

A high-angle photograph of a group of children and adults sitting on a light-colored tiled floor. They are gathered around a central bowl of food, which appears to be a soup or stew. The children are of various ages and are wearing colorful clothing. One child in the foreground is wearing a pink shirt and a white headscarf. Another child is wearing a blue and white patterned headscarf. The adults are also wearing colorful clothing. The overall atmosphere is one of community and shared mealtime.

GROWING STRONG TOGETHER A PARENTING PROGRAM TO SUPPORT THE REINTEGRATION OF CHILDREN AND PREVENT THEIR RECRUITMENT

Intervention Curriculum



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IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION

Acknowledgements

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Consultancy

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The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (The Alliance) is a global network of operational agencies, academic institutions, policymakers, donors, and practitioners. It supports the efforts of humanitarian actors to achieve high-quality and effective child protection interventions in all humanitarian contexts. The Alliance achieves this primarily by facilitating inter-agency technical collaboration, including the production of technical standards and tools, on child protection in all humanitarian contexts.

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Introduction

This Intervention Curriculum - hereinafter “the Curriculum” - aims at supporting parents to protect children, adolescents and young people (8-21 years) from recruitment and promote their reintegration following association with armed forces or armed groups.

The Curriculum is one of the tools developed for the implementation of “Growing strong together: A Parenting Program to support the reintegration of children and prevent their recruitment”. It is part of a comprehensive resource pack informed by formative research findings in consultations with girls, boys and parents, and from a desk review of over 100 relevant resources.

The resource pack includes:

1. The Desk-Review informing the structure and the content of the entire pack
2. This Curriculum: “Growing strong together: A Parenting Program to support the reintegration of children and prevent their recruitment – Intervention Curriculum”
3. The Constant Companion: Facilitator’s Guide
4. The Training of the Facilitators (ToF) Guide
5. The Family Visits Guide
6. The Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework and Tools

If you are a facilitator, this Intervention Curriculum is for you, to help you implement the sessions of the Parenting Program for family and community members!

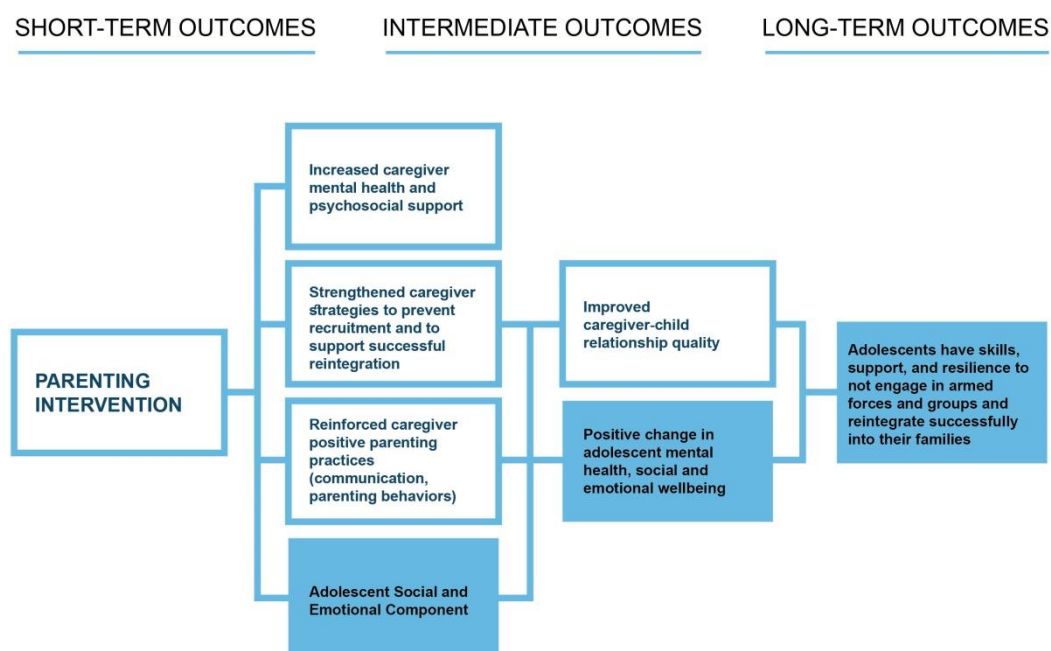
1. The Parenting Program

“Growing strong together: A Parenting Program to support the reintegration of children and prevent their recruitment” – hereinafter the “Parenting Program” - has been developed for contexts where Children have been Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (CAAFAG) or are at risk of association.

1.1 Goal of the Program

Children and adolescents affected by armed conflict are protected from recruitment and children and adolescents previously associated with armed groups receive support from their parents and guardians to reintegrate into families and communities and realize their full potential.

1.2 Theory of Change



1.3 Objectives of the Program

By the end of the program, parents have strengthened their capacities to:

- Identify the factors that can push or force their children to join armed groups, the risks they run and explain the consequences of their possible involvement with armed groups.
- Recognize their children's needs and the importance of understanding, respecting and valuing their children with all their aspirations, their opinions and struggles.
- Avoid harsh parenting practices and create positive relationships between them as parents and their children.
- Model the above-mentioned notions in their parenting styles and expressing them through communication, interaction and relationships with their children and other family members.
- Practice self-care strategies to reduce stress and manage emotions.

1.4 Program's fundamental values and principles

Four concepts are at the core of this Parenting Program: (i) the best interests of the child; (ii) child safeguarding; (iii) non-discrimination and inclusion; and (iv) gender equality. You, as the facilitator, must embody these principles in your approach and your facilitation.

The best interests of the child

When we talk about the *"best interests of the child"*, we should be primarily concerned with children's needs and rights, supporting children to grow, develop and achieve their full potential. For every need and right, there is a corresponding responsibility. Parents, among others, are responsible for their children's wellbeing and all their actions should keep in mind the best interests of their children as the primary concern.¹ The Parenting Program you are going to facilitate focuses on parents, and it ultimately aims at improving children's lives and wellbeing through parental responsibility.

In the Program we look at children as individuals, with their own capacities, capabilities and agency, even in the most restraining situations, but we also recognize children as human beings, who are growing and developing, and are entitled to particular rights and protection with their participation in matters that concern them.

Children and their families are also part of a broader community, and the best interests of the child can only be achieved when all social actors are involved in this effort. For parents, and community at large, fulfilling the best interests of their children should result in both protecting and empowering them. This balance is important at all times but might be undermined especially for children and adolescents living in conflict zones, who are particularly at risk of violence or traumatic experiences, and who are also covering roles and activities that in other communities/conditions are carried out exclusively by adults.

Child safeguarding

This Parenting Program, as all child protection programs, has been developed and will have to be implemented ensuring that (i) no staff or others working on behalf of IRC/any organization harm children and (ii) safety risks and cases of misconduct are identified, reported, and addressed in an appropriate and timely manner. In accordance with Article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), IRC recognizes the right of all children to be protected from all forms of abuse and exploitation and has a zero-tolerance policy regarding the abuse and exploitation of children.

All the workers involved in the implementation of this Parenting Program have been recruited ensuring that they are suitable to work with children. You, as a facilitator, must conduct yourself in a way that is safe for children and are required to report allegations of abuse and exploitation. Before starting your work, make sure you have read and understood your organizational Child Safeguarding Policy and if you have any doubt, feel free to ask the project team about it.²

Non-discrimination and inclusion

The principle of non-discrimination is embedded in the whole Program and its related facilitation style since all participants shall be treated equally, with no difference based on their *"race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status such as disability, age, marital and family status, sexual*

¹ [General Comment 14 on Best Interests of the Child and its relevance for state actors and service providers](#)

² The International Rescue Committee's child safeguarding policy is found here - [in English and in French](#)

orientation and gender identity, health status, place of residence, economic and social situation".³ Participants themselves are encouraged to treat their children and all the members of their family and community according to the same principle.

The Parenting Program aims at *leaving no one behind*, being as inclusive as possible. Some of the participants might come from disadvantaged backgrounds or belong to an ethnic minority, or face challenges such as disability, or might have specific requirements, and the Program allows for enough flexibility to be adapted to the variety of participants.

You, as facilitator, should constantly reflect on how inclusive your activities are. Each participant and each child you are responsible for is an individual. Even if they have faced similar challenges due to armed conflict – how they are affected, how they recover, how they learn, and how they support their children varies from individual to individual. You should use this individuality to strengthen the group and support their learning from each other.

Gender equality

Women and girls around the world do not fully experience equal rights and their potential often remains untapped. Starting from this consideration, the Program has been developed with gender equality and inclusion as core-values, always keeping in mind that being a female or a male child, a female or a male caregiver, a female or a male facilitator, has different meaning and consequences. This approach helps us not to fall into the trap of considering that what is needed by parents of male or female CAAFAG might guide a “*universalist*” program, presuming that all children share essentially the same (male or female) characteristics and experiences and consequently should receive the same kind of assistance. The unique dynamics, risk factors, and consequences of the involvement of boys and girls in armed groups are foregrounded, to help parents address their distinctive needs.

The Program also stresses the importance of recognizing and eliminating negative gender stereotypes within the family setting and it intentionally targets mothers and fathers alike. Both parents are responsible for their children and should take decisions together for the wellbeing of their children. The equality of their roles is at the backbone of this Parenting Program and you, as facilitator, should always keep it in mind during all the sessions, favoring collaboration.

Consider that in the majority of socioeconomic/geographical contexts females are responsible for child rearing, however it has been extensively proved that the role of male caregivers is fundamental as well, this Program in particular strongly supports the participation and involvement of men/boys and recognizes their value in building a nurturing and positive family environment.

For you, as facilitator, embracing the principle of gender equality and inclusion means taking into consideration gender dynamics which exist at a local level and that might compromise the effectiveness of the sessions implemented (for example, by paying attention to how certain activities might be received differently by men and women, or might be discussed with a different emphasis on the basis of gender or might reinforce gender stereotypes, discrimination or exclusion).

³ Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comment No. 20, Non-discrimination in economic, social and cultural rights (2009).



FURTHER RESOURCES:

The Constant Companion, which is part of this resource pack, will help you embrace gender equality and inclusivity in your work. You will also discuss these topics during the Training of Facilitators you will attend.

You will need to identify the most suitable approach towards gender equality and inclusion, based on the local context and community. The Supervisor of the Program will support you in doing that – remember to always discuss any doubts you have with him/her.

1.5 Terminology used within the Program

The following words recur throughout the Program's tools. They are used with a specific meaning that is usually more complex and broader than what we might think at first sight. Please read their definitions carefully and reflect on how they apply to your own context.

Children

The word “children”, in line with the CRC, refers to anyone under the age of 18. This program is designed for caregivers of children and adolescents, but also young people up to the age of 21. This age range should not be taken in a prescriptive way. Before starting your job as facilitator, you have to reflect on what being a “child”, “adolescent” or “young person” means and what being between the age of 8 and 21 years means in your context and community. Such reflections should involve the facilitators, the Supervisor of the Program, as well as the participants, who could discuss which term they find more appropriate to describe children who might fall into this age category. This will allow for the acknowledgement of the roles and responsibilities that boys and girls have within the family, the relationships with their relatives and community, the degree of freedom, vulnerability, agency and protection they are entitled to at different ages, and how it varies from context to context.

Children associated with armed groups

This expression refers to all Children, adolescents and young people who have been associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups (CAAFAG). This definition includes those who have taken part in any kind of role in an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, those involved as artists, such as children involved in cultural programs within the group, as well as those who have been in contact with such groups, accompanying them or engaging with them for any reason.

Parents

The word “parents” indicates all the people who have a close relationship with the child and are present in the child's life and have some form of parental responsibility. This includes: (i) fathers and mothers; (ii) aunts, uncles, grandparents, or other family members or kin; (iii) caregivers who do not have blood ties with the child. This Program aims to support the

reintegration of CAAFAG within their families and communities and to prevent their recruitment. Hence all the family and community members who have a close relationship with the child and who have his/her best interests in mind are welcome to participate.

Positive parenting

Positive parenting consists of a series of practices that focus on creating safe home environments and building a foundation of support and care for children, increasing parents' knowledge, and helping them recognize attitudes and behaviors that improve and support children's behavior and mental health. Different communities/cultures have different ways of providing positive and nurturing care to their children, e.g. through affection, quality time, praise and/or healthy methods of dealing with difficult behavior to encourage pro-social behavior. Systematic reviews on the effectiveness of parenting interventions in different geographical settings show that, if based on social learning theory principles, they are an effective strategy to improve parent–child relationships and reduce violence against children and disruptive child behavior everywhere⁴.

Reintegration

In this Program “reintegration” refers to the process through which children, adolescents and young people associated with armed forces and armed groups are integrated into civil society and enter into meaningful roles and identities as civilians who are accepted by their families and communities in a context of reconciliation (at local or national level). Sustainable reintegration is achieved when the political, legal, economic and social/cultural conditions needed for children to maintain life, livelihood and dignity have been secured. This process aims to ensure that children can access their rights, including formal and non-formal education, family unity, dignified livelihoods and safety from harm.

2. The Curriculum

2.1 Before you start: must knows

Who should take part in this journey?

The participants of the sessions are parents of children at risk of joining or associating themselves with armed groups, or parents of children who have joined armed groups and are currently trying to reintegrate into their families and communities. The entire Parenting Program is addressed to all caregivers. Therefore, parents may not necessarily have blood ties with the child, and the Program can also involve aunts, uncles, grandparents and any other family members or kin.

While the focus of the Program is on the families and caregivers, this **intervention needs to necessarily be integrated with a broader approach addressed to the larger family unit, the siblings, and extended family members, as well as the whole community**, to raise awareness and facilitate reintegration, to create the necessary accepting and welcoming environment that can prevent the risk of recruitment and ensure protection, support, security, and wellbeing of the child. While you facilitate this Curriculum, always keep in mind the common saying that “it takes a village to raise a child”.

Who should facilitate the sessions?

⁴ UNICEF Office of Research (OoR) – Innocenti. Research Brief 2017-10. “Parenting Interventions: How well do they transport from one country to another?”. Available at: https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/IRB_2017_10_R.pdf

This Curriculum should be delivered by **two co-facilitators**, who should share the various tasks needed to implement the sessions – coordinating the conversations with the parents, taking notes, preparing the materials, etc. Ideally, **the co—facilitators should be one male and one female.**

What is the rationale behind the sessions?

The Curriculum taps into parents' existing skills and knowledge, and via conversations, discussions and role plays followed by group feedback it aims at enhancing parents' abilities and empower them, in their role as nurturing caregivers.

The focus is on supporting parents discussing and identifying strategies to facilitate the reintegration of their children within the family environment, or to help them prevent the risk of recruitment.

In parallel, the Curriculum emphasizes the necessity for the parents to recognize their own strengths and needs, and to practice self-care strategies. In conflict-ridden environments self-care is essential. Therefore, the Program dedicates ample space for the parents to discuss, experiment, share and learn from each other on how to effectively reduce their stress and recognize and deal with intense emotions. While it is crucial that **locally appropriate self-care techniques** are discussed and presented, it is also essential to repeat, replicate, and try out these techniques multiple times over the course of the Program, to ensure that they become an integral part of the parents' everyday life, without resulting in extra burden.

You will find some tips and guidance on **how to facilitate** the sessions and how to coordinate among facilitators in the **Constant Companion and during the Training of the Facilitators**.

Are you well-prepared to facilitate this Curriculum?

BEFORE starting your job as facilitator, you must have:

1. Attended the Training of Facilitators included in this Parenting Program resource back.
2. Received training on the Foundations of Child Protection.
3. Received training on Gender-Based Violence (GBV) core concepts.
4. Received training on and be committed to Child safeguarding.

DURING the whole implementation of the Program (and facilitation of the sessions), you should:

5. Be familiar with and use “The Constant Companion: Facilitator’s Guide”.
6. Receive ongoing coaching and supervision beyond the training of facilitators.
7. Receive support from the Supervisor of the Program to contextualize the curriculum.

Who is there to help you?

The **Supervisor of the Program** is the main person you have to refer to.

First of all, you will discuss with him/her a structured and robust Referral Plan. Failing to identify **existing and functioning** agencies that can address specific issues of each family and child means failing to effectively support the child's secure reintegration. Before the implementation of the Program, you as facilitator and the Supervisor of the Program need to discuss which child protection actors are operational in the local context and what kind of support each actor can provide, as well as how participants can easily contact each specific actor.

At no point are you required to do a screening of the families. Throughout the Program the facilitators are encouraged to help the parents understand what problems might arise which the parents need to seek specialised help and support for, and where to find this help.

At the same time, you as facilitator are encouraged and supported throughout the Program to be vigilant and alert to recognise cases in which parents and families might struggle to seek help. Try to find possible paths to address these issues in consultation with the Supervisor of the Program.



REFERRAL PLAN AND REFERRAL HANDOUT

Before facilitating this session, you should have prepared a Referral Plan with a related Handout with your co-facilitator and the Supervisor of the Program. The Referral Plan contains all the indications for you, as facilitator, in case some particular issues arise, and gives you suggestions on if and how to intervene. The Referral Handout is a document related to the Referral Plan but meant for the participants. It includes a list of agencies operational in your local context and it describes the kind of support each agency can provide, as well as how participants can easily contact each specific agency.

What is there to help you?

Remember, you have the Constant Companion as a Guide to help you with:

- Facilitation tips to implement the activities - focusing on asking questions and moderating discussions; facilitating role plays; moderating activities with Open-Ended Stories; modelling your behavior; preparing for the sessions; opening and closing each working day.
- Skills and pre-existing knowledge that the facilitators should possess to implement this Curriculum.
- Practical tips on how to set up the sessions.
- Contextualization reminders.
- Potential issues or challenges you might encounter when facilitating and how to address them.
- Where to find additional support.

2.2 The components of the Curriculum

What will you find in this Curriculum?

In this manual you will find **20 Sessions**, each session lasting between 1 hour and 3 hours in order to cover the content. The actual time will vary from location to location, as this is influenced by the dynamics of the group or the size of the parenting group. Feel free to adapt the training agenda to your needs (you will find more on the suggested training agenda in the **Constant Companion**).

Sessions

This Curriculum is divided in Sessions. Following an overview of one Session:

SESSION 1 PART 1: WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION TO THE PROGRAM

Overview of the session:

Time 45 min

NOTE: This duration is only an indication and is dependent on the size of the group. This timing refers to a group of 15 participants.

Objectives:

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- List the objectives and methodologies of the session;
- Co-construct the group rules for the sessions and commitment of all group members
- Express their anxieties and worries and define their expectations for the sessions.

Activities Overview:

Session 1	Welcome and introduction to the program	TOTAL 45 min
Act 1	Welcoming participants and introduction to the sessions	10 min
Act 2	Energizer - getting to know each other	10 min
Act 3	Defining the rules	15 min
Act 4	Hopes and fears	10 min

Resource Needed:

- Referral plan already filled in;
- Flipcharts and markers

Content:

The sessions are based on participants' peer learning: by sharing their experiences and knowledge, they learn from each other. This requires the creation of a safe place for sharing and learning. During this first session, you will present the objectives and the methodology of the sessions and support the creation of a safe atmosphere. You will stress the confidential nature of the information shared during the whole Program. You will encourage participants to get to know each other and invite them to collectively negotiate the norms to effectively work together during the sessions.

Time: The length of the session is offered as a guideline and it reflects a group composition of 15/20 people. With a larger group you will need more time.

In general, it is recommended to have 1 – 2 sessions per week. That way, the sessions give space for the parents to reflect and time to internalise the past sessions before moving on to the next session. You will therefore need to decide on the number of sessions per week with the participants, as well as the timing and location based on what you agreed with the participants during the **pre-session meeting**. On average, the sessions are 2 hours long, but a few last up to 3 hours. This might be okay or might inconvenience some parents. You will need to discuss this with the parents. For example, if you decided to meet once a week for 2 hours maximum, the Program will last around 4.5 months. If participants preferred to meet twice a week for 1-3 hrs (as per session plan), you will probably work together for 10-11

weeks (2.5 months). Information on the pre-session meeting can be found in the **Constant Companion**.

Objectives: The session objective tells you what participants will learn and be able to do at the end of that session.

Activities Overview: Here you have a list of the activities of the session and the time needed for each activity.

Resource Needed: Here you will find what you need to prepare to facilitate the session. Make sure you revise all these elements before the session and that all materials are ready in advance. Coordinate with your co-facilitator to take care of this task.

Session summary: Have a look here, to see what the session will focus on and how it is organized.

Activities

CLOSING THE DAY: HOME PRACTICE AND EVALUATION (15 MIN)

Aims:

To recap the day, introduce and discuss the home practice and assess the session.

Materials:

Copies of the Homepractice handout: Gender equality in the household; (if possible)
Flipchart with hopes and fears from Session 1. Activity 4.

Modality: PLENARY

1. Ask one of two volunteers to recap two of the things discussed today.
2. Hand out the Home practice handout: Gender equality in the household
3. Explain that in the handout they will find a reminder of actions that they can take to promote gender equality in the household. Remember that these are only some examples - make sure you integrated these parent proposed during the previous conversations.
4. Say:
 - Gender equality in the household is only one of the many strategies to address the specific and unique needs of our daughters.
 - Nonetheless this is a crucial step towards acknowledging their unique needs, showing them respect and helping them feel valued and empowered and allowing them to thrive.
5. If you've had the chance to make the notes of the participants' hopes and fears on a flipchart; draw their attention towards it and ask them to place a star or stars on hopes that are realized.
6. Next, ask them to take a marker and remove fears that are starting to be overcome.
7. Then, ask them to add new fears or hopes that might have emerged.
8. Finally, ask the following questions to the group and make notes of the answers.
 - a. Is there anything that you particularly liked about this session?
 - b. Is there anything that you found particularly useful?
 - c. Is there anything that you would do differently?
9. Thank everyone for their participation and engagement.

Every Session contains different Activities. Following an overview of one Activity:

Time: The length of the activity is offered as a guideline and it reflects a group composition of 15/20 people. With a larger group you will need more time. Also, each activity can take more or less time depending on how engaged participants are and how much discussion is generated in each activity.

Aims: Here you find what participants will explore through the activity. This is what you, as a facilitator, should aim towards, as you facilitate this session. Keep this in mind especially when guiding participants' discussions or when they are sharing their own experiences and ideas.

Materials: Here you will find what you need to prepare to facilitate the activity. Make sure you revise all these elements before the session and that all materials are ready in advance. Coordinate with your co-facilitator to take care of this task.

Modality: In some of the activities, participants work in a group, or as pairs or as a plenary. You will find this information here.

ASK: To help you facilitate the discussion with the group, you will find the indication "ASK" accompanied by a series of questions. Do not forget to contextualize and edit these questions based on the context and the group composition.

SAY: In each activity you will find guidance on what to say, especially after participants' sharing moments. Remember that this Program is based on participants' mutual learning and on the acknowledgment that they already possess most of the skills and knowledge we will be discussing. Your role is not to lecture, but to guide their exchanges, highlighting the key points that help reach the aims of each of the activities. Therefore, use the notes after "SAY" only when these points have not been highlighted by the participants and/or to recap their conversations. Make sure you adapt these points and you integrate what emerges from what the participants' shared.

Pictogram for the facilitators: In some sessions/activities you will find a separate page called "Pictograms for the Facilitators". These are indicated under the list of **materials within each activity** and you will find them within the activity they refer to. These pictograms are visual aids that you can either reproduce on a flipchart or photocopy from the manual and show to participants. You do not need to distribute them to participants: they are only supposed to help participants recall pieces of information or instructions that you have provided. Once again, consider your context and edit them to make sure they are easily recognizable.

Facilitators' Notes: Here you will find additional information to help you facilitate discussions. Do not forget to contextualize the content of these notes before starting the Program. Also, these notes need to be integrated with what emerges from the participants' sharing moments.

Home practice handouts: In some of the sessions you will provide participants with a reminder of what has been discussed and tips to continue to practice the skills and behaviors at home. The home practice handout is a one-pager that needs to be contextualized and adapted before the session; you need to print one copy per participant beforehand and distribute it at the end of the session, during the "Closing the day" activity.

Writing and group discussions: To facilitate the participation of parents with limited literacy skills, you can conduct all the activities without asking participants to read or write. Nonetheless, make sure you keep track of what is being said: you can make notes on your notebook, or use a flipchart. Do not forget to **coordinate with your co-facilitator** to cover this task.

You can find more information on how to take notes during facilitation and how to coordinate group works and discussions in the **Constant Companion** and in the **Training of the Facilitator**.

Icons

In this Curriculum you will find some icons that will help you identify when a particular action is required.



Learn more:

This icon indicates when you might need to deepen your understanding of a particular topic, giving you additional resources to read.



Tips for you: Here you will find suggestions on how to communicate something to the participants and on how to perform a particular task, especially when dealing with sensitive issues.



Group work: To enhance the engagement of participants and promote critical reflection you will see that many of the discussions are organized around group work. Make sure that groups mix up every now and then. Also, make sure that mixed gender groups are appropriate, and, if group work is not appropriate locally, you can opt for working as family units or substitute group work with plenary discussions.



Plenary: In some cases, the debate will involve all participants together; always remember to involve everyone in the conversation (you find some tips for facilitating debates in plenary in the **Constant Companion**).



Pair work: Invite and encourage participants to work in pairs. Depending on your context and the participants' profiles, you can opt for working as a family unit (father and mother together, or mother and auntie, etc.).



Contextualization: This icon indicates that you need to think about the content and the activities of a session (or a part of it) and identify whether it needs to be adapted to reflect the local community and current situation the participants and their children are experiencing. An initial reflection on the general contextualization of the whole Curriculum needs to take place before the implementation of the sessions, but do not forget to take note of any aspect that

might emerge through the practice. More on how to adapt and contextualize the sessions to your local context can be found in the **Constant Companion** and is covered during **the training the facilitators attend to learn how to best work in this Parenting Program**. Furthermore, **the Learning and Development Toolkit⁵** can also be used to contextualize training.



Intense emotions: These sessions could trigger intense emotions. Be extra careful and prepared when facilitating these sessions. This aspect is also very dependent on the local context and norms. Discuss any doubt about these or other sessions with your **co-facilitator and with the Supervisor of the Program** during the **pre-implementation liaison**. You will find some tips on how to deal with intense emotions while facilitating in the **Constant Companion**.

⁵ <https://alliancecpha.org/en/child-protection-online-library/learning-and-development-toolkit>

Session 1: Overview

Time: 2 h 55'

Note to Facilitator: This is a long session, which is divided into two parts: part 1 introduces the Program, while in Part 2 participants start discussing their understanding of their child's development and needs.

You can either conduct this session in one single meeting or split it in two and cover it over two encounters. If in consultation with the parents you opt for doing it in one day, make sure you incorporate at least two breaks. Otherwise, make sure that you start each encounter with a welcoming moment, and you conclude with a closing and summarizing one.

Summary of Session

Part 1	Welcome and introduction to the program	TOTAL 45 min
Act. 1	Welcoming participants and introduction to the sessions	10 min
Act. 2	Energizer – getting to know each other	10 min
Act. 3	Defining the rules	15 min
Act. 4	Hopes and fears	10 min
Session 1 Part 2	My child and I	TOTAL 110 min
Act. 1	Growing strong together: children's development and the role of the family and community	50 min
Act 2	What does gender mean?	20 min
Act 3	Boys' needs, girls' needs	30 min
	Closing the day and evaluation	10 min

Session 1

Part 1: Welcome and Introduction to the Program



Part 1: Welcome & Introduction to the Program

Overview of the session

Time ⌚ **45 min** - **NOTE:** This duration is only an indication and is dependent on the size of the group. This timing refers to a group of 15 participants.

Objectives:

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- List the objectives and methodologies of the session.
- Co-construct the group rules for the sessions and commitment of all group members.
- Express their anxieties and worries and define their expectations for the sessions.

