talk to your child and describe what you're doing or intending to do. Describe and talk about what your child is doing, for example: "Oh, you're playing with the beautiful doll with the blue dress". Or "Let's go to the market and buy some vegetables". These kinds of descriptions are particularly important when playing with younger children.
  - Avoid unnecessary power struggles. For example: A father is playing a game with his son. The boy decides that he wants to play something else. If the father says to the son that they should first finish playing the game they've already started, and the son argues back and the father engages in the discussion back and forth, this creates a power struggle. Remember: The aim of the game is to have fun, learn and build a positive parent-child relationship.
  - Give your child positive attention and affirmation. Praise your child!
  - End inappropriate or dangerous games. If children start playing with dangerous objects such as knives or if they are hurting one another, the adult should intervene immediately.
- Ask the parents to form pairs and practise child-friendly play in a roleplay with their partner. Each pair should decide on an activity that they think their own children would enjoy. During the roleplay, one participant plays the child and the other plays the mother or father.

#### Example:

- Mother/father: "What would you like to play?"
- Child (3 years old): "I want to play with a ball. I want to play football".
- Mother/father (fetches or makes a ball): "OK, what should I do now?"
- Child: "I want to try to score a goal".
- They start to play
- Mother/father: "Wow, you're really good at playing football!"

#### **ALTERNATIVE >**

The roleplay can also be turned around so that the parents demonstrate what is **not** child-friendly playing. The parents should feel free to exaggerate to highlight what you might do wrong when playing with children. This kind of roleplay lightens the mood as the parents aren't under any pressure to do everything right, but instead to exaggerate and do everything "wrong".

#### **ALTERNATIVE >**

If the parents don't feel comfortable acting, they can also opt to use puppets. This creates distance and allows participants who are shy or who feel uncomfortable with the exercise to also gain some enjoyment from it.



Ask the parents how the child in their roleplay responded. How did the parent feel during play?

### **Support at School**

**Time:** 10 minutes **Structure:** The entire group



Ask the parents how they can support their children at school. Why is this support important?

#### Examples:

- Helping with homework
- Going over lessons at home
- Prioritising school in everyday routine
- Regular contact with teachers
- Participating in school activities
- Playing games with children that involve numbers, drawing, colouring and writing words and letters
- Creating an atmosphere that promotes learning in the home (e.g. providing a quiet and tidy place for children to learn)

Children spend a great deal of their time at school and a home environment that supports them in their learning is absolutely essential. As parents, you can make a significant contribution to ensuring that your child enjoys going to school. Each afternoon or evening, make a point of asking your children how school was that day. What homework have they got? Can you go over anything they learnt with them? Are there any important upcoming events at school? Put rules and a structure in place for school activities. For example, homework should always be completed in the same place and at the same time (e.g. at the child's own desk and immediately after school).

#### NOTE >

School isn't always a happy place for children. They may be bullied or have disagreements with other children. Bullying is when a person (who may be a child) or a group repeatedly hurts or torments an individual. Emphasise that parents must take their children seriously if they come to them with reports of bullying. If this happens, parents should meet with someone from the school and explain what has been going on. Alternatively, parents can consult an organisation that specialises in bullying for help.

### Homework

**Time:** 5 minutes **Structure:** The entire group



#### **SAY**

Today you've learnt how parents can support their children's learning through play. Over the next week, try to spend some time each day playing with your children and try out the child-friendly games we discussed in this session. Try to introduce at least one new game that you've never played with your children before.

### Feedback and Closing

**Time:** 10 minutes **Structure:** The entire group

- Ask the parents to share their feedback on the session. What did you like best? Do you have any unanswered questions? Which elements of the session were helpful and which were not? Do you have any comments or suggestions as to how the session could be improved?
- Ask the parents to write their name on the attendance list to record their attendance.
- **Explain** what topics will be covered in the next session:

- SAY >
  - In the next session, we'll talk about how you can respond without violence when your children misbehave or break rules.
- Get the group to do the closing activity (passing on positive energy and positive thoughts in a circle).
- Thank the parents for coming and for participating in the session. Invite the parents to stay for the "parenting café" and to chat to the other participants over a cup of tea and a snack. Chapter 4 of this handbook provides ideas for the "parenting café".

# Course Session 5: Rules and Reactions when Children "Misbehave"

In this session, the parents will discuss setting rules for children and how parents can respond, without violence, when children break these rules, misbehave or refuse to co-operate. The participants will learn force-free techniques for enforcing rules and disciplining children and will practise these techniques in roleplays.

### **Duration:**

1 hour 45 minutes

### **Material:**

• Course documentation

• Video: Household rules

• Video: Praising and ignoring

• 1–2 songs for dancing and equipment to play music

Timetable	Time
Welcome and Introduction	10 min.
Game: "Musical Statues"	5 min.
Rules and Consequences	15 min.
Distraction	10 min.
Praise and Ignore	15 min.
Roleplay: Distract or Ignore "Misbehaviour"	15 min.
Family Meetings to discuss Rules and Consequences	10 min.
Parental Responsibilities and Children's Rights	10 min.
Homework	5 min.
Feedback and Closing	10 min.

### **Welcome and Introduction**

**Time:** 10 minutes **Structure:** The entire group

- Welcome the parents and ask them how they and their families are doing.
- Ask the parents if they have any questions on the last session.
- Ask the parents if any of them would like to share a positive experience from the past week.
- Ask the parents to report back on the games they've tried out with their children over the past week and what their experiences of child-friendly play were.
- Introduce the topic for today's session:
- SAY

Today we're going to talk about a number of different strategies and techniques that parents can use to respond to "misbehaviour" without using violence. We'll also think about how you can put rules in place for your children at home that they will understand and stick to.

#### NOTE >

Throughout this handbook, we have deliberately placed the term "misbehaviour" – referring to unwanted behaviours in children, such as whining, tantrums or breaking rules – in quotation marks. This decision reflects the fact that these kinds of behaviours are not "wrong" behaviours, but rather the result of children's inherent natural need to push boundaries by breaking rules and express negative feelings, such as anger and disappointment.

### **Game: "Musical Statues"**

**Time:** 5 minutes **Structure:** The entire group

### SAY

Before we start discussing the first topic, which is rules and discipline, let's warm up and have some fun with a little bit of dancing. Stand up and dance around — being as crazy as you want — while the music is playing. When the music stops, stop moving immediately and stand completely still. If you do move, you're out of the game, so return to your seat.

Play a song that the parents can dance and move around to, perhaps a song in your own native language that they will know and like.

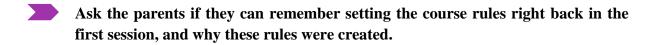
Stop the music every 15 to 20 seconds and keep an eye out for anyone who forgets to "freeze" as soon as the music stops. The game can be repeated with different songs.

#### **ATTENTION >**

It is essential to make sure that all participants feel comfortable playing musical statues. Encourage the people who are a little shy to take part and enjoy the dancing and movement. However, you should never pressurise anyone; if some people don't want to take part, respect their decision.

### **Rules and Consequences**

**Time:** 15 minutes **Structure:** The entire group, in pairs



### Initiate a discussion about rules by asking the following questions:

- Which rules have you introduced in your family? (Example: Wash your hands before you eat)
- What made you want to introduce these rules?
- Why are rules important?
- What could happen if there were no rules?
- Have you created any new rules or given up on any old ones since you arrived in Germany?
- Have you noticed any rules that German families have that are similar to or very different from the rules in your home country?



Creating structure and setting boundaries doesn't have to be restrictive for children. In fact, it helps them to feel safe because they know what is expected of them. However, this only applies to slightly older children. Children under the age of three are not yet capable of understanding and following rules. Their main goal is to explore their environment and learn new things; they don't yet have the self-control needed to follow rules.

At around three years of age, children start to understand rules and boundaries. This is when children should be told – in a child-friendly way – about the rules apply in their household and family. If parents expect particular behaviours from their children, they must ensure that the children know the rules. The rules must be **age-appropriate and clearly communicated**. When children follow the rules, they should always be praised for doing so. It is better to explain rules in a way that makes them sound as though they apply to everyone, for example "We only eat and drink in the kitchen".

- Remind the parents that girls and boys should be parented in the same way. It is important that the parents' daughters and sons are subject to the same rules and that these rules are enforced in the same way.
- Ask the parents if the rules that they have established in their homes are paired with consequences when the rules are broken.

### SAY

Children can comprehend and learn from consequences if the consequences are logical and appropriate. It is important to teach children why their behaviour was wrong and what they can do differently next time to get it right. Consequences for "misbehaviour" should teach children what behaviour their parents expect from them. When setting the consequences for "misbehaviour" by children, follow these rules.

The consequences should:

- Be **respectful**. The child should not feel humiliated by the "punishment"
- Be directly linked to the "misbehaviour"
- Be **appropriate** in terms of severity and duration and occur **immediately** after the "misbehaviour".
- Be **predictable**. Parents and children should work together to define the rules and consequences when rules are broken.
- Be **clear**. Parents should ask their children to repeat the rules and consequences back to them to give the child a sense of control.

#### SAY

Children should always learn something from the consequences of their "misbehaviour". For children to learn positive behaviours, they must understand the effects of their negative behaviours. Understanding the relationship between the cause ("misbehaviour") and the effect (consequence) is the key to behavioural change. For example, if a child deliberately smears toothpaste on the walls when brushing their teeth, the parents could ask their child to help clean the bathroom.

Ask the parents to give some other examples of appropriate responses to "misbehaviour" by children.

### **Examples**

- Drawing on the wall → Consequence: Cleaning the wall
- Not eating evening meal → Consequence: No snacks or sweets before the next meal

#### ATTENTION >

If the parents list aggressive behaviours, such as shouting and smacking, as responses to their children's misbehaviour, explain that these kinds of actions damage children's development and follow the steps described at the start of this handbook for disclosures of violence against children.

#### NOTE >

Children make mistakes, just like all other human beings. Parents can help their children to learn from their mistakes by discussing their mistakes with them and work together to come up with a strategy to remedy or improve the situation. The remedy should be directly linked to the mistake made and the child should be praised for doing it.



Show the video: "Household Rules".



#### SAY >

All children need and deserve attention from their parents and other adults who they love and respect. Children can learn to get attention in both positive and negative ways. In turn, the attention they get can promote positive or negative behaviours. If parents praise their children for good behaviour, such as sharing their sweets with their siblings, the parents are encouraging this behaviour. Negative behaviours can also be reinforced through attention. If parents primarily give their children attention when they are "misbehaving", then they might inadvertently be encouraging negative behaviour from their children. For example, if a child shouts and cries when the parent won't buy it any sweets and the mother or father always discusses the problem with the child, the attention the child gets may encourage it to continue its tantrums! This is why parents must think strategically about what kind of behaviours are the trigger for them giving their child attention. The more positive attention a parent gives as a result of positive behaviours, the less children will seek attention through negative behaviours.

#### NOTE >

Remind the parents of the story of the two lions and how the undesirable behaviours of the lions tie in with negative behaviours by their children, and how their responses can "feed" these undesirable behaviours.



Ask the parents to list ways they can encourage positive behaviour in their children.

#### Examples:

• Playing with their children, explaining the right way to behave (e.g. sharing toys or food) and setting an example

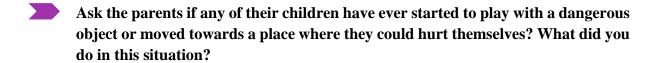
- Teaching children to be nice to their friends or siblings while they play
- Praising their children

We're now going to look at two force-free parenting techniques that create a positive environment for the family:

- Redirection
- Praising and ignoring

### **Distraction**

**Time:** 10 minutes **Structure:** The entire group



### Example:

"My child found some scissors and started playing with them. I took the scissors away and said: Be careful, these scissors are very sharp! Let's put them away and build a pillow fort with your brother instead".

### SAY

Parents can distract their children from something dangerous, damaging or inappropriate and refocus their attention on something else instead. This strategy works best with children up to four years old. For children over the age of four, parents should also explain why their child's behaviour is dangerous or inappropriate. After providing an explanation, you can then move on to redirection. This technique should be used when you cannot or do not want to ignore your child's behaviour.

- Ask the parents to list some examples of when they have distracted their children from dangerous objects or when they have successfully redirected unwanted behaviours such as whining or screaming.
- Ask the parents what they do if their child has a tantrum. Have they noticed German parents responding in a different way?

### SAY

Distracting children can also work if a young child is having a tantrum. The parents could say: "I can see you're really angry. I wish I could help you calm down. Why don't you draw me a picture to show me how angry you are?" Children under five often feel scared and unsure if parents leave them alone while they are in the midst of a tantrum. For this reason, it is often better to stay in sight until the child has calmed down. The mother or father should always remain calm, perhaps by breathing deeply,

flicking through a magazine or doing some tidying up. It can be difficult to stay calm as a parent when your child is having a severe tantrum, but it is important for your child to know that you can handle all of their emotions. Tantrums should be accepted but not given more attention than they deserve.

### **Praise and Ignore**

**Time:** 15 minutes **Structure:** The entire group



#### SAY

Often, it can be helpful to simply ignore unwanted behaviours that children exhibit. This is particularly true when children are "misbehaving" to get a parent's attention but are not damaging themselves or others in the process, as is the case with a tantrum. If you use the ignoring technique, there are a number of principles to bear in mind:

- Behaviours like whining and complaining should be ignored immediately and with clear physical body language to communicate your lack of response. Turn away from the whining child to immediately send out the message that they will not get their way by whining and complaining. If the child is a little older, you can start to move slowly away.
- Parents should **consistently ignore** the behaviour. This might sound easy, but it can be very difficult in practice. Children do not like being ignored and will sometimes escalate their tantrum if parents start to ignore their whining and screaming. Ensure that you continue to ignore crying and tantrums even if the screaming gets louder. This is the only way to teach your child that screaming louder will not get more attention.
- The most important aspect of the "ignoring" tactic is to **praise** the child as soon as the unwanted behaviour stops. Say something like: "Thank you for calming yourself down" once your child has stopped screaming and shouting. This approach teaches children that they won't get any attention from you for "misbehaviour", but they will get attention when they behave well.
- It isn't always possible to ignore negative behaviours. For example, if your child is hurting itself or someone else, or is in danger or creating a risk for others, then you must intervene and use different strategies.

Show the vide

Show the video: "Praise and Ignore".

### Roleplay: Distract or Ignore of "Misbehaviour"

**Time:** 15 minutes **Structure:** The entire group, in pairs

Ask the parents to come up with a list of behaviours that children may exhibit where the tactics of redirection or ignoring may be particularly useful.

### **Examples:**

- Shouting or screaming
- Complaining or whining
- Tantrums
- Fussy eating or being disruptive during mealtimes
- Making faces
- Minor arguments between children
- Ask the parents if any of them would be happy to volunteer for the next roleplay. One person will play the child and the other person its mother or father.
- Show both volunteers the example scripts for the roleplays. They can choose to apply either tactic: redirection or ignoring. Give the parents a few minutes to prepare. Feel free to adjust the script if you think that a different example would be more appropriate.