Activities Overview:

Session 1	<i>Welcome and introduction to the Program</i>	TOTAL 45 min
Act. 1	Welcoming participants and introduction to the sessions	10 min
Act. 2	Energizer – getting to know each other	10 min
Act. 3	Defining the rules	15 min
Act. 4	Hopes and fears	10 min

Resource Needed:

- Referral Plan and related Referral Handout.
- Flipcharts and markers.

Session summary:

The sessions are based on participants' peer learning: by sharing their experiences and knowledge, they learn from each other. This requires the creation of a safe space for sharing and learning. During this first session, you will present the objectives and the methodology of the sessions and support the creation of a safe atmosphere. You will stress the confidential nature of the information shared during the whole Program. You will encourage participants to get to know each other and invite them to collectively negotiate the rules and norms of behavior within the group to effectively work together during the sessions.

Activity 1. Welcoming participants and introduction to the sessions (10 min)

Aims: To welcome participants and establish a positive atmosphere; to introduce the objectives of the sessions and methodology utilized.

Modality:



Plenary

1. While people are getting seated, greet participants one by one and take the time to get to know each of them.
2. Smile and show a positive attitude! Thank everyone for being there.
3. Introduce yourself: say your name and something about your background.
4. Give the floor to your co-facilitator to introduce him/herself.
5. The participants are likely to be nervous about the nature and content of the sessions and they will have many questions.
6. **SAY:**
 - Thank you for coming! As parents, you have a central role in ensuring your children's wellbeing and helping them make the right choices in life. Being a parent is also a great challenge: we are here to share our experiences and challenges, gain support and strength from each other, and seek additional help when needed.
 - Some of us here may have children, others may be caring for children, and others may be in a household with children. And this makes all of us important people in the lives of these children.
 - These sessions are based on our active participation and involvement: through conversations and discussions, we will learn from each other to find the most suitable approaches to support our children. Please put away anything that might be laying in front of you. You just need to focus on what we will be doing here together. I will be using questions and activities, because we all need to share, listen and learn together here. This Program works only if we work all together and participate, sharing the things we know and feel.
 - With this Program we aim at supporting you as parents in welcoming your children home, and/or preventing their recruitment by armed groups or armed forces, by managing their ongoing needs for care and protection.
 - Together we will discuss some reasons that could lead our children to joining armed groups, the risks they run and consequences of the possible involvement with armed groups.
 - We will acknowledge our children's needs and the importance of understanding, respecting and valuing them with all their aspirations, their opinions and their struggles, preventing their potential inclusion in armed groups or facilitating their reintegration if they have been recruited by armed groups.
 - We will also recognize how our everyday interactions and relationships with our children can channel such respectful, caring and nurturing attitudes towards them.
 - Finally, we will discuss the strategies that we utilize to take care of ourselves as parents and caregivers.

7. Remember that this is a safe space for sharing: all the information shared here will remain here. If you need any specific support, you can always reach us (facilitators), at any point before or after the sessions.

Activity 2. Energizer - getting to know each other (10 min)

Aims: To facilitate introductions, establishing a positive and relaxed atmosphere .

Modality:



Plenary

1. Ask participants whether they know a name-learning game, and if they are willing to demonstrate it.
2. If no one is willing or able to contribute, use the following energizer game to help participants learn each other's names and to build a positive and relaxed atmosphere.
3. Ask participants to form a circle (possibly standing). Choose someone to start the game.
4. Ask the first person to say: "My name is (Name here) and I like (object that starts with the same letter as their first name)", for example, my name is Maria and I like Mangoes.
5. Then the next person says the same thing with their name, while also repeating the sentence of the person before. For example, "her name is Maria and she likes mangoes. My name is Ali and I like animals". Every person in the circle repeats the same process, until the last person in the circle, who repeats everyone's names and objects.

Activity 3. Defining the Rules (15 min)

Aims: To involve everybody in deciding the rules for the sessions.

Materials: (Optional) Flipchart; Marker.

Modality:



Plenary



Tips for you - Examples of rules

- Always respect other participants' opinions
- Avoid using the phone
- Be on time

Try to formulate the rule in positive rather than negative terms (instead of "do not be late" use "be on time")

1. SAY:

- We are all from different homes, but we make one community.
- We have come together in these sessions to achieve the same objectives. We will spend time together in the coming months. It is important that we all agree on how to conduct ourselves when we meet.

2. ASK:

- i. Why do you think this is necessary to have such guidance?

3. SAY:

- Some rules are necessary to help the sessions succeed. Which rules do you think we should have in this group to work together during our sessions?

4. Give everyone one minute to think and invite someone to start sharing ideas. Note the suggestions on a flipchart or use symbols that represent the idea.

5. After every suggestion, ask whether everyone agrees.

6. ASK:

- a. Which rules do you think that we as facilitators should follow?

In this way, you encourage the participants to feel that the sessions are a dialogue between equals.

7. Once everyone has shared,

ASK:

- a. Do you all agree with the rules we have defined here?

8. Edit the flipchart until an agreement with the entire group is reached.

9. Finally, explain that one of the fundamental principles of the Program is *confidentiality and mutual respect*.

10. ASK:

- a. What does mutual respect imply? What about confidentiality?

11. SAY:

- Mutual respect implies that we should listen to everyone's opinion, without judgement; we should also let everyone have a say, without excluding anyone.
- Confidentiality means that we keep information and experiences shared during the sessions private, we do not share them outside the Program.

12. If possible, leave the flipchart somewhere where it can be kept as a reminder for the remainder of the Program.

Activity 4. Hopes and Fears (10 min)

Aims: To allow participants to voice any worries they have and share their expectations for these sessions. For the facilitator to gauge expectations and any reservations.

Materials: (Optional) One flipchart divided into two columns labelled "Hopes" and "Fears"; marker.

Modality:



Plenary

1. **SAY:**
 - It is normal to feel excited or anxious at the beginning of a Program. I would like to start by finding out what hopes and fears you have brought with you today.
2. **ASK:**
 - a. Now, think about one hope and one fear you might have about this Program.
3. Invite a volunteer to start sharing his/her hopes.
4. Once done, invite the rest of the participants to stand up if they feel they share the same hope.
5. Repeat until everyone has had a chance to share his/her hopes. If possible, take notes on the flipchart, trying to connect these, seeing which are similar.
6. Now, repeat the process with the fears.
7. Once done, provide a short recap. Invite participants to share if there is anything else that should be added.
8. **SAY:**
 - Thank you for sharing your thoughts! During the next weeks we will try to tackle all these expectations and fears together.
9. If there is any hope or fear that will not be the focus of the Program, tell participants that these aspects will not be tackled in the next sessions.
10. If any fear or hope emerged, which touches on individual needs or issues of participants, have the **Referral Plan** at hand and make a short reference to the services available, which can provide individual support. Remember not to put people in the spotlight but speak generally about these support systems. The Referral Plan should have been developed before the implementation of these sessions together with the **Supervisor of the Program**.
11. If you have had the chance of noting the answers on a flipchart, keep the flipchart at hand during the next sessions so that you can revise whether any of the hopes has been fulfilled or any of the fears have been tackled.

Note: If you have decided to conduct this session in one encounter with the participants, make sure you take a 10 minutes break here and then continue with the next activity in Session 1 part 2.

If you have decided to split this session over 2 encounters, close the current meeting with the **activity “Closing the day and evaluation”** that you will find at the end of Session 1 Part 2. Remember to start next time with a welcoming moment: you can use the instructions from Session 2 Activity 1.

Part 2: My child and I



Part 2: My child and I

Time ⌚ 1h 40 min

Objectives: By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Recognize children's roles, needs and responsibilities.
- Describe the basic principles of child development.
- Reflect on gender implications for children's growth and identity.

Session 1 Part 2	My child and I	TOTAL 110 min
Act. 1	Growing strong together: children's development and the role of the family and community	50 min
Act 2	What does gender mean?	20 min
Act 3	Boys' needs, girls' needs	30 min
	Closing the day and evaluation	10 min

Resources Needed:

- **Referral Plan and related Referral Handout.**
- **Flipcharts and markers.**
- (If possible) Flipchart with hopes and fears from [Session 1. Activity 5.](#)
- Reproduce the **5 Pictograms for the facilitators** on 5 flipcharts, so that everyone can see them. Alternatively, you can make copies and distribute. You will find the Pictograms in the next pages:

Session summary:

Participants reflect on the development of their children, linking it to the way they feel, communicate and act at different stages of their growth. In this session we will also set the basis for one of the concepts that is central throughout the whole module: gender.

Activity 1. Growing strong together: children's development and the role of the family and community (50 minutes)

Aims: To discuss elements that contribute to the healthy development of a child; to recognize the role that loving and caring family relationships have on the development of the child, at different stages of their growth.

Modality:



Plenary

1. **SAY:** (Fictional scenario)
I want to present to you Sandra. Sandra lives in your village/city. She is a 35-year-old woman, she has a husband and three children. She has encountered challenging situations during the years, but she thinks of herself as a content person, who has become the best that she could be.
2. **ASK:**
 - a. What do you think are things that make her a content woman? Think about her personality, her family life, her relationships with her children and husband, her economic situation, her work, her health.
3. Gather some ideas, and then **SAY:**
 - Some of these elements that make Sandra a content person are external, and she might have had little influence on them. For example, she might be living in a conflict-free area (*edit and use an example that was provided by the participants*).
 - On the other hand, she had the chance to influence many of the elements that contributed to making her a happy adult.
4. **ASK:**
 - a. What do you think helped her become a happy, satisfied person?
 - b. What contributed to her healthy development as an adult?
 - c. How do you think her family environment when she was a child might have contributed to her development?
5. Gather some ideas, and if needed integrate the conversation with the points below, **SAY:**
 - Everyone, both boys and girls, are born with the brain capacity to be strong, be smart, be happy adults.
 - When we live in a loving family, and we are surrounded by a caring community, our development is supported and encouraged. A loving, and stress-free environment has a huge impact on the way our brain develops: it helps to make it strong, more able to think critically, solve problems, and learn to face challenging situations and cope with them.
6. **ASK:** Now, let's imagine what some of the things could be that could have negative consequences for Sandra's development and wellbeing.
7. Invite some participants to share their ideas. Some examples of answers could be: she lives in a war area, she has lost her job, her family did not have enough resources to let her study etc.
8. Next **SAY:**
 - There are plenty of possible challenges that could negatively affect a child's development and make it harder for that child to grow into a happy and healthy adult.
 - Sandra might have faced big challenges in her life, but having had a loving family environment when she was a child has surely helped her deal with these issues and grow up to be a healthy, strong and happy person.
 - If the child is provided from the very beginning of her life with loving and caring family relationships, which support, stimulate and understand her, we are providing her with a safety net, a parachute that will accompany her for the rest of her life and help her cope with difficulties, both when she is a child and as a grown up.
9. **ASK:**

- a. What do you consider to be loving and caring family relationships?
Some examples of answers here could be: the family members show each other affection; they listen to each other; they avoid yelling at each other etc. Be open and let participants share how they see loving family relationships. (Note: write down the answers and use them in section 10).
 - b. How can they help the child deal with challenging situations and become a happy adult?
10. Convey the following points, making sure that you integrate the suggestions provided by the participants of what loving and caring family relationships are. **SAY:**

LOVING AND CARING FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

Make sure you encourage participants to share what they identify as loving and caring family relationships (see Step 810- Activity 1).

Use their points to facilitate the discussions and refer to these aspects throughout the course of the entire Program: this is what you will be aiming towards together.

At the same time, the parents can suggest some behaviors which cannot be accepted as expressions of loving relationships, and that need to be addressed right away here, as well as in the course of the entire Program: any form of violence or harsh punishment should be tackled and avoided. For example, if parents suggest that obedience and respect are aspects of loving family relationships, inquire what this means in practice, and how can children show obedience and respect. Also, ask whether parents are equally prepared to respect their children, and how. You should make sure that it is clear from the very beginning that violence and harsh punishment are not acceptable and equally that mutual respect is a key element of a loving environment.

- Repeated stress, exposure to traumatic events and violence can cause “toxic stress”.
- Toxic stress can mean the brain is constantly in a state of “danger” and does not manage to function normally. Toxic stress can make it harder for children to make safe and healthy decisions.
- For example, children who have been recruited by armed groups, can be exposed to long lasting violence and stress, and this can have a deep impact on their brain.
- This does not mean that there is no hope: children have the ability to recover from these experiences and go back to being healthy, happy human beings, but they need help.
- By providing a loving, supportive, stimulating, predictable and stress-free environment, parents can help the child’s brain recover from stressful experiences and help children grow up to be happy and healthy.
- By being responsive towards your child’s needs, you promote and ensure her safety and security.
- *(Integrate the points you have noted, that the parents consider to be loving and caring family relationships) By respecting each other, listening to each other, avoiding violence at home, finding time to spend with each other, we are building and providing a loving, encouraging, stimulating and supportive environment. This helps children develop as strong, healthy, human beings, who are able to solve problems, build positive relations themselves, face critical situations and find strategies to cope with them.*

11. ASK:

- a. While all children need care, love, respect and protection from their family and from the community, they also have changing needs, at different stages of their life.
- b. Let's think about Sandra's life as a child. What do you think she was able to do when she was 8 years old?
- c. What did she like?
- d. What were some of her needs?
- e. Which things contributed to her healthy development when she was 8? Some answers can be: a healthy diet, feeling loved by her family, good relationships in the neighborhood, going to school etc.

Ask parents to think about her family environment, her relationship with her parents, siblings, other family members, her community; her health; what she did in her free time; her school life; her friends.

12. SAY:

- Now imagine Sandra at the age of 14.

13. ASK:

- a. What do you think she was able to do when she was 14 years old?
- b. What did she like when she was 14, that she did not like before? What did she like as a smaller child, that she did not like when she was 14?
- c. What were her needs when she was 14?
- d. Which things contributed to her healthy development when she was 14? Some answers can be: a healthy diet, having many friends, helping her family at home, going to school, etc.

Again, think about her family environment, her relationship with her parents, siblings, other family members, her community; her health; what she did in her free time; her school life; her friends.

2. Integrate the following points with what emerged from the conversations with the parents.

SAY:

- Biological changes in their bodies and mind, as well as experiences they are exposed to, determine changes in children's behavior, feelings, abilities, interests and needs.
- During adolescence, the part of the brain that deals with complex behaviors such as planning or decision-making changes, and this change continues into early adulthood.
- Consequently, the child starts learning to control impulses, use good judgment, plan and think about the consequences of actions.
- Older children can be helped by their parents to learn how to make good decisions and use good judgment, for example by discussing together the decisions that affect their life.
- Also, older children experience puberty. During puberty, a child's body changes as it grows into adulthood, and this has also a big impact on a child's emotions and feelings: They might feel confused, overwhelmed or experience intense emotions.
- As they enter adulthood, older children also start needing more independence: the peer group, and the recognition they receive from them becomes more and more important. While biology has a central role in children's growth, the differences

between younger and older children are more based on children's individual lives and experiences, and on what our community thinks and expects from our children, at different stages of their life, rather than on biology.

- Reflecting on our children's development and changing needs can help us reflect on the way in which we support them, at different stages of their life.
- Equally, living where there is armed conflict has a big impact on child's development, and on their needs. We need to think about our experiences and behavior as parents to respond appropriately to these changing needs and just as it is challenging to live in uncertainty for adults, it is the same for children and they seek reassurance from their parents or other supportive persons in their lives.
- This means, all children, no matter what their age, need your support as parents: they need you to stay tuned to their cues, they need you to try to understand what their needs are, and, through meaningful communication and interaction, they need you to stimulate a trustful and supportive relationship.
- Do not worry, this is a lot of information! We will spend the next several sessions talking about how to help our children learn the skills needed to live safe, healthy and happy lives. We will talk about how to support their continued healthy brain development through predictable, stimulating, and nurturing parenting practices.

5 minutes break (Optional): Find a locally appropriate way to take a break and relax. You can invite some participants to volunteer and share a locally appropriate relaxation technique, such a song or a quick game. If no one volunteers, be ready to propose a short and energizing activity..

Activity 2. What does gender mean? (20 min)

Aim: To recognize what gender means.

Modality:



Plenary

1. Ask participants to reflect on their own childhood and that of their children's.
2. **ASK:**
 - a. What do you think has changed in terms of the treatment of boys and girls?
 - b. What are some of the things that have changed because of the context of armed conflict? How has this changed how boys are treated? What about girls?

- c. How do these roles or perceptions create a safe environment for boys and girls?
- d. How do these roles or perceptions cause harm to boys and girls?
- e. What do you think gender and sex are, and how are they different?

NOTE: This could be a heated discussion, based on the local context. Do not worry! This is only the first of a series of activities aimed at reflecting on the role of gender and gender norms on the child's development, needs and expectations and the relationship between the parents.

3. Convey these points below, only if they did not emerge through the conversation before!

SAY:

- Girls and boys are very similar: while we may think girls and boys develop differently, research indicates that there are few actual differences. Besides a few biological exceptions, such as giving birth, or nursing a baby, boys and girls can do the same things.
- What girls were not allowed to do in the past is different from today, and it will continue to change, because this is not due to the biology of our bodies, but to what our society and harmful cultural practices expects from boys and from girls.
- To understand this, we needed to distinguish between two elements:
- Sex: refers to the biological differences between males and females, such as the genitalia, genetics and hormones.
- Gender: refers to the other differences between boys and girls, such as clothing style, manner, behaviors, tastes, family roles and education, which are defined by norms, roles and relationships. These aspects vary from society to society and can be changed.

Activity 3. Boys' needs, girls' needs (30 min)

Aims: To recognize myths and truths about gender; to reflect on the unique and similar needs of the child based on their gender and age.

Modality:  **Plenary**

1. Explain that you will make some statements, and after each statement the participants should remain seated if they believe that the statement is true or stand up if they think it is a myth/false (if possible, otherwise invite them to lift their hands). Read the following statements and invite a few volunteers to explain the reason for their choice after each statement. Make sure to highlight which ones are the myths and which are truths after each discussion (you find this information in parenthesis).



- a. Boys should not be encouraged to share their emotions. (Myth)
- b. Girls and boys can be equally sensitive and caring. (Truth)
- c. Boys need more independence than girls. (Myth)
- d. Girls need more guidance in their life. (Myth)

- e. Both girls and boys can be negatively affected by violence. (truth)
- f. Boys are more inclined to violence. (Myth)
- g. Both boys and girls can be victims of recruitment by armed groups. (Truth)

2. **SAY:**

- Our thoughts around boys' and girls' needs and experiences are often influenced by myths. Research shows that while there are biological differences between boys and girls, there is also a lot that is similar.
- How a child behaves or what she/he likes is largely influenced by his/her educational background, health, relationships and economic background. The differences we perceive are mostly due to how our culture and society think that boys and girls should behave, what they should like or dislike and the roles they should take: for example boys may be expected to be tougher and not emotional, while girls may be expected to be caring and sensitive. These ideas do not have any biological grounding.
- Because of the different roles and responsibilities that society attributes to girls and boys, they have different **needs**, and they are exposed to different potential **risks**.
- As parents, we need to be particularly careful in supporting our girls' needs, as well as our boys', and promote equality in the household, because this has a big impact on our children's wellbeing.

GIRLS' NEEDS AND RISKS

The specific needs and risks that girls might face largely depend on the local context, culture, norms and roles. Also, how these needs and risks change with age is influenced by these same factors.

Consider that, in general, girls are more at risk than boys, they are often not asked their opinion, or they don't make decisions, and so they have less power. They might be more subjected to violence, including rape, they might be forced to get married.

3. **ASK:**

- a. What are the differences between boys and girls in terms of their **needs**?
- b. What are the differences in terms of the **risks** they can be exposed to?
- c. What are the differences between boys and girls who have been recruited by armed groups in terms of **risks**?
- d. What are differences of **needs**?
- e. How can we as parents promote equality in the house between boys and girls, but also make sure we address their different needs?

4. **Reflect on what has emerged through the discussion. Convey the following points only if they did not emerge in the conversation. SAY:**

- Thank you for sharing your examples.

- Boys and girls who are recruited by armed groups are both exposed to risks, but girls are more likely to be exposed to discrimination or harm because they are women/female, and often they are more at risk of stigmatization when they return to their communities.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE:

Gender-based violence has its roots in gender inequalities. It refers to violence against a person because of their gender. Both women and men experience Gender-Based Violence. but the majority of victims are women and girls

- *(Integrate the next point with some of the examples that emerged from the conversation with the participants)* Promoting gender equality in the house can mean:
 - i. Expecting similar things from our boys and girls, for example, expecting both boys and girls to be able to be polite, caring, sensitive as well as strong, courageous and bold.
 - ii. Asking our boys and girls of a similar age to take similar roles in the house, for example asking both of them to help clean the house, or care for younger siblings, or fetch water.
 - iii. Respecting them in the same way and avoiding using any form of violence against both boys and girls.
 - iv. Seeing them both as capable of similar things in the present and in the future, for example assuming that both can be equally good at school, and both have similar chances of becoming doctors, or mechanics.
- Treating our boys and girls in a similar way and protecting our girls from **Gender-Based Violence** has a big impact in the prevention of recruitment and in helping children reintegrate into the family.
- Do not worry – in the next sessions we will explore these aspects further.

Closing the day and evaluation (10 min)

Aims: To recap the day and assess the session.

Materials: (If possible) Flipchart with hopes and fears from [Session 1. Activity 4.](#)

Modality:



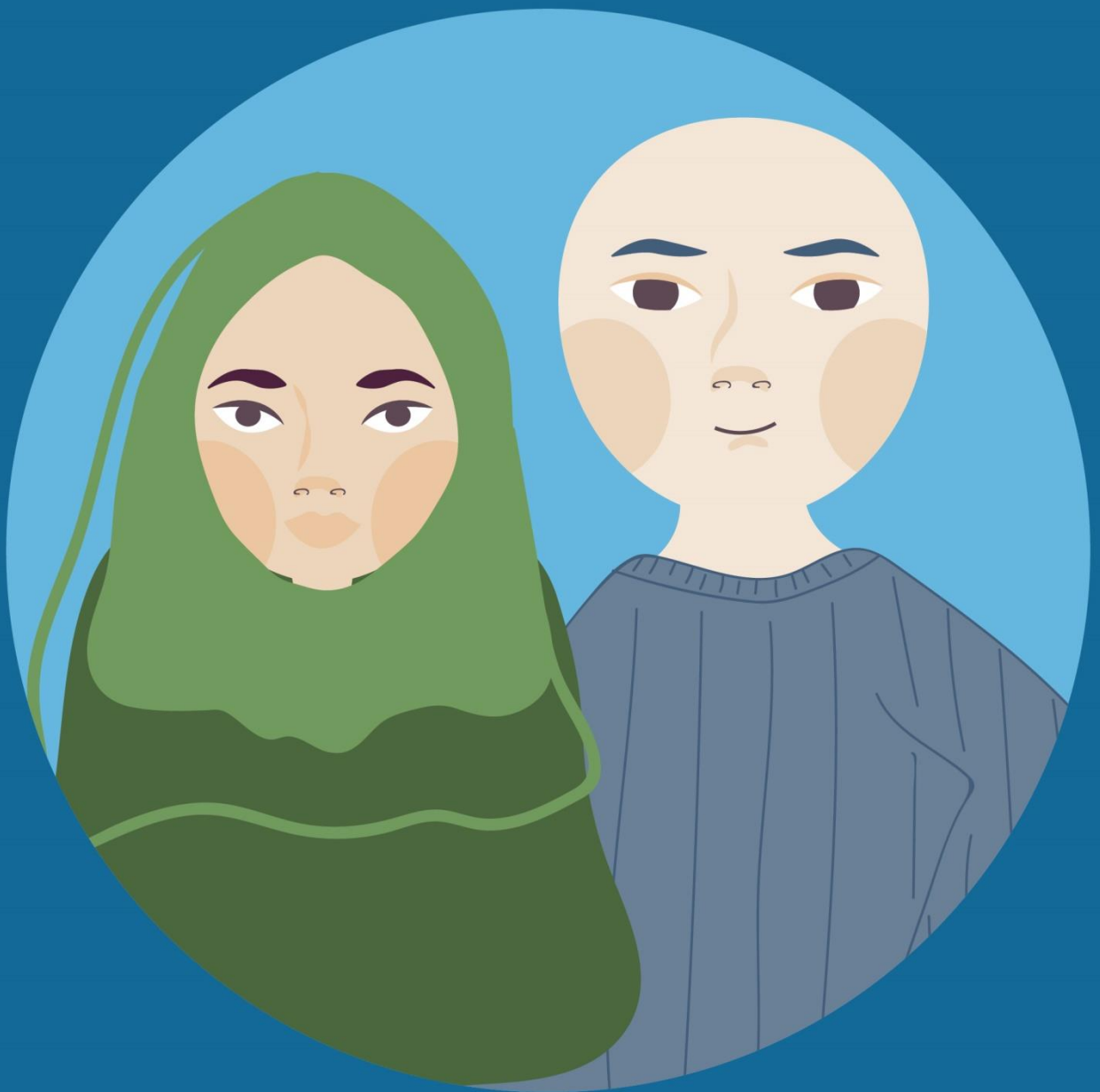
Plenary

1. **ASK** one or two volunteers to recap two things discussed today.
2. If you've had the chance to make notes of the [participants' hopes and fears on a flipchart](#), draw their attention to it and ask them to place a star on hopes that are realized.
3. Next, take a marker and remove fears that are starting to be overcome.
4. Then, ask them to add new fears or hopes that might have emerged.

5. **Finally, ASK** the following questions to the group.
 - a. **Is there anything that you particularly liked about this first session?**
 - b. **Is there anything that you found useful?**
 - c. **Is there anything that you would do differently or wanted to add on?**
6. Thank everyone for their participation and engagement.

Session 2

Our role as parents



Session 2: Our role as parents

Time ⌚ 3h

Note to Facilitator: This is a very rich and long session, which might be extended further if you think that discussing family, culture and gender roles might require more time. Therefore, we would recommend you consider splitting this session into two parts and conducting it over 2 encounters. For example, you could conduct activities 1 to 3 over one encounter, and activities 4 and 5 over another one. If you do so, remember to always start the session with a welcoming moment (activity 1) and close with a recap and evaluation.

Aims: By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Share their experiences of their roles and responsibilities as parents.
- Unpack together the impact of gender on their family roles and dynamics.
- Identify specific parenting practices for children with disabilities.
- Recognize positive and negative customs related to parenting and child rearing practices.

Activities Overview:

Session 2		TOTAL 180 min
Act. 1	Welcoming participants	10 min
Act 2	Recognizing our role as parents	40 min
Act 3	Addressing the needs of children with disabilities	50 min
Act 4	Children's gender and family roles	40 min
Act 5	Parents' gender and family roles	30 min
	Closing the day and evaluation	10 min

Resources Needed:

- Referral Plan and related Referral Handout.
- Flipcharts and markers.
- (If possible) Flipchart with hopes and fears from [Session 1. Activity 4.](#)

Session summary:

Participants will reflect on their own beliefs and cultural norms around parental roles and child rearing practices and on their role as parents and their way of caring for a child. The parents will discuss customs related to parenting which can have a positive impact on a child and on the family relationships, and those that can have a negative impact. Participants will also reflect on the impact of gender and disability on their parenting practices. They will explore their behaviors towards their daughters, and whether they have different roles as male and female caregivers. They will reflect on what consequences gender dynamics have on each member of the family and on their relationships.

Activity 1. Welcoming participants (10 min)

Aims: To welcome participants, establish a positive atmosphere and recall what we discussed in the previous sessions.



Tips:

You will start every session welcoming participants, recalling what has been done during the previous sessions and, from Session 8 onwards, discuss how the home practice went. Try to cover these aspects in a way that is comfortable for you and be creative and use different strategies. You will find some suggestions in the Constant Companion.

Modality:



Plenary

1. Welcome parents.
2. Smile and show a positive attitude! Thank everyone for being there.
3. Start with a short and engaging activity that will get everyone's attention, such as a local song, a quick game, or a brief energizer. You will find more suggestions in the Constant Companion. Also, you can invite some participants to volunteer and propose an energizer.
4. **ASK** some volunteers to recall what was discussed in the previous session.

Activity 2. Recognizing our role as parents (40 min)

Objective: To share ways in which parents support their children's needs and development at different stages of their growth.

Modality:



Plenary

1. **ASK:**
 - a. What do you think is your role as a parent in your child's development? How do you support your child?
2. **Reflect on what emerges from the discussion and, if needed, add the following points. SAY:**
 - We have seen in the previous session that your role as parents is crucial in helping your child become the best they can be as children and as future adults.
 - From the very beginning of your children's life, you help them reach their full development by **responding to their needs**: in this way you are providing a supportive, stimulating and loving environment.
 - Let us now have a look at what we mean by "responding to children's needs".
2. **ASK:**
 - a. What are some of the things you do to respond to your child's needs at each stage of their development?
 - b. What are some of the things you do, or have done, when your child was younger, such as under 12.
 - c. What are things you do to support older children, for example above 12?
 - d. What barriers do you have in responding to your children's needs?
3. Take notes of the answers in your notebook. **Keep them at hand, as you will need them in the next session!** Always encourage everyone to participate. If needed, use some of the information in the table below – see [Facilitator's Table 1: Addressing our children's needs](#). **Remember that we will investigate each of these practices in detail over the course of the next sessions!**
4. **Next ASK:**
 - a. What does our community expect from us as parents? For example, how should parents behave towards their children? Towards each other? What kind of role is the mother expected to have? What about the father?
 - b. Which beliefs and customs can have a positive influence on our children's wellbeing and our family's relationships?
 - c. Which beliefs and customs could be dangerous or negative for boys? What about for girls?
5. Remind participants that while it is true that they have a key role in ensuring their child's wellbeing and full development, there are other elements that can affect it.
6. **ASK:**
 - a. What do you think are other things that can contribute to your child's development and wellbeing?
 - b. Which factors can put children at risk of not living a healthy, full, and happy life?



Contextualize: Some examples here can include poverty, malnutrition, exposure to violence, early marriage and separation from the parents. Note that the involvement with an armed group can have huge consequences on a child's development. We will look into this aspect in [Session 3 to 5](#).

7. **(Optional and depending on the context)** In some contexts, the government or local associations also fosters positive parenting strategies. If this is the case in your context, **ASK:**
 - a. Have you ever heard of any scheme your government or local association has in place to motivate parents to plan financially for their children and their families? What is it? How does it work?
 - b. What positive parenting practices are they trying to foster?
8. Let participants discuss, and, if needed, integrate with information on the types of support provided by the local or national government to children and their families.
9. **SAY:**
 - While it is important to protect children and keep them safe from risk factors that could affect their full development, it is crucial to recognize children's and family's **strength. Even under the hardest circumstances, children can manage to overcome problems to become thriving adults. Each family, even under challenging circumstances, possess unique skills and resources to address these challenges together.**
 - Additionally, these dramatic events that may negatively impact your child's wellbeing can have consequences on your own wellbeing as well, on you as parents and as adults. In the next sessions we will discuss and together identify strategies to help us address or cope with these challenges.

REMEMBER THAT

All children, everywhere in the world and at any stage of their development, need love, care, protection and respect.

Children who see themselves as good, caring and capable are more likely to make good decisions.

Children who feel supported and accepted by their parents are more likely to turn to them for advice and help.

Children who have watched their parents handle conflict, anger and stress without aggression or violence are more likely to resolve their own conflicts well.

Children who learn from their parents how to listen to, communicate and treat others with respect are more likely to do the same with their peers and teachers.

TABLE ADDRESSING OUR CHILDREN'S NEEDS AND RIGHTS

Main aspects are relevant for all children.

What do children of all ages (male and female) need and are entitled to from their parents:

- Reassurance and support to adjust to new situations (e.g. change in family composition, school life).
- Being listened to and receiving attention when they are communicating.
- Independence to try and do things by themselves.
- Protection.
- Respect.
- Trust.
- Support, affection and understanding.
- Help to deal with new tasks.
- Being taken seriously.
- Being listened to.
- Feeling they can trust their parents.
- Being able to reach them without fearing judgment or reproach.
- Adequate shelter, healthy food and health care.

What you as parents should do:

- Recognize and respect your children's unique way of expressing themselves, their own strengths and their challenges, and help them overcome them.
- Be careful with struggles at school – anger or apathy.
- Talk to your children, be interested in their life at school and outside and help them deal with social life and school tasks.
- Show your appreciation: for example, recognize their good efforts in an appropriate way and do not compare them to others.
- Define home rules together.
- Help them deal with conflicts in non-violent ways.
- Model their behavior by being the person you want your child to be.
- Take them seriously.
- Respect their emotions.
- Involve your child in decisions that affect their lives, in accordance with their evolving capacities.
- Be honest.
- Monitor their activities but...
- Trust your children and nurture their independence.
- Be warm, calm and loving.
- Be stable and reassuring.
- Deal with conflict in a non-violent way.
- Solve problems together.
- Be patient.
- Provide adequate shelter, nutrition and health care.



FACILITATORS' NOTES 1: Addressing our children's needs and rights

MAIN ASPECTS RELEVANT FOR OLDER CHILDREN

What do older children (adolescents; males and females) need and are entitled to from their parents:

- Respect and understanding: their bodies and minds are going through a series of intense changes, which can be hard to handle for a child.
- To be taken seriously: the child is moving towards adulthood, and he/she wants to be heard and listened to.
- To be heard: to take them seriously, we have to listen to them.
- Independence: since they are moving towards adulthood, they want more and more independence, they want to make their own decisions, and sometime this can cause conflict in the family.
- Support in finding "who they are": older children start thinking more deeply about who they are, and this is evident in the way in which they start performing new tasks. They like different things, they have very strong bonds with their group of peers and they need to find ways to "belong" to a group.

What you as parents should do:

- Show respect and understanding, take all of their challenges and emotions seriously, even when sometimes you might not completely understand what is going on, or why your child is reacting in a certain way.
- Take your child seriously and do not always assume you know what he/she wants.
- Ask your children questions about their life, their interests, their friends BUT;
- Respect their silences if they do not want to talk. Do not put pressure on them and be open when they want to communicate with you.
- Show your child you trust him/her by giving autonomy and responsibilities, for example by constructing house rules together, and letting him/her solve problems independently when possible, BUT;
- Show your child that you recognize their capacity has evolved and that you listen to them and include them in decisions that affect their lives. Monitor his/her behavior, be alert to any sign of discomfort, or deeper issues for which your child might need support from you. Keep your child safe while respecting his/her growing need for independence.

5 minutes break (Optional): Find a locally appropriate way to take a break and relax. You can invite some participants to volunteer and share a locally appropriate relaxation technique, such a song or a quick game. If no one volunteers, be ready to propose a short and energizing activity.

Activity 3. Parents addressing the needs of their children with disabilities (50 min)⁶

Aims: To recognize the needs that children with disabilities might have; to reflect on strategies that parents of children with disabilities use to address these needs.

Modality:



Plenary

1. **SAY:** So far, we have talked about children and adolescents' development and needs. But what about children experiencing disabilities ?
2. **ASK:**
 - a. Who are children with disabilities?
 - b. What kind of risks, violations or discrimination are children with disabilities exposed to?



3. **SAY:**
 - People with disabilities often face barriers, physical but also social, that make it difficult to do everyday things and participate in community life. For example, steps or staircases might block a person using a wheelchair from accessing a building. Or prejudices against people with down syndrome might make it harder for that person to find a job.
 - There are different kinds of disabilities. Could you give some examples?

Listen to parents' comments and integrate what emerges from the conversation with the participants with some of the following points:

- Some disabilities are observable, like not being able to walk and thus using a wheelchair, and some are invisible, like a mental disability or being deaf.
- Disabilities include:
 - a. Learning disabilities
 - b. Developmental disorders that affect communication and behavior (autism spectrum disorder)
 - c. Mental health conditions
 - d. Speech or language impairment
 - e. Visual impairment

⁶ Adapted from ChildFund International (2016) Gender-Based Violence Against Children and Youth With Disabilities. A Toolkit For Child Protection Actors Commission Refugee Women's Capacity Development Tools On Disability Inclusion In GBV Programming. <http://www.socialserviceworkforce.org/system/files/resource/files/GBV-Disability-Youth-Toolkit-2-Capacity-Development-Tools.pdf?lang=es>.

- f. Deafness
- g. Hearing impairment
- h. Deaf blindness
- i. Orthopedic impairment
- j. Intellectual disability
- k. Traumatic brain injury
- l. Multiple disabilities.

Pause after each type of disability and ask whether everyone understands what that means, or give an example of that type of disability. If in doubt, use the examples provided in the [Facilitators' Notes 2: Examples of disabilities](#).

- Some people have more than one type of disability.
- There are many types of disabilities and each child has unique needs.
- In different contexts, girls and boys with disabilities are exposed to different kinds of risks: they can be vulnerable to violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect, they can be deprived of their rights, for example their right to play with other children, their freedom, or the right to go to school. They can be discriminated against by others because of their disabilities.

4.ASK:

- ASK: If you look around you in the room or in our community, what kind of barriers have you observed and how do these barriers limit someone with a disability? Examples/responses may include:
 - Physical barriers: a road that is flooded and cannot be crossed, a room with a poorly constructed roof and rain gets in- etc.
 - Information barriers: information is provided in a language we do not know, the information is provided in colors we cannot easily see, the information is provided to other people and not the people who actually need it (such as parents instead of their children)
 - Institutional barriers: policies that don't allow people to enter a place at a certain time, rules that designate certain places for one group or another
 - Attitudinal barriers: a health worker who blames a woman for having a child who has difficulty walking and provides unsympathetic care, a teacher who tells his classroom that only those quick to finish homework will succeed in life, thereby discouraging slow learners. etc.

5. ASK:

- a. Can you identify which type of disability is more subject to exclusion and rejection in our community?
5. Now invite two participants to volunteer for the next activity.
 6. Give each volunteer a character:
 - a. Abeba, a girl with a disability.
 - b. Aster, a girl without a disability.
 7. Explain that you will read a series of scenarios experienced by the two girls during their life.
 8. Explain that, after each statement, the whole group should agree whether they think that scenario increases or decreases the **risk of violence, neglect, abuse or rights violations** for the child involved.

9. Explain that the volunteers take steps forward when the scenario increases the risk of violence, neglect, abuse or rights violations or backwards if it decreases these risks.
10. Explain that each girl may have both positive and negative things happening in a single scenario, and so they can decide to let the volunteers take multiple steps forward or backwards accordingly.
11. Read the following statements (points a. to i. in the scenario below) one by one and allow a few minutes after each statement for the group to discuss and to agree whether each volunteer should move forward or backward. To facilitate the discussion, **after each statement**

ASK:

- a. Is the character in this scene at risk of violence? From whom? Why?
- b. Is the character deprived of any right, such as education or freedom?
- c. Is the child neglected? Is she being discriminated against?

1. ABEBA

a. Abeba was born with an impairment – she has difficulty moving and was slow to develop her speech. The doctors said that Abeba would never go to school, and so she spent most of her childhood inside the house.

b. Abeba's mother helps her with daily care, like washing and going to the toilet. Her father recently left the family, and now Abeba's mother must find a way to get income for the family. Abeba's younger sister must stay at home to help her when their mother goes out for meetings/ to find work.

c. Abeba's mother now has a job. Abeba is home alone most of the day, but different relatives come throughout the day to help her go to the toilet or have lunch. Sometimes her cousin is late, and when Abeba complains, her cousin gets angry with her and refuses to take her outside. Abeba likes being outside in her wheelchair and will talk to anyone who stops to say "hello."

d. Abeba's sister and another neighbor have started attending a group at the local women's center. They brought a social worker to the house to talk to Abeba. Abeba gets to know the staff, and then decides that she would like to go to the center. The staff organizes transportation so that the three girls can travel together to the center. Abeba looks forward to these days being around the other girls and is hoping to learn more about computers.

e. One day the girls meet to identify the activities they would like to do at the center. Abeba doesn't speak at this meeting and all the other girls want to do hairdressing. They all say that Abeba will enjoy this, as they can all do her hair for her – she can be the client, because she doesn't need to stand up to do that.

1. ASTER

f. When Aster was a baby, the doctor and nurses gave her mother information about development, and she had the opportunity to play with other children when her mother was visiting neighbours and friends. She finished her primary school education, but is now missing classes, as she has to undertake different chores in the home.

g. As a teenager, Aster is still in touch with her friends that she met at school. They meet sometimes in the shops and talk a lot on the phone. Some of her friends are now going to a

community centre to learn about accounting, and Aster would like to join them. Her friends give her lots of information that she shares with her parents. They say it is OK for her to go, as long as she is able to continue her other housework.

H. Aster has learned a lot in her accounting course and has made many new friends. Her brothers sometimes take her phone away to prevent her from talking to these friends, especially her friends who are boys. The other girls at the centre sometimes have the same thing happen, and they discuss different ideas about how to talk to their families about this.

i. Aster has passed her accounting course and wants to find work. The teachers at the centre give her some ideas of places to look for work and how the recruitment process works. Aster talks to her aunt – she also has a job and has a lot of experience. Aster's aunt supports Aster when she discusses this idea with her family.

12. To summarize the activity,

ASK:

- a. How are the risk factors different for Abeba and Aster? How do they change at different stages in their lives, when they are younger and older children?
- b. How would these scenarios be different if the characters were boys? What kind of additional risks can girls with disabilities have, compared to boys?
- c. Do you think that when children live among armed groups they are at risk of injury and disability? Why?
- d. What kind of risks do children who have been recruited by armed groups have when they return home with a disability?
- e. How can we as parents address these needs? How can we make sure we give them an active role in the family and help them be heard and participate in the community?

4. **SAY:**

- Children and youth with disabilities can face various forms of violence, abuse, neglect and violation of rights.
- Girls with disabilities can also be at risk of violence, abuse, stigmatization and gender-based violence.
- Equally, children with disabilities who have been recruited by armed groups or who return home with a disability are also strongly at risk of exclusion, rejection, stigmatization, violence and abuse.
- As parents we need to be aware of these risks and barriers to participation, to be able to address their needs.
- Caring for a child with a disability can sometimes feel overwhelming. Stigmatization from the community adds another layer of burden to our tasks.
- One important thing is to focus on what children can do, their abilities, rather than their disability.
- Remember that every child with a disability has strengths. These may be in doing artwork, in their personality, or in their motor skills. We can use children's abilities to assist in the areas that they have most challenges with.⁷
- Also, together we can find out how they can actively participate in family and community life, which roles and responsibilities they can embrace.

⁷ Adapted from Unicef.org, Maureen Samms-Vaughan, Caring for children with disabilities

- In the next sessions we will investigate how different parenting practices can address the needs of children with different disabilities and help them thrive.



FACILITATORS' NOTES 2: Examples of disabilities

Here you have some examples that can help you explain the different types of disabilities. Remember that each disability can affect the individual differently, also based on the socio-economic background of the person, and the stereotypes associated with each type of disability. Also each disability or impairment can range from mild to profound, with different impacts on the individual.

Types of disabilities	Examples
Learning disabilities	A person with learning disability may have difficulties understanding new or complex information or learning new skills.
Autism spectrum disorder	Autism spectrum disorder involves challenges in social interaction, speech and nonverbal communication, and repetitive behaviors. The effects and the severity of symptoms are different in each person.
Mental health conditions	A person affected by an anxiety disorder, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, depression, etc.).
Speech or language impairment	A person who has difficulty in articulating words, for example stuttering.
Visual impairment	A person who is blind or who has partial vision.
Deafness and hearing impairment	A person who does not hear or hears only partially.
Deaf-blindness	A person who does not hear, or hears only partly, and cannot see.
Orthopedic impairment	A person who is missing an arm or leg.
Intellectual disability	A person with Down syndrome.
Traumatic brain injury	A person who suffers an injury to the brain as a consequence of a car accident or a stroke.
Multiple disabilities	A person with more than one disability.

Activity 4. Children, gender and family roles (40 min)

Aims: To connect how the gender of children as well as parents' experiences influence parenting practices.

Modality:



CONTEXTUALIZE: OPEN-ENDED STORIES AND NAMES

You will find various scenarios or Open-Ended Stories through the curriculum. They are all marked in **green in the text**. Consider contextualizing them as needed. They should be imaginary scenarios that reflect the local reality.

Also, change names with locally appropriate ones.

1. **SAY: (Open-Ended Story)**

I want you to meet Ahmed. Ahmed is 10 years old, he lives with his mother, father, two sisters and a baby brother. In the compound there are also his grandparents and aunts and uncles.

2. Next, **ASK:**

- What do you think Ahmed does in the house?
- How is his relationship with his mother? Father? Sibling?
- What do you think he will become when he grows up?

3. Take time for each question and invite everyone to participate. Always make sure that



CONTEXTUALIZE: GENDER AND ROLES IN THE FAMILIES

In each context, the roles of the male and female parents are different. How they are supposed to interact with their daughters and sons, and how their roles as fathers and mothers are perceived by the community and by themselves is different. Also, the expectations and stereotypes around girls and boys are different in each context. Reflect on how these aspects are defined locally and facilitate the discussion accordingly.

you encourage everyone's participation without discriminating or excluding anyone.

4. Now, repeat the same exercise, but this time use the following story. **SAY: (Open-Ended Story)**

Now I want you to meet Zahra. Zahra is also 10 years old, she lives near Ahmed, she also lives with her father and mother, and she has two sisters and a baby brother. In the compound there are also her father's parents and siblings.

2. **ASK** the same questions as before.
 - a. What do you think Zahra does in the house?
 - b. How is her relationship with her mother? Father? Siblings?
 - c. What do you think she will become when she grows up?
5. It is very likely that the answers to the questions will be very different from these provided before: this happens because the social norms and roles that our society attributes to children are different for boys and girls. For example, our society expects boys to behave in a different way from girls, or to dress differently and play different games.
6. **ASK:**
 - a. Why do we think that the answers we gave about Ahmed are different from what we think about Zahra? Why is his relationship with the parents different?
7. Reflect on **what it is expected** for boys and girls in your context: what people think they can do, say, how they can behave, which roles they can take. Look at the answers given about what the children will become when they grow up.
8. **ASK:**
 - a. Why do you think we expect different things for our children? For e.g. Why do we expect boys to become doctors, but not girls?
 - b. How does this influence their growth?
 - c. How does your community/culture suggest you should treat your daughter?
 - d. How are sons or daughter expected to be treated in the family?
9. **SAY:**
 - From the very first months of life, parents and adults in all societies treat boys and girls differently and have different expectations for boys and girls.
 - Treating boys and girls differently means giving them different support and different opportunities to succeed in life.
 - Most of the time, these different perceptions and expectation bring a disadvantage to girls.

MOTHERS AND FATHERS

In this session we talk about the role of mothers and fathers in the family. The person in the father or mother role does not have to be the child's biological parent. Any male or female within the family can develop a strong attachment to the child and fulfil this role (or help biological parents fulfil theirs).

10. **ASK:**
 - a. What do you think of the ways in which our culture and society expects us to treat our girls and boys? Which practices can help the child grow well? Which practices can create barriers to their development?
 - b. Is there any practice that could put girls more at risk of recruitment by armed groups? What about boys?

10. Now, repeat the same exercise, but this time use the following story. **SAY:** (Open-Ended Story)

Now I want you to meet Devine (girl) and Patrique (boy). They are both 10 years old, and they are neighborhood friends. Devine has two younger brothers and an older sister, and lives with her mother, stepfather, and the parents of her mother's new husband. Patrique is has three younger brothers and lives with his parents. They live in a community where there is a risk of recruitment.

11. ASK:

- a. Do you think that Devine and Patrique face the same risk of recruitment? Why?
- b. How would their experiences be different, if they are both recruited by the armed group and they return home to their families?
- c. How might their relationships with their family, friends and community change when they return home?

12. SAY:

- Boys and girls can both be at risk of recruitment by armed groups.⁸
- At the same time, there are specific elements that could push girls to join an armed group: for example, being treated differently from her male siblings, discrimination in the household, or gender-based violence can push a girl to join an armed group.
- When they come home after they have been recruited by an armed group, girls are also more at risk of stigmatization and rejection from the family and community. We will look into what stigmatization is and how to deal with it in Session 15.
- Also, in the next sessions we will explore the risks and consequences of the recruitment that are gender specific and how parents can help address these risks.

⁸ United Nations and World Bank (2018). Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict. Washington, DC: World Bank.



PARENTING AND LOCAL CULTURE

The local culture/community creates expectations of what a mother and a father should do, how they should behave with their children, how they should share tasks in the family, and what rearing practices are considered appropriate. Some of these can have positive or negative consequences on children. These aspects are highly dependent on the local context, so it is advisable to think about them in advance and anticipate potential ideas to guide the discussions in activities 4 and 5. Here are a few examples of possible ideas you can put forward:

Cultural practices related to parenting with positive outcomes:

- a. The community needs to be involved in the child's upbringing.

Cultural practices related to parenting with negative outcomes:

- a. Taking care of the children is exclusively a mother's responsibility.
- b. Girls should exercise less freedom than boys.

To help you reflect on which practice could have positive or negative consequences, think about how the practice could affect each member of the family.

Activity 5. Parents' gender and family roles (30 min)

Aims: To recognize the influence of culture on family roles; to understand the influence that gender roles can have on child development.

Materials: (Optional) Pieces of paper and pens (one per participant).

Modality:



Plenary

1. SAY:

You are at the hospital. You enter the doctor's room and are greeted by a man and a woman, both wearing a white coat and no badge. One of them is the doctor and one is the nurse.

2. ASK:

- a. Which one of the two you think is the doctor? Which one is the nurse? Why?

3. Then SAY:

- Even though both characters could be doctors or nurses, we often think of nurses as female and doctors as male. Unfortunately, this might be true in practice. In

several countries more men than women become doctors, and more women than men become nurses. However, this happens not because they have different capacities, but for cultural reasons.

- This happens because girls are generally treated very differently than boys since they are born. We have different expectations and stereotypes about girls which makes it difficult, even for them, to think about their own future as “doctors” rather than “nurses”.
- For example, women are often expected to be more caring and nurturing, and therefore more suited to be nurses than men. This idea is not based on any fact, but rather on the way our culture thinks about men and women, on the stereotypes embedded in our culture about men and women.
- Stereotypes are oversimplified, partial or mistaken ideas or beliefs many people have about a group of people who we believe share similar characteristics (*share an example of stereotype in your community*). These ideas about men and women are rooted in our everyday life and they also influence the ways we think about the roles of mothers and fathers in the family.

4. ASK:

- What roles in our community do we usually attribute to fathers? What about mothers?
- How do you think these roles affect the mother? And what about the father?
- How do they affect the relationship between husband and wife?
- What could we do to ensure an equal relationship between fathers and mothers in the home?

5. Have participants discuss. If needed, use the notes in the boxes “**Fathers’ and mothers’ roles**” and “**Cultural changes**” below, to help you facilitate the conversation. Be aware that these questions can lead to a heated discussion, and many might not be willing to acknowledge the meaning and importance of gender equality in the household at this point. Do not worry: this is just the beginning of a long journey, and you will be exploring these issues further during the course of the next sessions.

6. ASK:

- a. What roles do fathers have towards their sons? And towards their daughters?
- b. What roles do mothers have towards sons? And towards their daughters?
- c. Have these roles changed over time?
- d. Do you think these roles are the same in all communities? And in all families within your community? Why? Why not?

Have participants discuss. Reflect on the answers given and integrate the following points as needed, making sure you refer to what parents have just suggested. **SAY:**

- Fathers’ and mothers’ roles and relationships with their sons and daughters have always changed through history and across countries.
- This means that these roles are defined by culture and not biological differences between mothers and fathers.
- There is no biological difference between men and women that determines their ability and way of caring for children, their ability to be affectionate or address their children’s needs.
- Although in some communities parenting focuses on the role of the mother, the role of the father is equally important and deserves more attention.

- The fathers' role is crucial at all stages of development and this is true for all the fathers and the children of the world..

7. **ASK:**

- a. Do you agree with this statement? Why is the father's role so crucial in the development of the child?

8. Let participants discuss. Reflect on the answers given and integrate the following points as needed, making sure you refer to what parents just suggested. **SAY:**

- The father's ability to express his emotions and show care and intimacy with his children has a deep and long-lasting benefit for children's healthy development.⁹
- For example, researchers have shown that the involvement of fathers can contribute to reducing aggressive behaviors in boys, increase self-esteem in girls, and improve children's school performances.

⁹ Senefeld, S., Krisowaty, L., (2014). Parenting Support in Africa: A Facilitator's Manual. Catholic Relief Services, Baltimore, MD.



FATHERS' AND MOTHERS' ROLES

In each community, the role of the father and mother is different, but here is an example that can guide your reflection:

*Who is expected to have more power in the family? Who can make decisions? In many contexts the fathers have more authority and power in the family, and they can decide for themselves, define the relationships within the family and also how the family members interact with the world.

*Who is expected /allowed to earn money? Historically men have been the major providers for the family. If men have difficulties fulfilling the bread-winning role and women increase their capacity to support the family financially, men's authority role is undermined.

*How is the role of women perceived? Can they earn money? What is their status? For many women, their status within the community is defined by their parenting role. They are respected based on their caring abilities for their children and other people in need, such as the elderly.

In many contexts, people attribute women a lesser status within the family relations: women lack power to make decisions about their own lives, which also leads to accessing limited economic resources, putting them at risk of disadvantage, discrimination, exclusion, abuse and violence.

If we want to create positive family relationships, we need to make sure that all members of our family enjoy the same liberties and rights regardless of gender. Here are some ideas of how we could contribute to gender equality among adults in the family: make sure you reflect on what participants share before integrating these points.

- Mother and father/ husband and wife see each other as equal: they treat each other with respect, consider each other's needs, and support one another.
- Everyone participates equally in family decision-making and all family members work as a team to achieve shared goals.
- Mothers and fathers share caring duties, household duties and they can both contribute to the family budget.



CULTURAL CHANGES

When discussing gender, several people state that the different treatment men and women have within their community is part of their “culture”. Removing these ideas, practices, stereotypes about gender would be seen by them as removing a part of their culture, an imposition by “different” cultures on their own.

In this respect, it is important to reflect on the fact that “culture” is not a concept set in stone; it is difficult to place boundaries to “culture”. Cultures change in place, but also in time and within themselves. Each community holds different ways of thinking and doing things, different stereotypes, but these change in time, thanks to the community of people who reflect on them and change their practices to improve their wellbeing and the wellbeing of their fellow community members.

Think about your community 50 years ago and your community now: things have surely changed, ways of doing things have surely changed, because “culture” changes. There is no such thing as “pure and eternal culture”.

This is why in this session we are going to reflect on gender stereotypes. Because, even if we recognize them as being part of the current practices in our community, they can be changed if the community members think they do not support their wellbeing and that of their children.

It is important for community members to reflect on the different ways they treat boys and girls and they treat themselves as women and men because, if these practices are harmful and do not support their wellbeing, it is their duty as community members to change them. This would not mean “betraying” their own “culture”, it would rather mean transforming their own culture in the ways they prefer and find more suitable for their happiness and that of the future generations which will constitute their future community.

Closing the day and evaluation (10 min)

Aims: To recap the day and assess the session.