### Example script for ignoring:

- *Child:* Mum, I want to eat one of the biscuits we bought in the shop.
- Mother/father: I'm sorry, you can't have a biscuit right now because we're going to eat dinner soon.
- Child: But Mum, I want a biscuit! You're so mean.
- [The mother/father ignores the comment and gets on with a household task.]
- Child: [Louder]: Mum/Dad! I really want a biscuit! [Starts to scream]
- [The mother/father continues to ignore the child and continues focusing on another task]
- The parents can breathe in and out deeply to stay calm.
- [The child stops screaming]
- *Mother/father:* [Goes to the child]

Well done for calming yourself down. I understand that you want a biscuit, but if you eat now, you won't be hungry at dinner time. Do you want to come help me make dinner?

- *Child:* Yes [they make dinner together]

### Example script for distraction:

- [The small child is screaming because the mother has taken away a toy that belongs to the child's brother.]
- Child: [angry] I want the toy back!
- Mother/father: [Does not respond to what the child said.] Oh! Look, here's a lovely card game. Shall we have a look at it together and see what it's like?
- *Child:* [Hesitates, but is interested] But I want to play with this toy.
- Mother/father: [Takes the card game and shows the cards to the child.] These cards are really cool. Shall we have a look at the rules together?
- *Child:* [Responds to the redirection]: Yes, let's play this card game together.
- Ask the parents if the person playing the parent was able to effectively distract or ignore the child. What message did the mother/father communicate to the child in the roleplay?
- Repeat the roleplay with a different example and a different response.

### NOTE >

The roleplay should be fun for the parents. However, it is also important to make sure that they apply the tactics of redirection and ignoring correctly. Ensure that the parents in the roleplay praise their children as soon as the negative behaviour stops. Remind the parents how important positive attention is for children.

### Family Meetings to discuss Rules and Consequences

**Time:** 10 minutes **Structure:** In pairs, the entire group

Ask the parents if their families have regular meetings where the whole family sits together to discuss different things (such as the rules that apply within the family).

### SAY

If your children are older, regular family meetings to discuss rules and consequences can be very helpful. These meetings should be structured to ensure that all members of the family have enough time and space to share their feelings and ideas. It's important that everyone gets an opportunity to speak. You can then discuss the rules and the associated consequences together. Meetings like this can help members of the family to understand one another's opinions and perspectives, which leads to better acceptance of the rules and consequences. However, these kinds of family meetings should not be held in stressful situations; the atmosphere should always be positive. It's essential that all family members involved in the discussion are relaxed and feel comfortable.

Ask the parents what they think is important for these kinds of family meetings.

### Example:

- The discussion should be structured in a way that leads to a solution
- There must be space for everyone to share their opinion; no hierarchical structures
- All family members must agree to the solution
- It's also important to recognise positive behaviour

#### NOTE >

A regular family meeting can also be helpful in other areas, as it provides each member of the family with a platform to address problems in a safe space and find a solution as a family.

### Parental Responsibilities and Children's Rights

Time: 10 minutes Structure: Pairs, the entire group



#### SAY >

We've talked a lot today about rules and consequences within families. In Germany, there are also some very specific laws and rules that relate to parents, giving them certain rights or responsibilities.



Ask the parents if they know what the responsibilities of parents are in Germany.

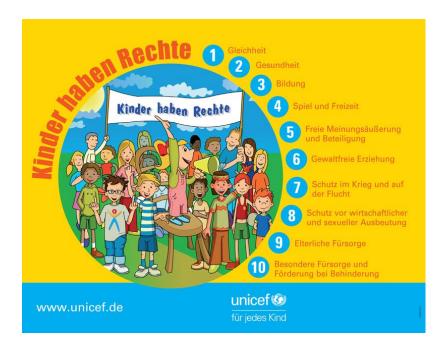
#### Examples:

- Parents must meet their children's basic needs. These needs include regular meals of an adequate size, appropriate clothing, a clean and safe environment, healthcare and emotional support
- Parents must protect their children against harmful influences and dangers
- Parents must supervise children in a way that is appropriate for their age to protect their children and to protect others against damage that could be caused by their children
- Parents must encourage their children and ensure that they get access to appropriate education and training
- Parents must raise their children without violence and respect them as individuals with their own opinions



In Germany, parental responsibilities are derived from the constitution, the Civil Code and the children's rights set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Ask the parents if they know any of the children's rights in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Show the parents the picture "Children have rights". An enlarged version of the picture is provided on page 159.





This picture shows the ten most important rights of the child. These rights, which are part of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, have applied to children all over the world since 1989. They specifically mention every child's right to be a child (including in war zones) and emphasise that all children have the same human rights as adults. However, unfortunately, in some countries these rules are not followed. In Germany, parents may suffer legal consequences if they fail to respect their children's rights.

#### NOTE >

Tell the parents that the right to a force-free upbringing was enshrined in German law in the year 2000. Parents are not allowed to use violence against their children, including as a form of punishment or discipline. Remind the parents that, if they have difficulty responding to their children's "misbehaviour" without using violence, they can talk to you again after the session for further support.

### Homework

**Time:** 5 minutes **Structure:** The entire group



#### **SAY**

Over the next week, try to practise the tactics we've learnt today for dealing with "misbehaviour" and talk to other parents in your social circle about how they handle their children when they are having a tantrum or behaving aggressively.

### **Feedback and Closing**

**Time:** 10 minutes **Structure:** The entire group

- Ask the parents to share their feedback on the session. What did you like best? Do you have any unanswered questions? Which elements of the session were helpful and which were not? Do you have any comments or suggestions as to how the session could be improved?
- Ask the parents to write their name on the attendance list to record their attendence
- Explain what topics will be covered in the next session:
- In the next session, we'll talk about what parents can do when their child is exposed to severe psychological stress. We will discuss how to communicate with children in an understanding, empathetic way and how to talk about stressful events with them.
- Get the group to do the closing activity (passing on positive energy and positive thoughts in a circle).
- Thank the parents for coming and for participating in the session. Invite the parents to stay for the "parenting café" and to chat to the other participants over a cup of tea and a snack.

# Session 6: The Psychosocial Needs of Children

In this session, the participants will learn more about the psychosocial effects that stressful and disruptive experiences can have on children. The group will look at the potential consequences of parents ignoring signs of stress and psychological stress in their children. The parents will learn how to talk about stressful experiences in a child-friendly way and how they can promote good mental health in their children. They will also discuss the benefits of effective and empathetic communication with children.

• **Duration**: 2 hours

• Materials:

Course documentation

Video: "Empathy"

Timetable	Time
Welcome and Introduction	10 min.
Singing: Lullaby	10 min.
Rituals and Routines	10 min.
The Psychosocial Effects of War and	25 min.
Displacement on Children	
Relaxation Exercise: Shake it off!	5 min.
Talking and Listening	20 min.
Game: "Emotional Charades"	10 min.
Empathetic Communication with Children	15 min.
Homework	5 min.
Feedback and Closing	10 min.

### **Welcome and Introduction**

**Time:** 10 minutes **Structure:** The entire group

- Welcome the parents and ask them how they and their families are doing.
- Ask the parents if they have any questions on the last session.
- Ask the parents if any of them would like to share a positive experience from the past week.
- Ask the parents to report back on the discussions they've had with other parents this week about handling their children's "misbehaviour" and whether they've been able to practise any of the tactics covered in the last session.
- Introduce the topic for today's session:
- SAY

Some of you have children who are a little older and who will have actively experienced fleeing war, arriving in a new country and living with lots of other people in shared refugee accommodation. They might even have witnessed acts of war and conflict first hand in your home country, and have lasting memories of these traumatic events. These kinds of experiences can be very stressful for children and are likely to have an impact, even if the children were so young at the time that they can't actively recall what happened. In today's session, we're going to talk about how parents can use routines and rituals to help their children develop a sense of stability and how you can recognise and address psychological stress in your children. We will also look at the topic of empathetic communication and how to talk to your children about what they have experienced.

#### NOTE >

Not all of the parents on the course will have children who directly experienced fleeing from their home country and travelling to Germany. Some of the parents may have children who were born in Germany and are too young to have experienced war, conflict and displacement first hand. However, this session will still be useful to all of the parents, as their children may need to cope with challenges such as racism, fear of deportation, multiple transfers or conflicts within shared accommodation, school or even their own family in the future. It is important that parents talk to their children about what makes them feel sad or scared and that they are able to recognise the signs of stress that children may exhibit and know how to respond.

### Singing: Lullaby

**Time:** 10 minutes **Structure:** The entire group

Ask the parents if they sing to their children at bedtime to help them get to sleep. Ask the parents to suggest a song or lullaby that the entire group can sing together. Songs that are accompanied by specific gestures (e.g. hand movements) are ideal.

- Sing the suggested song with the group, with the relevant gestures where applicable.
- Ask the parents if they know any German songs that parents sing to their children.

#### **Rituals and Routines**

**Time:** 10 minutes **Structure:** The entire group

### SAY

Rituals like singing lullabies before bed give children a feeling of security and stability. A regular day-to-day routine is also an important tool for introducing stability into a child's life. All children – and particularly those who have lived through periods of uncertainty, with a lot of moving around, different caregivers or role models and constantly changing routines – need a regular day-to-day routine with consistent mealtimes and bedtimes and stabilising rituals. Rituals are sequences of actions that are performed in the same order every day.

- Ask the parents if they have set day-to-day routines and rituals in their homes. Are there any rituals that they had in their home countries or in their families that they would like to reintroduce?
- Work together to brainstorm ideas for stabilising routines and rituals that are easy to introduce.

### **Examples:**

- Brushing teeth together in the morning
- Eating together after saying a prayer or exchanging pleasantries (such as asking if the other family members had a good day or saying 'enjoy your dinner').
- Goodbye ritual when children go to school in the morning (e.g. a hug)
- Doing homework together after school
- An afternoon tea break for the entire family
- Weekend rituals like trips to the park
- Bedtime rituals like reading together or singing a lullaby



Children feel safe and secure when they know what the day has in store for them. Routines and rituals help to promote good mental health. Think about some regular routines and rituals you could introduce in your family to help your children feel more stable.

### The Psychosocial Effects of War and Displacement on Children

**Time:** 25 minutes **Structure:** The entire group, small groups

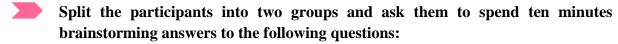
#### ATTENTION >

This part of the session may make some participants feel very emotional. Monitor the atmosphere in the room and don't hesitate to give the parents a break if you think they need it.



#### SAY

Children depend on the care, empathy and attention of loving adults. In times of war and displacement, their sense of security is damaged or even destroyed entirely. They may have lost relatives, their home and their entire day-to-day routine, or objects that meant something to them. While all this is going on, the child's parents are often focused solely on the task of getting the family to safety, looking after everybody and building a new home for the family. As we've already discussed, children have an innate ability to sense how their parents are feeling, including any stress that the parents are going through. As a result of war, fleeing their home country or other traumatic experiences, some children may develop serious psychological issues such as depression or severe anxiety. It is important that parents think about the psychosocial effects that displacement may have had on their children, and consider ways to help their children feel more stable and help them process the traumatic experiences they have been through.



What effects might the experience of displacement and life in shared accommodation have on children?

### **Examples**:

- Poor hygiene conditions
- Loss of day-to-day rituals and routines and trusted people
- Little space to play or learn (not a child-friendly environment)
- No or little privacy for the family
- Unfamiliar environment and people
- Unfamiliar food

- Little attention from parents
- Caregiver constantly changing
- Atmosphere of fear or aggression in shared accommodation

# What signs of psychosocial stress might children display as a result of these experiences?

### **Examples:**

- Frequent crying
- Physical unrest and difficulty concentrating
- Fearful or aggressive behaviour
- Difficulties sleeping, nightmares
- Eating disorders (eating too much or not enough)
- Skin rashes
- Stomach pain and diarrhoea
- Loss of energy
- Withdrawal and isolation
- Backward steps in development (e.g. wetting the bed)
- Reliving traumatic experiences in games or drawings

#### NOTE >

Children who have a long history of displacement and who have experienced acts of war in their home country are usually most severely affected. Often, these children will have been off school for extended periods of time; they may even have had to work to contribute to the household income, and will have been exposed to poor hygiene conditions, cold and a poor/non-varied diet. Many of them will have experienced violence and have lost friends and family members. It is important that parents take these sources of stress into account so that they can help their children to process their experiences.

- Ask each group to report back on the key points from their discussion.
- Ask the parents if they've noticed any similar signs of stress in their children as a result of war, displacement or living in shared accommodation.

#### NOTE >

The parents may be relieved to hear that they are not the only parents whose children have suffered psychological damage as a result of their experiences. Talking about these issues will help them better understand their children's physical and emotional responses to stress and to draw parallels between the responses of children and the responses of adults.

The things you are describing are all very normal responses, and children affected by these symptoms can make a full recovery. Every child will respond differently depending on their age, gender, background or just their personality, and there is no right or wrong way to respond to stressful experiences. Parents usually notice any changes in their children's behaviour very quickly, but it can sometimes be difficult to link these changes to the stressful situation that caused them. If this is the case, it can be helpful to think about your own stress levels and whether your children are experiencing similar stresses. You could also talk to other parents and ask for their support if you notice any worrying changes in your children's behaviour.

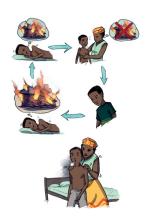
Ask the parents if their children were exposed to stressful situations in their home country or when fleeing to Germany, or if they have experienced and witnessed traumatic events.

### SAY

Often, children can struggle with uncontrollable memories of trauma if they have experienced something that was severely stressful for them. These uncontrollable memories may surface at night in the form of nightmares, or during the day as sudden intrusive thoughts. In young children, this can result in problems falling asleep or sleeping through the night, or issues with food (eating too much or too little). Children may also suddenly 'forget' how to do things they had already learnt to do (such as speak in full sentences or use a potty). They may become anxious, cry more often or show aggression during play. Some children may withdraw, refuse to speak and lose interest in playing with other children. Children who are a little older often try to repress negative thoughts and stop themselves thinking about certain situations or people.

Show the parents the picture <u>"Ignoring stress symptoms"</u> and explain that, when children repress or avoid difficult memories, they might temporarily feel better. However, in the long term, doing so prevents them from processing what has happened to them. The traumatic memories may start to pop up more powerfully and frequently than before.

An enlarged version of the picture is provided on page 160.



Stressful experiences and traumatic childhood memories that have been repressed can continue to affect people right up into adulthood, increasing the risk of depression and other health issues. To break out of this cycle, it is important to give children the opportunity to talk about their experiences and memories and to help them understand, describe and process what has happened to them.

### **Relaxation Exercise: Shake it off!**

**Time:** 5 minutes **Structure:** The entire group

### SAY

Talking about how your children are affected by your living situation or by what your family has been through can be very stressful. Let's take a moment to shake off some of these negative feelings and relax a little.

- Ask the parents to stand up and space themselves out.
- Get the parents to quickly shake all of their limbs one at a time. They should shake each limb ten times. Count out loud, using different languages if you want!

Left arm: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
Right arm: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
Left leg: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10

Right leg: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10Entire body: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10



- You can repeat the 'Shake it off' exercise as many times as you want if you think it would be helpful.
- Once you're done, ask the parents to stand still for a moment and notice how their body feels.

### Talking and Listening

Time: 20 minutes **Structure:** The entire group; small groups



Ask the parents if they've spoken to their children about stressful experiences before. How did the conversation go? How did the children respond?