Materials: (If possible) Flipchart with hopes and fears from [Session 1. Activity 4.](#)

Modality:



Plenary

1. **ASK** one or two volunteers to recap two things discussed today.
2. If you've had the chance to make notes of the [participants' hopes and fears on a flipchart](#), draw their attention to it and ask them to place a star or stars on hopes that are realized.
3. Next, take a marker and remove fears that are starting to be overcome.
4. Then, ask them to add new fears or hopes that might have emerged.
- 5.
6. **Finally, ASK** the following questions to the group and make notes of the answers.
 - a. **Is there anything that you particularly liked about this session?**
 - b. **Is there anything that you found particularly useful?**
 - c. **Is there anything that you would do differently?**
7. Thank everyone for their participation and engagement.

Session 3

Who is a child "at risk"? Why are they joining?



Session 3: Who is a child "at risk"? Why are they joining?



Time ⌚ 2h 5min

Objectives: By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Reconstruct the reasons, risk factors or drivers that could lead a child to join an armed group.
- Distinguish the risk factors which can be gender specific.

Activities Overview:

Session 3		TOTAL 125 min
Act. 1	Welcoming participants	10 min
Act 2	Why are they joining?	60 min
Act 3	Age specific and gender specific risk factors	45 min
	Closing the day and evaluation	10 min

Resources Needed:

- Referral Plan and related Referral Handout.
- Flipcharts and markers.
- (If possible) Flipchart with hopes and fears from [Session 1. Activity 4.](#)
- Reproduce the visuals from Pictograms for the Facilitator 6: The Life of the Child on some flipcharts, so that everyone can see them. Alternatively, you can make copies and distribute.

Session summary:

With this session, we want to support parents in sharing what they know about their children's motives behind joining or being forced to join an armed group. Sharing and learning from each other's ideas and experiences will help establish group support and an

agreement on the needs and challenges children involved with armed groups might face, as well as the possible responses of the families.

Therefore, the parents will discuss some of the reasons or drivers for joining and highlight the importance of striking a balance between the picture of the child as a victim, but as someone who can also be aware of his/her choices and who may desire to be held accountable for these choices. We will conclude with a reflection on specific reasons or drivers that could lead girls to join, and on the vulnerabilities that girls consequently face.

Activity 1. Welcoming participants (10 min)

Aims: To welcome participants, establish a positive atmosphere and recall what we discussed in the previous sessions.

Modality:



Plenary

1. Welcome parents.
2. Smile and show a positive attitude! Thank everyone for being there.
3. Start with a short and engaging activity that will get everyone's attention, such as a local song, a quick game or a brief energizer. Below is one example. You will find more suggestions in the Constant Companion. Also, you can invite some participants to volunteer and propose an energizer.
4. Ask people to stand up. Explain that they should follow what you ask them to do.
5. Say: "Walk".
6. Let participants walk around the room for a few seconds.
7. Say: "Stop". They should stop where they are.
8. Call out "Walk" then "Stop". And repeat a few times.
9. Next, tell everyone you are going to switch those two commands. Now when you say "Stop" they should start walking and when you say "Walk" they should stop walking.
10. Say: "Stop". Then "Walk". And repeat.
11. Next, explain that you are adding two more commands. When you say "Name" they say their name out loud, when you say "Clap" they clap their hands once. The other two commands stay the same, so "Walk" means stop, "Stop" means walk, "Name" means say your name, and "Clap" means clap.
12. Call out a combination of "Walk," "Stop," "Name," and "Clap." Repeat a few times.
13. Finally, explain that you are switching the last two commands. Explain that now "Walk" means stop, "Stop" means walk, "Name" means clap, and "Clap" means say your name. Repeat a few times.
14. After the energizer, ask some volunteers to recall some key points discussed in the previous session.

Activity 2. Why are they joining? (60 min)

Aims: To share the risk factors that could lead a child to join an armed group; to identify age specific risk factors.

Materials: Reproduce the [Pictograms for the facilitator 6: The life of the child \(see below\)](#) on some flipcharts, so that everyone can see them. Alternatively, you can make copies and distribute.

Modality:



Group work

Pictograms for the facilitator 6: The life of the child

Reproduce these symbols on a flipchart and make sure that everyone understands their meaning.



Family's economic situation



Family



Friends



Feelings and emotions

1. Ask participants to form 4 groups.
2. Assign one of the following profiles to each group (use locally appropriate names).
 - a. Group A. Amos is an 8-year-old boy
 - b. Group B. Bahati is a 17-year-old boy
 - c. Group C. Carine is an 8-year-old girl
 - d. Group D. Dera is a 17-year-old girl



3. SAY:

In your village there has been a conflict with an armed group for the last two years. Some of the children have been recruited by the group to join them, including the children that have been assigned to you.

Can you think about some of the reasons that could push or force them to join the armed group?

Think about the following (show the images or the copies of the [Pictograms for the facilitator 6: The life of the child](#)): remind the participants that they should think of what applies to the child and age group they have.

- a. His/her situation at home, and relationships with his /her parents, siblings and other family members.
 - b. His/her community and his/her friendships.
 - c. His/her feelings, emotions and challenges.
 - d. His/her economic situation.
4. Explain that they have 15 - 20 minutes to discuss together and list some possible reasons that the child they have been assigned might have joined an armed group. Explain that they should deliver their presentation in maximum 5 minutes. Walk around the room and help the groups, if needed.
5. After 20 minutes invite each group to present. Coordinate with your co-facilitator to make sure you **note down the main points on your notebook** and keep them at hand for the next sessions.
6. After all the presentations, make sure that the contextualized points in the table below – [Facilitators' Notes 3: "Factors that put children at risk"](#) - have all been covered (coordinate with your co-facilitator!).
7. Remember that push and pull factors are often linked together: e.g., the absence of job opportunities can be a push factor, and it can be reinforced by the idea that joining an armed group can represent an economic opportunity (pull factor).
8. At this point, do not highlight which elements are relevant for older children or girls, as indicated in the list.
9. After all presentations

ASK:

- a. Which of these risk factors can family relationships have an impact on?
10. Let participants discuss and, if needed, highlight some of the elements indicated in the [Facilitator's Notes 3: "Factors that put children at risk"](#). Reassure participants that this will be the topic of the entire Program.
11. SAY:
 - In many instances the child might want to join an armed group voluntarily. Other times she or he might be abducted.

12. ASK:

- a. Which circumstances could put the child in danger of abduction? When and where could it happen?
- b. Do you think that as parents you could reduce such risk of forced recruitment?

15. SAY:

- In the case of abduction, there is no push or pull factor which puts a child at risk of recruitment: the child is simply forced to join against her/his will.
- Even if forced recruitment or abduction cannot be influenced via caring and loving relationships, we can think of strategies that can help reduce the risk of abduction. Do not worry, we will explore this aspect in one of the following sessions! (See Session 14)



FACILITATORS' NOTES 3: Factors that put children at risk.



Here are some push and pull factors that could lead a child to join an armed group. Before this session, reflect on the reasons and factors which are more relevant or specific to your context and contextualize this list accordingly. Also, remember that this curriculum aims at tapping into participants' existing knowledge and experiences: let participants share and discuss, and convey these points only when they are not covered through participants' conversations.

Be particularly careful with the factors that could be more specific for older children, or girls, as this can vary depending on the context.

Push: Factors that can encourage a child to join an armed group

- Lack of educational and employment opportunities.
- Family/home violence /domestic abuse/ sexual abuse (can be influenced by family relationships).
- Abuses and humiliation at school or in the community (can be influenced by family relationships).
- Poverty.
- Marginalization, stigmatization, and discrimination (can be influenced by family relationships).
- Family destruction, dispersal or separation from family members due to the war.
- Lack of protection and social or family support systems - e.g., if separate from the family (especially younger children) (can be influenced by family relationships).
- The family may be forced to associate with an armed group – e.g., if they do not send their children their life and that of their children will be in danger.
- The family may force their children – e.g., because they believe in the cause, because they need economic support, violent extremist groups are perceived as a community defense against a threat or to revenge the loss of loved ones.
- Loss of a sense of belonging (especially older children) (can be influenced by family relationships).
- Loneliness (especially older children) (can be influenced by family relationships).
- Lack of a feeling of freedom (especially older children) (can be influenced by family relationships).
- The group seems to give a sense of purpose (especially older children) (can be influenced by family relationships).
- Frustration with injustice, corruption, abuses by institutions (can be influenced by family relationships).
- Feeling of powerlessness (especially older children) (can be influenced by family relationships).

- Need to escape from armed forces' or groups' attacks.
- Peer pressure (especially older children) (can be influenced by family relationships).

Pull factors: Factors that attract a child towards an armed group

- Believing in the cause (can be influenced by family relationships).
- Better future (can be influenced by family relationships).
- Money.
- Educational opportunities.
- Peer mentoring (especially older children) (can be influenced by family relationships).
- Desire to be part of a group, sharing a purpose (especially older children) (can be influenced by family relationships).
- Reducing loneliness and getting support by joining a group - e.g., if separated from family members (especially younger children).
- (Online) Propaganda/grooming (can be influenced by family relationships).
- Gaining new power, status, glory (especially older children) (can be influenced by family relationships).
- Revenge of victims/family or community members - indirect identification with victims (can be influenced by family relationships).
- Claim of justice of the group (can be influenced by family relationships).
- Escape structural violence or family pressure at home (can be influenced by family relationships).
- Gain a sense of self, a life purpose, belonging, scope (especially older children) (can be influenced by family relationships).
- A sense of obligation to act in defence of one's in-group (can be influenced by family relationships).
- Scarcity of jobs or difficulties finding one (especially older children).
- Assert their power and gain equality (especially for girls and older children) (can be influenced by family relationships).
- Attraction towards some activities offered by the armed group such as cultural program, physical exercise etc.

Push factor which affect GIRLS

- Family/home violence /domestic abuse/ sexual abuse (can be influenced by family relationships).
- A lack of protection by social or family support systems (can be influenced by family relationships).
- The family can force the child to marry a soldier (can be influenced by family relationships).
- Lack of freedom (especially older children) (especially girls) (can be influenced by family relationships).
- Feeling of powerlessness (can be influenced by family relationships).
- Lack of educational and employment opportunities.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gender inequality in the home and community (can be influenced by family relationships).
<p>Pull factors which affect GIRLS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educational opportunities. Escape violence or family pressure at home (can be influenced by family relationships). Need for empowerment and to gain equality (can be influenced by family relationships). Protection and a support system in the armed group (can be influenced by family relationships).
<p>Besides push and pull factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The child can be abducted or forced to join an armed group.

5 minutes break (Optional): Find a locally appropriate way to take a break and relax. You can invite some participants to volunteer and share a locally appropriate relaxation technique, such a song or a quick game. If no one volunteers, be ready to propose a short and energizing activity.

Activity 3: Age specific and gender specific risk factors (45 min)

Aims: To identify vulnerabilities and risks which are age and gender specific.

Modality:



Plenary

- Read the following Open-Ended Story:
 “Gabriel is a 17-year-old boy. Due to the conflict, his parents have lost their jobs, and his family has struggled to provide for the five children. The parents have decided to sell their goat and move to the city hoping to find some work. Gabriel has tried to find a job, but without success. Also, he has started a new school in the neighborhood where they now live but he has had difficulties making new friends. He became more isolated and felt lonely”.
- ASK:**
 - Does this story reflect what you know about your community?
 - What are some of the reasons that could push Gabriel to join an armed group?
 - Which of these reasons do you think are more specific to older children like Gabriel?

Think again about the following (show the pictograms developed using the [Pictogram for the facilitators 6: The life of the child](#)):

- His situation at home, and relationships with his parents, siblings and other family members.
- His community and his friendships.
- His feelings, emotions and challenges.
- His economic situation.

To help you facilitate this discussion, look at the [Facilitators' Notes 3: Factors that put children at risk](#). See the elements that are more relevant for adolescents (indicated in the table). Make sure you convey only these points which did not emerge through the conversation among participants.



3. **SAY:**

- Peer relationships are very influential in adolescence. During this time, peers become the center of the child's life: peers are a source of emotional and social support.
- During adolescence, children's identity development becomes very relevant: they want to find unique ways of answering the question "who am I?".
- This means that feeling isolated or excluded can have a strong impact on older children.
- Younger children are more dependent on their family for support and protection: when this support fails, they might be more at risk of joining, for example if they are separated from their family, or if they are survivors of abuse and violence in the home environment.

4. Next, read the following Open-Ended Story:

Mahvash is a 10-year-old girl. She likes studying and she has lots of friends in school, but her parents did not allow her to continue because she is a girl. She felt very upset at first. At home, Mahvash's father often shouts at her and sometimes hits her. Mahvash's father sometimes hits her mother as well. Mahvash does not know who to turn to for help.

5. **ASK:**

- a. What could some of the reasons be that could push Mahvash to join an armed group?
- b. Which of these reasons do you think are more specific to younger children like Mahvash?

Think again about the following (show the pictograms developed using the [Pictogram for the facilitators 6: The life of the child](#)):

- Her situation at home, and relationships with her parents, siblings and other family members.
- Her community and friendships.
- Her feelings, emotions and challenges.
- Her economic situation.

6. **Next, ASK:**

- a. Do you think that there is any risk factor which is specific to girls, or that can impact girls more easily?

If necessary, use the notes in the [Facilitators' Notes 3: Factors that put children at risk](#) to help you facilitate this part. Make sure you convey only these points which did not emerge through the conversation among participants.



7. **SAY:**

- The risks of recruitment are largely the same for boys and girls, but there are some which are unique to girls.
- Very often girls have less power within the family and community. Joining can be a way to empower themselves.
- In the case in which the armed group is attacking the village or community, joining can be seen as the only strategy to find protection against violence.

8. **ASK:**

- Children can be forced by armed groups to join them, or they can join voluntarily, under the pressure of these risk factors. But they are never completely free in their decision to join. Do you think this is true? Why? Why not?

9. **SAY:**

- Children have less power than adults – they cannot do whatever they want, freely. Therefore, we cannot say that they join an armed group completely voluntarily.
- But this does not mean that we should ignore their motives for joining an armed group. If children consider themselves to have volunteered, we need to acknowledge that.
- If you want to take responsibility for your actions, how would it make you feel if someone told you that you couldn't do something, because you had no choice in the matter? We need to respect the way our children think about their experience and involvement with an armed group.
- This is an important step towards respecting our children.
- Do not worry! This is quite a complex concept, but it has many consequences for our work. We will look into it more extensively over the course of the next sessions, but it is important to understand that:
- Our children are never really joining the armed groups voluntarily, even when they say they did.

Closing the day and evaluation (10 min)

Aims: To recap the day and assess the session.

Materials: (If possible) Flipchart with hopes and fears from [Session 1. Activity 4](#).

Modality:



Plenary

1. **ASK:**

- a. This has been a very intense session. How are you feeling?

2. **SAY:**

- Remember that you can reach us individually before or after the sessions. We also have a list of agencies with us who you can reach for specific needs. We will give it to you during one of the following sessions but, if you prefer, you can ask for it now.
 - You have done a great job in sharing your ideas and experiences, we know it is not always easy, but thanks to each of your contributions we are learning from each other and strengthening our community together.
3. Before closing the day, invite participants to take a few minutes to conduct a relaxation exercise together: you can invite some participants to volunteer and share a relaxation technique they use or they've heard of. If no one volunteers, be ready to propose a short activity that can help participants release a bit of the anxiety, tension or other negative feelings that emerged during the course of this session.
 4. Next, ASK one or two volunteers to recap two things discussed today. Also, always remember to respect the will of these who might not want to join.
 5. If you've had the chance to make notes of the [participants' hopes and fears on a flipchart](#), draw their attention to it and ask them to place a star or stars on hopes that are realized.
 6. Next, take a marker and remove fears that are starting to be overcome.
 7. Then, ask them to add new fears or hopes that might have emerged.
 8. **Finally, ASK:**
 - a. **Is there anything that you particularly liked about this session?**
 - b. **Is there anything that you found particularly useful?**
 - c. **Is there anything that you would do differently?**
 9. Thank everyone for their participation and engagement.

Session 4

The experiences of children associated with armed groups



Session 4: The experiences of children associated with armed groups



Intense emotions

Time ⌚ 1h 10min

Objectives: By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Distinguish the different roles and experiences of children associated with armed groups.
- Identify the specific roles and experiences of girls associated with armed groups.

Activities Overview:

Session 4		TOTAL 70 min
Act. 1	Welcoming participants	10 min
Act 2	Children's roles within armed groups	20 min
Act 3	Linking the roles and the experiences of children associated with armed groups	30 min or more
Closing the day and evaluation		10 min

Resources Needed:

- Referral Plan and related Referral Handout.
- Flipcharts and markers.
- (If possible) Flipchart with hopes and fears from [Session 1. Activity 4.](#)

Session summary:

Participants discuss the unique experiences that every child associated with armed groups faces and reflect on the different roles that the children might undertake or might be forced to undertake and the roles which are often undertaken by girls.



Note: Reflecting on the experiences that children might face when joining an armed group can be very difficult. Talking about children's abduction, the violence suffered, witnessed, or inflicted, and all other deprivation, abuse and maltreatment they might have suffered can be a stressful and traumatizing experience for parents. Make sure you discuss this session and its contextualization with your **co-facilitator and with the Supervisor of the Program** before implementing it. Also, it is a good idea to involve a social worker/case worker to help deal with intense emotions as part of your Referral Plan.

Have your Referral Plan at hand should any issue arise which needs to be addressed by a specialized agency.

Finally, you will find some guidance on how to support parents who might be experiencing intense emotions in the **Constant Companion**.



REFLECTING ON CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES WITH ARMED GROUPS

Sessions 4. The experience of the child involved with armed groups and session 6. Consequences of association with armed groups for the child can have traumatic and emotional consequences for the parents. It is advisable to reflect on what is the best approach in the local context to carry out these sessions. Here, we have suggested to conduct the discussion in a plenary. In other contexts, it might be better to invite participants to work in pairs, or as a family unit.

Additionally, the use of Open-Ended Stories provides a less personal, and therefore less threatening, way of exploring sensitive or possibly traumatic topics, and this tool can be combined with other communication strategies which can reduce the risk of re-living a traumatic experience. For instance, instead of asking the whole group to discuss each Open-Ended Story, you could invite small groups or pairs formed around the family unit to make a drawing depicting one day in the life of the four characters in the four Open-Ended Stories. Do not ask each group to present their work, but rather walk around the various groups, note down their answers and provide a summary at the end. In this way you avoid spotlighting any of the participants. Coordinate with your co-facilitator to facilitate each pair or small group and report their ideas back to the plenary.



HOW TO TALK ABOUT CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES

When asking participants to reflect on the experiences that their children might have had when recruited by armed groups, or when sharing examples of these experiences, parents might feel shocked, or they may experience very intense emotions. Parents are always protective towards their children, no matter how old they are and how much they have gone through; it might be really difficult for them to discuss what their children did or were forced to do.

Before facilitating this session, think carefully with your co-facilitator and with the Supervisor of the Program about what you think parents in your community are willing, ready, and open to share and discuss. Think about which kind of experiences can be particularly difficult to address and may lead parents to feel very bad about their children and themselves. Think about which words you can use, to reduce these risks for the parents and to talk to them about their children without generating extreme distress.

For example, if you think that talking about sexual abuse can be challenging, you can introduce the topic here, using a vocabulary that you think is acceptable for the participants, and you can delay a more in-depth exploration of the experiences, risks and challenges that girls and boys face to the next sessions. REMEMBER: No matter how extreme and painful children's experiences are, they are young human beings, and, as such, they ALWAYS have the possibility of overcoming them and transforming them into their own strengths. Resilience is a human characteristic, especially for those who have attentive parents. YOU, AS A FACILITATOR, SHOULD BELIEVE IN CHILDREN OVERCOMING THEIR PROBLEMS AND SHOULD TRY TO TRANSMIT THIS BELIEF TO PARENTS.

If intense emotions arise, remember to use the strategies indicated in the Constant Companion, and if needed to make reference to the Referral Handout, if any issue arise which requires the intervention of an external agency.

Throughout this and the following sessions, often remind participants that:

*No matter how hard the experiences your children might have had, they have the ability to recover from these experiences and lead a happy life, especially if you are there to support them.

*The recruitment of your child, and the experiences he/she might have faced, are not your fault. There are many factors that can force a child to join an armed group, we should not blame ourselves for what happened and try to do all we can to support our children once they return home.

Activity 1. Welcoming participants (10 min)

Aims: To welcome participants, establish a positive atmosphere and recall what we discussed in the previous sessions.

Modality:



Plenary

1. Welcome parents.
2. Smile and show a positive attitude! Thank everyone for being there.
3. Start with a short and engaging activity that will get everyone's attention, such as a local song, a quick game or a brief energizer. You will find some suggestions in the Constant Companion. Also, you can invite some participants to volunteer and propose an energizer.
4. After the energizer, ask some volunteers to recall some key points discussed in the previous session.

Activity 2. Children's roles with armed groups (20 min)

Objectives: To reflect on the roles that children could undertake or be forced to undertake within armed groups; to identify the roles undertaken by girls.

Modality:



Plenary

1. **SAY:**
 - In the previous session we have explored some of the reasons that could push children to join armed groups.
 - In this session we will discuss the possible experiences of children while they are a part of armed groups. **The objective of this session is to reflect together on what we know about our children.**
 - Understanding their experiences helps us identify their potential challenges and better address their needs.
 - It can be challenging and emotional to reflect on our children's experiences with armed groups, and we want to remind you that this is a safe space.
 - We should all agree that what we share in this room isn't shared outside. Remember that what you share in the group will not be used to discuss individual experiences, but rather to learn from each other and make our community safer for children.
 - If something you share could cause harm to you, your family or the child, we will follow-up individually after the session to see how we can provide support.



TALKING TO YOUR CHILD ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCES

It can be very hard for parents to engage with their children about their experiences with armed groups. It can be equally hard to understand whether the child is willing to share his/her experiences or not.

Some tips on how to address this topic and what to keep in mind when trying to talk to a child about such traumatic and complex issues are addressed in Session 12. Parent-child relationship: better communication, better listening.

2. ASK:

- a. What do children do when they are with armed forces or groups?
- b. Is there any role which is more often assigned to **younger children**?
- c. Is there any role which is more often assigned to **older children**?
- d. Is there any role which is generally assigned to **girls**?

Coordinate with your co-facilitator to make sure that you take notes of the points that arise in your notebook. Support the participants' exchange and, if needed, integrate their conversation with the relevant points in the [Facilitator's Notes 4: Children's roles and experiences with armed groups](#). Make sure you convey only these points which did not emerge through the conversation among participants.

1. SAY:

- Children can take very different and multiple roles. Most of the time, they cannot choose their roles, and can be forced to take on these roles against their will.
- The roles they are forced to undertake also determine the experiences they have and the consequences for the child's wellbeing, as we will see in the next activities.
- Boys and girls might be forced to do similar things, but there are some roles which are unique to girls. We will discuss this further.

Activity 3. Linking the roles and the experiences of children associated with armed groups (30 min and more)

Aims: To reconstruct the experiences that children associated with armed groups could undergo; to recognize that, despite the different roles, all children associated with armed groups are exposed to violence and abuse and that the association of children with an armed group should always be avoided.

Modality:



Plenary

1. SAY:

- Let's imagine the experiences that a child might face when recruited by, or forced to join, an armed group.
- I will read you a scenario and we will discuss it (Open-Ended Story):



Josef is a 10-year-old boy. He has been pushed by some of his peers into joining an armed group. He has been working as a messenger for the group for the last 5 months.

2. **ASK:** Ask the following questions one by one, allowing enough time after each question to elicit a few answers. Do not forget to coordinate with your co-facilitator to take notes of the answers in your notebook. Use the information in the [Facilitator's Notes 4: Children's roles and experiences with armed groups](#) to make sure that the relevant points are covered.

Remember that your role is to encourage participants' sharing and peer learning, rather than lecturing: use the notes only if you think some crucial aspects have not been conveyed.

- a. What do you think his first day being away from home felt like? What did he have to do to fit in or to survive?
- b. What does his daily life look like?
- b. Do you think he lives with his parents or not?
- c. What does the place where he lives look like?
- d. What does he see or hear at night?
- e. What do you imagine his relationships with his peers to be like? And with the adults in the group?
- f. How would these experiences be different if Josef were a girl?

3. After this discussion, read the following three Open-Ended Stories, and after each Open-



Ended Story, repeat the questions in step 2 above.

a. Sandrine is a 13-year-old girl who has worked as a spy with an armed group for the last 2 years.

b. Wilson is an 18-year-old boy who was a combatant with an armed group for the last 2 years, but he could return home and spend some time with his family every other week.

c. Rissa is a 16-years-old girl who married one of the chiefs of the armed group and stayed with the group for 1 year.

4. After you have discussed all the Open-Ended Stories

ASK:

- a. How do you think the experience of Sandrine, who was recruited 2 years ago, might be different from that of Josef, who was away for 5 months?
- b. Wilson stayed with the armed group for 2 years, but he could return home sometimes during that time: what kind of consequences does this experience

- have for Wilson? How is his experience different from that of the other children, like Sandrine, who stayed away from her parents the whole time?
- c. How do you think the fact that Rissa is a girl makes her experience different from that of Wilson? What kind of consequences does Rissa's experience have for her?



3. SAY:

- **No matter how they are recruited and which roles they cover, children associated with armed groups are exposed to very high levels of violence: they may witness, suffer or be forced to take part in torture and killings. They may be deprived of food or shelter, they may be beaten, they may be forced to take drugs or experience sexual abuse.**
- **Children recruited by armed groups, even if they decide to join voluntarily for different reasons, are victims, and their participation in conflict has serious implications for their physical, sexual, reproductive, emotional, and cognitive well-being and development.**
- **Therefore, as parents, we should always aim to prevent the involvement of our children in armed groups, as it can be damaging to their development.**
- **Girls are also recruited and used by armed groups. They have vulnerabilities unique to their gender and role in society.**
- **This is one of the key aspects of this Program: we should all agree to this before moving forward!**
- In the next session we will discuss what kind of consequences these different roles and experiences can have on a child's physical, psychological, and emotional wellbeing, and reflect on the strategies we can use to address these consequences.

Recognizing that the association of children with an armed group should always be avoided.

It might happen that some of the parents are in favour of their children joining an armed group. They might have different reasons for that. If this is the case, you should make sure that this is discussed and addressed here: you should make sure that after Session 4, all participants agree that joining an armed group is never a good option for children. Use the points in Activity 3, Step 3 to address this issue and make sure you reiterate this to them in the next sessions. If nonetheless some of the parents are still in favour of their children joining an armed group, you should discuss the issue with the Supervisor of the Program to find ways of addressing this problem together. If all parents are not onboard with this aspect, we risk endangering the success of the entire Program.



FACILITATORS' NOTES 4: Children's roles and experiences with armed groups

Reflect on which roles and tasks are assigned to children in your context and adapt accordingly. Also reflect on which roles are gender and age specific. For more information, have a look at the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action 2019 , standard 11: "Children associated with armed forces and groups.

Children can be:

- Messengers
- Combatants
- Cooks
- Cleaners
- Spies
- Wives/girlfriends
- Used for sexual exploitation or abuse (girls and boys)
- Nannies who take care of the babies and younger children
- Carriers of goods and weapons
- Leaders (of a group/of other children in the armed group)
- Designers, photographers, writers, speakers, etc. (any activity connected to the propaganda of the armed group ideology)
- Responsible for online communication
- Teachers for younger children
- Responsible for entertainment
- Responsible for mine-laying
- Human shield
- Checkpoint or prison guard

Example of outcomes of their experiences

Depending on the individual experience of each child, the daily life and experiences of children associated with armed groups can be very diverse, and so are the outcomes of these experiences. Therefore, in the list below you will find that some statements contradict each other. This is to help you reflect on your context: adapt the list to your reality and utilize only the points that reflect that reality.

- Children are separated from/leave their family or;
- They live with their family and regularly join the group.
- While living with the armed group, they can experience exceptionally harsh living conditions or;
- They experience better living conditions, for example they are given shelter, food and they are paid for their work.
- They may be deprived of food.
- They receive economic benefits for being part of the group.
- They may be isolated and lonely or;
- They find support and mentorship through peers in the armed group.

- They may be separated from familiar surroundings and support networks.
- They cover roles of power.
- They may be exposed to combat – shelling, artillery exchanges and explosions.
- They may be exposed to or witness violence inflicted on others.
- They witness killing/death or experience the loss of loved ones.
- They may face consequences of violence.
- They may be forced to inflict violence on others.
- They may use or be forced to use drugs or alcohol.
- They may (be forced to) marry a member of the armed group or;
- They may be survivors of sexual abuses (both girls and boys).
- They may face emotional abuse, which means, for example, being constantly blamed, criticized, or embarrassed by another person
- They may be exposed to daily threats of death.
- They may become pregnant or have children with members of the armed groups or armed forces.
- They may be forced to behave against their culture, custom and religion.

Closing the day and evaluation (10 min)

Aims: To recap the day and assess the session.

Materials: (If possible) Flipchart with hopes and fears from [Session 1. Activity 4.](#)

Modality:



Plenary

1. Explain to the participants that, as a practice in reflection, they should reflect on strategies to talk to their children about the consequences of joining an armed group.
2. Explain that at this point they do not need to engage with their children, if they do not feel comfortable about it yet, but only think about ways to approach the subjects, when best to do that, and when to avoid doing that.
3. Explain that you will discuss the consequences of child involvement in the next session, and that in one of the following sessions you will also explore how to talk to the children about the consequences of recruitment by armed groups.
4. **Ask** one or two volunteers to recap two things discussed today.
5. If you've had the chance to make notes of the [participants' hopes and fears on a flipchart](#), draw their attention to it and ask them to place a star or stars on hopes that are realized.
6. Next, take a marker and remove fears that are starting to be overcome.
7. Then, ask them to add new fears or hopes that might have emerged.
8. **Finally, Ask** the following questions to the group and make notes of the answers.
 - a. **Is there anything that you particularly liked about this session?**
 - b. **Is there anything that you found particularly useful?**
 - c. **Is there anything that you would do differently?**
9. Thank everyone for their participation and engagement.

Session 5

Consequences of association with armed groups for the child



Session 5: Consequences of association with armed groups for the child



Intense emotions

Time ⌚ 2h 30 min

Objectives: By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Link the consequences of child recruitment to a child's identity, wellbeing and relationships, during and after his/her direct involvement.
- Recognize that, from the point of view of the child, the experience of being associated with an armed group is a complex one, bringing trauma and difficulties, but is also part of his/her life that cannot be canceled (relations with peers, skills acquired, lessons learned, etc.).
- Distinguish gender specific consequences of child recruitment to a child's identity, wellbeing, and relationships, during and after recruitment and during reintegration at home.
- Identify how these consequences could affect the child's return, reunification and/or relationship with their family and the community.

Activities Overview:

Session 5		TOTAL 150 min
Act. 1	Welcoming participants	10 min
Act. 2	Linking the roles and the experiences of children associated with armed groups with consequences for their wellbeing	40 min
Act. 3	Returning home	40 min
Act. 4	Taking care of the needs of our girls	50 min

Resources Needed:

- Referral Plan and related Referral Handout.
- Flipcharts and markers.
- (If possible) Flipchart with hopes and fears from [Session 1. Activity 4.](#)

Session summary:

This session can be sensitive depending on the context especially where the community members believe in the cause brought forward by the armed group and might encourage child recruitment. Facilitators should therefore carefully review the content to conduct the session in a way that does not cause harm. Consult your Supervisor should you have any doubts on how to proceed.

This session links the roles and experiences of children associated with armed groups, as explored in [Session 4. The experiences of children involved with armed groups](#), with the consequences and outcomes for them, their wellbeing, development and relationships with the members of the household and community. The participants will discuss the specific consequences that such association might have for girls. The participants also reflect on the fact that, even after such a traumatic experience, children might carry some positive feelings about it (often related to a sense of independence, new skills acquired, feeling part of a group, etc.).

By reflecting upon the impact of negative experiences for the child's development and overall wellbeing, the participants will conclude that affiliation should be avoided at all costs, even if parents agree with the cause, or that the association made them gain new power and the child wants to voluntarily join in what seems to be a non-dangerous role (such as cook).



REFLECTING ON CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES WITH ARMED GROUPS

Sessions 4 and session 5 can have traumatic and emotional consequences for the parents. It is advisable to reflect on what is the best approach in the local context to carry out these sessions. Here, we suggest conducting the discussion as a plenary. In other contexts, it might be better to invite participants to work in pairs, or as a family unit, and write down the comments and reflections on pieces of paper that the facilitator(s) collects and reads to the plenary.

Also, the use of Open-Ended Stories provides a less personal and therefore less threatening way of exploring sensitive or possibly traumatic topics, and this tool can be combined with other communication strategies which further aim at reducing the risk of re-living a traumatic experience. For instance, instead of asking the whole group to discuss each Open-Ended Story, you could invite small groups or pairs formed around the family unit to make a drawing of what one day in the life of the four characters in the four Open-Ended Stories could be like. Do not ask each group to present their work, but rather walk around the various groups, note down their answers and provide a summary at the end. In this way you avoid spotlighting any of the participants. Coordinate with your co-facilitator to facilitate each pair or small group and report their ideas back to the plenary.



Note: Reflecting on the experiences that children might face when joining an armed group can be very difficult. Talking about children's abduction, the violence suffered, witnessed or inflicted, and all other deprivation, abuse and maltreatment they might have suffered can be a stressful and traumatizing experience for parents. Make sure you discuss this session and its contextualization with your **co-facilitator and with the Supervisor of the Program** before implementing it. If possible, also make sure that a case worker/social worker is present during these sessions, to address any intense or discomforting emotions that might emerge.

Do not forget to have the **Referral Plan** at hand: you might need it, in case any issue emerges, which needs to be addressed by a specialized agency.

You will find some guidance on how to support parents who might be experiencing intense emotions in the **Constant Companion**.

Activity 1. Welcoming participants (10 min)

Aims: To welcome participants, establish a positive atmosphere and recall what we discussed in the previous sessions.

Modality:



Plenary

1. Welcome parents.
2. Smile and show a positive attitude! Thank everyone for being there.
3. Start with a short and engaging activity that will get everyone's attention, such as a local song, a quick game or a brief energizer. You will find some suggestions in the Constant Companion. Also, you can invite some participants to volunteer and propose an energizer or a song.
4. Ask some volunteers to recall some key points discussed in the previous session.

Activity 2. Linking the roles and the experiences of children associated with armed groups with consequences for their wellbeing (40 min)

Aims: To discuss the consequences of the association with an armed group for their child's wellbeing, development, and relationships during and after recruitment; to recognize that the child can perceive some of the experiences connected to his/her association with the armed group as positive; to infer that affiliation should always be avoided at all costs.

Modality:



Plenary

1. SAY:

- In the previous session we have explored the different roles and experiences that children could undergo when recruited.
- Now we will discuss what we see as possible consequences of their association for their wellbeing, their development and their relationships.
- It can be challenging and emotional to reflect on our children's experience with armed groups, and we want to remind you that this is a safe space.
- What you share in the group will not be used to discuss individual experiences, but rather to learn from each other and make our community safer for children.
- If anything you share could cause harm to you, your family or the child, we will follow-up individually after the session to see how we can provide support.

2. SAY:

- i. As we have done in the previous session, let's take a look once again at the Open-Ended Stories of the various children associated with armed groups.

Open-Ended Story 1: Josef is a 10-year-old boy, who worked as a messenger with an armed group for the last 5 months. He has been living away from his parents. He has not been involved in direct combat, but he has seen some of his friends being

seriously injured during the combats. He also suffers under the abuse and humiliation of the commanders, and he lives in very poor conditions, with little to eat and a precarious shelter. He feels very isolated and he would like to go back to his family, but he can't.

SAY: I will now read a second story, this time, it is about a girl.

Open-Ended Story 2: Sandrine is a 13-year-old girl, who worked as a spy with an armed group for the last 5 months. She was not abducted but decided to join with some of her peers. She visits her parents every week but spends most of her time with the armed group in the bush. She feels part of a group now, she supports the cause of the armed group and wants to revenge some of her family members who have been killed during the combats. Also, thanks to her association with the group, she can provide her family with some economic support. She has not been actively part of the combats, but she witnessed violence and abuse every day.

2. **ASK** the following questions one by one, allowing enough time after each question to collect a few answers. **Do not forget to coordinate with your co-facilitator to take notes of the answers in your notebook!** To help you facilitate the conversation, use the information in the **Facilitators' Notes 5: [Consequences of the child's association with armed groups for his/her wellbeing, development, and relationships](#)**. Remember that your role is to encourage participants' sharing and peer learning, rather than lecturing: use the notes only if you think some crucial aspects have not been conveyed.

- a. Reflecting on the story of Josef, what are some of the problems he has faced? What about Sandrine?
- b. Reflecting on session 1, where we talked about children's development and wellbeing, what are some of the things we identified that a younger boy like Josef needs in order to grow up well and healthy? What about a younger girl?
- c. How is this experience negatively impacting the way in which a younger boy should be growing up? What about the girl?
- d. Is there any similarity in the story of Josef and Sandrine? And is there any difference?
- e. What would Josef, a boy, need from us parents? What about Sandrine, a 13-year-old girl?

3. After this discussion, present participants with the following two Open-Ended Stories, and

after each Open-Ended Story, repeat step 2. above.



Open-Ended Story 3: Wilson is an 18-year-old boy who was as a combatant with an armed group for the last 5 months. He was part of a group of peers who had decided to support the cause, and he agreed to join with them. He wanted to be a hero for his family and community. During the last 5 months he has witnessed and inflicted violence, he has seen many of his peers die, and he has himself been victim of violence. He would like to go home but he can't.

Open-Ended Stories 4: Raissa is a 16-years-old girl who joined an armed group because she wanted to escape the constant attacks to her village. She was not happy at home because her father used to beat her, and her mother was shouting all the time. She married a 33-year-old commander within the group because this made her feel safe. She was supposed to cook and

clean for the group and her husband forced her to have sexual intercourse with him every day, even if she did not want to.



CHILDREN SHARING THEIR TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCES

It can be the case that parents do not know the extent of what their children have witnessed or experienced. This also happens because the children, especially older ones, might want to protect their parents.

Remind participants that it is important not to force children into sharing their experiences if they do not want to, but also remind them that they should be open to listen without judging and offer opportunities of undivided attention to the children to facilitate the dialogue. You can find more information on this aspect in Session 12. Parent-child relationship: Better communication, better listening.

4. After you have discussed all the Open-Ended Stories, **ASK:**
 - a. Each child in this story experiences or witnesses violence and traumatic events. Each one lives in a condition of frequent and intense stress. Do you remember what happens to the brain when a child is exposed to intense stress?
5. Let participants discuss. Reflect on the answers given and integrate the following points as needed, making sure you refer to what parents just suggested.

SAY:

- High levels of stress affect the development of a child's brain. When people are afraid, scared or under stress, the brain gets into a sort of "automated mode", to help us deal with the scary situation in an effective and fast way. We are on a high alert and therefore we "silence" the thinking brain.
- If the child is in a constant state of alert, this can cause long-term damage to the brain.
- Most of the consequences of being part of an armed group are clearly negative for the child – such as violence. But some can be perceived by the child in a positive way, such as gaining power or earning money.
- It is very important to understand how their involvement can be perceived as positive for the child, as this can have consequences for the child's reintegration into the home and community. For example, children, especially older ones, may have experienced independence and power, and they may miss their life with the group because at home they are not treated as grown-ups. In some armed groups, girls may take up roles which are similar to the ones that boys have, and they may appreciate this equality and freedom. Also, the group can give children a sense of belonging, which is very important especially for older children. We need to be aware of these elements and not force the child back into a role that he/she might not fit into any longer. The child needs understanding and kindness, and not judgment and shame.

Even if some of these aspects might be perceived as positive, both by the child and by his family, the exposure to violence, the abuse and the high level of stress have negative consequences for the child's wellbeing and development.

6. **ASK:**

- a. Do you think that joining an armed group is never an acceptable choice for a child? Do you think that the participation of the child in an armed group is always a negative and traumatic experience we need to avoid or try to prevent?

7. **It is crucial that you make sure everyone agrees to these points before moving forward. As we have indicated and discussed already in Session 4, all participants should agree that a child's involvement with an armed group needs to be avoided. If you do not manage to reach an agreement with everyone on this point at this stage, it might be hard to achieve the overall objectives of this Program. Therefore, it is a good idea to discuss this issue with the Supervisor of the Program, before the implementation of the next session.**

5 minutes break (Optional): Find a locally appropriate way to take a break and relax. You can invite some participants to volunteer and share a locally appropriate relaxation technique, such a song or a quick game. If no one volunteers, be ready to propose a short and energizing activity. This break can also help you re-strategize should you face some resistant reactions to asking the questions in point 6 above.

Activity 3. Returning home (40 min)

Aims: To discuss the challenges that children who have been recruited by armed forces face when returning to their family and community.

Modality:



Plenary

1. **SAY:**

- When we are together with our family members or members of the household, we know most of the things that are happening to them. We see them happy or sad; we see them leave to go to work and come back.
- In general, we know how each member of the family is doing.
- At times, people leave to go visit other relatives and come back.

2. **ASK:**

- a. How do you welcome and interact with someone who has been away for a week or two weeks visiting relatives in a different town?

(Responses will be varied and may include: we prepare a special meal, we ensure we are home to welcome them, we spend time listening to the news about where they have come from, etc.).

3. **SAY:**

- When someone leaves for a longer time, for example for 6 months or one year, things may change in the home.

4. **ASK:**

- a. What are some of the changes that can happen in the family in 6 months or in 1 year?

(Responses may include: a child is born, someone dies, someone is sick and heals, a new house is built, children go to a different level at school, etc.).

5. **ASK:**

- a. Now think about this family member coming back after 6 months or 1 year, what are some of the ways you would welcome him/her?

6. **SAY:**

- Now let us come back to the children we talked about in the previous activity, who have been recruited by an armed group.
- Let's now imagine that the 4 children about whom we spoke in the previous activity have found a way to return home to their parents (the facilitator can re-read the stories again).

7. **ASK:**

- a. Let's start by focusing on the experiences of the boys. What are some of the immediate needs of the boys given their experience? (responses could include health, food, education, support etc.)
- b. What are their fears, hopes and feelings in coming back home?
- c. What has changed in the household while they were gone? And what could these changes mean to them?
- d. How has the child changed while away?
- e. What do you think is the feeling of their parents? What about the other household members?
- f. How would the community react to the child coming back?
- g. How would the family react if the child comes back with a physical disability?

8. Now focus specifically on the story of the two girls in the Open-Ended Stories before. Read them again if necessary: these stories below are the same ones as before, you can ask the participants if anyone remembers the story of Sandrine and Raissa and wants to recap. If not, you can read them again.

Open-Ended Stories 2: Sandrine is a 13-year-old girl, who has been used as a spy by an armed group for the last 5 months. She was not abducted but decided to join with some of her peers. She visits her parents every week but spends most of her time with the armed group in the bush. She feels part of a group now, she supports the cause of the armed group and wants to revenge some of her family members who have been killed during the war. Also, thanks to her association with the group she can provide her family with some economic support. She has not been actively part of the combats, but she witnessed violence and abuse every day.

Open-Ended Stories 4: Raissa is a 16-years-old girl who joined an armed group because she wanted to escape the constant attacks to her village. She was not happy at home because her father used to beat her, and her mother was shouting all the time. She married a 33-year-old commander within the group because this gave her a sense of safety. She was supposed to cook and clean for the group and her husband forced her to have sexual intercourse with him every day, even if she did not want to.

9. **Ask** the following questions one by one, allowing enough time after each question to elicit a few answers. **Do not forget to coordinate with your co-facilitator and take notes in your notebook.** To help you facilitate the conversation, use the information in the **Facilitator's Notes 5: Consequences of the child's association with armed groups for his/her wellbeing, development and relationships**. Remember that your role is to encourage participants' sharing and peer learning, rather than lecturing: use the notes only if you think some crucial aspects have not been conveyed.

- a. What are some of the immediate needs of the girls given their experience?
- b. How does they feel?
- c. How do you think the other household members might react? What about the community?
- d. How do you think their families might react?
- e. How has the child changed while away? And what do these changes mean for them and for the family members?
- f. What are their fears and hopes in coming back home?
- g. How would the family react if the girl comes back with a physical disability?

10. Let participants discuss. Make sure you convey only these points which did not emerge through the conversation among participants, **SAY:**

- We need to reflect on our girls' stories, and recognize the challenges that they have faced, and still face, to effectively address the risks of recruitment. This will also strengthen the role of the family and community as support systems and ensure their safe return home.
- Girls suffer particularly harsh conditions when they join armed groups because they can be survivors of gender-based violence, such as sexual abuse, or violence inflicted by the husband or partner, they generally receive less food, and are paid less or not paid at all, and they often experience rejection and stigmatization when returning home.
- There are three points that I want to emphasize, which we always need to keep in mind during the journey we are having together and in your daily life.
- Remember: Children are resilient – they have the ability to recover quickly from challenging situations! With the right help and support they can overcome challenges and distress caused by their experiences with armed groups.
- At the same time, there are many push and pull factors that contribute to a child joining an armed group: we must not blame ourselves for what happened and try to do all we can to support our children once they return home.
- What we have shared and discussed so far will help us reflect on how our behaviors in the family contribute to create a healthy, loving and supportive environment for our

children, and therefore prevent their recruitment or support their reintegration into the family environment.



GIRLS ASSOCIATED WITH ARMED GROUPS: CONSEQUENCES AND CONSIDERATIONS

One of the main consequences of girls' association with armed groups might be discrimination and stigmatization when returning to their family and community. Girls may undergo exceptionally harsh and traumatic experiences while away, and they may find themselves rejected by family and community members once home. They may be received with suspicion, isolation, and discrimination and also with humiliation and shame.

Some girls are particularly vulnerable to stigmatization, especially those who belong to different ethnic communities, or those who return home with a baby.

Parents might find the girls' behavior once they get back home particularly challenging to deal with or difficult to understand. Their behavior is often a reaction to the rejection, or the fear or the perception of rejection; they can isolate themselves even when they desperately want to be included. Emphasize that if the family and the community accept and support the girls, their behavior will improve.

As a facilitator it is your task to emphasize the responsibility of families and communities to help girls find their place again in the community. This is one of the key steps to ensure their reintegration in the family and community.

Remember: We will further explore the special requirements and vulnerabilities of girls associated with armed groups as well as specific family practices to tackle these needs in *Session 7. In action: Gathering ideas to build a positive and supportive family environment and in Session 8. Gender specific needs, gender specific responses.*

If any issue emerges that cannot be addressed directly through this Program, do not forget to make use of the Referral Plan and support families or girls who might need specialised help from external agencies. If you are unsure of how to address a concern or problem, consult the Supervisor of the Program.

Activity 4. Taking care of the needs of our girls (50 min)

Aims: To recognize that the return of girls who have been associated with armed groups can pose unique challenges and consequences for the parents.

Modality:



Plenary

1. SAY:

- When girls return after having been involved with armed groups things can be complicated for the parents.
- Let us have a look at some quotes by girls who talk about their experiences once they came back from life with an armed group.

2. Explain that you will read a few statements: These are real voices of girls who had been recruited by armed groups, they are taken from findings from our discussions with

children like yours in different countries.



3. Read the following extracts:



“Since we came back, we have lived in perfect harmony with my little brothers. But some of my fellow girls call me a brothel because we sold porridge to the [armed group]. However, others continue to play with me”.¹⁰ 15-year-old girl

“We were called a ‘prostitute;’ people would not allow their daughters to associate with me.” 17-year-old girl

“At school, the others discriminate against me. They say they are afraid of me; some don’t talk to me.” 13-year-old girl ¹¹

4. ASK:

- How do you think the parents of these girls feel?
- How do the girls feel?
- What kind of challenges do the parents face?
- What is the relationship of the parents with the community like?
- What is the relationship of the daughter with the community like?

5. SAY:

- Children involved with armed groups are often victims of stigmatization and rejection, and this can be especially strong against our girls.
- Also, we might ourselves be targeted by rejection and social stigmatization.
- At this point, it is important to recognize our feelings and our challenges with the community. We, as parents and as adults, live in complex and often stressful and traumatizing realities: it is crucial to reflect on the impact of the environment on our lives and our own wellbeing. In the next sessions we will learn what stigmatization implies for our children’s and our own wellbeing and how to cope with that.

¹⁰ IRC SPARC Central African Republic research findings.

¹¹ What the girls says, child soldiers international.

6. SAY:

- Now, let's imagine that one of these girls comes back home to her parents with a small baby she had with one of the armed group's commanders.
7. Explain that you require three volunteers to enact a role play between the two adult caregivers of the girl and imagine the challenges that the parents could identify in this situation, the ways they would try to support the child, and how they would behave towards the baby.
 8. Give the volunteers a few minutes to prepare for the role play, up to 10 minutes, and that the scene should not take more than 3 minutes.
 9. After preparation, or 10 minutes, invite the volunteers to present their role play.
 10. At the end of the role play,

ASK:

- a. What do you think of this scenario? Is this what happens in our community?
11. Discuss the reaction of the parents. Then invite another group of three volunteers who want to role play the same scenario and add any different element or reaction based on what happens in the community.

ASK:

- a. What do you think of this second role play? Are these issues that may come up in our community?
- b. How does the reaction of the family and community affect the daughter?
- c. How does the situation affect the parents? How do they feel? What challenges do they face?
- d. How does the situation affect the baby? How does the behavior of the family and community affect her current life? What about her future development?
- e. Which solutions could parents utilize to support their daughter?



12. SAY:

- Having a baby at a young age can already be a huge challenge in itself, for the young mother as well as for her parents. As parents, one might experience a wide range of feelings and emotions, from anger, guilt, insecurity and rejection.
- As parents, we might face the harsh stigmatization from the community for our daughter's situation, but it is crucial to remember what she has experienced, how she feels and how the situation impacts her.
- As parents, we have to help our child cope with her situation and her motherhood. We have to help her learn to be a mother, while at the same time remember that she is also still a child.
- Also, the way in which we treat the baby will have long lasting consequences on her development and wellbeing and will also affect the relationship we are trying to build with our daughter.
- In the next sessions we will investigate what this can mean in practice.



FACILITATORS' NOTES 5: Consequences of the child's association with armed groups for his/her wellbeing, development and relationships.

Depending on the local contexts, the daily life and experiences of children involved with armed groups can be very diverse. Therefore, in the list below you will find that some statements contradict each other. This is to help you reflect on your context: Adapt the list to your reality and utilize only the points that reflect that reality.

Physical consequences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical disability • Physical injuries, health conditions and diseases • Sexually transmitted diseases (STD's) • Malnutrition • Substance abuse • Survivor of Gender-Based Violence
Emotional consequences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feelings of guilt and shame • Desensitized to violence • Anxiety (separation anxiety, school phobia, psychosomatic complaints, sleeping problems etc.) • Survivor of Gender-Based Violence • Unwillingness to seek help • Anger • Fear for their safety and future
Mental health consequences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental health issues • Trauma • Stress • Post-traumatic stress disorder • Substance abuse • Depression • Panic attack • Survivor of GBV
Economic consequences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic hardship
Relational consequences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survivor of GBV • Separation from home/care • Stigmatization, rejection • Extreme loneliness • Isolation • Mistrust towards adults

Consequences which can be perceived a positive by the child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attachment to the group • Sense of belonging • Gained emotional support through peers • New forms of power • New sense of authority • Autonomy and freedom • New sense of purpose and identity • Economic benefits
Consequences of Gender Based Violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) • Pregnancy • Anxiety, depression • Undermined confidence and self-esteem • Severe trauma
Consequences of severe trauma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Anxiety ○ Isolation ○ Recurrent, unwanted distressing memories of the traumatic event ○ Upsetting dreams or nightmares about the traumatic event ○ Severe emotional distress or physical reactions to something that reminds you of the traumatic event. ○ Negative thoughts about yourself, other people or the world ○ Hopelessness about the future ○ Memory problems, including not remembering important aspects of the traumatic event ○ Difficulty maintaining close relationships ○ Feeling detached from family and friends ○ Lack of interest in activities you once enjoyed ○ Difficulty experiencing positive emotions ○ Feeling emotionally numb ○ Physical consequences such as loss of appetite, difficulties sleeping

Consequences upon child returning home

Physical consequences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical disability • Physical injuries or acute or chronic health conditions and diseases
Emotional consequences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aggressive behavior • Conflicting feelings of guilt, shame and injustice, or fear for their safety and future • High level of attachment to the armed group • Fear of parents' reprisal

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear of re-recruitment
Material/ economic consequences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No access to educational opportunities • No access to jobs • Risk of detention • Lack of resources and means
Relational consequences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changed relationships and behaviors with member of the opposite sex as a consequence of Gender-Based Violence (both for boys and girls). • Changed relationships with adults and peers: The community may perceive the child to be an adult now, while he/she may still have the same needs for care, support and protection, as all other children. • Changed relationships with adults and peers: The community and family ignore the power, autonomy and independence that the child has had while with the armed group and tries to place him/her back within the roles and relationships he/she had before joining. • Community/family rejection. • Lived experiences of the child may impede his/her ability to engage with children the same age. • The community perceives that the child is receiving an unfair advantage in specific programs targeting children. • Limited peer support. • Child is convinced that there has been a rupture with their family - new dependency relationship on the armed group. • Stigmatization linked to disabilities. • Stigmatization linked to “lost value” of girls (connected to their actual or presumed sexual experiences). • Return home but stereotypes are frequent and can lead to going back again.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stigma or stereotypes that a child is possessed or has an evil spirit. • Community suspicion - communities fear that the child will engage in violence after returning home. • Community/family's fear that the armed group/force will find the child (particularly if they escaped) and cause harm to the child and family. • Isolation. • Family/community discrimination. • Family/community humiliation. • Loneliness. • Family/community stigmatization.
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Closing the day and evaluation (10 min)

Aims: To recap the day and assess the session.

Materials: (If possible) Flipchart with hopes and fears from [Session 1. Activity 4](#).

Modality:



Plenary

1. **SAY:** I know that today's session was not easy and may have made some of us remember experiences that are sad. In case you want to talk to someone, we can help you find the right support once we have closed the session. Please come and speak to us.
2. **Ask** one or two volunteers to recap two things discussed today.
3. If you've had the chance to make notes of the [participants' hopes and fears on a flipchart](#), draw their attention to it and ask them to place a star or stars on hopes that are realized.
4. Next, take a marker and remove fears that are starting to be overcome.
5. Then, ask them to add new fears or hopes that might have emerged.
6. Finally, **ask** the following questions to the group and make notes of the answers.
 - a. **Is there anything that you particularly liked about this session?**
 - b. **Is there anything that you found particularly useful?**
 - c. **Is there anything you would do differently?**
7. Thank everyone for their participation and engagement.

Session 6

Our challenging role as parents



Session 6: **Our challenging role as parents**



Time ⌚ 1h 20 min total

Objectives: By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Recognize and express the challenges that the association of their child with an armed group might pose on their family's relationships and on their own wellbeing.
- Recognize, accept and respect their emotions in relation to their child's association with an armed group.
- Recognize and accept the impact that experiences such as war, trauma, loss, or displacement have on their wellbeing and recognize their own emotional needs.