During and after conflicts and stressful experiences, children can feel scared and unsure. They notice that the family's normal day-to-day routine has been disrupted and sense that their parents are scared or stressed. Their new environment may be confusing for them, causing them to feel shy or anxious. Sometimes, they might worry about their future or the safety of their family. Both children and adults need time to mentally recover from conflict. Parents can sometimes find it difficult to cope with their children's worries and fears. They might feel tempted to say things like: "Don't cry" or "We don't need to talk about that". But it helps children to understand and process what has happened if they can talk about their experiences or worries.

#### ATTENTION >

Tell the parents that, when discussing conflict, they should not encourage talk of retaliation or retribution. Propagating a culture of revenge not only leads to more violence, but also increases psychological stress and holds the person back from processing negative experiences.

Ask the group to work together to brainstorm answers to the following questions. The answers can be written on the flipchart.

### Why is it important to talk to children about stressful experiences?

### Examples:

- Prevents children from feeling "eaten up" by fears and worries
- Parents can explain situations and clear up misunderstandings
- Parents can better understand what is troubling their children
- Makes it easier to process traumatic experiences and painful memories
- May help to reduce the child's fears and worries
- Children learn that their feelings are normal

### Why might parents put off talking to their child about stressful experiences?

### Examples:

- It can be painful to hear children talking about their worries
- Parents may be concerned that talking about worries may be a further source of stress for the child
- Parents may be concerned that the conversation will cause upset and stress for them
- Parents may be unsure what to say to their child

- It can be draining to have these kinds of conversations with children
- It can be difficult to find the right words
- Parents don't have time for an in-depth discussion

#### What should parents do if the child doesn't want to talk?

### **Examples**:

- Be patient and look out for suitable opportunities to open up a conversation
- Set aside time each day for talking the child can then go to the parent when he or she feels ready to talk
- Don't pressurise children into saying more than they want to say at this moment in time
- Find other ways to communicate, such as drawing or joint activities that the parent and child can do together



#### SAY

Sensitive listening means finding the right time to talk and giving the child enough time to say what they want to say. Parents should use body language and tone of voice to communicate to their children that they are interested in what they have to say. Encourage their children to keep talking and ask them questions. Sensitive listening also means accepting all of the child's feelings as natural and normal, even if it is difficult for you to come to terms with these feelings. If your children come to talk to you when you are busy doing something else, agree on a time when you'll be able to listen to them and answer their questions. If your children are not yet ready to talk about their experiences, don't force them. Just keep telling them that you're there to listen and help.

#### **ALTERNATIVE >**

If children find it difficult to talk to their parents about their feelings or traumatic experiences, it can be helpful to see if they are willing to 'talk' through a cuddly toy or puppet. Putting this extra layer between the child and the listener can make it easier for children to open up.

#### ATTENTION >

If the parents indicate that any of their children have stopped talking, it is highly likely that the child in question will need professional psychosocial support. In such cases, advise the parents to consult a paediatrician to examine the child and arrange a referral to a therapy service if necessary. This approach can also be helpful if a parent finds talking to their children and processing past experiences too difficult. Professional support can be a great help to both parents and children in these circumstances.

### Game: "Emotional Charades"

**Time:** 10 minutes **Structure:** The Entire group

Tell the parents that games play a role in helping children to feel stable. It is important to ensure that children get plenty of time to play and have opportunities to interact and form bonds with other children. Games not only promote children's development, but also aid relaxation, reduce their stress levels and distract them from negative thoughts.

### SAY

We're going to play a game about communicating your feelings. Both children and adults often express their feelings in a non-verbal way. As children develop their social skills, they learn to identify feelings in themselves and in others. To enable them to talk about their feelings, children need to have a name or label for them. Games like "Emotional charades" can help children recognise their feelings and describe them using words.

Ask the group if anyone would like to volunteer and come to the front. Tell the volunteer which feeling you'd like them to act out to the group (whisper in their ear so the rest of the participants don't hear). The group will then guess which feeling the person is acting out.

### **Examples**:

Happy, sad, angry, proud, jealous, in love, anxious, disgusted, ashamed, surprised...

The person who guesses the feeling correctly then comes up to the front to act out a different feeling.

#### **ALTERNATIVE >**

Parents can play a simplified version of the game with young children (aged three or above). Sit opposite one another and make happy/sad/surprised (...) faces. The other person must guess the feeling that the person is acting out using their facial expressions. If the children are older, you can use more complex feelings/words.

### **Empathetic Communication with Children**

**Time:** 15 minutes **Structure:** The entire group

### SAY

It's important to handle conversations with children sensitively – and this is true of all children, not just those who are suffering psychological stress. Parents should always be empathetic in parent-child interactions and should help their children to solve problems. Empathetic communication also helps to promote a loving relationship between the parent and the child.

- Write the word EMPATHY on the flipchart or on a sheet of paper so that the parents can see it.
- Ask the parents if they know what empathy means.
- SAY

Empathy is the ability to put yourself in another person's position and understand their feelings, needs and wishes. For parents, this means noticing the emotions, needs and wishes of your children and responding in a caring and loving way. Listening to your children and putting yourself in their position promotes healthy social and emotional development and makes you better able to understand why your children are behaving in a certain way. Empathetic communication is a loving and caring parenting tool. The four steps to empathetic communication are easy to follow and will help parents understand their children's feelings and respond sensitively.

### Write out the four steps to empathetic communication on the flipchart:

- Step 1:
  - Recognise the feeling
- Step 2:
  - Find out the reason for the feeling
- Step 3:
  - Respect and confirm the feeling
- Step 4
  - Help the child cope with the feeling

#### SAY

The first step is to listen to the child to identify the feelings he or she is experiencing. As parents, you can ask your children directly what is wrong or how they are feeling. If it is difficult for the child to identify or describe their feelings, the parent could say: "You look sad, are you feeling sad?" The more parents talk about feelings with their children and explore and describe them together, the faster their children will learn to express their feelings using words.

The second step is to understand why the child is sad. You could say something like: "Why are you feeling sad? I really want to help you if I can". Your child can then decide whether he or she wants to tell you the reason. If they don't want to, you can say: "You can come and talk to me whenever you're ready".

The third step is to respect and acknowledge the way the child is feeling. Your child might have fallen over and hurt their knee. Always think about the reason why your child is feeling a certain way, because acknowledging and respecting the reason for the feeling is crucial. Acknowledging the feeling is all the more important if a child is having trouble expressing their emotions. If parents dismiss or reject their children's feelings, the child may never talk to the parents about their feelings again. If your child doesn't know why they're feeling sad, acknowledge their confusing and say: "I know you're sad and it's OK to feel sad. I'm here to help you if you need anything".

The fourth step is helping your child to cope with their feelings or to resolve a problem. Sometimes, a situation may require the parent and child to discuss ways to resolve a problem. The parent could say something like: "Let's find out what we can do to help you feel better". Sometimes, the situation simply requires the parent to comfort the child with a cuddle, some reassuring words or perhaps a plaster if they've hurt themselves.



To consolidate the parents' learning and help them remember the four steps to empathetic communication, show the <u>video: "Empathy"</u>.

#### NOTE >

Tell the parents that they should treat all their children the same and should communicate with the same level of empathy with both girls and boys.

### Homework

**Time:** 5 minutes **Structure:** The entire group



Encourage the parents to spend some time implementing the practices learnt in this session, such as the four steps to empathetic communication or introducing a new family ritual, over the coming week. Ask the parents to observe their children's behaviour and to take some time to talk to their children about things that are important to them. This might include negative memories that are making them feel sad.

### Feedback and Closing

**Time:** 10 minutes **Structure:** Entire group

- Ask the parents to share their feedback on the session. What did you like best? Do you have any unanswered questions? Which elements of the session were helpful and which were not? Do you have any comments or suggestions as to how the session could be improved?
- Ask the parents to write their name on the attendance list to record their attendance.
- **Explain** what topics will be covered in the next session.
- In the next session, we'll talk about what parents can do to encourage their children to eat a healthy diet and get enough exercise.
- Get the group to do the closing activity (passing on positive energy and positive thoughts in a circle).
- Thank the parents for coming and for participating in the session. Invite the parents to stay for the "parenting café" and to chat to the other participants over a cup of tea and a snack.

## **Session 7: Healthy Diet and Activities**

In this session, the participants will discuss a healthy diet and activities. They will learn how important a healthy diet is for children and will talk about what kind of diet babies and young children need to promote healthy growth and brain development. The session will also cover eating habits and the importance of an active lifestyle.

**Duration:** 2 hours

#### **Materials**

- Course documentation
- Snacks cut into small pieces for the "Snack surprise" exercise
- Blindfolds/scarves

Timetable	Time
Welcome and introduction	10 min.
Eating habits in Germany	15 min.
The importance of a healthy diet	10 min.
Healthy vs unhealthy food	20 min.
Game: Snack surprise	20 min.
Healthy diets for babies and young children	10 min.
Mealtime rituals	10 min.
Staying active	10 min.
Homework	5 min.
Feedback and close	10 min.

### **Welcome and Introduction**

**Time:** 10 minutes **Structure:** The entire group

- Welcome the parents and ask them how they and their families are doing.
- Ask the parents if they have any questions on the last session.
- Ask the parents if any of them would like to share a positive experience from the past week.
- Ask the parents to report back on the conversations they've had with their children over the past week. What were their experiences of practising empathetic communication with their children? Did they introduce any new family rituals?
- Introduce the topic for today's session:
- SAY

A healthy diet and activity level are essential elements of a child's physical and psychological development. Today, we're going to talk about what parents can do to encourage their children to eat healthily and to promote an active lifestyle for the entire family.

### **Eating Habits in Germany**

**Time:** 15 minutes **Structure:** The entire group



What we eat and how we eat it has a huge impact on our sense of wellbeing. Most of us like to eat. Eating something we like makes us feel happy and satisfied, and the same is true of our children. The things we eat might also remind us of home. I imagine that many of you miss some dishes and foods that you used to eat in your home country. Since you came to Germany, your eating habits might have changed. Maybe some of the foods you used to enjoy at home aren't available here, or maybe they are too expensive. German cuisine is different to what you were used to in your home country, and the timings of meals and the rituals around mealtimes might also be different.

- As an introduction to the topic, discuss the following questions as a group:
  - Which foods that you are in your home country do you miss now that you're living in Germany?
  - Which German dishes have you tried? Which ones did you like? Were there any you didn't like?

- Which eating habits have you seen in Germany that are different from eating habits in your home country?
- Has the way you prepare and eat meals (including the timings of meals and mealtime rituals) changed since your family moved to Germany? If so, how?

#### **ALTERNATIVE >**

If the parents have not had much experience of German cuisine, spend a few minutes describing a few typical German dishes and eating habits.

#### NOTE >

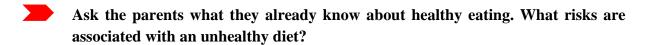
This discussion should be fun and give the parents plenty of opportunity to share their thoughts and observations. Make sure that the discussion doesn't take on a negative tone, but that it remains constructive and encouraging.

### The Importance of a Healthy Diet

**Time:** 10 minutes **Structure:** The entire group



What we eat and how we eat it has a huge impact on our own sense of wellbeing and that of our children. This is part of the reason why we're discussing a healthy diet in today's session - because eating well is important for our children's physical and psychological development.



### Examples of risks:

- Weight gain/loss
- Weakened immune system
- Difficulty concentrating
- Loss of energy
- Conditions such as diabetes and heart problems
- Slower physical and psychological development

### SAY

There is only one food in the world that contains all of the essential nutrients that the body needs to stay healthy and function properly. Do you know what it is? It's the mother's milk, which contains absolutely everything a baby needs in the first few months of its life. But for babies that have been weaned, and obviously for adults too,

it is important to eat a diet comprised of a wide range of foods to ensure that the body gets all the nutrients it needs. A healthy diet should provide us with the right amount of energy (which is measured in calories). Children and adults should eat the number of calories that their body needs each day to go about everyday life, but it is important not to eat more than necessary. Consuming more calories than you need over an extended period of time will lead to weight gain, as all of the excess calories that we don't need are stored by the body as fat.

On the other hand, if the body isn't getting enough nutrients and calories, we have less energy, feel tired, struggle to concentrate and get ill more frequently. For children, who need lots of nutrients to fuel growth and brain development, it is particularly important to ensure that the diet contains the right amounts of nutrients, vitamins and minerals required for healthy development. A healthy diet is made up of these key elements:

- WHAT we eat and drink;
- HOW MUCH and HOW OFTEN we eat and drink (e.g. multiple smaller snacks or two large meals a day) and
- HOW we eat and drink (e.g. with others or alone)

### Healthy vs. Unhealthy Food

**Time:** 20 minutes **Structure:** The entire group



#### SAY

A healthy diet is made up of foods that fuel the body without adding anything that is unnecessary or damaging.

Ask the parents to list some examples of healthy and unhealthy foods.

Healthy Food	Unhealthy Food
- Wholegrain products	- Foods containing saturated fat (e.g.
- Lean meat or fish	butter, fatty meat, cream, milk,
- (Fresh) fruit and vegetables	coconut oil)
- Nuts and seeds	- Refined sugar
- Low-fat dairy products	<ul> <li>Food with a high salt content</li> </ul>
- More natural	- More processed ingredients

- Ask the parents to think about what they themselves have eaten over the past week and what they have given their children to eat and drink. Ask a few of the parents to share their thoughts with the group.
- Write the foods and drinks that the families have consumed on cards and pin the cards to a wall or the flipchart.

- Ask the parents if they think that their children are getting all of the nutrients they need. Do they find it difficult to feed their children a healthy diet in Germany? Why? Do they miss any foods that they can't get in Germany or that they have had difficulty finding?
- Show the parents the picture <u>"The food pyramid"</u> and ask them if they've seen this pyramid before. Discuss the pyramid with the parents.

An enlarged version of the picture is provided on page 161.



Ask the parents to place the foods and drinks that you wrote down on the cards into the relevant categories on the pyramid. You can also add other foods that the parents didn't mention to the cards.

### ATTENTION >

Ensure that parents who have given their children "unhealthy" foods from the very top of the pyramid are not stigmatised or laughed at by the other participants. Emphasise that it is important, but not always easy, to ensure that children eat healthily every day. It's completely understandable that a parent might sometimes give their child something less healthy to eat because they don't have time to cook a healthy meal, or because the child is refusing to eat anything else or because an alternative food is too expensive or unavailable. However, emphasise that these situations should be the exception rather than the rule and that parents should make an effort to feed their children a healthy diet.

Ask the parents whether and how often their children eat sweet things.

As humans, we are genetically pre-programmed to love sweet foods like cake and chocolate. It is fine to eat sugary foods in small amounts, and these foods can be enjoyed as part of a healthy diet. But most people are consuming far too much sugar. Consuming large amounts of sugary food is bad for our teeth, makes us put on weight and can result in conditions like diabetes. Sugar is also highly addictive. Children shouldn't eat any sugar at all in their first year of life. They won't miss it if they've never had it. But if they've become used to the taste, it is very difficult to wean them off it again. The basic rule is that children should eat no more than a child-sized palm full of sugar each day. But they can reach this amount surprisingly quickly! Many foods that appear healthy – like tomatobased sauces, fruit yoghurts or juices - contain large amounts of sugar. Often, we're completely unaware of this hidden sugar. This is why it's important for parents to look at the ingredients in the foods they buy. If sugar is listed anywhere near the beginning of the ingredients list on the packaging, you can be sure that the product is very high in sugar. Parents should aim to set a good example for their children and reduce their own sugar consumption. It's also important that sweets are not used to comfort or calm children or simply to keep them occupied. Children should think of sweets as something special that they only get once in a while.