Activities Overview:

Session 6		TOTAL 800 min
Act. 1	Welcoming participants	10 min
Act 2	Recognizing the impact of the environment on our wellbeing	20 min
Act 3	Our children and us: How do we feel? What does their involvement with armed groups mean for us and our family?	40 min
Closing the day and evaluation		10 min

Resources Needed:

- Referral Plan and related Referral Handout.
- Flipcharts and markers.
- (If possible) Flipchart with hopes and fears from [Session 1. Activity 5.](#)

Session summary:

Now that we have built a picture of the roles, tasks, experiences and consequences of these experiences with the armed groups for the children, it is time for the parents to reflect on themselves. We cannot care for our children if we do not recognize the challenges that we are facing as adults and as parents. Participants will reflect on the consequences that their child's recruitment by an armed group might have on themselves, their wellbeing and their relationships within the home. They will reflect on the challenges they might face when the child is away, as well as when he/she returns home.

Activity 1. Welcoming participants (10 min)

Aims: To welcome participants, establish a positive atmosphere and recall what we discussed in the previous sessions.

Modality:



Plenary

1. Welcome parents.
2. Smile and show a positive attitude! Thank everyone for being there.
5. Start with a short and engaging activity that will get everyone's attention, such as a local song, a quick game or a brief energizer. You will find some suggestions in the Constant Companion. Also, you can invite some participants to volunteer and propose an energizer or a song.
3. Ask some volunteers to recall some key points discussed in the previous session.

Activity 2. Recognizing the impact of the environment on our wellbeing (20 min)

Aims: To let participants share how the environment in which they live and the experiences they have affect their own wellbeing.

Modality:



Plenary

1. **SAY:**
 - The challenges we have explored so far are linked to the experiences of our children when they are involved with armed groups and when they return home. But we are also affected by the environment in which we live.
2. **ASK:**
 - a. What are some of the issues or challenges that we face every day?

Some answers here might be: living in a conflict area, having witnessed or experienced violence, job insecurity, displacement, and having lost most of our belongings, the loss of some of our family members and friends, the constant threats of attacks etc.

b. How do these experiences affect our wellbeing? How do they make us feel?

Some answers here might be: we feel overwhelmed, stressed, constantly under threat, insecure, vulnerable etc.

c. How do these feelings affect our family life and relationships and our relationships with the community?

3. Let participants discuss. Reflect on the answers given and integrate the following points as needed, making sure you refer to what parents just suggested. **SAY:**

- Besides the challenges linked to our children's experiences, the environment in which we live significantly affects our own wellbeing. For example, living in a conflict area can make us feel anxious and stressed. It is very important to acknowledge the challenges we face as parents and as human beings, and the emotions that derive from these situations.
- It is crucial to recognize, acknowledge and celebrate the efforts we make as adults and as parents in dealing with such challenges.
- We need to be aware and honor our ability as individuals and as family and community members to live a functional life within these hard conditions every day.
- At the same time, we need to constantly ensure that our needs are met and take good care of our wellbeing, and address timely any issue that might arise. We owe it to ourselves, and also we cannot take care of our family and children, if we do not take care of ourselves too.
- We are not alone: other parents and adults feel the same way, and experience similar struggles and challenges.
- In the next sessions we will focus on our own wellbeing and think about strategies to tackle these challenges, while working on our relationships with our loved ones.
- Do not forget that if you need additional support, we are here to discuss anything with you before and after the sessions, and that there are other specialized services that can help you deal with some of these challenges and struggles. You are not alone!

Note: If you are working exclusively with parents whose children have not been recruited by armed groups, but might be at risk, explain to the participants that the next activity addresses more directly the consequences that parents might face when their children are recruited. Even if this scenario does not apply directly to their life, it is advisable to conduct this activity as it will help to better understand the consequences of recruitment. Explain that you will put yourselves in the shoes of these parents whose children are returning home and reflect on the challenges they might face and imagine what it means for them as they try to support their child.

Activity 3. Our children and us: How do we feel? What does their association with armed groups mean for us and our families? (40 min)

Aims: To recognize and express the challenges that child recruitment might pose on relationships within the family and on the parents' wellbeing; to infer that these emotions are shared by others, that they are normal and need to be accepted.

Modality:



Plenary

2. SAY:

- We have seen what it can mean for our children to be involved with armed groups, and what consequences this might have for them and their wellbeing.
- But as parents this experience can have big consequences for us, our wellbeing, and our relationships within the family and outside.
- We need to understand these consequences and, if needed, tackle them to be able to appropriately take care of ourselves and our family.

3. Explain that you will read a few statements: these are accounts given from parents of children who have joined armed groups and have returned home, they talk about their own struggles and challenges. These are real voices of parents, they are taken from

findings from discussions with parents like them in different countries.



4. Read each of the following quotes. After each extract you will ask questions.

Extract 1. "We are really concerned about the future of our children. When your child is out in the armed group and you have nothing to give him, it hurts. Me and my husband have a lot of worries because if we cannot find something for these children, they will one day risk re-entering the armed group. When they ask us something, we are unable to give it to them, it hurts us as parents." - Female caregiver of multiple children.

Pause for a few minutes and ask the whole group the following questions:

5. ASK:

- a. What challenge is the parent experiencing?
- b. How is the parent feeling and how does this affect the parent's wellbeing?
- c. How does such a situation affect the relationship between the parent and their child?
- d. Now think about the other household members in this family like aunties or grandparents or anyone else in the family. How can they be affected if parents cannot provide for the child?
- e. What about his/her relationship with community members?

6. Next, read the next two scenarios one after the other.

Extract 2. "Sometimes [he and his brothers] fight and quarrel with each other. ...If he asks for food and his brothers say, there is no food, he gets angry and sometimes he beats them. We also get angry sometimes, we insulted him and for almost two weeks, he didn't come home. ...He didn't behave like that before. ...It was his time in the group that had an impact on his behavior." - Female caregiver of boy.

Extract 3. "Yes I'm very worried, even when we were still in the bush, we were very worried about his fate. Listen, when you have a child who joins the armed group, no matter what happens his father thinks about death." - Male caregiver of boy 5.



PARENTS' REACTION TO CHILDREN'S ASSOCIATION WITH ARMED GROUPS, GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

The parents whose children have been associated with armed groups, might react in very different ways to their return home. In this session, it might happen that the parents disclose cases of violence or neglect in the household and/or disclose violence towards children or Gender-Based Violence.

Remember that these behaviors are in no case acceptable and they need to be addressed accordingly. Refer to the information contained in the Constant Companion on how to deal with these kinds of disclosures. Have at hand the Referral Plan as developed together with the Supervisor of the Program.

7. After you have read the above two scenarios, follow the discussion with the following questions,

ASK:

- a. What other challenges can parents' face, when their children return home after they have joined an armed group?
- b. What kind of emotions might parents, whose children come back from armed groups, feel?
- c. As parents, how do you know when you are experiencing such emotions?
- d. What challenges might parents experience, when the child recruited is a girl?

Do not forget to coordinate with your co-facilitator to take note of the answers in your notebook.

Use the information contained in the [Facilitator's Notes 6: Challenges faced by parents](#) to facilitate the discussion. Make sure you convey only these points which did not emerge through the conversation among participants.

8. To conclude, convey the following points, making sure you integrate them with what emerged through the conversation among participants.



SAY:

- When our children come back, we can experience a diverse and conflicting range of emotions: we can be happy for their return but frightened by the risk of them joining again. We might be angry with them for not opening up to us, or feel ashamed for what has happened, or scared by their aggressive behavior.
- It is important to recognize that the experiences and feelings we are undergoing are normal, that they are shared by other parents and that we are not alone.
- In the course of the next sessions, we will learn how to reflect on our feelings and learn to cope with them.



FACILITATORS' NOTES 6: Challenges faced by parents

Depending on the local contexts, the daily life and experiences of the children associated with armed groups can be very diverse, as with the consequences for ourselves as parents. Therefore, in the list below you will find that some statements contradict each other. This is to help you reflect on your context: adapt the list to your reality and utilize only the points that reflect that reality.

Challenges faced by parents

- Parents might feel a great range of different and conflicting emotions: Anger, sadness, self-blame and blame of the child, fear, disgust, regret, shame, hatred, helplessness, love, joy for their child's return, etc.
- Parents might struggle to provide for their children, feeling that their inability to provide them what they ask for might lead their children to re-join the armed group.
- Parents might fear for their child's wellbeing and safety.
- The child might be aggressive and there are tensions in the home.
- The parents are also affected by trauma and loss, and they might use harsh discipling techniques towards their children.
- The child does not want/manage to open up, and the parents struggle to communicate with him/her (Session 10).
- The parents do not understand their children's behavior.
- Stigma from the community implies that parents feel isolated and rejected.
- Parents feel that the community blames them for their children's behavior and choices.
- Parents might find it difficult to understand their child's need for independence and autonomy, as a consequence of the involvement with the armed group

Challenges linked to the association of girls

- Parents might feel a great range of different and conflicting emotions: Anger, sadness, self-blame and blame of the child, fear, disgust, regret, shame, hatred, helplessness, love, joy for their girl's return, etc.
- Parents might find it difficult to understand the child's need for autonomy and independence that she might have gained through her experience with the armed group.
- Stigma from the community implies that parents feel isolated and rejected.
- (If the child comes home with a baby/pregnant) The parents struggle to balance their child's role as a mother and as daughter.
- (If the child comes home with a baby/pregnant) The parents have conflicting emotions about the mother and the child.
- (If the child comes home with a baby/pregnant) The parents don't know how to emotionally and materially support the new mother and child.
- If the local community has no health facilities, the parents may struggle to support the girl or access required medical treatment.

Closing the day and evaluation (10 min)

Aims: To recap the day and assess the session.

Materials: (If possible) Flipchart with hopes and fears from [4](#).

Modality:



Plenary

1. **Ask** one or two volunteers to recap two things discussed today.
2. If you've had the chance to make notes of the [participants' hopes and fears on a flipchart](#), draw their attention to it and ask them to place a star or stars on hopes that are realized.
3. Next, remove fears that are starting to be overcome.
4. Then, ask them to add new fears or hopes that might have emerged.
5. Finally, **ask** the following questions to the group and make notes of the answers.
 - a. **Is there anything that you particularly liked about this session?**
 - b. **Is there anything that you found particularly useful?**
 - c. **Is there anything that you would do differently?**
6. Thank everyone for their participation and engagement.

Session 7

In action: Gathering ideas to build a positive and supportive family environment



Session 7: In action: Gathering ideas to build a positive & supportive family environment

Time ⌚ 2h 30 min

Objectives: By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Recognize the ways in which their relationship and behavior towards the child impacts the child's chances of recruitment and re-recruitment.
- Reflect on how their behaviors ease children's reintegration into the family environment and prevent further recruitment.
- Indicate strategies they utilize to address their own needs and ensure their wellbeing.

Activities Overview:

Session 7		TOTAL 150 min
Act. 1	Welcoming participants	10 min
Act 2	Building healthy, supportive and loving family relationships	30 min
Act 3	How healthy, supportive and loving family relationships can reduce the risk of children's engagement with armed groups	40 min
Act 4	Can family relationships reduce the risk of forced recruitment or abduction?	20 min
Act 4	How healthy, supportive and loving family relationships can address some consequences of our children's experience with armed groups	40 min
Closing the day and evaluation		10 min

Resources Needed:

- Referral Plan and related Referral Handout.
- Flipcharts and markers.
- (If possible) Flipchart with hopes and fears from [Session 1. Activity 4.](#)
- Reproduce on two flipcharts the images in the [Pictogram for the facilitators 7: Risk and behaviors \(see Activity 3\).](#) and place them somewhere visible to everyone.
- Reproduce on two flipcharts the images in the [Pictogram for the facilitators 8: Consequences and behaviors \(see Activity 4\).](#) and place them somewhere visible to everyone.

Session summary:

This session introduces the second part of the workshop, in which the parents discuss approaches they use to build a supportive family environment. The session starts by recalling the main points that the parents highlighted in the last sessions: **a. The reasons for joining an armed group**; **b. The consequences of the experience within the armed group for the child**; **c. The consequences for the parents and the impact of the external environment on their wellbeing and relationships.** From these starting points, parents recognize their approach for the construction of a positive and supportive family environment, and to prevent recruitment and support reintegration.



TIPS TO FACILITATE SESSION 8

This session can be a bit challenging to facilitate, because you are asked to recall what participants said and discussed during the last sessions and help them link these points with practical approaches to family life. Therefore, to help you facilitate the discussions, you should:

- Accurately prepare the session with your co-facilitator.
- Coordinate the various tasks, making sure that before you start implementing the next activities, the various tables presented in the next pages are all contextualized and all integrated with the points that the parents highlighted during the previous sessions (you will find indications on this aspect in each of the following activities).
- Make sure that one facilitator coordinates the discussion, while the other takes care of reading the necessary information or notes.
- Take note of the main points generated by the groups.
- Make sure you practice the session in advance with your co-facilitator.

Activity 1. Welcoming participants (10 min)

Aims: To welcome participants, establish a positive atmosphere and recall what we discussed in the previous sessions.

Modality:



Plenary

1. Welcome parents.
2. Smile and show a positive attitude! Thank everyone for being there.
3. Start with a short and engaging activity that will get everyone's attention, such as a local song, a quick game or a brief energizer. You will find some suggestions in the Constant Companion. Also, you can invite some participants to volunteer and propose a short activity.
4. Ask some volunteers to recall some key points discussed in the previous session.

Activity 2. Building healthy, supportive, and loving family relations (30 min)

Aims: To let participants share what they identify as a healthy, supportive and loving family; to reflect on behaviors and actions that each family member embodies to realize healthy, supportive and loving family relationships.



OUR FAMILY

There is no such thing as an Ideal Family: Every family is unique and can thrive in different ways. But there are some common elements that can make for a healthy, supportive and loving relationships and family life. Reflect with the parents in your group on which family values are important in your community. If needed, you can suggest some of the following points and adapt them to your context and community.

*Open and honest communication among family members. Everyone is heard equally, without discriminations based on their gender, age or abilities.

*Mutual respect and appreciation. Every voice, opinion and emotion is acknowledged and respected. No humiliation, shaming or guilting.

*Each person is encouraged; everyone is put in the position to find his/her own strengths.

*Family members show mutual trust.

*Each person is encouraged to learn to make the right choices independently. Everyone tries to identify what is right and act accordingly. Also, children and adults are encouraged to talk to a trusted family member or adult and to ask for support when they don't know how to make the right decision.

*When problems that arise in the family are solved together, but everyone is also given space for privacy and independence.

* All family members have rights as well as responsibilities and deserve respect; family members are not treated differently based on their gender, ability or age.

*There is no use of harsh punishment, nor of violence of any sort, against any of the family members.

Modality:



Plenary

1. **ASK:**

- a. What do you imagine a healthy, supportive and loving family to be like?
- b. In a healthy family, what do parents expect from their children?
- c. In a healthy family, how do parents behave towards their children?
- d. In a healthy family, what do children expect from their parents?
- e. In such a family, how do the children behave towards their parents?

If you feel that some culturally relevant points did not emerge through the conversation, use the information contained in the **tips box: Our family** to integrate them into the discussion. Remember that your role is to encourage participants' sharing and peer learning, rather than lecturing: use the notes only if you think some crucial aspects have not been conveyed.

2. **SAY:**

- During the next sessions, we will focus on sharing and learning from each other some of the strategies you can use to build a healthy, supportive and loving family.
- We will investigate approaches you use to:
 - Communicate and listen to our children.
 - Understand and manage emotions, and relaxation techniques to cope with stress.
 - Show respect and appreciation.
 - Problem solve together.
 - Avoid violence and find positive ways to guide our children's behavior.
 - Make a family budget and save money together.
 - Learn to make the right choices.
 - Build trustful relationships.
- Each of these practices contributes in different ways to building a loving, supportive and caring family.



ISSUES THAT NEED TO BE DEALT WITH SEPARATELY

Some issues such as domestic violence, GBV, child abuse etc. could arise here, but they cannot be addressed by you as a facilitator. Have the Referral Plan at hand to address any of these issues.



FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS IN THE LOCAL CONTEXT

In some contexts, parents might describe an ideal family as one where children show respect towards parents. What respect means can vary from one place to another. In some places, respect might be interpreted as being one directional: children must show respect towards adults, but adults do not have to show respect towards children. Consequently, children are not expected to be heard, nor to express their emotions or feelings, and parents – especially fathers – are not expected to listen to their children. Parents are expected to impart discipline and be the moral guide of the family.

If this is the case in your context, it is important to tackle this aspect here and throughout the next sessions. Ask participants: What do you expect from your children? If they mention respect, remind them what we learned in Session 2 and 3: children largely learn to behave through their parents' own behavior. If as parents we treat children with respect, we listen to them and we give them space to express their feelings and emotions, we can expect our children to behave accordingly and show us respect.

Do not worry: This aspect will also be handled in other sessions and we will have many chances to go over it again in the course of the Program.

Activity 3. How healthy, supportive and loving family relationships can reduce the risk of children's engagement with armed groups (40 min)

Aims: To analyze how healthy, supportive and loving family relationships can contribute to tackling some of the risk factors of children's association with armed groups.

Materials: Reproduce on two flipcharts the images in the [Pictogram for the facilitators 7: Risk and behaviors \(see below\)](#), and place them somewhere visible to everyone.

Modality:



Group work

Pictogram for the facilitators 7: Risk and behaviors

If possible, you can reproduce the following two pictograms on a flipchart and place them somewhere visible for the participants to remember what they should focus on.

Risks for the child



Family behavior to address these risks



1. SAY:

- Let's see how the "family" that we have discussed in the previous activity can help reduce the risk that children join an armed group.
- Remember: The responsibility of your child's actions does not fall entirely on your shoulders! There are some elements that we can influence, but others that we do not have much control over.
- For example, as you might remember, we have seen that economic hardship can push a child to join an armed group. This is a factor which is difficult to manage and for which we might need appropriate support.
- Now we will discuss the ways in which our behaviors reduce the risks that our children might join armed groups.

2. Invite participants to form 4 groups.

3. Explain that you will read two scenarios. Two groups should work on the first scenario, and two on the second scenario.

4. Invite group 1 and 2 to work on the following scenario. Read out loud:



Farid is 15-year-old boy. Since the war has started, his family have lost their home and land and have been displaced somewhere else. The child has found himself more and more isolated and lonely. In the area where they now live, his peers make fun of him, hit him and send him away because he belongs to a minority group which is discriminated against in this region of the county.

5. Next, invite group 3 and 4 to work on the following scenario. Read out loud:



Jamal is a 12-year-old girl. Her parents have decided that it is time for her to stop going to school and are planning to marry her with a friend of Jamal's father, but Jamal does not want to. She would like to study, go to school and be with her friends.

6. Invite them to discuss the following points in groups (show the [Pictogram for the facilitators 7: Risk and behaviors, if possible](#)):

- a. What risks are the child facing that could lead him/her to joining an armed group?
- b. What could we do in the family or in the community to address these issues?

7. Explain that they have 15 minutes to discuss these points. One person from each group will present the group's ideas, the presentation should not take more than 5 minutes.

Coordinate with your **co-facilitator** to walk around the groups and make sure the instructions have been understood.

8. After 15 minutes, invite each group to present their ideas. Take notes in your notebook.

9. At the end of the presentations, reflect on what emerged through the presentations and integrate the following points as needed, making sure you refer to what parents just

suggested. **SAY:**



[Edit the text in [brackets] below and integrate the risks and behaviors suggested by the parents during this activity, using the notes you took in your notebook].

- Through loving, supportive and caring family relationships we can address some of the risks that our children might join an armed group.
- For example, Farid risks being recruited by an armed group because **[his family is poor and he cannot support his parents; he feels lonely, isolated and he is discriminated against by his peers; he might think that by joining he will find a group to belong to, and maybe also make some money to help his parents]**.
- By **[talking to Farid, asking him how he feels, showing him love and support, trying to solve his problems together and find together ways to overcome his troubles]** we can make Farid feel more confident and help him make the right choices in life, and avoid joining an armed group. For example, the parents might discuss with Farid what ways they could address the issue, and together they

could agree to attend group sessions with an organization which support adolescents; or they could agree to help him find a sport center he could join.

- Similarly, **[Jamal might think that the only way to escape a forced marriage is by joining an armed group]**.
- As parents we could **[listen to Jamal, respect her as a girl, and treat her equally; her father and mother could engage in a conversation with her to find out about her needs and identify together ways to address them]**. In this way we can help reduce the risk that she might join an armed group.



ISSUES THAT NEED TO BE DEALT WITH SEPARATELY

Some issues such as domestic violence, GBV, child abuse etc. could arise here, but they cannot be addressed by you as a facilitator. Have the Referral Plan at hand to address any of these issues.

Activity 4. Can family relationships reduce the risk of forced recruitment or abduction? (30 min)

Aims: To reflect on situations that might put children at risk of abduction; to identify the role of the family in reducing this risk.

Modality:



Plenary

1. **SAY:** (Open-Ended Story)

Manuel is a 15 year old boy. He likes playing football, he has plenty of friends and, even though he does not like math and science, he is happy about going to school, and helps the family working in a gas station during the weekend.

One evening he was coming back home late from work, and he took a shortcut down a smaller side road. A car approached quickly, and he was forced to get in. Since then he has been forced to work as a combatant for a local armed group, without being able to communicate with his family and friends any longer.

2. **ASK:**

- a. Is this situation common in our context?
- b. Which circumstances can put children in danger of being abducted by armed groups?
- c. Do you think that there is anything that the family can do to prevent these issues?

3. Let participants discuss. Reflect on the answers given and integrate the following points as needed, making sure you refer to what parents just suggested. **SAY:**

- In cases like these, it might seem like the family does not have the ability to prevent the abduction.
- At the same time, by being open towards our children and communicating with them, we can discuss together what we think and what they think are behaviors or situations that could be risky and find ways to help them avoid these risks.
- We will discuss these approaches later during the Program, in Session 14, when we discuss problem-solving with our children, but we wanted to reassure you that abduction is also a concern we can try to explore together, and address as a family.

Activity 5. How healthy, supportive and loving family relationships can address some of the consequences of our children's experience with armed groups (40 min)

Aims: To analyze how healthy, supportive and loving family relationships can contribute to tackling the challenges that children face because of their association with armed groups.

Materials: Reproduce on two flipcharts the images in the [Pictogram for the facilitators 8: Consequences and behaviors \(see below\)](#), and place them somewhere visible to everyone

Modality:



Group work

Pictogram for the facilitators 8: Consequences and behaviors

Layout/design: a symbol for consequences/outcomes of recruitment

Symbol for behavior of parents/family relationships

1. SAY:

- Now you have introduced some of the behaviors that contribute to building a healthy, supportive and loving family, and how these behaviors could help us prevent a child from joining an armed group.
- Let's see how a loving and supportive family could also help us tackle the challenges due to the consequences and outcomes that children face because of their involvement with armed groups.

2. Explain that you will follow the same process as per the previous activity.

3. Invite participants to form 4 groups.

4. Read out loud:



Princess joined an armed group when she was 14 because she got to know Rima [female name], the 20-year-old commander of one of the liberation army groups. She admired her authority, independence and power, and the fact that, as a woman, she could do the same things men could do, and she was respected by everyone in the group, both men and women.

When Princess joined, she was in charge of preparing food for the group, and she soon married a commander of the group and had a child with him. After some months, she was assigned to lead a small group of young fighters. Now Princess is 17. Her husband has died, the conflict is over, she has returned to her community and she has joined some relatives (or foster care), as her parents are still being traced.

5. Explain that in groups they should discuss the following points (show the **Pictogram for the facilitators: Consequences and behaviors, if possible**):

- a. What challenges to the reintegration into her family and community could Princess face?

- b. What challenges could the parents or foster parents face, as a consequence of Princess's recruitment?
 - c. What could the parents do to address their challenges and those of the daughter?
6. Explain that they have 15 minutes to discuss these points. One person from each group should present the group's ideas, the presentation should not take more than 5 minutes.

Coordinate with your **co-facilitator** to walk around the groups and make sure the instructions have been understood. If needed, read the story more than once.

7. After 15 minutes, invite each group to present their ideas. Take notes in your notebook.
8. At the end of the presentations, reflect on the answers given and integrate the following points as needed, making sure you refer to what parents just suggested.



SAY:

[Edit the text in [brackets] below and integrate the challenges and behaviors suggested by the parents during this activity, using the notes you took in your notebook].

- Through loving, supportive and caring family relationships we can address some of the challenges that our children might face after having experienced recruitment by an armed group.
- For example, Princess may face various challenges when returning to the community: **[As a girl, she might face rejection and stigmatization from the family and community because of her role with the armed group, this rejection is stronger because she comes home with a child; also, she might struggle to find her place in the community because she has experienced a higher degree of freedom and autonomy with the armed group, than what is normally permitted to girls in her community, and she might struggle to accept unequal treatment compared to her male peers; Princess might find it hard to fit in again and do what is normally expected from girls in the local community].**
- **[Also, the experiences witnessed or endured during the time with the armed group can have a big impact on the girl's mental and physical wellbeing: she might suffer trauma, she might be a survivor of violence and abuse.]**
- Through love, respect, trust, communication and by treating Princess equally to her male peers, parents can help Princess find her place with her relatives and in the community. Parents can involve siblings and extended family or community members in a dialogue to be open and accepting towards her reintegration, avoiding discrimination and stigmatization. These approaches work to make her feel at home and welcomed, and help her address these challenges she might face upon returning.
- As parents, we need to reflect on the ways in which our behaviors can make our children feel welcomed back home, and at the same time manage their ongoing needs for care.

**9. To conclude,
SAY:**

- In the next sessions, we will discuss the behaviors you can utilize to contribute to construct loving family relationships together. We will learn from each other and share our successes and challenges.
- In particular, we will look into approaches you use to:
 - Communicate and listen to our children.
 - Understand and manage emotions, and relaxation techniques to cope with stress.
 - Show respect and appreciation.
 - Problem-solve together.
 - Avoid violence and find positive ways to guide our children's behavior.
 - Make a family budget and save money together.
 - Learn to make the right choices.
 - Building trustful relationships.



ISSUES THAT NEED TO BE DEALT WITH SEPARATELY

Some issues such as domestic violence, GBV, child abuse etc. could arise here, but they cannot be addressed by you as a facilitator. Have the Referral Plan at hand to address any of these issues.

Closing the day and evaluation (10 min)

Aims: To recap the day and assess the session.

Materials: (If possible) Flipchart with hopes and fears from [Session 1. Activity 4](#).

Modality:



Plenary

1. **Ask** one or two volunteers to recap two things discussed from today.
2. **If the following points were not recalled, SAY:**
 - Remember that a harmonious and loving family environment is a deterrent for recruitment and for several other “risk-behaviors”.
 - Violence within the family is one of the factors pushing children to enroll.
 - The feeling of closeness in a loving family environment, is one of the main factors influencing successful reintegration.

- Being recognized and valued and feeling acknowledged and respected in the family are other factors that can strongly contribute to the reintegration of a child into the family and community and can prevent his/her recruitment.
3. If you had the chance to make notes of the [participants' hopes and fears on a flipchart](#), draw their attention to it and ask them to place a star or stars on hopes that are realized.
 4. Next, ask them to take a marker and remove fears that are starting to be overcome.
 5. Then ask them to add new fears or hopes that might have emerged.
 6. Finally, **ask** the following questions to the group and make notes of the answers.
 - a. **Is there anything that you particularly liked about this session?**
 - b. **Is there anything that you found particularly useful?**
 - c. **Is there anything that you would do differently?**
 7. Thank everyone for their participation and engagement.

Session 8

Gender specific needs, gender specific responses



Session 8: Gender specific needs, gender specific responses

Time ⌚ 3h 15 min

This is a very rich and long session. In many contexts, gender can be a sensitive topic and the conversations and discussions among parents might take even longer than expected. We recommend you consider splitting this session into two and conducting it over 2 encounters. If you do so, remember to always start the session with a welcoming moment.

Objectives: By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Recognize targeted approaches to address gender specific challenges, needs and aspirations.
- Recognize the unique needs of each girl.

Activities Overview:

Session 8		TOTAL 195 min
Act. 1	Welcoming participants	10 min
Act 2	Addressing the unique needs and challenges of our girls	40 min
Act 3	Girls who return home after being recruited by armed groups: Addressing their challenges and needs – PART 1	50 min
Act 4	Girls who return home after being recruited by armed groups: Addressing their challenges and needs – PART 2	40 min
Act 5	Activity 5. Addressing the needs of girls returning home with a baby, and the baby/child's needs	40 min

Resources Needed:

- Referral Plan and related Referral Handout.
- Flipcharts and markers.
- (If possible) Flipchart with hopes and fears from [Session 1. Activity 4.](#)
- Copies of the [Home practice handout: Gender equality in the household.](#)

Session summary:

This session starts with a recap of the children's needs, and their experiences, risks and challenges as shared by the participants in the previous sessions. The participants will recognize girls' specific, individual needs and discuss the culturally appropriate, relevant and effective responses that they can implement within the family relationships to fulfill these needs and address the challenges they might face.

Activity 1. Welcoming participants and reflecting on the home practice (10 min)

Aims: To welcome participants, establish a positive atmosphere and recall what we discussed in the previous sessions.

Modality:**Plenary**

1. Welcome parents.
2. Smile and show a positive attitude! Thank everyone for being there.
3. Start with a short and engaging activity that will get everyone's attention, such as a local song, a quick game or a brief energizer. Below is one example. You will find more suggestions in the Constant Companion. Also, you can invite some participants to volunteer and propose an energizer.
4. Invite participants to walk around loosely shaking their arms and legs and relaxing.
5. After a short while, shout out: "Find someone..." and name an article of clothing. For example: "Find someone who is wearing black shoes".
6. Explain that they should rush to stand close to the person described. Repeat this exercise several times using different types of clothing. You can also use colors instead of clothing, or safe and harmless information about the participants that the rest of the group should know, for example "find someone who has three children" or, "find the youngest one in the group", or "find someone who owns a cow".¹²
7. Ask some volunteers to recall what was discussed in the previous session.

¹² Adapted from Alliance, (n.a.). 100 ways to energise groups: Games to use in workshops, meetings and the community. <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/library/100-ways-energise-groups-games-use-workshops-meetings-and-community>.

Activity 2. Addressing the unique needs and challenges of our girls (40 min)

Aims: To recall the specific needs of girls at different stages of their development; to reflect on the impact of gender inequality in the household.

Modality:



Plenary

1. SAY:

- In the previous sessions we have seen that girls have specific needs and vulnerabilities.

2. ASK:

- a. Can you recall some of the needs which are specific to girls?
([see Session 1 activities 2](#) and 3).



3. SAY:

- In some contexts and cultures, girls are raised differently than boys. For example, the parents behave differently towards their daughters or their sons, or girls are expected to take certain jobs and not others, and the same goes for boys.
- This is because we, as parents, were raised in a certain way, and we continue reinforcing how girls and boys are perceived in our society.
- On the other hand, we have seen that research shows that biologically girls and boys are not very different. The different way we see them and treat them derives mostly from the different roles and responsibilities that society attributes to girls and boys.
- These roles that we assign to girls and boys within the family and outside determine how they are treated, what expectations we have of them, what privileges and opportunities they are entitled to receive or how they are expected to behave. These expectations are based on gender stereotypes about boys and girls in our society.
- Gender stereotypes are generalized ideas about characteristics or attributes or roles that all women or men should possess or roles that women or men should cover.
- For example, a stereotype is to assume that all boys are courageous and all girls are caring.
- These oversimplified ideas often do not reflect what girls and boys, or men and women feel and want, or who they are. Therefore, they affect the person's self-esteem, their wellbeing, their freedom, and the enjoyment of their basic rights.
- As a consequence of how our society sees and treats boys and girls, they have different needs, and they are exposed to different potential risks.
- Girls are often affected negatively by these cultural gender stereotypes: They are often expected to be submissive, to be dependent; they have less privileges, less freedom and less of a say in decision making.


4. ASK:

- a. What happens when we treat our daughters differently from our sons? When we give our sons more opportunities, freedom and more authority?
 - b. How can this negatively affect our daughters?
5. Let participants discuss. Reflect on the answers given and integrate the following points as needed, making sure you refer to what parents just suggested.

SAY: 

- Inequality in the way we treat our children tells our daughters that they are less worthy or less capable. It reduces their self-esteem.
 - When girls are treated differently from boys, they are also more at risk of abuse and domestic violence.
 - If you remember, we have seen that these are all factors that can push a girl to join armed groups: Low self-esteem, lack of freedom, autonomy and power, exclusion from feeling fully part of the household and violence and abuse in the home are all factors that can lead a girl to be more easily recruited by armed groups.
 - Every girl and boy deserves an equal chance to grow up well. At the same time, while all girls are given less opportunities, one girl is not the same as another: each girl is unique, and we have to reflect on what they need both as girls and as individuals.
6. **ASK:**
 - a. How do you think that inequality in the household and in the community affects our sons?

7. Let participants discuss. Reflect on the answers given and integrate the following

points as needed, making sure you refer to what parents just suggested. **SAY:** 

- Boys are also affected negatively by gender inequality: The society expects them to act in a certain way – very often to be tough, to not show their emotions and to not show weakness. Therefore they may feel under pressure to act out these roles and they cannot freely express who they are.
 - This can lead to more aggressive behavior and substance abuse, mental health issues and struggles to seek help when needed.
 - By being conscious of gender stereotypes and by trying to tackle them, building an equal environment in which both sons and daughters, as well as fathers and mothers, have equal opportunities, receive equal respect, freedom, and autonomy, we are providing every member of the family with more opportunities to thrive, with a better quality of life and we are reducing the risks of both boys and girls being recruited by armed forces.
8. **ASK: What can we do, in our household, to treat girls and boys equally? How can we give them the same opportunities in life?**
 9. Let participants discuss. The following are some examples you can provide:
 - Make sure that the house rules are the same for your sons and daughters of similar age – for example, both girls and boys of similar age are expected to be home at a certain time in the evening.
 - Assign similar household tasks and responsibilities to sons and daughters – both girls and boys can be in charge of housecleaning tasks.

- Make sure expectations, life-goals and opportunities are the same for your sons and daughters – for example, both boys and girls can aspire to be doctors, or can be allowed to attend school.
- Ask yourself, am I involving my daughter equally as I involve my son in family decisions? Do I let my sons make more decisions about their life than I allow my daughters?
- Help both your sons and daughters to understand and express a range of emotions – for example, both boys and girls are allowed to cry and show their fragility.
- Within your capacity, advocate for an equal treatment of boys and girls in your community. Point out issues that you think reflect an unfair treatment of girls, or an oversimplified view of what girls and boys should do, or how they should behave. For example, if you see a close friend treating his sons and daughter differently, discuss this with him.
- Be a role model yourself. Treat all people with a different sex than yours with respect and empathy.

10. ASK:

- a. Can we expect that our efforts to treat our children equally will succeed if we, as mother and father, are not in an equal relationship?
- b. How can we ensure equality also in the husband-wife relationship, and more broadly in the family relationships? Try to be specific and think about practical behaviors in the household.

11. Let participants discuss. Some examples can be:

- Let the father take some of the caring tasks from the mother, and let the mother take some of the tasks which are generally perceived to be “for men”. For example, the father can help put the children to bed, or assist them when one of them is sick; the mother can chop the wood or take care of the family budget.
- Make sure expectations, life-goals and opportunities are the same for husband and wife. For example, the wife should be allowed to pursue education or find a job if she wants to.
- As the mother and father, make sure that you both have the opportunity to express a range of emotions. Both are entitled to feel sad, frustrated, angry, and express that; equally, both are entitled to feel love and warmth, and express that.
- Embody a gender sensitive approach within the extended family relationships and within the community: what is valid within the couple’s relationship should be valid for all girls and women in your family and community.

12. Reassure participants: this is not an easy change, it requires adjustment, it certainly requires a lot of learning, and being humble and asking for help from the other partner. It takes time, but it contributes to building a positive family environment, and a more gender-sensitive community.

Activity 3. Girls who return home after being recruited by armed groups: Addressing their challenges and needs – PART 1 (50 min)

Aims: To identify the specific needs of girls who have experienced recruitment; to address these needs and support their reintegration into the family and community.


Modality:



Plenary

1. SAY:

- Now I will read you two scenarios¹³ and we will discuss them together.

- 2. Read the following **scenario (Open-Ended Story)**:**  Note that these scenarios are real reports of experiences of children who have been abducted by armed groups.

Anourite, 16 years old¹⁴

Anourite was kidnapped by an armed group during an attack on her school in 2008. She was 8 years old. The group held her captive for four years, during which time her role was to carry the babies and the group's belongings.

"They killed, we did not know why. We were beaten, even though we were only children. At first I said: 'I want to see my family,' and they beat me even more. So I stopped crying."

Anourite was physically tied to an LRA fighter during an attack by the FARDC when she was struck by a bullet in the leg. She was left in the forest, where she was found the next day and brought to the hospital.

Today, Anourite has a pronounced limp. She wears a homemade prosthesis, which is uncomfortably heavy, and falling apart: "My father repairs it from time to time".

Anourite told us that she has received no support since her return, nor medical assistance for her disability. She would like to go to school, but her family does not have the funds.

Since her disability prevents her from working in the fields, she is unable to contribute to the cost of her own schooling.

3. ASK:

- a. What kind of challenges do you think Anourite is facing or might be facing?
- b. Which of her needs are neglected?



There is no wrong answer, and the answers depend on the local context and the experiences of the parents and children: leave participants the freedom to imagine what the girl might be experiencing, beyond what you read to them in the text. Coordinate with your co-facilitator to make notes.

- 4. If needed, use the answers below to help facilitate the discussion.**

- She suffers from deep trauma due to having witnessed and experienced physical violence, witnessed death, torture, constant threats and witnessed sexual violence during her time with the armed group, and having been separated from her family.
- She might feel that she is not fully part of her family since she has been separated for so long and the home environment has changed since she left.

¹³ Child Soldiers International (2017). What the girls say: improving practices to reintegrate girls in DRC.

¹⁴ Ibid.n

- Her disability makes her suffer exclusion and stigmatization in the community.
- Due to negative social norms, she may be blamed for her “lost value” and having “met men”.
- Some family members are angry with her and reject her because she has “met men”.
- Her disability and social isolation prevent her from going to school.
- Her disability and social isolation make it hard for her to contribute to the family (she finds it hard to find a job).

5. Next ASK:

- What do you think the family of Anourite could do to address these challenges and support her needs?



There is no wrong answer, and the answers depend on the local context and the experiences of the parents and children: Allow participants the freedom to imagine what the girl might be experiencing, beyond what you read to them in the text. Coordinate with your co-facilitator to make notes.

If needed, use the note below - [Facilitators' Notes 7: Anourite's challenges and family approaches](#) to facilitate the discussion. Make sure you convey only the points which did not emerge through the conversation among participants.

It could be a good idea to have a look at the corresponding session indicated next to each of the answers to have a better explanation of the way in which these approaches can address the needs or challenges that Anourite is facing.



FACILITATORS' NOTES 7: Anourite's challenges and family approaches

Anourite's challenges	Family approaches
She suffers from deep trauma.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Her parents talk to her and listen to her (explain that we will explore the benefits of effective communication in Session 10. Parent-child relationship: Better communication, better listening). • Her parents help her to understand and manage her emotions (explain that we will explore the benefits of effective communication in Session 11. Starting from ourselves: Self-care practices to learn to deal with our emotions and Session 12. Parent-child relationship: Understand and manage emotions).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If they notice that the problem is bigger than them, and the child is showing intensified signs of stress, anxiety or sadness, they can refer to the appropriate agency to receive specialized care. • Some signs that should warn them could be: Self-harm, suicidal tendencies, expressing that they seek to harm others, being inconsolable, refusal of food, she stops speaking, engaging in risky behaviors.
She might feel that she is not fully part of her family.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Her parents can involve her in family activities, decision making and problem solving (Session 14. Parent-child relationship: Learning to solve problems together). • Her parents can involve her in taking care of the family budget and finances (Session 18. Parent-child relationship: Making a family budget and saving money).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • She is excluded and stigmatized by the community due to Her disability. • Since she is a girl, she is facing exclusion and stigmatization in the community: They blame her for her “lost value” and having “met men”. • Some family members are angry with her and reject her because she has “met men”. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Her parents can help her fight stigmatization and feel better about herself by involving her in family decision making, family activities and problem solving (Session 15. Self-care and caring for our children: Dealing with stigmatization). • Her parents can seek the help of a community leader to help reduce the stigmatization from the community. • Her parents can involve her in taking care of the family budget and finances (Session 18. Parent-child relationship: Making a family budget and saving money). • Her parents can talk and listen to her, and praise her, giving her a chance to feel valued and respected (Session 10. Parent-child relationship: Better communication, better listening).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Her disability and social isolation prevent her from going to school. • Her disability and social isolation make it hard for her to contribute to the family (she finds it hard to find a job). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Even though the family can do little to help her access the job market, they can help her fight stigmatization, which could open up job opportunities, as could involving her in taking care of the family budget and finances. (see tip box: Gender and family finances).

Activity 4. Girls who return home after being recruited by armed groups: Addressing their challenges and needs – PART 2 (40 min)

Aims: To identify the specific needs of girls who have experienced recruitment; to address these needs and support their reintegration into the family and community.

Modality:



1. Read the following scenario (Open-Ended Story):

Amira joined an armed group when she was 16, to help fight for her community. She has been married to a member of the armed group and has a child with him. One year later, she decided to leave the group and she rejoined her community and family, and she brought her baby home with her. Even though her mother welcomed her warmly at the beginning, the family was cold and indifferent towards the child, saying he was not their blood. Amira left the family and was welcomed and helped by a neighboring family.

2. ASK:

- a. What kind of challenges do you think Amira is facing or might be facing in the future?
- b. Which of her needs are being neglected?



There is no wrong answer, and the answers depend on the local context and the experiences of the parents and children: Allow participants the freedom to imagine what the girl might be experiencing, beyond what you read to them in the text. Coordinate with your co-facilitator to make notes.

If needed, use the notes below - [Facilitators' Notes 8: Amira's challenges](#) to facilitate the discussion. Some are the same as in the case of Anourite explored before, some are specific to the case of Amira. Make sure you convey only these points which did not emerge through the conversation among participants.



FACILITATORS' NOTES 8: Amira's challenges

Social	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• She suffers from deep trauma due to having witnessed and experienced physical and psychological violence, death, torture during her time with the armed group, and having been separated from her family.• Relationships with others: Since she is a girl, she may be excluded and stigmatized by her peers, siblings or in the community: They blame her for her “lost value” and having “met men”.• Some family members are angry with her and reject her because she has “met men”.• She is not respected, because she came home with a child.• She might struggle in her new role as a mother.• Since she is a mother, she is expected to be an adult, but she is still also an adolescent.
Education	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Her social isolation prevents her from going to school or from making friends at school.• She needs to take care of her baby, and she cannot attend school fully.
Finances	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Her social isolation makes it hard for her to contribute to the family (she finds it hard to find a job).• She might struggle to find enough money for her and her child.
Health	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It might be hard to access hospitals or other health care facilities, because there are none in the area where she lives, or she does not have enough money.• She might have issues affecting her sexual-reproductive health, for example she might have contracted HIV .• Her child needs access to a clinic for treatment or vaccinations.

4.Next, ASK:

- a. What do you think the family of Amira could do to address these challenges and support her needs?



There is no wrong answer, and the answers depend on the local context and the experiences of the parents and children: Allow participants the freedom to imagine what the girl might be experiencing, beyond what you read to them in the text. Coordinate with your co-facilitator to make notes.

If needed, use the notes below - [Facilitators' Notes 9: Amira's challenges and Family approaches](#) to help facilitate the discussion. Some are the same as in the case of Anourite explored before, while others are specific of the case of Amira. Make sure you convey only these points which did not emerge through the conversation among participants.

It could be a good idea to have a look at the corresponding session indicated next to each of the answers to have a better explanation of the way in which these approaches can tackle the needs or challenges that Amira is facing.



FACILITATORS' NOTES 9: Amira's challenges and Family approaches

Amira's challenges	Family approaches
Social	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> She suffers from deep trauma due to having witnessed and experienced physical and psychological violence, death and torture during her time with the armed group, and having been separated from her family. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Her parents talk to her and listen to her (explain that we will explore the benefits of effective communication in Session 10. Parent-child relationship: Better communication, better listening). Her parents help her understand and manage her emotions (explain that we will explore the benefits of effective communication in Session 11. Starting from ourselves: Self-care practices to learn to deal with our emotions and Session 12. Parent-child relationship: Understand and manage emotions). If they notice that the problem is bigger than them, and the child is showing intensified signs of stress, anxiety or sadness, they can refer to the appropriate agency to receive specialized care. Some signs that should warn us could be: Self-harm, suicidal tendencies, expressing that she seeks to harm others, being inconsolable, refusal of food, she stops speaking, she engages in risky behaviors.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relationships with others: Since she is a girl, she is facing exclusion and stigmatization from her peers, siblings or in the community: They blame her for her “lost value” and having “met men”. Some family members are angry with her and reject her because she has “met men”. She is not respected, because she came home with a child. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Her parents can help her fight stigmatization and gain a positive self-image by involving her in family decision making, family activities and problem solving (Session 15. Self-care and caring for our children: Dealing with stigmatization). Her parents can seek the help of a community leader to help reduce the stigmatization from the community. Her parents can involve her in taking care of the family budget and finances (Session 18. Parent-child relationship: Making a family budget and saving money). Her parents can talk and listen to her, giving her a chance to feel valued and respected (Session 10. Parent-child relationship: Better communication, better listening).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> She might struggle in her new role as mother. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Her parents have a big role in supporting the child and helping her learn to be a mother. Modeling behavior is one of the first tools parents have: the child learns to be a mother by seeing their parents enacting their roles in the family. Parents should put aside their own feelings about the baby and the pregnancy and focus on helping the child understand and manage her feelings towards the baby in a healthy way (Session 11. Starting from ourselves: Self-care practices to learn to deal with our emotions and Session 12. Parent-child relationship: Understand and manage emotions). If possible, and safe for the mother and child, the parents could help their daughter in attending or continuing school or training and in supporting the family livelihood. Education and economic stability can help the girls returning from recruitment with a child be accepted by the local community.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Since she is a mother, she is expected to be an adult, but she is still also an adolescent. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Her parents should not forget that their daughter still has the same needs as all other children: she has the need to be loved, respected, supported and understood. Even if the parents are treating her as an adult, she is not an adult just yet.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (If possible, here you can remind participants of some of the characteristics and needs of older children, see session 1 Part 2. My child and I).
Education	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Her social isolation prevents her from going to school or from making friends at school. She needs to take care of her baby, and she cannot attend school fully. 	Even though the family can do little to help her access the job market, they can help her fight stigmatization, which could open up job opportunities, and involve her in taking care of the family budget and finances (see <i>tip box: Gender and family finances</i>).
Finances	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Her social isolation makes it hard for her to contribute to the family (she finds it hard to find a job). She might struggle to find enough money for her and her child. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Her parents should help her reach the appropriate service that can provide help. Her parents can involve her in taking care of the family budget and finances (see <i>tip box: Gender and family finances</i>) and learn to save money.
Health	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It might be hard to access hospitals or other health care facilities, because there are none in the area where she lives, or she does not have enough money. She might have issues affecting her sexual-reproductive health, for example she might have contracted HIV. Her child needs access to a clinic for treatment or vaccinations. 	Her parents should help her reach the appropriate services that can take care of her health.

2. Afterwards, ASK:

- Is there any specific challenge that our daughters might face, or any need that might arise from their involvement with armed groups, that we have not discussed so far?
- How do you think parents could address these needs and challenges?

3. SAY:

- In some cases, girls who join armed groups can gain authority – they can be allowed to take part in combat and cover roles which are generally associated with men. They can also receive economic benefits, new power, freedom and autonomy.

4. ASK:

- a. What happens when they come home?
- b. How could the family react?
- c. How could the girl feel?

5. Let participants discuss. Reflect on the answers given and integrate the following points as needed, making sure you refer to what parents just suggested.

SAY:

- In these cases, if the girl finds herself in a family environment in which girls are discriminated against, in which her voice is not heard, she has less opportunities and feels less valued than her siblings, she can feel frustrated and disrespected.
- She can be more inclined to join the armed group again.
- It can be very hard for parents to understand the new position of the girl, and make sense of her need for autonomy, but this is a crucial step towards her reintegration.
- Strategies such as frequent communication, listening and problem-solving together can be beneficial to foster the child's sense of self and belonging within the family and community.

6. Conclude by saying:

- As parents, we have a huge responsibility: the way we treat our children, and especially the different way in which we treat our girls and boys, has a big impact on their life.
- At the same time, we always need to remember that there are some problems or situations which are beyond our control: as boys and girls are expected to undertake certain roles and behave in certain ways, also outside of the walls of the house; they are at risk, due to economic or structural factors that make them vulnerable. These are situations where we have less control.
- A healthy, supportive and loving family will equip our girls with the tools needed to address these structural factors that are beyond our direct control. We are not powerless!

Activity 5. Addressing the needs of girls returning home with a baby, and the baby/child's needs. (40 min)

Aims: To analyze the case in which our daughter comes home with a baby, and recognize the ways in which our behavior as parents does not only affect the wellbeing of our daughter, but also her baby, and recognize strategies to ensure the wellbeing of mother and child.

Modality:



Plenary

1. SAY:

- So far we have explored how we address the needs of our girls who have joined an armed group and how to welcome them home.
- We also explored how our relationship might change when they come home with a child.
- At the same time, our behavior towards the baby will have an impact on the baby's wellbeing and healthy development, as well as on the wellbeing of the mother.
- Let's go back to the story of Amira from the previous activity, and explore a bit more the relationship of the family and community members with the baby (*the story below is a continuation of the one from the previous activity*)

Amira comes back home after having joined an armed group. She is 17, and she has a 1.5-year-old baby girl, Anu. Her family has accepted and welcomed Amira's return, but they are very cold towards Anu, they do not consider her as part of the family as she is not "their blood", and she brought shame on the family. Hence Amira decides to leave her family and she is welcomed by a neighboring family, who is very kind and supportive towards both her and Anu.

2. **ASK:**

- a. In this example the mother of Amira does not accept her baby. How do you imagine the mother of Amira behaves towards the baby? What does she do? How does she interact with baby Anu?
- b. What about the father, and the siblings of Amira?

3. Next, **SAY:**

- Let's continue to explore the life of Amira and Anu. Imagine now that Amira needs to leave the house to attend classes. Amira asks for her mother's help to take care of Anu while she is away. Her mother accepts. Anu is making some fuss and starts crying as soon as Amira leaves the house.
- 4. Ask some volunteers to take 4/5 minutes to role play the way in which Amira's mother might behave towards the child, focusing on what she does, how she looks at her, the tone of her voice. Remind them that Amira's mother loves and accepts Amira's return, but she does not accept Anu, the baby.
- 5. Once the volunteers have presented their role play, **ASK the whole group:**
 - a. How do you think the behavior of Amira's mother impacts Anu? How does Anu feel?
 - b. Does the behavior of the mother have an impact on the wellbeing and development of Anu? Why?
 - c. How does Amira feel, if her mother does not accept Anu?
- 7. Let participants discuss. Reflect on the answers given and integrate the following points as needed, making sure you refer to what parents have just suggested. **SAY:**
 - If you remember, during the first session we discussed the elements that contribute to a child's healthy growth and development.
 - We have seen how a stress-free environment, and loving, supporting and understanding family relationships contribute to the child's wellbeing, and support the child's wellbeing.
 - If Anu is deprived of love, care and affection in these first years of her life, she will suffer as a baby, and this will have long lasting consequences.

6. **ASK:**

- a. How do you think Amira's mother should behave towards Anu, to address her needs, and also to ensure she grows up well? What do you think are Anu's needs? Again, be concrete: think about the mother's tone of voice, body posture, how she engages with Anu, etc.
8. Gather some ideas - some examples can be: the mother uses a warm tone of voice; she gets closer to the baby, and makes eye contact; she takes Anu in her arms and tries to console her; etc.
9. After having gathered some ideas, invite some participants to conduct another role play, based on the same scene suggested above, but this time the mother has a positive attitude towards Anu.
10. Once done, invite some other volunteers to show how the father of Amira could interact with Anu, how he could address her needs.
11. Finally, if these points have not emerged in the conversation, make sure to **SAY**:
 - Children, no matter how old they are, need warmth: warmth means unconditional love – being loved, no matter what. It means receiving expressions of physical and verbal affection: they need to hear that you love them and feel it. It means empathy towards their feelings: they need to be understood. It means sensitivity towards their needs: they need you to recognize their needs and respond to them.
 - Clearly, these aspects will be different as the child grows: a small baby will want you to show physical affection by holding her, stroking her, by using a soft tone of voice. An adolescent child might probably appreciate less to be hugged, but she will nonetheless need to feel loved, for example by being listened to, or being involved in family decisions.
12. Conclude by inviting participants to brainstorm behaviors that provide warmth to a baby or a small child, such as a 2 year old, and recognize how the baby reacts to these behaviors (e.g., I say "I love you"; I play with her, I read to her; I listen attentively to her stories; I console and reassure her if she has trouble sleeping at night).
13. Finally, **ASK**:
 - a. How has the scenario changed when the father of Amira was involved in the care of the child.
 - b. How does the involvement of the father of Amira in the care of Anu support the development of the baby?
14. If needed, have a look again at Session 2 activities 4 and 5, where you will find a detailed explanation of the role of the male carers in the support of the child's wellbeing and development.

Closing the day: Home practice and evaluation (15 min)

Aims: To recap the day, introduce and discuss the home practice and assess the session.

Materials: Copies of the [Home practice handout: Gender equality in the household](#); (If possible) Flipchart with hopes and fears from [Session 1. Activity 4](#).

Modality:



Plenary

1. **Ask** one or two volunteers to recap two of the things discussed today.
2. Hand out the [Home practice handout: Gender equality in the household](#).
3. Explain that in the handout they will find a reminder of actions that they can take to promote gender equality in the household. Remember that these are only some examples – make sure that you integrated those that parents proposed during the previous conversations.
4. **SAY:**
 - Gender equality in the household is only one of the many strategies to address the specific and unique needs of our daughters.
 - Nonetheless this is a crucial step towards acknowledging their unique needs, showing them respect and helping them feel valued and empowered and allowing them to thrive.
5. If you've had the chance to make notes of the [participants' hopes and fears on a flipchart](#), draw their attention to it and ask them to place a star or stars on hopes that are realized.
6. Next, ask them to take a marker and remove fears that are starting to be overcome.
7. Then, ask them to add new fears or hopes that might have emerged.
8. Finally, **ask** the following questions to the group and make notes of the answers.
 - a. **Is there anything that you particularly liked about this session?**
 - b. **Is there anything that you found particularly useful?**
 - c. **Is there anything that you would do differently?**
9. Thank everyone for their participation and engagement.

GENDER EQUALITY IN THE HOME

- Make sure that the house rules are the same for your sons and daughters of a similar age – for example, both girls and boys of a similar age are expected to be home at a certain time.

- Assign similar household tasks to sons and daughters – both girls and boys can be in charge of housecleaning tasks.

- Make sure expectations, life-goals and opportunities are the same for your sons and daughters – for example, both boys and girls can aspire to be doctors, or can be allowed to attend school.