# Ask the parents if they want to share any healthy eating tips of their own with the group.

### Examples:

- Cook your own food rather than buying ready-meals
- Use less fat (butter and oil) when cooking
- Replace white bread with wholemeal bread
- Don't buy sugary drinks like lemonade (replace with sugar-free juices if necessary)
- Use alternative sweeteners such as agave syrup or honey<sup>5</sup>
- Replace sweets with fruit

#### NOTE >

Some of the parents may think that they can't afford healthy foods and that the unhealthy options are cheaper than fresh, healthy foods. Discuss the parents' observations with them and as a group, think about where parents could buy food that is healthy and more affordable. Buying healthy foods in bulk may be a good way to keep the costs of healthy eating down.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Honey can be dangerous for children under one year of age. It may contain bacteria that can release poisonous substances into babies' intestines, which can damage the nerves and cause muscle paralysis and breathing difficulties. Because of these risks, honey should never be given to babies.

#### **Game: Snack Surprise**

**Time:** 20 minutes **Structure:** In pairs



#### SAY

It can be very difficult to convince children to try new foods. Most children know what their favourite foods are and refuse to eat anything else. They might claim not to like something even if they've never actually tried it. But there are some creative methods that parents can use to convince their children to try new foods. With this in mind, we're going to play a game that you can use to get children interested in new foods.

Ask the parents to get into pairs.



#### SAY

I've prepared a few healthy snacks for you. One of you will wear a blindfold and your partner will pick out some snacks for you to try. If you want, you can hold the food in your hand first and guess what it might be before you eat it. Or you can put all your trust in your partner and let them place the snack straight into your mouth! Then guess what it was that you ate and count up how many times you get it right. Swap roles after a few rounds. If you like this game, you could think about playing it with older children to introduce them to some new foods.

#### ATTENTION >

Before playing this game, check that none of the participants are allergic to any of the foods.

#### NOTE >

You can use small pieces of apple, banana, kiwi, berries, cucumber, carrot and wholemeal bread, as well as dried fruit and nuts, as snacks for the parents to try. Make the game more interesting by preparing a few snacks that the parents won't be expecting and that will be harder for them to guess.

#### **Healthy Diet for Infants and Toddlers**

**Time:** 10 minutes **Structure:** The entire group

Ask the parents about their experiences with feeding babies and small children and discuss any questions that arise on weaning and switching to baby food and solids.

#### SAY

If possible, babies should be solely breast-fed up to six months of age. There is no better diet for a baby than the milk that its mother produces. The milk is not only nutritious, but also contains various substances that strengthen the child's immune system. Babies who are exclusively breast-fed in the first six months of life suffer from diarrhoea and sickness less frequently and are less susceptible to illness generally. Breastfeeding also has a positive impact on brain development in children. Ultimately, it's up to the mother to decide how she wants to feed her baby. Although breastfeeding has many benefits, children can also thrive on commercially produced baby milk. If you use powdered baby milk, it's very important to follow the instructions on the packet carefully and use boiled water to mix the product. Regardless of whether a mother opts to breastfeed or bottle feed her baby, the physical closeness and sucking action of feeding are calming for the baby and help to form a close bond between the mother and her child.

#### NOTE >

Tell the parents that there are many places in Germany that offer support and information on breastfeeding and infant nutrition. Doctors and midwives can provide additional support. Also let the parents know that they can breastfeed in public areas in Germany, but that not all people are accepting of mothers breastfeeding in public.

#### SAY

The transition from breastfeeding or milk powder to baby food (e.g. vegetable purees) and normal foods like bread and cheese should be a step-by-step process. At the age of four months at the earliest and by the seven-month mark at the latest, parents should start introducing pureed foods to their babies. The right time differs for every child, and depends on their growth, development and the baby's willingness to accept anything other than breast or bottle-feeding. Pureed foods that you make yourself at home are more affordable and often more varied, depending on how creative you want to be. By introducing lots of different combinations of ingredients, you can expand the range of flavours that your baby is used to and prime their tastebuds to enjoy new things. Never add salt, honey or sugar to food you're preparing for your baby! Salt can damage a baby's kidneys, and honey may contain bacteria that can release poisonous substances into babies' intestines, which can damage the nerves and cause muscle paralysis and breathing difficulties. From the age of ten months, you can start giving your baby solid food. At this stage, you no longer need to pure food, but it should be chopped up into very small pieces. Foods like small berries or hard nuts can easily become a choking hazard for young children, so these kinds of foods should be avoided. Always start slowly when introducing new foods and see how the baby responds to new things. Don't be discouraged if your baby doesn't take to something the first, second or even the third time – just try again another day.

Ask the parents how much and how often they breastfeed or feed their children.

SAY

Babies and young children have small stomachs and need to eat more frequently than adults. The child knows best when it is full. Parents shouldn't put their children under pressure to finish everything on their plate or drink the entire bottle.

#### **Mealtime Rituals**

**Time:** 10 minutes **Structure:** The Entire group

Ask the parents whether they have any specific mealtime rituals or routines in their households. Have these routines or rituals changed since the family moved to Germany? Have they learnt about any German eating habits/rituals that they didn't know about before?

Ask the parents to describe mealtimes in their family.

- Does the entire family eat together?
- Where do they usually sit at mealtimes?
- Are mealtimes always at the same time each day, or do they vary?
- Is the television on or do they have music playing during mealtimes?
- Are mobile phones allowed at the table?
- Does everyone stay at the table until everyone in the family has finished eating?

#### SAY

Fixed mealtimes where the entire family comes together to eat help to strengthen bonds within the family. Families should aim to eat at least one meal a day together. The routine that this creates gives children a sense of security and stability. Families shouldn't sit down in front of the television to eat, as this distracts both the parents and the children from their food. Distraction makes it harder for parents and children to recognise when they are full. Families who eat in front of the television tend to eat too much and can become overweight more easily.

#### NOTE >

Remind the parents that they shouldn't eat in front of the television either, as children copy the behaviours of their parents.

#### **Staying Active**

**Time:** 10 minutes **Structure:** The entire group; small groups

Ask the parents if they engage in activities with their children that involve the children being active and running around. Why are sport and physical activity important for children? Are there any situations in which children can't be active? Have the children or parents come across any new types of sport or activities since the family moved to Germany? Do the parents play sports or do they stay active in other ways?

#### SAY

Physical activity and movement play an important role in the physical and psychological development of children. There are countless activities that parents can do with their children to stay active, both indoors and outside. Children should spend around 60 minutes a day engaged in physical activity. This movement strengthens their muscles and musculoskeletal system. Parents should think about different ways that they can get active alongside their children. Playing at the playground or park or participating in a sport not only helps keep children active, but also enables them to meet and make friends with other children of the same age. For parents, too, these kinds of activities can be a great way to meet other parents who have children of the same age as yours.



Split the parents into two groups and give each group a sheet of flipchart paper. Ask one group to think about activities that children can do indoors, and one group to think about activities for outdoors. The activities should all involve physical movement and allow children to let off steam. Ask the parents to think of as many activities as they can in their home/accommodation and the surrounding area or other areas near where they live. Ask the parents to think about any factors that could make the activities more difficult (e.g. lack of transport) and how they could overcome these kinds of obstacles.

#### ATTENTION >

The parents should ensure that their children aren't in any danger during play; for example, any sharp objects or small objects that children could choke on must be removed.

#### Examples:

Inside	Outside
<ul> <li>Ball games (playing with a soft ball while sitting or standing)</li> <li>Playing hide and seek</li> <li>Building hide-outs/dens (from soft materials, such as cushions)</li> <li>"Bowling" (soft ball and various objects as pins, e.g. cardboard toilet paper rolls or plastic bottles)</li> <li>Use sticky tape to mark out a rectangle on the floor and get the children jumping in and out of it or taking objects to and from the rectangle</li> <li>Balloon tennis with cardboard rackets</li> <li>Musical statues</li> <li>Yoga or gymnastic exercises</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Ball games (e.g. football)</li> <li>Going to the park</li> <li>Blowing/chasing bubbles</li> <li>Setting up an obstacle course</li> <li>Climbing trees</li> <li>Hide, seek and chase</li> <li>Skipping or double Dutch skipping</li> <li>Water play (if the weather is warm), e.g. in puddles or using buckets or bottles of water</li> <li>Chalk drawing on paths or stony surfaces</li> </ul>

#### NOTE >

If children have spent time outside playing and running around during the day, they will be more tired in the evening and able to sleep better. This will help them feel more balanced and will increase their concentration, enabling them to focus on "quieter" games. Remind the parents that movement and interaction are important for both boys and girls and that both need the same amount of exercise.

#### Homework

**Time:** 5 minutes **Structure**: The Entire group



#### **SAY**

A healthy diet and exercise are important for adults and children alike. Over the course of the next week, try to introduce your family to a new healthy food, such as a new fruit or vegetable. Also try to play with your children in a way that gets all of you active, both indoors and outside.

Next week will be the final session of our parenting classes. So I'd also like to ask you to think about what you've learnt from the sessions, what you enjoyed the most and whether the things you have learnt will help you develop as a parent.

#### Feedback and Closing

**Time:** 10 minutes **Structure:** The entire group

- Ask the parents to share their feedback on the session. What did you like best? Do you have any unanswered questions? Which elements of the session were helpful and which were not? Do you have any comments or suggestions as to how the session could be improved?
- Ask the parents to write their name on the attendance list to record their attendance.
- **Explain** what topics will be covered in the next session:
- SAY >

In the next session, we'll discuss the various sources of support available to parents and families in Germany and explain how you can access this support. The next session will also be the last of our parenting classes. At home, have a think about which topics were key for you and the most important lessons that you have taken from the course. Next week, we'll briefly go over everything we've covered as a group and then celebrate reaching the end of the course together. You're welcome to bring guests to the celebration, so feel free to invite your partner, friends or other family members.

- Get the group to do the closing activity (passing on positive energy and positive thoughts in a circle).
- Thank the parents for coming and for participating in the session. Invite the parents to stay for the "parenting café" and to chat to the other participants over a cup of tea and a snack.

# Session 8: Support Offers and End of the Course

In this session, the participants will learn why it might be important to access additional support from persons outside of their own family. They will learn about support available for families in Germany and in their region, as well as how to access this support and how to use it in a way that meets the specific needs of their family. This last session also includes a summary of the entire course and revision of all the topics from the previous sessions. The participants will also be given their certificates. The participants can invite family members and friends to the second part of the session, which is a celebration to mark the end of the course.

#### **Duration:**

2 hours and 5 minutes

#### **Materials:**

- Course documentation
- Two/three small balls of different colours
- Certificates for participants

Timetable	Time
Welcome and introduction	5 min.
Accessing support	15 min.
Game: Two balls	15 min.
The role of child protection services	15 min.
Child daycare facilities in Germany	20 min.
Energiser: "Cha!"	5 min.
Group review of course	40 min.
Award of certificates	10 min.

#### Welcome and Introduction

**Time:** 5 minutes **Structure:** The entire group

Welcome the parents and ask them how they and their families are doing.

If the parents have brought guests along, welcome them too and ask them to briefly introduce themselves to the group.

#### NOTE >

If the parents have brought along their partners, other family members or friends, ensure that the guests are involved in all of the discussions and exercises during the session. However, monitor the mood in the room carefully. If you feel that some of the parents may not be comfortable with the guests' presence or involvement, respond by modifying or shortening the exercises or sending the guests out of the room briefly.

- Ask the parents if they have any questions on the last session.
- Ask the parents if any of them would like to share a positive experience from the past week.
- Ask the parents to share their experiences of trying out new foods and to tell the group about the activities they've been doing with their children this week. Did the children like the new foods? Did they enjoy the activities?
- Introduce the topic for today's session:

#### SAY

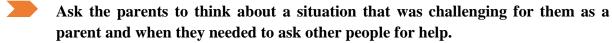
Back in your home countries, many of you will have had a large network of family members and friends who you could call on for support with things like childcare and who might sometimes need your support in return. I'm sure many of you miss having this kind of network and might feel very alone and lost sometimes here in Germany. To help you with these feelings, we're going to spend some time in this session going over the types of support you can get as a parent and as a family in Germany and how you can access the help you need.

#### ATTENTION >

Be aware that some families may not be used to seeking support outside of their own families, and that support systems in Germany can be quite complex. This session is only intended as an introduction to the support structures in place. The parents should be given a list of places where they can access support services for children and families specific to the location of their course. Remember that parenting classes are not an appropriate setting to provide individual support for families and that the focus of the session should be on encouraging parents to access specialist support if they need it.

#### **Getting Support**

**Time:** 15 minutes **Structure:** In pairs, entire group



- Who did they ask for help in this situation? (e.g. family members, friends, external advice services or other support services)
- Did they find this external support helpful?

Ask the parents to get into pairs and discuss their experiences. The parents should list some areas of everyday life where they think support from others – particularly child protection services organisations – would be helpful for life in Germany. Ask each pair to share their ideas with the rest of the group.

#### **ALTERNATIVE >**

It's possible that some of the parents may never have received any support or do not want to talk about their experiences with the group. If this is the case, they can also talk about the experiences of a relative or a friend who accessed support in a challenging situation.

#### SAY >

We all need a little help and support from other people from time to time. Asking for help does not mean that you are weak or that you have failed as a parent. In fact, it takes a lot of courage to ask others for help. When they admit that they need some support, parents are demonstrating that they care for their children and that their children's wellbeing is important to them. Accessing help shows that they are trying to be the very best parents they can be.

Explain to the parents that you're going to tell them about a few of the support services available for them to access in Germany in the next part of the session.

#### **Game: Two Different Balls**

**Time:** 15 minutes **Structure:** The entire group

Ask the parents to stand up and form a circle.

#### SAY

We've just talked about how helpful it can be to ask others for support. The game we're going to play now also relies on co-operation. The game will only work if we work together as a team and support one another!

#### **Explain the game to the parents. SAY:**

We're going to throw this ball to one another. Before you throw the ball to the next person, make eye contact with the person to let them know that you intend to throw the ball to them. Remember who threw the ball to you and who you threw it to. Each person should only receive the ball once. If you haven't yet had the ball, let the others know until everyone in the circle has caught the ball once.

- Play a few rounds of this game, throwing the ball in the same sequence each time. Gradually pick up the pace each round.
- Once you've mastered this stage, introduce a second ball of a different colour or size and get the parents to throw this ball in a different sequence. They should also try to remember who threw them the new ball and who they threw it to. Practise this new sequence with the second ball for a few rounds.
- Then combine the two balls and the two different throwing/catching sequences. Start with the first ball and the first sequence you practised with this ball. After a few seconds of play, add in the second ball and the second sequence. Try to throw both balls around the circle as fast as possible without getting confused!

#### NOTE >

This game is about concentrating and working as a group. The game will only succeed if the participants take note of what the others are doing and make eye contact when they throw the ball to the next person. Be patient with the group if the game doesn't work out on the first few tries.

#### The Role of Child Protection Services

**Time:** 15 minutes **Structure:** The entire group



#### SAY

Let's talk briefly about child protection services, an organisation that I'm sure you've all heard of. Child protection services is the central organisation for children, young people and families in Germany. Its role is to support parents in raising, caring for and educating their children. It's very important that you all know and understand the role and remit of child protection services and when it might be useful for you to contact child protection services for help.

- Ask the parents what they know about child protection services and how it works. Has anyone in the group had any contact with child protection services? Have they heard anything positive about the organisation? Have they heard anything negative that might put them off contacting child protection services for support? Is an institution like child protection services completely new to them, or was there something similar in their home country?
- During the discussion, note down a few key words on the flipchart.
- Explain the role of child protection services and clear up any misunderstandings.
- SAY

Child protection services is a local government organisation that ensures that children and young people have access to sufficient help and support services. The child protection services offices work to safeguard children's wellbeing and to protect children and young people from danger. The role of child protection services is to protect children and young people and to promote their development. Another key area of the work carried out by child protection services is to assist in child and familyrelated legal disputes and in court proceedings involving minors to represent the interests of children and young people in legal matters. Child protection services offices focus on programmes to support families, such as providing advice to parents on various topics. Child protection services offices also work with various other organisations and can provide information on appropriate support offered by other institutions and organisations. Most of the support offered by child protection services is completely free of charge and available to any parent who needs it. Children and young people can also contact child protection services themselves if they are facing specific problems or are in crisis. Child protection services staff will talk with the parents and the children to determine how best to support the family.

As a group, discuss the following types of support that child protection services can provide for parents and children:

- Promotion of youth work and youth social work, for example through leisure and cultural programmes made available to young people
- General advice and family support
- Information and support in crisis and conflict situations, for example by providing advice and referrals to appropriate support programmes around relationships, separation and divorce and childcare-related matters
- Information on daycare and daycare facilities for children
- Parenting advice, help to integrate emotionally disturbed children and young people and help for young adults, for example through meetings with and home visits by social workers
- Advice and support in paternity matters and making claims for child maintenance payments
- Assisting in family court matters (e.g. deciding parental care responsibilities or visitation rights)
- Legal representation (e.g. guardianship) where no other appropriate persons are available
- Assisting in court cases relating to crimes committed by minors
- Other services: Providing play areas and equipment for children and young people in the local area



As we've already mentioned, one of the most important duties of child protection services is to protect children and young people. All young people have the right to develop to their full potential and to grow into adults who can take responsibility for themselves and live in harmony with their community. Of course, primary responsibility for achieving this lies with the parents, as raising their children is a parent's right and responsibility. The role of child protection services is to support parents in doing so. The so-called family court only gets involved if children are deemed to be severely at risk and the parents cannot or will not accept help. In such cases, the court ensures that help is provided so that the development of the children in question is not hindered any further. Child protection services will only take a child into its own custody as a final resort and in cases where there is an acute danger to the child. If a child is taken into the custody of child protection services, it will be temporarily placed with a foster family or in a specialist home for children. Before any action like this is taken, the situation will be carefully considered and discussed in depth with both the parents and the children involved. Often, child protection services staff are able to find solutions with the parents. Child protection services offices have qualified teams who make fair decisions, taking both the wellbeing of the children and the rights of the parents into account.

#### NOTE >

Please emphasise that it is a complex and expensive process for child protection services to remove a child from their family. Child protection services staff will only order the removal of a child from the family (against the will of the parents) if the parents are not willing or able to co-operate to reduce the risk to the child.



Ask the parents if they know where their local child protection services office is and locate the relevant details as a group if necessary.



#### SAY

In addition to child protection services, there are many other authorities, institutions and organisations that offer support for families, including social services offices, the Federal Employment Agency, Jobcentres, health and education offices and other independent bodies such as associations, initiatives, drop-in centres and advice points, migration organisations, religious organisations, sport and cultural organisations and neighbourhood initiatives. You can obtain more information on all of these organisations and services from child protection services.

#### **Child Daycare Facilities in Germany**

**Time:** 20 minutes **Structure: The** entire group, in two groups



#### SAY

In previous sessions, we've talked a lot about the developmental stages that children go through and how parents and caregivers can support and encourage learning in children. In Germany, there are also daycare facilities, known as "kitas", that help to promote children's development and learning before they reach school age.

Ask the parents if they know what "kitas" are and why attending daycare can be beneficial for children and the family as a whole.

#### SAY

Kita is short for the German word "Kindertagesstätte", which means "child daycare facility", and it's used to refer to organisations that educate and care for children. The word may be used for a playschool (for children below four years of age), kindergarten (from the age of three until school age), afternoon childcare (for school-age children who don't attend school all day) or for various other combined learning and play groups, such as those offered by religious organisations or family centres. Attending daycare can be very beneficial for children: They are looked after by trained staff who provide individual attention and care to each child and develop social skills by interacting with other children. They make friends with other children and learn

German quickly. These kinds of daycare organisations can also be a huge help to parents and the wider family. While the children are being looked after and learning at the "kita", the parents have time to pursue their own interests and look after their own needs. They can also ask the staff any questions they have about parenting or child development and pick up tips. Often, "kitas" are a way for parents to meet other parents and families and make some new friends or build a network of helpful contacts. Even though daycare can be very beneficial, some parents still have concerns about letting their children attend a "kita". Or a parent may find themselves unable to secure a place for their child even though they want to make use of the service.

#### NOTE >

The topic of daycare can feature more or less prominently on the agenda for the session depending on the ages of the participants' children. Base the information on the parents' needs and plan time for the topic and any questions that arise accordingly.



### Explore the parents' ideas about and experiences of daycare by asking questions such as:

- How did you find the process of getting a "kita" place for your children?
- Do you have any experience of the play and learning that goes on in "kitas"?
- Do you have any concerns about sending your children to a "kita"?
- Do you have any experience of working together with a "kita" as a parent?



If you can, answer the parents' questions about daycare and clear up any misunderstandings.

#### NOTE >

You are not expected to be able to answer all of the questions that the parents might ask about daycare. The parents might be able to help answer one another's questions and provide advice to other members of the group. If you don't know the answer to a particular question, you can refer the parents to child protection services, who will provide advice on childcare provision and learning and development opportunities for children.



#### **SAY**

In Germany, children between the ages of one and six have a legal right to a daycare place. Parents do not have to be employed to get a place in daycare for their children. However, if parents only work part-time, they are usually only entitled to half a day of daycare. Unfortunately, in most Germany cities, there are more families wanting daycare for their children than there are places in "kitas". As a result, many parents have difficulty actually finding their child a place. The child protection office can advise parents looking for a daycare place and support them in their search. The costs

of daycare can vary between regions. Generally, the amount that parents must contribute towards their child's care depends on their income. Theoretically, parents should be able to choose between multiple "kitas". However, because demand for places far outstrips supply, this is not always possible. In major cities, parents are often happy just to get a place in any "kita" at all.

#### NOTE >

Refugee families can find it particularly difficult to obtain the daycare places that their children are entitled to. Families with a background of displacement often don't know that their children have a right to a place or how to go about getting one. In many regions and cities across Germany, the hunt for a place in a "kita" takes a lot of tenacity and determination. However, parents who have been displaced often aren't as confident in pursuing their rights as parents who have lived in Germany for a long time. It is important to encourage the parents to pursue their right to a daycare place for their children and to obtain support from child protection services or another advisory body.



Ask the parents how their children settled into daycare. Ask the parents to discuss how parents and other family members can make it easier for children to get used to the new routines of starting at a "kita".

#### **Examples**:

- Visiting the "kita" together in advance
- Mentally preparing the child to start daycare, perhaps by getting the child to
  practise the journey to the "kita" with parents or siblings or introducing the idea
  of daycare into conversations and games with the child in a positive way
- Getting the child involved in practical preparations for attending daycare (e.g. letting the child choose their own rucksack)
- Not passing on your own worries to the child
- Parents actively working with and sticking to the induction plan proposed by the "kita"
- Letting the child take a familiar object (e.g. a cuddly toy, other toy or specific item of clothing) with them initially to remind them of home
- Where possible, avoiding other changes in the child's life during the daycare induction period
- Saying goodbye properly when dropping the child off at daycare, but not drawing out the goodbye for longer than necessary
- Communicating with daycare staff who are very experienced in introducing children to daycare settings and who will undoubtedly have some excellent tips to share in a positive and appreciative way.

#### SAY

When children first arrive at their "kita", they'll be confronted with lots of new faces and lots of new routines to learn. The environment, the teachers, the toys and the other children will all be new and unfamiliar to them. Many children will feel insecure and anxious when they first start attending daycare. This is why it's so important that parents allow plenty of time for their children to get used to the new environment and are patient and loving with their children. During this induction phase, parents should not put themselves or their children under any pressure; they must give their children all the time they need to get used to the new setting. The staff at the "kita" will have a lot of experience of getting children accustomed to the environment and will be able to provide some helpful tips. It's important that parents speak to the teachers, communicate with them in a positive and appreciative way and trust them to take care of their children.

Distribute the <u>handout: Daycare (kitas)</u> and explain to the parents that daycare providers all adopt and work with different childcare concepts and techniques.

#### NOTE >

Emphasise how important it is that parents familiarise themselves with the childcare techniques used in their chosen "kita" before confirming their child's place. This helps to prevent disappointment or annoyance arising at a later stage. Some childcare concepts — such as woodland kindergartens or toy-free kindergartens — may seem odd to parents. Religious organisations might not also be the best fit for every family. Explain to the parents that daycare providers usually offer tours, trial days and opportunities for parents to meet with the staff so that families can learn about the provider's approach to childcare and learning.

Explain that most "kitas" in Germany do not structure their daycare sessions with actual lessons (regardless of the approach they take to childcare).

#### SAY

In "kitas", children spend time playing, singing and making things together, and go on trips to the playground and to explore nature. The teachers ensure that these activities promote the children's social, emotional, creative, motor and sensory development in a playful and age-appropriate way. At daycare, children learn everything they need to know before starting school.

#### NOTE >

If the parents are sceptical as to whether a "kita" will adequately prepare their child for school, remind them of the topics covered in session four. Emphasise that playing, singing and making things with other children will promote the development of their child's social skills and linguistic ability, as well as their fine and gross motor skills; children do not need to learn to read, write and count before going to school.

#### "Cha" Energiser

**Time:** 5 minutes **Structure:** The entire group



#### SAY

We've now covered all of the topics for the "Families Make the Difference" parenting classes, so now we'll go back to the start and review everything we've learnt together. Before we do that though, let's do one more energising activity to get us all motivated to look back at what we've learnt!

- Ask the parents to form a circle.
- Using your hands, make a small ball shape in the air; this ball contains your "cha". Carefully throw the "cha" ball into the middle of the circle and say "cha" as you do so. Ask the participants to do the same and throw their "cha" ball into the middle one by one.
- Start the next round with a larger, louder "cha" and ask the other participants to say "cha" louder when they throw their "cha" into the circle.
- Continue the exercise until you can't say "cha" any louder; by this point, all of the participants should be feeling re-energised.

#### **Group Review of the Course**

**Time:** 40 minutes **Structure:** The Entire group



#### SAY

This is the last session in our "Families Make the Difference" parenting classes. Now is a good time to look back at the course and work together to summarise what we learnt and discussed in each session.

- Read out the title and description of each session and ask the parents to explain what they learnt in each session. Ask the parents to summarise each session briefly and to present the key points to the guests, if any are present. Support the parents if they struggle to remember anything. The presentations should not only be informative for the guests, but should also provide a good opportunity for the participants themselves to review what they have learnt.
- Ask all the parents to share their favourite relaxation exercises, games, strategies for communicating with children or other positive parenting techniques with the group (and the guests). Ask the parents to describe how they have applied the new practices and strategies at home and to share the positive effects that the new techniques have had on their children and family life in general.

#### NOTE >

Make sure that all of the parents get involved in the review process. If you need to, ask the parents to contribute to the discussion in turn.

- If there are any guests in the room, ask them if they have noticed any positive changes in their relative or friend's parenting style or ability to cope with stress since the course began. Also ask the guests if they have had any particularly positive experiences with specific methods and contributions to a positive family environment.
- Emphasise to all the parents (and the guests) how important it is that all family members strive for harmony in the family and that parents support one another in their efforts to raise happy and healthy children using positive parenting techniques.

#### **Award of Certificates**

**Time:** 10 minutes **Structure:** The entire group

One by one, ask each of the participants to come up to the front. Congratulate each person and hand them their certificate for completing the course. Ask the group to give each person a round of applause.

#### SAY

I want to say a huge thank you to all of you for participating in these parenting classes. You've shared your experiences and knowledge and listened to and learnt from one another. You've all been interested and engaged, asked lots of questions and have been willing to try out new things. Some of the exercises took a lot of courage and sometimes it will have been hard for you to talk about the topics we've covered. I'm very proud

of you and really happy that you were all so committed to the course and to taking part in the sessions. You and your families will definitely benefit from all of your new knowledge and skills! I would love to stay in touch with you all and it would be wonderful if you as a group were able to stay in touch and continue to share your parenting tips and experiences and support one another.

#### **NOTE**

>

If you wish, you can indicate that you will be available to support the parents in the future if they have any parenting-related questions. However, you should only do so if you actually want to help the parents on a voluntary basis after the course. This is completely up to you, and there is no expectation that you will offer your time in this way.



Invite the parents and guests to the final parenting café to celebrate the end of the course.

### Chapter 4 – Parenting Café

#### **Approach**

Wherever possible, the parents should be offered the opportunity to attend an hour-long "parenting café" at the end of each session. The parenting café allows the parents to discuss the topics covered during the sessions in an informal atmosphere while enjoying tea, coffee and snacks. The parents are free to choose the topics they want to talk about during the parenting café session. The facilitators do not cover any new content, but can revisit topics from specific sessions if the parents wish to do so. The parenting café also provides an opportunity for the parents to continue any discussions that started during the session. However, the facilitator should ensure that engaging in continued discussions does not turn the parenting café into an extension of the session itself; the parenting café should always take place in a relaxed atmosphere.

The aim of the parenting café is to deepen the trust between the parents themselves and also between the parents and facilitators, in order to strengthen the dynamic of the group. Many of the activities and exercises used in the parenting classes rely on a relationship of mutual trust between the participants; with this in mind, the aim of the parenting café is to build trust between the parents in the group and between the facilitator and the parents, which will strengthen the group dynamic. The parenting café is also intended to help participants form friendships and to build support networks with others in the group.

The parenting café should also provide an opportunity for participants to talk to the facilitator about any personal questions or specific challenges they are facing and to obtain information on any additional support they may require. Facilitators can also use the parenting café framework to obtain additional feedback on the session from the participants and to explore the needs and interests of the group in more detail. If the parents express an interest in covering different topics or additional information, the facilitator can take their wishes into account in the next session.



#### The role of the facilitator during the parenting café

During the parenting café sessions, the facilitator should not play an active leading role, but should be available for questions and discussions in smaller groups or with individual participants. Facilitators are not there to provide individual, case-specific support, but to provide information on other support that is available and to encourage parents to seek out this support if they need it. Facilitators and participants can contact the IRC project co-ordinator at any time for further advice on the facilitator's role.

#### **Preparation and Structure**

The parenting café should take place in a relaxed, casual atmosphere and should be structured in line with the needs and interests of the parents participating in the sessions. To create a positive mood, IRC will provide drinks and snacks for the parenting café; the facilitator prepares these in advance of the session. Tables and chairs can be pushed to the side or rearranged for the parenting café. This makes the atmosphere more informal and allows the parents to move around to sit or stand in different places if they wish. Depending on the needs of the participating families, children may attend the parenting café or remain in the childcare room where they spent the session.

#### **Ideas for Activities**

If the participants show an interest, the facilitator can arrange extra activities for the parenting café. The parents themselves can also make suggestions, contribute ideas and initiate activities.

Parenting café activities may be linked to and build on the topics covered during the session, or they might introduce new aspects of a topic. For example, the parenting café might involve singing songs or playing games as a group, practising relaxation techniques or making toys for children. The next section provides some ideas of activities that you could use at the parenting café.

#### **Colouring Mandalas**

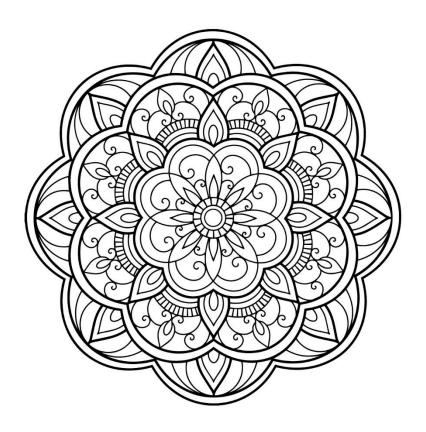
Works well with course session 2

Materials: Mandala templates, white paper, colouring pencils

A mandala is a geometric pattern usually made up of circles or squares and oriented towards a central point. Mandalas are often thought of as magical, symbolic or religious. The artistic patterns originated in the Indian and Tibetan cultures and are used as meditation objects in Buddhism and Hinduism.

Drawing and colouring mandalas has a calming and almost meditative effect. The geometric designs create a feeling of peace and harmony.

- Colouring in a mandala also promotes concentration and creativity. This activity works particularly well with session 2, which covers "Stress management and relaxation", but it can be used after any session.
- If the parents find the activity relaxing, the facilitator can encourage them to integrate drawing and colouring mandalas into their everyday lives.
- You don't need much space or equipment for this activity. The exercise is also a good choice for parents to do together with their (slightly older) children. Children also find drawing and colouring mandalas calming, and the activity helps to reduce stress and promote creativity.
- There are lots of different types of mandala that vary in complexity. For younger children, it's a good idea to start with basic templates or get them to draw their own simple patterns. If the parents are interested, facilitators can print out various mandala templates for the participants to use at home.



**Template: Mandala** 

#### **Making Hand Puppets**

Works well with: Sessions 4 & 6

Materials: Old socks, needles, fabric glue, scissors, a range of craft materials such as felt, buttons, yarn and old fabric

The course handbook suggests using roleplays in some activities. These roleplays can also be acted out using puppets so that the participants don't need to act. Puppets are helpful not only in roleplaying exercises for adults, but also when communicating with children. Children can sometimes find it easier to talk to a puppet than directly to an adult. By communicating through a puppet, parents can explore their children's worries and questions in a child-friendly way. Children often treat puppets or cuddly toys like best friends who are always with them and who they trust completely. The parenting café is an opportunity for the parents to make a puppet together. The puppet doesn't necessarily have to be finished in one session; it can become a group project that stretches out over multiple weeks.

The easiest and cheapest way to make a puppet is to use an old sock. The toe end of the sock is folded in and used as a mouth (the mouth can be strengthened using felt or cardboard if necessary).

- The heel of the sock is where the puppet's eyes will go.
- The mouth, eyes, nose and hair can be made from buttons, wool, felt or other fabrics.



Even the most simple sock puppet with button eyes and woolly hair can bring a lot of joy to children and their parents! Facilitators can provide detailed instructions and bring a selection of craft materials along to the parenting café. The week before, they should also ask the parents to bring in a few old socks (and other craft materials if possible).

#### Making Power Cards<sup>6</sup>

Works well with: Sessions 1, 2 & 8

Materials: Envelope, white paper, blank cards, pens, materials for decoration, glue, scissors

A strength card set is a set of cards designed to conjure up positive emotions and memories. The parents make the cards themselves and can then use them in stressful and challenging situations to remind themselves of happy memories and make themselves feel stronger. The cards help parents to focus on positive emotions, giving them a sense of security because they can look back at their own personal set of cards for inspiration and strength whenever they need it.

The parents will need a few things to make their own strength card sets – including blank cards, envelopes and various items that can be used for decoration.

The envelope is used to hold the set of cards and should be designed and decorated in a way that will make the owner feel happy when they see it or pick it up at some point in the future.

Each of the cards is assigned to a category and labelled with the appropriate title. Some example categories are listed below.

On each card, the parents write words or draw images that they like and that remind them of positive feelings or bring them pleasure and joy. Each card can be personalised with additional information or drawings. The parents can also note down on the cards why they chose this word or object.

#### Examples of Categories:

The participants don't all have to choose the same categories; each parent should choose what feels most appropriate for them. They can also leave out categories or add their own.

- My favourite place a picture or a description of a place (past, present or imagined) where you feel or felt peaceful and secure
- **Gratitude list** things you are grateful for (e.g. "My health" or "My daughter's smile")
- Food or drinks you enjoy the things you choose should be easy to obtain
- My favourite books books that lift your mood (leave this out if the participants can't read or write)
- My favourite music music that lifts your mood; not sad music
- Humorous or positive sayings or pictures
- Happy moments and memories from the past

-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> This exercise is inspired by the Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs (2006) IPSV Support Group Guide: A Guide to Psychoeducational Support Groups for Survivors of Intimate Partner Sexual Violence, Olympia, WA.

- Fun activities that you enjoy
- **My support network** a list of people you can visit or call who will be there for you and will cheer you up
- Activities to reduce stress the activities should be easy to do
- **Relaxation exercises** that work for you such as deep breathing, focusing on yourself, muscle relaxation, prayer etc.

#### **ALTERNATIVE >**

Instead of making strength cards, the parents could also make a "good mood box" containing objects, such as photographs that cheer them up, a few bags of their favourite tea, a poem, a pretty rock or a small bottle of a fragrance or oil that brings back positive memories. These kinds of objects can sometimes be more effective at conjuring up positive thoughts than written words. The facilitator could also encourage the parents to create their own good mood box at the start of the course, and gradually fill it with objects and written tips for themselves as they work through the classes each week.

#### **Drawing, Colouring or Handcrafting**

Works well with: Session 4

*Materials:* White paper, a range of pens and pencils, various. craft materials, glue, colouring pencils

The parenting café can also be used as an opportunity for parents to draw, colour or make whatever they want, as long as the room is suitable for these activities and the parents are interested. The facilitator should discuss the creative options with the parents in advance and provide and prepare the required materials with the IRC's support.

Drawing, colouring and crafting together not only promotes creativity, but also encourages mindfulness. The parents could opt to do some colouring in with bright pencils, make some decorations, decorate candles or other objects, make jewellery or toys or any other crafting activity of their choice.

Let the parents know that they are welcome to share their ideas and initiate creative sessions with the group themselves. However, the facilitator should ensure that the sessions only require materials that are available readily and at low cost so that the parents can do the activities themselves at home if they want to.

It's also important that the activity is fun and relaxing for the parents and that the parents don't feel under pressure. Each individual should be allowed to work on their own ideas at their own pace, or simply watch the others.

Creative activities are also a great opportunity to get the children involved. The facilitator can also give the parents some craft materials to take home so that they can complete the projects they have started with their children.

#### <u>Ideas for drawing, colouring and crafting:</u>

- Nature (e.g. flowers, trees, animals)
- Paint or decorate objects brought in from home
- Window or interior decorations
- Garlands
- Keyrings
- Crafts for holidays or specific seasons
- Small trays, baskets or storage boxes

#### **Baking or Cooking**

Works well with: Session 7

Materials: Baking and cooking utensils and ingredients

Sharing meals and preparing food together can be a bonding experience. If the space is suitable, the parents could cook or bake something together as a group during the parenting café session. As time is limited, it's best to choose small meals that are quick to prepare.

The parents will definitely enjoy cooking dishes from their home countries together. The facilitator should encourage the parents to make suggestions and bring their own recipes with them

The facilitator should also ensure that the participants are all enjoying cooking or baking together and looking out for any signs of people feeling homesick or experiencing other negative emotions.

While the participants are cooking and baking, the facilitator can initiate a discussion about a healthy diet and mealtime rituals. Cooking or baking together is a great activity for the parenting café after session 7, which looks at the topic of "Healthy diet and activities".

Any children present can help out if they are old enough. The facilitator should encourage the parents to cook and bake different things with their children at home and try out new recipes and foods from time to time.

NOTE > Remind the parents that both boys and girls can help with cooking – all children will enjoy this kind of activity and should be invited to help with food preparation.

#### **Singing and Dancing**

Works well with: Session 6 or as a weekly routine for the group Materials: Equipment to play music, enough space

In many countries and cultures, music is an important part of everyday life. The parenting café session can be a great opportunity for the parents to enjoy singing or even dancing together as a group.

- The parents can bring their own song suggestions and/or the facilitator can choose some tracks in advance.
- As with all the activities, the facilitator should ensure that the parents are enjoying the music and dancing and that it is not triggering any negative memories or feelings.
- The parents could sing children's songs together and teach one another new songs that they can all sing with their own children at home. This activity works well with session 6, when the parents sing lullabies as a group.
- The facilitator can also suggest that the group starts or finishes the parenting café each week by singing a song together, to create another stabilising ritual for the parents.
- Listening to music or singing together can also be approached from a more meditative angle and used as a relaxation technique. Calming, repetitive music is ideal for this kind of activity.
- The facilitator and the parents can also listen and dance to music from their mobile phones or own speakers during the parenting café. Throughout the activity, it is important to ensure that all of the parents feel comfortable and that no-one is forced to sing or dance if they don't want to.
- Children can ofcourse get involved in any music-related activities as well.

# **Chapter 5 - Handouts**

Handout: "Signs of Stress"

(Course session 2)

SIGNS OF STRESS	
PHYSICAL	EMOTIONAL
<ul> <li>Sleep problems</li> <li>Tummy ache, nausea or diarrhoea</li> <li>Fast heart rate</li> <li>Severe fatigue</li> <li>Trembling muscles and tension</li> <li>Back and neck pain</li> <li>Headaches</li> <li>Inability to relax and recuperate</li> <li>Missed periods in women</li> <li>Frequent illness</li> <li>Weight gain or loss</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Severe fluctuations in mood (feeling happy one minute and sad the next)</li> <li>Feeling of being "overly emotional"</li> <li>Short temper</li> <li>Anger</li> <li>Feeling demotivated, loss of hope</li> <li>Depression and general feeling of sadness</li> <li>Lack of trust in others</li> <li>Anxiety</li> <li>Lack of emotion/feeling of emptiness</li> <li>Disassociation and loss of sense of connection</li> <li>Increasingly negative attitude towards life</li> <li>Loss of meaning (doubting existence of or feeling angry with god)</li> </ul>
MENTAL	BEHAVIOUR-ORIENTATED
<ul> <li>Difficulty concentrating</li> <li>Confusion</li> <li>Forgetfulness</li> <li>Difficulties making decisions</li> <li>Dreams or nightmares</li> <li>Intrusive and unwanted thoughts</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Taking risks (e.g. driving carelessly)</li> <li>Eating too much or not enough</li> <li>Smoking more</li> <li>Loss of energy</li> <li>Feeling tense</li> <li>Sense of unease</li> <li>Aggression and verbal outbursts</li> <li>Alcohol consumption or drug use</li> <li>Compulsive behaviours (e.g. nail-biting) or nervous ticks</li> <li>Withdrawal and isolation</li> </ul>

#### Handout: "Relaxation Techniques"

(Course session 2)

#### One Minute to focus the Mind<sup>7</sup>

Focusing the mind helps you to concentrate and brings your attention into the present to prevent your mind from racing. It also helps your brain perform better and will reduce your heart rate and blood pressure.

This is a simple exercise that you can do at any time throughout the day.

- Take some time to try it out. Look at your watch and take note of the time.
- For the next 60 seconds, your only job is to focus all your attention on your breath.
- Even though you're only spending a minute on the task, it can feel like an eternity. Keep your eyes open and breathe normally.
- Be prepared to stop your mind wandering (because it almost certainly will) and to bring your attention back to your breath whenever you need to.
- Remember that this exercise is not a competition or a personal challenge.
- You can't fail with this exercise; all you can do is gain experience.
- Use this exercise multiple times a day to bring yourself back to the present moment and create a feeling of clarity and freedom in your mind.

#### A Safe Space

#### Get comfortable and read the text below:

- Imagine a place or a scene in which you feel calm, safe and happy. This place might be somewhere you remember (perhaps from a holiday), or it can be a place you've heard of (maybe in a story) or a place you've imagined for yourself.
- Take a few deep, slow breaths in and out. Close your eyes and continue to breathe normally. Imagine your safe space and imagine yourself sitting or standing in it.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> http://www.the-guided-meditation-site.com/mindfulness-exercises.html

- Can you see yourself there? Take a look around you. What do you see? What are your immediate surroundings like? Look at the details. Look at the different colours. Imagine reaching your hand out to touch what's around you. What does it feel like?
- Now look further into the distance. What can you see? Look at what's in the distance. Look at the various colours and shapes and shadows.
- This is your special place and you can imagine anything you want. When you're there, you feel calm and safe.
- Place your bare feet on the ground. What does the ground feel like? Walk around slowly and observe what's around you. Notice how you look and how you feel.
- What can you hear? Perhaps the soft whispers of the wind or the sounds of birds or the sea. Can you feel the warmth of the sun on your face? What can you smell? Perhaps the sea air, flowers or maybe even your favourite food?
- In your special place, you can see the things you want to see, imagine yourself touching and smelling them, and hear sounds that soothe you. You feel relaxed and happy.
- Now imagine that someone who is important to you is with you in your special place.
- Someone who is there to be a good friend and to help you; someone strong and caring. They are there only to help you and to look after you. Imagine that this person will explore your special place with you. You're happy to be there with them. This person is here to help you and is good at solving problems.
- Have another look around you. Look closely at everything you see. Remember that this is your special place. It will always be there. You can always come to this place when you need a little peace, security and happiness. Your helper will always be there for you whenever you need them. Now prepare to open your eyes and to leave your special place behind for now. You can come back whenever you like. When you open your eyes, you might just notice that you feel a touch more relaxed and content with life.

### **Quick Head Massage**

This quick head massage has a calming effect and can help you to de-stress and relax the muscles in your face – an area where we can carry a lot of tension without even realising it! If you wear a head scarf, don't worry; the instructions for the head massage will still work for you. Just make sure you only apply gentle pressure when massaging the head.

During the few minutes you spend on the massage, concentrate fully on yourself. You might find it helpful to close the eyes.

- Sit upright on a chair. Place your feet flat on the floor, about hip-width apart. Now start to focus only on your breath: The rhythmic in and out of your breathing. You might notice your tummy rising and falling.
- Place your hands on your forehead and spread your fingers. Allow the tips of your fingers to touch your hairline. Then move your fingers slowly over the top of your head or through your hair in a combing motion, right around to the back of your head. Keep the pressure gentle. While still applying light pressure, bring your hands over your ears and back to the front of your head. Repeat this massage around ten times.
- Now imagine you are massaging shampoo into your scalp with gentle pressure. Move your fingertips in small circles. Now move on to your temples. Place the first finger and middle finger of each hand on your temples and massage in small circles. Repeat around ten times in a clockwise direction and ten times in an anti-clockwise direction.
- Your neck will also benefit from a quick massage to relieve tension. Using your fingers, feel around the back of your neck for the top of your spine, or your cervical vertebrae. Place a hand next to the most prominent vertebra. Applying gentle pressure, run your hand along your neck muscle to your collarbone at the front. Repeat this exercise ten times before switching to the other hand and repeating on the other side. Try to keep your shoulders relaxed throughout.

#### NOTE >

The instructions for the quick head massage should also work for women who wear head scarves. However, ensure that all participants feel comfortable with the exercise. It's fine to leave out or adjust some of the steps. The pressure applied to the scalp should be light and comfortable.

#### Handout: "Milestones of Development"

(Course Session 4)

#### NOTE >

All children develop at a different pace. The milestones listed in this handout are intended as a guide only. Don't worry if your child hasn't yet reached a particular milestone or if you notice other children developing faster or slower; this is completely normal. Try not to compare your child with other children too much. Contact a paediatrician if you have any concerns or questions about your child's development.

#### **Social/Emotional Development (Social Interactions)**

Social/Emotional Develop	ment (Boeiai interactions)
2 months	4 months
<ul> <li>Begins to smile at people</li> <li>Can soothe themselves for a short time (e.g. by sucking own hand)</li> <li>Tries to look at parents</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Smiles spontaneously, particularly in response to people</li> <li>Likes to play with people and cries when play ends</li> <li>Copies some movements and facial expressions (such as smiling or frowning)</li> </ul>
6 months	9 months
<ul> <li>Knowns familiar faces and begins to identify others as strangers</li> <li>Likes playing with others, particularly own parents</li> <li>Responds to the emotions of others and often appears happy</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>May show fear of strangers</li> <li>May be clingy with familiar adults</li> <li>Has favourite games/cuddly toys</li> </ul>
1 year	18 months
<ul> <li>Responds to strangers in a shy or nervous way</li> <li>Cries when the mother/father leave</li> <li>Has favourite objects and people</li> <li>Shows fear in some situations</li> <li>Repeats noises or actions to get attention</li> <li>Stretches out arm or leg to help during dressing</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Likes to pass things to others (to play)</li> <li>May have tantrums</li> <li>May show fear of strangers</li> <li>Shows a preference for trusted people</li> <li>Plays simple roleplay games, such as feeding a doll</li> <li>May cling to parents in new situations</li> <li>Uses a finger to point things out to others</li> </ul>
2 years	3 years
<ul> <li>Copies others, particularly adults and older children</li> <li>Excited when in the company of other children</li> <li>Gradually shows increasing degree of independence</li> <li>Shows stubborn behaviours (does not want to do what he/she is being told to do)</li> <li>Mostly plays alongside other children, but begins to integrate other children into own play</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Copies adults and friends</li> <li>Shows affection for friends without prompting</li> <li>Takes turns during play</li> <li>Shows concern if a friend is crying</li> <li>Understands the concept of "mine" and "yours"</li> <li>Shows a wide range of emotions</li> <li>Happy to separate from mother and father</li> <li>May respond with anger to major changes in routine</li> </ul>
4 years	5 years
<ul> <li>Enjoys new things</li> <li>Engages in pretend play such as "mummies and daddies"</li> <li>Increasingly creative in imaginative games</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Wants to be liked by friends</li> <li>Wants to be like his/her friends</li> <li>Better understanding of rules</li> <li>Likes to sing, dance and act</li> </ul>

- Plays with other children
- Often struggles to distinguish between what is real and what is imagined
- Talks about what he/she likes and is interested in
- Is aware of own gender
- Can distinguish between what is real and what is imagined
- Shows more independence (e.g. can visit next-door neighbour alone)

#### **Linguistic Development (Communication)**

2 months	4 months
<ul> <li>Baby talk, makes happy noises</li> <li>Turns head in response to sounds</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Begins to babble</li> <li>Smiles and copies noises in environment</li> <li>Cries in different ways to indicate hunger, pain or tiredness</li> </ul>
6 months	9 months
<ul> <li>Responds to sounds with own sounds</li> <li>Uses sequences when babbling ("ah", "eh", "oh") and likes to take turns making sounds with parent</li> <li>Responds to own name</li> <li>Makes noises to show happiness and displeasure</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Understands the word "no"</li> <li>Makes likes of different sounds, such as "mamamama" and "bababababa"</li> <li>Copies the sounds and gestures of others</li> <li>Points at things</li> </ul>
1 year	18 months
<ul> <li>Responds to simple spoken requests</li> <li>Uses simple gestures, such as shaking the head to say "no" or waving to say "bye"</li> <li>Says "Mama" and "Dada" and uses exclamations such as "uh-oh!"</li> <li>Tries to copy words</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Says some individual words</li> <li>Says "no" while shaking head</li> <li>Points to something to indicate that he/she wants it</li> </ul>
2 years	3 years
<ul> <li>Points to objects or pictures when another person says what the object is or what the picture shows</li> <li>Knows the names of familiar people and body parts</li> <li>Speaks in sentences of two to four words</li> <li>Follows simple instructions</li> <li>Repeats words that he/she has picked up from conversations</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Follows instructions with two or three steps</li> <li>Can name familiar objects</li> <li>Can say their first name, age and gender</li> <li>Says words like "I", "my", "we" and "you" and some words in plural form (cars, dogs, cats etc.)</li> <li>Speaks well enough for strangers to understand most of the time</li> <li>Can hold a conversation with two or three sentences</li> </ul>
4 years	5 years
<ul> <li>Knows some of the basic rules of grammar, such as the correct use of "he" and "she"</li> <li>Knows songs or poems off by heart</li> <li>Tells stories</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Speaks very clearly</li> <li>Tells simple stories in full sentences</li> <li>Uses the future tense, e.g. "Grandma is coming tomorrow"</li> </ul>

#### **Cognitive Development (Learning, Thinking and Solving Problems)**

	, Thinking and Solving Problems)
2 months	4 months
<ul> <li>Pays attention to faces</li> <li>Starts to follow things with his/her eyes and recognises people from a distance</li> <li>Starts to get bored (crying, restlessness) if an activity is not varied enough</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Shows that he/she is happy or sad</li> <li>Responds to affection</li> <li>Uses the hands and eyes together, e.g. to see a toy then reach out for it</li> <li>Follows moving objects from one side to another with the eyes</li> <li>Recognises trusted people and objects from a distance</li> </ul>
6 months	9 months
<ul> <li>Looks for things in environment</li> <li>Tries to put objects in mouth</li> <li>Shows curiosity towards objects and attempts to grab things that are out of reach</li> <li>Begins to pass objects from one hand to another</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Observes the direction of an object if it is dropped</li> <li>Looks for things hidden in front of him/her</li> <li>Puts things in his/her mouth</li> <li>Easily moves things from one hand to another</li> </ul>
1 year	18 months
<ul> <li>Explores objects in different ways, such as shaking, banging or throwing</li> <li>Looks at an object when someone names it</li> <li>Copies gestures</li> <li>Begins to use objects properly, e.g. drinks from a cup, brushes hair</li> <li>Places objects in a container and takes them out again</li> <li>Follows simple instructions such as "pick up the toy"</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Knows what familiar objects are for, e.g. phones, hairbrushes and spoons</li> <li>Points to things to get attention from others</li> <li>Points to body parts</li> <li>Scribbles independently</li> <li>Can follow simple verbal instructions without gestures, e.g. sitting down in response to: "Sit down"</li> </ul>
_	_
Starts to sort objects by shape and colour     Completes sentences and rhymes from familiar books     Engages in simple imaginative play     Builds towers from four or more blocks     Follows two-step instructions such as "pick up your shoes and put them in the cupboard"     Names objects in picture books	<ul> <li>Can play with toys with buttons, levers and moving parts</li> <li>Engages in imaginative play with dolls, animals and people</li> <li>Can solve puzzles with three or four pieces</li> <li>Understands what "two" means</li> <li>Can open and close lids and operate door handles</li> </ul>
4 years	5 years
<ul> <li>Knows some colours and numbers</li> <li>Understands the concept of counting</li> <li>Begins to have an understanding of time</li> <li>Remembers parts of a story</li> <li>Draws people with two or four body parts</li> <li>Plays board games or card games</li> <li>Can tell you what he/she thinks will happen next in a story</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Can count 10 or more objects</li> <li>Draws people with at least six body parts</li> <li>Can copy some letters or numbers</li> <li>Can copy triangles and other shapes</li> <li>Recognises things that are used every day, such as money and food</li> </ul>

### **Physical Development (Movement)**

2 months	4 months
<ul> <li>Can hold head up and begins to move upwards when lying on front</li> <li>Makes gentle movements with arms and legs</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Can hold head up easily and without support</li> <li>Presses down with legs when feet are on a hard surface</li> <li>May be able to roll from lying on front to lying on back</li> <li>Can hold and shake a toy and play with dangling toys</li> <li>Can move onto elbows when lying on front</li> <li>9 months</li> </ul>
<ul> <li>Turns around in both directions (from lying on front to lying on back and vice versa)</li> <li>Begins to sit up without support</li> <li>Bears weight on legs and can teeter around</li> <li>Teeters around, sometimes scrabbles forwards then backwards</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Able to stand and maintain position</li> <li>Can move into a sitting position independently</li> <li>Sits without support</li> <li>Pulls up to stand</li> <li>Crawls</li> </ul>
<ul> <li>Can sit down without any assistance</li> <li>Pulls up to stand and walks along furniture (holding onto it for stability)</li> <li>Can walk a few steps without support</li> <li>Can stand independently</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Can walk independently</li> <li>Can walk up steps and run</li> <li>Pulls toys along while walking</li> <li>Can help when getting undressed</li> <li>Drinks from a cup</li> <li>Eats with a spoon</li> </ul>
2 years  Stands on tip-toes Kicks and throws balls Begins to run Climbs up and down from furniture without assistance Can go up and down stairs with assistance  • Draws or copies straight lines and circles	<ul> <li>3 years</li> <li>Climbs proficiently</li> <li>Runs proficiently</li> <li>Goes up and down stairs one step at a time</li> </ul>
Jumps and stands on one leg for up to two seconds     Usually catches balls     Throws and mashes food, and cuts food with supervision	<ul> <li>Hops; may be able to jump over things</li> <li>Uses a fork and spoon and occasionally a child-safe knife</li> <li>Can go to the toilet alone</li> <li>Can use swings and climb</li> </ul>

#### Handout: "Game Ideas"

(Course Session 4)

### For babies > 1 year old "Serve and Return"

Serve and return is a technique that helps to stimulate a baby's brain. The parent and the child each copy the actions of the other. The parent could smile at their baby and ask them to smile back. Then they should copy what their child does in response. You can copy the sounds, gestures or faces your baby makes to interact with him or her.

This game is covered in more detail in the "Serve and return" section in session 4.

## For children aged 1–3 years "Show me something blue?"

If your children are over one year old, you can say things like "Show me something blue" and get the child to point to all the blue things in the room. Or, if you're outdoors, you could ask: "Show me a tree". The child can then point to all the trees they can see. You can also build on this game by setting more complex challenges, such as "Show me things that are small and blue".

## For children aged 3–5 years "I see something, you don't see"

One person chooses something that they can see in their immediate environment but doesn't tell the other person what it is. The person then says: "I spy with my little eye, something that is ....", giving a clue about the object they have chosen. For example, "I spy with my little eye, something that is straight"

The other players guess by asking questions that can only be answered with "yes" or "no".

#### For children aged 6–11 years Concentration Game:

Games and exercises that require concentration are very important, both for children and for adults. Concentration is something that you can practise through play by placing four different objects on a table so that everyone can see them. After five seconds, all of the objects are covered. Someone in the group can now attempt to name all of the objects they saw. The game can be repeated with other objects and more objects can be added to increase the challenge.

For younger children, start with three objects. If four objects proves too easy for older children, you can increase the number of objects to five, six or even seven! Alternatively, you can show the children a list of words or numbers that they then have to reproduce.

#### "Categories"

Each person is given a pen and a piece of paper and is asked to draw five columns (one narrow column and four wider columns). The first column is left blank, and the words "Name", "Place", "Animal" and "Food" are written at the top of the other columns. One person begins by reciting the alphabet in their head. Another person in the group says "Stop". The person who was reciting the alphabet says which letter they stopped at. All of the players write down a word starting with this letter for each of their categories. As soon as a player has a word in each category, they shout "Stop". The first person to correctly complete all categories wins the round.

#### Example:

	Name	Place	Animal	Food
A	Ali	America	Ape	Apple

#### **ALTERNATIVE >**

This game require the parents to be able to write. If they can't, the words can be drawn instead.

#### "A to Z races":

- Form two groups and give each group some paper and pens. Agree on a category (e.g. food, sport or places). The category should be as wide as possible.
- In each team, one person starts the round by writing down a word that is associated with the category and starts with the letter "A". If the groups opted for the "Food" category, for example, "apple" could be the first thing written down. The paper and pen are then passed to the next person, who writes down something starting with the letter "B" (e.g. banana). If the person can't come up with a word for a particular letter, it can be left blank.
- The first team to reach "Z" calls out "stop". The number of words written down is counted up and the team that collected the most words wins!

#### ATTENTION >

This game is not suitable for participants who cannot read or write. The facilitator must ensure that the participants are comfortable with the level of the game and that they do not feel bad if they cannot read or write perfectly. The facilitator should also explain to parents who are illiterate that they can still support their children with their school work and encourage them to do so. Activities such as telling stories or concentration games do not involve any need to read or write.

#### "Our Cat":

- The group is shown a picture of a cat (or another animal).
- Each person must come up with a description of the cat that starts with the first letter of their name. For example, a person called Manar could describe the cat as "majestic". She would say: "Our cat is... majestic".
- The next person repeats this description and adds their own, again using the first letter of their first name. For example, if the second person is called Samira, she could say: "Our cat is majestic and sly". The game continues until everyone has added a description; the game gets harder as the list gets longer!

### **Handout – "Kita Childcare Concepts"**

(Course Session 8)

All childcare facilities (referred to as "kitas" for short) are educational institutions. This means that their role is not only to look after children, but also to work with them and promote their development in line with a specific pedagogical concept and methodology for learning. Although there are lots of different approaches, all kitas focus on allowing children's individual personalities room to develop freely. Learning through play promotes children's linguistic and social development.

Regardless of how a kita is organised or the pedagogical concept on which it bases its work, all kitas seek to prepare pre-school children for school with a programme of learning that is appropriate for their age.

As the concepts adopted by different kitas can vary significantly, it is not always easy to find the right kita for your child. Ideally, all parents would be able to send their children to a kita that uses the concept that they like best. However, in large cities, kita places are often limited and parents often consider themselves lucky to get a place for their child at all.

#### NOTE >

Explain to the parents that they should always ask about the concept and methodology of the kita when they visit for a look around or when they first speak with the staff. Most kitas provide brochures explaining their approach or will be happy to talk to parents about it. Enquiring at this stage helps to clear up any misunderstandings or false assumptions. The kita will also be able to arrange for an interpreter to be present at these kinds of discussions if necessary.

#### **Focal Points**

- Some kitas place particular importance on an **early musical education**, which involves introducing children to sounds, melodies and creating their own music.
- Other kitas are strongly influenced by Christian values and will follow a more religious approach to education. In most cases, you don't need to be a member of the church to register your child with an evangelical or catholic kita.
- There are also **bilingual or multilingual kitas** where the children and staff use multiple languages in their interactions. In Germany, English and French are often used as second languages in these kitas, alongside German.
- Some kitas may focus on motor development and movement. These providers aim to help children gain experience of physical movement and sensory input through targeted, regular physical activity.

### **Examples of Pedagogical Concepts**

- In **forest kindergartens**, most of the children's learning takes place outdoors. Children are encouraged to find ways to play with moss, sticks and stones, to climb on tree stumps and to play hide and seek in the woods.
- In **Freinet schools**, the children set their own schedule for the day. They are encouraged to express their own wishes and share their ideas. The children decide together as a group how their day will be structured.
- Kitas that work with the Montessori principle also place a high value on raising children to be independent and responsible for their actions. For example, the children decide how long to play with something before moving on to the next activity. The environment is structured to encourage children to independently try out different movements or experiments.
- **Special education kitas** are often well-equipped to provide individual support for children with disabilities or learning difficulties.

### The Structures within the Kitas

- In many kitas, the children are divided into groups by age, so that children of the same age can play together.
- There are also kitas that use a more **open approach** so that children constantly move between and form new groups. The staff provide little in the way of fixed structure, instead encouraging the children to develop their own routines.

# **Chapter 6 - Illustrations**

## **Course Session 1: The Concept of Caring Parenting**

Illustration: Playing with children I

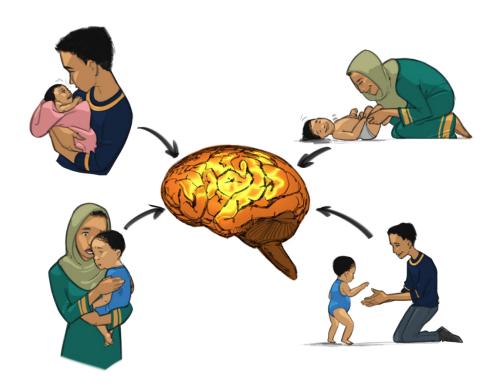


## **Course Session 1: The Concept of Caring Parenting**

Illustration: Playing with children II



Picture: Brain development I



**Course Session 3: Brain Development in Children** 

Illustration: Brain development II

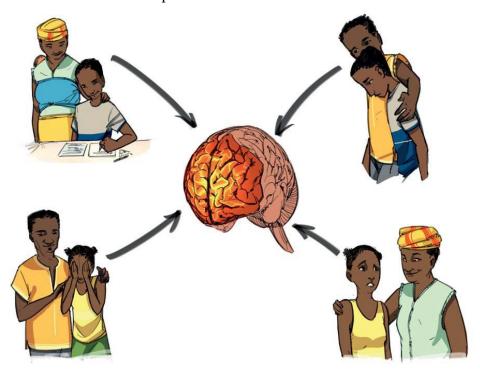
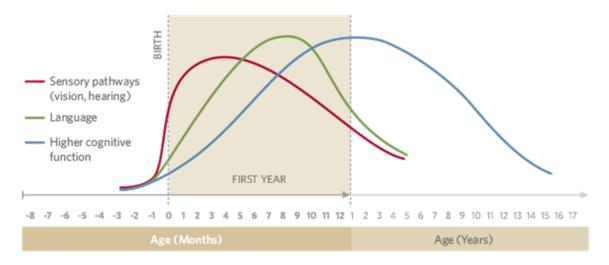


Illustration: Brain Development III

# Human Brain Development



Source: Nelson, C. (2000). From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

Illustration: The Brain with Neurons

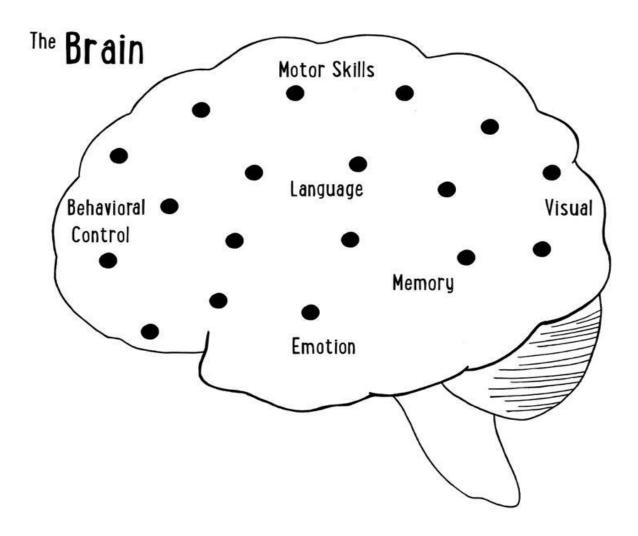


Illustration: The Brain with Synapse Connections

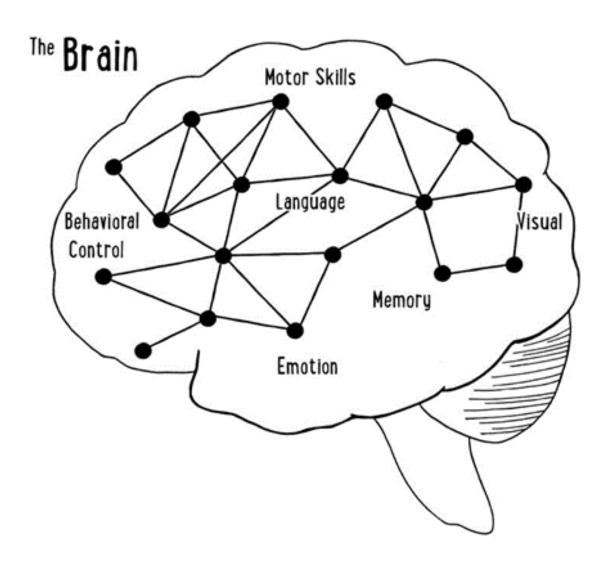


Illustration: The Brain with Strong Connections as a result of Love and Affection

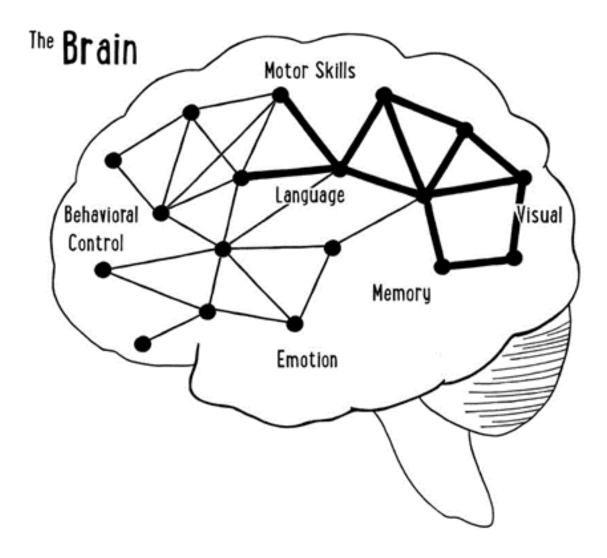


Illustration: The Connections in the Brain are destroyed by Toxic Stress and Experiences of Violence

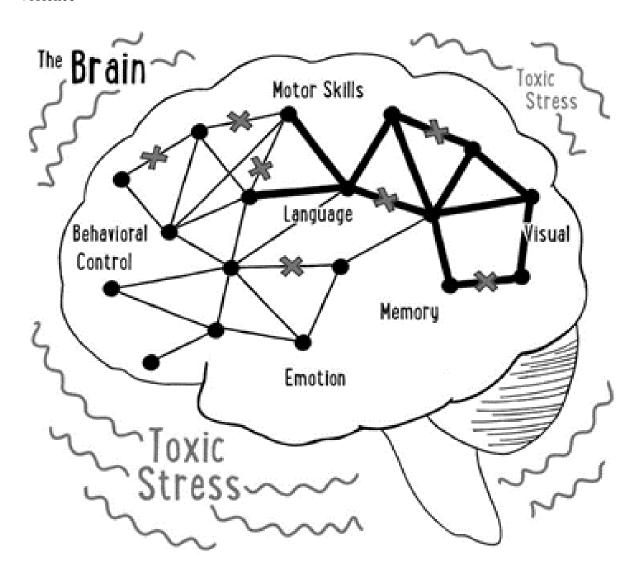
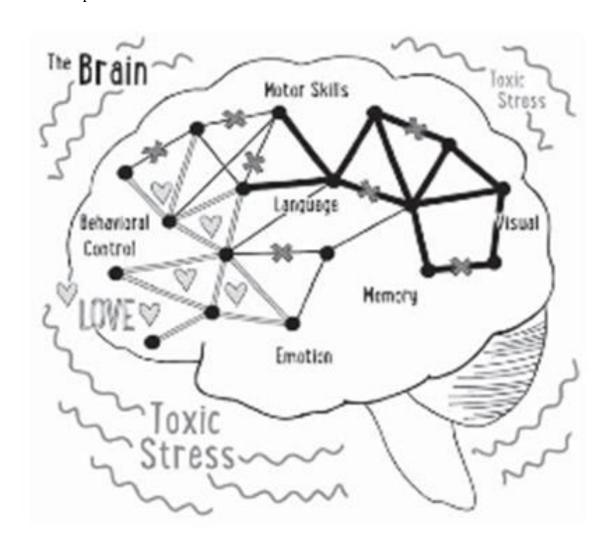
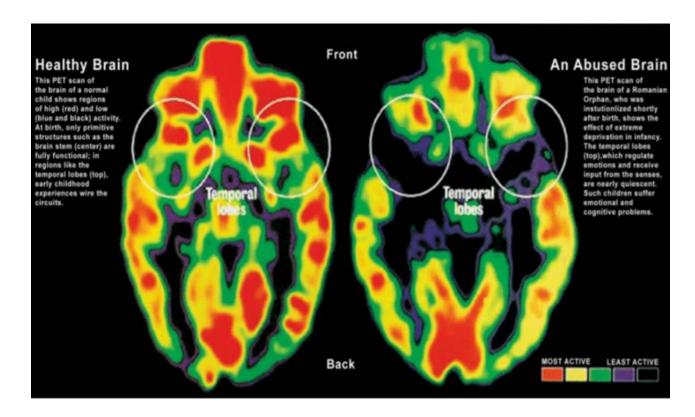


Illustration: The Connections in the Brain are renewed by Loving, Caring and Predictable Relationships



Graph: Brain Scan



## **Course Session 4: Child-Friendly Playing and Learning**

Illustration: Serve and Return



# **Course Session 4: Child-Friendly Playing and Learning**

Illustration: Active Engagement with Children



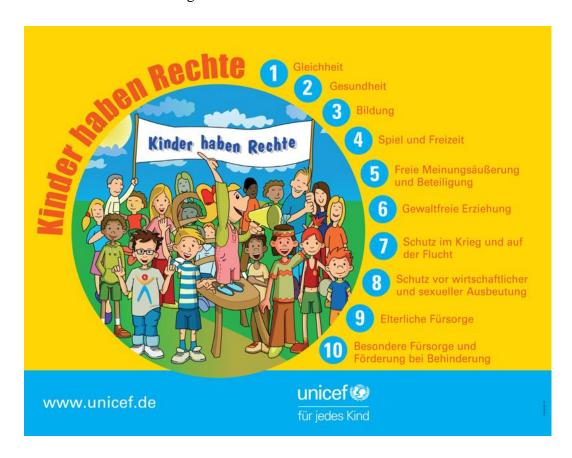
# Course Session 4: Child-Friendly Playing and Learning

Illustration: Telling Stories



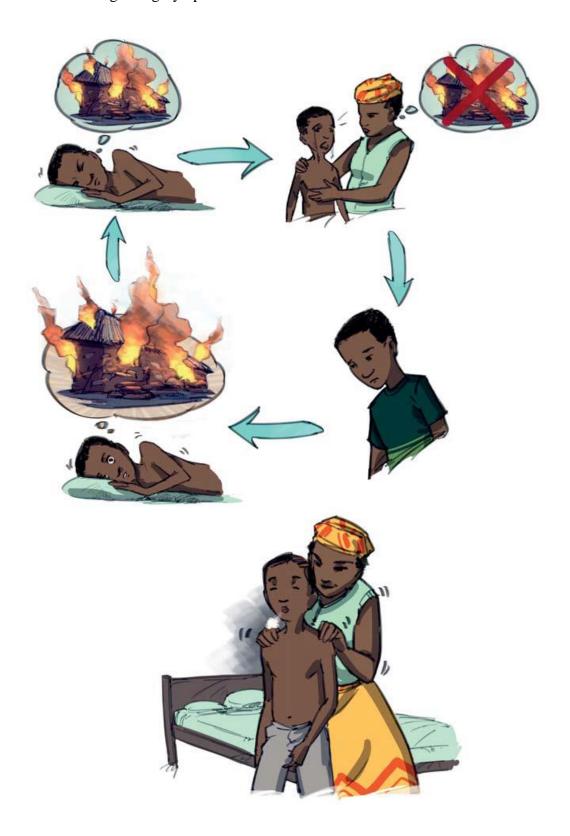
## Course Session 5: Rules and Reactions when Children "Misbehave"

Picture: Children have Rights



# **Course Session 6: The Psychosocial Needs of Children**

Illustration: Ignoring Symptoms of Stress



# **Course Session 7: Healthy Diet and Activities**

Illustration: Food Pyramid



# **Chapter 7 - Attachments**

# **Reading Recommendations**

Berger, R. (2015): Stress, Trauma and Posttraumatic Growth. Social Context, Environment and Identities. *In Chapter 7* (Developmental Perspectives: Stress, Trauma and PTG Across the Life Cycle): Trauma in Children (p. 106) and Trauma in Adolescents (p. 117) *In Chapter 10* (Interventions for Couples and Families): Working with Traumatized Families (p. 173)

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→ We also recommend the Center on the Developing Child website from Harvard University. The website explains various key concepts, including toxic stress in further detail, and also includes summaries of scientific publications and news. <a href="https://developingchild.harvard.edu/guide/a-guide-to-toxic-stress/">https://developingchild.harvard.edu/guide/a-guide-to-toxic-stress/</a>

## **IRC Resources**

This course manual for parents of children aged 0-11 years is based on course manuals and materials developed for the international work of IRC. For the implementation of the parent courses in Germany, the English language materials were translated and adapted to the German context. The implementation of the Parents' Courses was also scientifically monitored in various national contexts. The original versions and the resulting studies are listed here.

- Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (ACPHA) (2017). Evidence and resources on the improvement of children's wellbeing due to a reduction in family violence and improved parental psychosocial wellbeing in humanitarian contexts. Geneva: Task Force on Psychosocial support for families and caregivers. URL: <a href="https://alliancecpha.org/en/child">https://alliancecpha.org/en/child</a>-protection-online- library/evidence-and-resources-improvement-childrens-wellbeing-due-reduction
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- You can find more information about the work of IRC at: https://Rescue-DE.org

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The contents and conclusions presented in this text are the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the funding bodies. Some content has been previously published in English in other IRC publications. These are listed in the appendix under IRC resources including the respective funding agencies and links to the original publication.