- Make sure that both boys and girls of a similar age are involved in similar ways in family decisions.

- Help both your sons and daughters to understand and express a range of emotions – for example, both boys and girls are allowed to cry and show their fragility.

- Let the father take some of the caring tasks from the mother, and let the mother take some of the tasks which are generally perceived to be “for men”, for example, the father can help put the children to bed, or assist them when one of them is sick; the mother can chop the wood, or fix the radio.

- Make sure expectations, life-goals and opportunities are the same for both the husband and wife. For example, the wife should be allowed to pursue education or find a job if she wants to.

- As the mother and father, make sure that you both have the opportunity to express a range of emotions. Both are entitled to feel sad, frustrated, angry, and express that; equally, both are entitled to feel love and warmth, and express that.

- Integrate and continue practicing any other approach that you are familiar with and works for you, to build equal relationships in the household and outside!



Session 9

Starting from ourselves: Self-care practices for stress reduction



Session 9: Starting from ourselves: Self-care practices for stress reduction

Time ⌚ 1 h 30 min

Objectives: By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Identify instances that increase their level of stress.
- Recognize the consequences of higher stress levels on their wellbeing and on the relationship with their children and family dynamics.
- Practice one relaxation technique .

Activities Overview:

Session 9		TOTAL 90 min
Act. 1	Welcoming participants	10 min
Act. 2	What stress is and how we recognize it	30 min
Act. 3	Reflection – the impact of stress on our family life	15 min
Act. 4	Sharing and practicing stress coping mechanisms	20 min
	Closing the day: Home practice and evaluation	15 min

Resources Needed:

- Referral Plan and related Referral Handout.
- Flipcharts and markers.
- (If possible) Flipchart with hopes and fears from [Session 1. Activity 4.](#)
- **Create the emotion thermometer:** a. Place a long piece of paper tape on the floor - if possible, going from one side of the room to the other.
b. Reproduce or make copies of the symbols that you find in the [Pictogram for the facilitators 8: Emotions thermometer](#) (see Activity 2) along the tape, as shown in the picture in Activity 2. You can draw the symbols on pieces of white paper and stick

them to the floor, or you can draw them with some chalk on the floor (make sure to remove it afterwards).

- Copies of the home practice handout “[Stress management](#)” for each participant.

Session summary:

This is the first of three self-care sessions. In this session, parents will discuss the consequence of a stressful environment on their wellbeing and share what they do at home to lower their stress level. Be aware that talking about emotions can be a taboo topic in some contexts and that adults might feel uncomfortable talking openly about their emotions in front of a group of strangers. Adapt the following activity to the needs of your context.

Activity 1. Welcoming participants and reflecting on the home practice (10 min)

Aims: To welcome participants, establish a positive atmosphere and recall what we discussed in the previous sessions.

Modality:



Plenary

1. Welcome parents.
2. Smile and show a positive attitude! Thank everyone for being there.
3. Start with a short and engaging activity that will get everyone’s attention, such as a local song, a quick game or a brief energizer. Below is one example. You will find more suggestions in the Constant Companion. Also, you can invite some participants to volunteer and propose an energizer.
4. Ask participants to think of an adjective to describe how they are feeling today.
5. Explain that the adjective must start with the same letter as their name. For instance, “I’m Henri and I’m happy”. Or, “I’m Chantri and I am creative”.
6. As they say this, they can also mime an action that describes the adjective¹⁵.
7. **ASK:**
 - a. Is anyone willing to share how the **home practice from the previous session went?**
 - b. What have you found easy?
 - c. What have you found difficult?
8. Remind participants of the confidential nature of the sessions, and of your availability before or after the sessions if anyone needs additional help or support. Always have the **Referral Plan and its related Handout** at hand, to use if needed. Do not forget that the Referral Plan and its Handout are “live documents”: do not just refer participants to them, but if you recognize that there is any need that should be

¹⁵ Adapted from Alliance, (n.a.). 100 ways to energise groups: Games to use in workshops, meetings and the community. <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/library/100-ways-energise-groups-games-use-workshops-meetings-and-community>.

addressed outside the sessions, make every possible effort to find the appropriate actor or case worker and, if needed, guide participants towards the right actors in your context. Also, you should discuss any complex matters with the **Supervisor of the Program**, who should be able to help you find the best approach to solve the issues at hand.

9. Always praise those brave enough to share.
10. Ask some volunteers to recall some key points discussed in the previous session.

Activity 2. What stress is and how we recognize it (30 min)

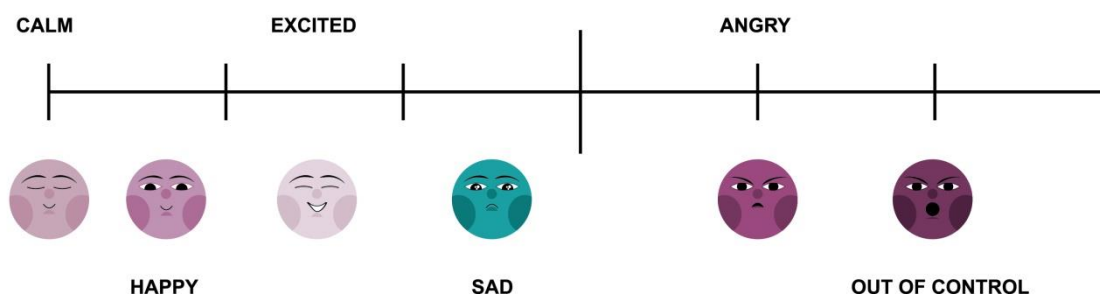
Aims: To recognize causes and symptoms of stress.

Modality:

Plenary 

Materials: Create the emotion thermometer: Place a long piece of paper tape on the floor - if possible, going from one side of the room to the other. Reproduce or make copies of the symbols that you find in the [Pictogram for the facilitators 8: Emotions thermometer](#) (see next page) along the tape, as shown in the picture below. You can draw the symbols on pieces of white paper and stick them to the floor, or you can draw them with some chalk on the floor (make sure to remove it afterwards).

Pictogram for the facilitators 8: Emotion thermometer





1. Show the group the **emotion thermometer** on the floor and ask the group to identify the meaning of each symbol that you have placed on the line. Make sure everyone agrees on the meaning of the symbols.

2. Read the story to the group (**Open-Ended Story**):



Anousheh is a hardworking man, a loving and caring father of three, and a husband, but recently things around him got really complicated: He lost his job because of the war, and his economic situation worries him, he fears he will not have enough money to pay the school fees of the children, and maybe he will not manage to ensure a roof over their heads in the next months. The birth of his last son does not make things easy: The baby is often crying at night and seems inconsolable. The relationship with his other two older children is also getting more difficult, they spend most of their time out of the house and when they are in the house there are often arguments. The risk of attacks of the armed group to the village makes him feel in a constant state of alert and danger.

3. Invite each participant to individually think about the following question:

ASK:

- a. How do you think Anousheh feels? Which emotions is he probably experiencing?
4. Invite them to walk to the emotion thermometer on the floor and stand in correspondence to the emotions they each think that Anousheh is experiencing.
5. Once everyone has taken a place on the thermometer, invite participants to answer the following questions (do not force or push anyone to answer!)
- a. Why have you chosen this emotion, what makes you think that Anousheh feels that?
 - b. How can you recognize when one feels that emotion (refer to the emotion that the participant has selected on the thermometer).
 - c. In what other situations could one feel a similar emotion?



TIPS - STRESS: SOME REACTIONS THAT PEOPLE MIGHT EXPERIENCE IN SITUATIONS OF STRESS

- changes in his/her behavior (aggression, isolation, silence)
- Dizziness
- General aches and pains
- Grinding teeth, clenched jaw
- Headaches
- Indigestion or acid reflux symptoms
- Increase in or loss of appetite
- Muscle tension in neck, face or shoulders
- Problems sleeping
- Racing heart
- Cold and sweaty palms
- Tiredness, exhaustion
- Trembling/shaking
- Weight gain or loss
- Upset stomach
- Anger or irritability
- Anxiety
- Change of mood
- Sadness or depression
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Isolation

6. Once all who want to contribute have had a chance to share their ideas, thank them and invite them to take their place again.

7. **SAY:**

- Anousheh is probably feeling a range of different emotions, and some days he might feel angrier, other days more stressed or more insecure, other times he might even be happy, despite the situation.
- Sometimes he might struggle to figure out what he is feeling.
- This is completely normal!

9. **ASK:**

- a. What consequences do you think that the situation Anousheh experiences might have on his wellbeing? How well does he sleep? How well does he eat? What does he do during the day?

10. Use the notes in the tip box **“Stress: Some reactions that people might experience in a situation of stress”** to make sure that the relevant points are covered. Remember that your role is to encourage participants’ sharing and peer learning, rather than lecturing: use the notes only if you think some crucial aspects have not been conveyed. At the end,

SAY:

- Situations like the ones in which Anousheh finds himself can cause a lot of stress and can have long lasting consequences for a person’s wellbeing.

- Being a parent is a very hard task: there are many instances in which we might feel overwhelmed and insecure.
- The external environment might add additional pressure on us: economic challenges, an unstable environment, war, family tensions might put us under constant pressure, just like in the case of Anousheh.
- These external factors can generate stress and the body reacts with physical, mental, and emotional responses.

11. ASK:

- How do we define or call “stress” in our community?

12. Substitute the word “stress” below with the definition or terminology provided by the participants.

13. SAY:

- [Stress] is a normal part of life, but it is dangerous when it continues without relief. In some instances, stress can become so much a part of our life that we stop realizing that it is even there.
- We need to learn to recognize when stress is getting “too much”, learn to cope with it and ask for help from family, friends, peers or a health care professional, when needed.

Activity 3. Reflection - The impact of stress on our family life (15 min)

Aims: To recognize the consequences of our stress on the other family members.

Modality:

Plenary 

1. ASK:

- How do you think Anousheh’s situation impacts his family life?
- How does he behave with his wife when he is feeling stressed?
- How does he behave with his sons? What about his daughters?

2. Let participants discuss. Reflect on the answers given and integrate the following points as needed, making sure you refer to what parents just suggested. **SAY:**

- Children, especially younger ones, mirror parents’ emotions. If parents are stressed and behave aggressively, they can be aggressive.
- Also, when parents are worried or stressed, it affects the children in the home. The children may adopt undesired behaviors or do things they think will help the situation, which may have negative consequences.
- Even when we do not yell when stressed, children feel the tension in the home. The tension makes children feel in a constant state of danger, which is very unhealthy for their brain development.
- Learning to cope with stress is crucial for our own wellbeing, and for the creation of a positive and stable family environment: to care for others we have to start by caring for ourselves.



TIPS - Positive coping strategies

- Keep a positive attitude.
- Accept that there are events that you cannot control.
- Be assertive instead of aggressive. Name your feelings, opinions, or beliefs instead of becoming angry, defensive, or passive.
- Learn and practice relaxation techniques.
- Exercise regularly.
- Eat healthily.
- Set limits and say no to requests that could create excessive stress in your life.
- Get enough rest and sleep.
- Seek out social support. Spend time with those you love.
- If the problem is bigger than you, seek external help! You are not alone (consult the Referral Plan).

Activity 4. Practicing stress coping mechanism (20 to 40 min)

Aims: To share and practice one or more stress coping strategies.

Modality: Plenary

1. ASK:

- a. People can use positive or negative strategies to cope with stress. What do you think are some negative strategies that Anousheh could use to deal with stress?

Some examples might be:

- He hits/shouts at his children to make them behave.
- He smokes.

2. ASK:

- a. What could some positive coping strategies be?
- b. How do positive coping strategies help Anousheh?

3. SAY:


- Coping strategies will not change Anousheh's situation: the problems that cause the stress do not go away, but these strategies can help him stay calm.
- When we are calm, we react better to the issues that cause our stress, and we can make better decisions.
- We can better reflect on the causes of our stress and try to find ways to solve it, or ask for help from family, friends or specialized agencies when needed.

4. ASK :

- What coping strategies do you utilize to calm yourself down when you feel stressed or overwhelmed?

If needed, use the **Tip box: Positive coping strategies**, to facilitate the discussion.

Remember that your role is to encourage participants' sharing and peer learning, rather than lecturing: use the notes only if you think some crucial aspects have not been conveyed.

5.  Depending on the local customs and on the responses that the participants provide, invite some volunteers to model the relaxation technique or coping strategy that they enjoy and that works for them to reduce stress, and practice it as a group.



ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

If time allows, before practicing the relaxation techniques (point 3 -5), invite the participants to step again onto the emotion thermometer on the floor, in correspondence to how they are feeling in that moment.

Let participants show the relaxation practice, and try it together and, before point 7, invite participants to once again step onto the emotion thermometer on the floor, in correspondence to how they are feeling in that moment, and identify whether their emotion has changed thanks to the exercise.

Follow with point 7.

6. If this is not an option, and no one is willing to share their relaxation technique, model one that you are familiar with and invite participants to follow your lead. If you do not feel comfortable sharing any relaxation technique you are using, you can take some ideas from the box below “examples of relaxation techniques” and invite participants to try one or two together. Make sure you adapt them to your context.
7. If you have the opportunity to practice one or two relaxation techniques together, follow up with the following questions.
- ASK:**
- How did you feel during and after the exercise?
 - Do you regularly try to use relaxation strategies?
8. **SAY:**
- Whichever approach you have that helps you relax, make sure you practice it regularly. Use the technique that best works for you every time you feel that your emotions are becoming overwhelming, when anger is mounting, or whenever you are unable to cope with what is happening around you.
9. Finally, emphasize your availability if further help is needed, and remind participants that they are not alone. **At this point it is crucial to remind participants of their own existing support networks or of the existing appropriate actors or case workers that they could talk to should they need help.**
10. Thank everyone for sharing their ideas and practicing together!

Closing the day: Home practice and evaluation (15 min)

Aims: To recap the day, introduce and discuss the home practice and assess the session.

Materials: Copies of the home practice handout “[Stress management](#)” for each participant; (If possible) Flipchart with hopes and fears from [Session 1. Activity 4.](#)



EXAMPLES OF RELAXATION TECHNIQUES:

Before proposing a relaxation technique, make sure you allow participants enough time and space for them to share their own relaxation technique, which works for them.

Reflect on what is the most appropriate approach towards relaxation in your context. In some contexts, some relaxation techniques such as deep breathing might be erroneously interpreted as a form of prayer. Think about how best to frame this activity in your context. Also, reflect on the local appropriateness of practicing physical activities together. If needed, consider conducting this activity in two separate spaces for women and men. Here are a few examples of technique you can propose, if no one, including you, is willing to share their own approach:

- a. Take a walk: find a quiet area , possibly in the nature.
- b. Sing a song: find a tune that makes you feel good and listen to it and/or sing.
- c. Be creative: play music, draw, dance, cook (if it is something that makes you feel good).
- d. Find a quiet corner and breathe deeply: Focus on the movement of your belly when you take air in and let it out. Breathe deeply and slowly, trying to move your belly muscles rather than your chest.
- e. Rest, or take a nap.
- f. Do sports: movement helps reduce stress. 20 minutes of movement can make you feel significantly calmer.
- g. Talk to a friend: you can talk about the stressful situation, but you do not have to.
- h. Read a book.
- i. Keep a journal.

Modality: 

Plenary

1. Hand out the home practice handout “[Stress management](#)” to each participant.
2. Remind participants that it is important to practice their technique regularly, not just when they are under stress, so that it becomes an automatic response of our body to a stressful situation.
3. Ask them to keep track of their daily practice: they can place a cross next to the weekday in the handout, every time they have managed to use any relaxation technique. They can also make a drawing to indicate the type of approach they have used.
4. **ASK** one or two volunteers to recap two things discussed today.
5. If you’ve had the chance to make notes of the [participants’ hopes and fears on a flipchart](#), draw their attention to it and ask them to place a star or stars on hopes that are realized.
6. Next, ask them to take a marker and remove fears that are starting to be overcome.
7. Then, ask them to add new fears or hopes that might have emerged.
8. Finally, **ask** the following questions to the group and make notes of the answers.
 - a. **Is there anything that you particularly liked about this session?**
 - b. **Is there anything that you found particularly useful?**
 - c. **Is there anything that you would do differently?**
 - d. **Remind participants of the Referral Plan should they need an external support.**

Do not forget that the Referral Plan and its corresponding Handout are “live documents”: do not just refer participants to it, but if you recognize that there is any need that should be addressed outside the sessions, make every possible effort to find the appropriate agency and, if needed, guide participants towards the right actors in your context. Also, you should discuss any complex matter with the **Supervisor of the Program**, who should be able to help you find the best approach to solve the issues at hand.

9. Thank everyone for their participation and engagement.

Home practice handout: [Stress management](#)

DAY	Have you practiced your stress management technique today? Which one (make a drawing)
DAY 1	
DAY 2	
DAY 3	

DAY 4	

Examples of relaxation techniques



Take a walk.



Sing a song.



Be creative: play music, draw, dance, cook (if it is something that makes you feel good).



Find a quiet corner and breathe deeply.



Rest, or take a nap.



Do sports.



Read a book.



Keep a journal.

INTEGRATE AND CONTINUE PRACTICING ANY OTHER STRESS MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUE THAT WORKS FOR YOU!

Session 10

Parent-child relationship: Better communication, better listening



Session 10: **Parent-child relationship: Better communication, better listening**

Time ⌚ 2h 5 min

Objectives: By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Value the importance of knowing and respecting their children with all their aspirations, their opinions and their struggles, and embody this respect in their communication with them and other family members.
- Enact and practice good communication with other adults and with their children.

Activities Overview:

Session 10		TOTAL 125 min
Act. 1	Welcoming participants and reflecting on the home practice	5 min
Act. 2	Can you listen to me, please? Communication game	15 min
Act. 3	Reflection and discussion: What is good communication?	20 min
Act. 4	Role playing good communication	70 min or more
	Closing the day: Home practice and evaluation	15 min

Resources Needed:

- Referral Plan and related Referral Handout .
- Flipcharts and markers.
- (If possible) Flipchart with hopes and fears from Session 1. Activity [4](#):
- Select eight images (cut out from magazines or newspapers) and cut each image in six uneven pieces (the number of images should be half the number of participants, i.e., for 16 participants, prepare 8 images). Mix all the cut-outs and place them together in a box. (These will be the puzzles that you will need in Activity 2).
- Copies of the [Home practices handout: Good communication in the family](#).

Session summary: In this and the following sessions, participants reflect on one of the key elements of positive and supportive relationships: the need to respect each other. Mutual respect can be embodied through various daily practices. In this session we will focus on communication, and participants will discuss how good communication can help build a respectful and supportive family environment. The session will focus on parental understanding of non-judgmental listening, observing the other person and talking. The participants will also share ways they communicate their appreciation towards their children through simple daily gestures. They will leave with a reminder to practice good communication with their children.

Activity 1. Welcoming participants and reflecting on the home practice (5 min)

Aims: To welcome participants, establish a positive atmosphere and share the home practice experience.

Modality:



Entire group

1. Welcome parents.
2. Smile and show a positive attitude! Thank everyone for being there.
3. You can skip the energizer here, as the next activity (Activity 2. Can you listen to me, please?) introduces the topic of good communication via an engaging energizer.
4. **ASK:**
 - Is anyone willing to share how the **home practice from the previous session went?**
 - What have you found easy?
 - What have you found difficult?

Remind participants of the confidential nature of the sessions, and of your availability before or after the sessions if anyone needs additional help or support. Have the **Referral Plan and Handout** at hand to share if needed. Do not forget that the Referral Plan and its corresponding Handout are “live documents”: do not just refer participants to it, but if you recognize that there is any need that should be addressed outside the sessions, make every possible effort to find the appropriate agency and, if needed, guide participants towards the right actors in your context. Also, you should discuss any complex matter with the **Supervisor of the Program**, who should be able to help you find the best approach to solve the issues at hand.

5. Always praise those brave enough to share!
6. Ask some volunteers to recall some key points discussed in the previous session.

Activity 2. Can you listen to me, please? Communication game (15 min)

Aims: To energize participants with a fun activity that introduces the topic of good communication; to rehearse the struggle of communicating when someone is not listening.

Materials:

- Select eight images (cut out from magazines or newspapers) and cut each image in six uneven pieces (the number of images should be half the number of participants, i.e., for 16 participants, prepare eight images).
- Mix all the cut-outs and place them together in a box.

Modality:



Pair work

1. Ask participants to help you place all the sitting arrangements – chairs or mats - in the largest circle possible.
2. Place the box with the cut-outs in the middle of the circle, on the floor, making sure that there are no obstacles between the box and the participants' sitting area.
3. Invite participants to form pairs. Join the activity if you have an odd number of participants. In each pair, one person will be 1 and the other 2.
4. Now, invite all participants who have been assigned to group 1 to leave the room. Explain to group 2 that each one has to think of a happy memory from their childhood.



TIPS: TRY IT OUT FIRST!

This activity can sound confusing, but it is extremely simple: The trick is to try it out a couple of times when you are rehearsing, so you will be confident in giving the instructions when you are facilitating.

5. Explain that the goal of the game is to share as much information about the happy memory they have chosen, with their partner from group 1, but they can only talk to their partners when they are both sitting at their places. They will have 3 minutes.
6. Now, go to group 1, and explain that each of them has the goal of completing a puzzle (putting together one image that has been cut into 6 pieces) as fast as possible. Explain that they have a maximum of 3 minutes to complete the task.
7. Clarify that, once back in the room, they will find the pieces of the puzzles mixed-up in a box.
8. Do not share the goals that you assigned to the members of group 2!
9. Explain that there are only two rules:
 - a. They can only take one piece that they think belongs to their puzzle at the time. They can bring it to their seat, check if it works, and only then, they can go back to the box with the puzzle pieces and pick the next one.

If they pick a piece that does not belong to their puzzle, they should bring it back to the box.

b. They are not allowed to talk.

10. Now, ask group 1 to go back into the room again, and take their place in pairs as at the beginning of the activity.
11. Start the time! **NOTE:** It is normal that the members of group 1 will struggle to complete the puzzle. It is possible that no one will complete it. Do not worry, it is part of the game.
12. After three minutes stop the game and ask everyone to go back to their place.
13. Thank everyone for their participation.

Activity 3. Reflection and discussion: What is good communication? (20 min)

Aims: To reflect on the elements of good communication and emphasize the importance of listening to establish good communication; to identify the impact of stress on communication.

Modality:



Plenary

1. **ASK:**
 - a. What do you think happened in this game? What have you observed?
Invite some volunteers to share their ideas.
2. **ASK** someone from group 1:
 - a. What have you understood from the story that your partner was telling you?
 - b. Was it easy or difficult to follow what he/she was saying? Why?
3. Invite members of group 2 to share their feelings.
ASK them:
 - a. How did you feel when you were trying to tell your story to your partner? What happened?
4. **ASK the whole group:**
 - a. Why do you think the communication did not work?
 - b. **What are some of the elements of good communication that were missing here?**
5. Use the information in the **Tip Box: “What is good communication”** to make sure that the relevant points are covered. Remember that your role is to encourage participants’ sharing and peer learning, rather than lecturing: use the notes only if you think some crucial aspects have not been conveyed.



WHAT IS GOOD COMMUNICATION?

- Focused listening, observation of the other person, talking.
- Use your body language to communicate with your child and to show that you are interested in what s/he is doing – sit down with him/her, look at him/her in the eyes.
- Use an encouraging tone of voice – avoid yelling.
- Follow the lead of your child: engage with his/her topics of interest, what s/he is doing or how s/he feels.
- Give your child full and undivided attention when you are communicating. Try to stop what you are doing when talking to him/her.
- Listen to him/her and respond in a sensitive and emphatic way - not just when s/he is happy, but also when s/he shows anger, frustration, sadness.
- Do not judge.
- Show interest in what the child is saying.
- ASK open-ended questions (What, Why, How).
- Keep your requests simple.
- Show respect and appreciation: praise your child, say thank you, admit your own mistakes.
- Try not to engage in confrontational communication when you feel angry, annoyed, frustrated or stressed. Remember: good communication implies respecting and valuing your child.

6. At the end of the conversation,

SAY:

- Good communication happens when one person talks and the other one listens.
- Listening attentively is fundamental.
- In this activity, communicating was not easy, because the listeners were busy with other tasks, which is a scenario we are very familiar with in our daily life.
- Communication is an activity which takes energy and time, but through good communication we build the foundation for a good relationship with our children and other family members.
- When we communicate, and we concentrate on what the person is saying, we show that we care and respect him/her.

Activity 4. Role playing good communication (70 min or more)

Objective: To give participants a safe space to share the way in which they enact good communication skills; to reflect on the elements of good communication and why it is important to communicate regularly and openly with your child; to recognize the benefits of good communication on the family relationships.

Modality:



group work followed by plenary discussion



LEARN MORE – ROLE PLAYS

Have a look at the Constant Companion, to learn how to facilitate role plays.

1. SAY:

- In the first activity we discussed what we understand as good communication.
- In the next activity we will role play the way in which we enact good communication at home, and we will discuss the benefits of communicating frequently and openly with our children.

2. Divide participants into groups of 4.

3. Read the scenario: (Open-Ended Story)



“Jemima is a 9-year-old girl. She comes home from school, she looks frustrated and angry. Her mother is at home busy working. She seems stressed and frustrated. Jemima says: ‘Mum, you have no idea what happened to me today’. And she throws herself on a chair.

4. Explain that we will do a role play.

5. To prepare for the role play, each group should start by discussing the following point:

- a. Why is the mother stressed?
- b. Why is Jemima frustrated? What do you think happened?
- c. How do you think the scene will develop?
- d. How would you engage in **good communication if you were Jemima’s parents?**

6. Explain that they have 15 minutes to prepare their role play. Explain that the scene needs to be prepared together, but that only two people from each group will enact the scene – one will play the mother, and one the daughter.

7. Explain that they should make sure the mother uses good communication. The scene should not take more than 3 minutes.

8. After 15 minutes, let each group present their sketch. Stop them after 3 minutes.

9. After each performance has taken place, ask the whole group to discuss together by using some or all of the questions from the [Facilitators' Notes 10: "The story of Jemima" Feedback](#). If you do not have enough time, you can shorten this activity by letting all groups perform their sketch and start the discussion only at the end, after the presentations.
10. After the discussion, add your own comments and summarize the main points that arose from the group.
11. Try to be positive but do not be afraid to suggest how you think things could be done better.
12. Thank everyone after their performance!
13. **ASK:**
 - What are the benefits of good and frequent communication with children?
 - What can happen if there is no communication or poor communication?
 - How could good communication – and listening - help reduce the risk of recruitment by an armed group?
 - How could it facilitate the children's reintegration in the family, if they have experienced recruitment?
14. Reiterate some of the points discussed during the session – use again the **Tip Box: "What is good communication". Reflect on the answers given by the participants and integrate the following points as needed, making sure you refer to what parents just suggested. SAY:**
 - When communicating with your child, it is important you show him/her respect and that you value his/her ideas.
 - Try to communicate with your child every day.
 - Communicate your appreciation and your respect to you child by frequently praising him/her: say well done, good job! But also thank him/her whenever possible.
 - With older children it is particularly important to be open to listen. Do not force them to talk when they do not want to. Ask questions, but respect their silences, and be ready to listen when they want to talk to you.
 - Also, avoid being judgmental: listen and respect any feeling they might have.
 - When you think you might have made a mistake, acknowledge that and share it with your child: Learn to say, "I am sorry". It is an important way to acknowledge your child's value and show respect.
 - Communicating and showing respect gives your child **confidence, he/she learns to turn to you when facing challenges, he/she learns to be resilient, to bounce back from struggles.**
 - **These are key skills to prevent a child's involvement with an armed group and to support his/her reintegration into the family.**



COMMUNICATION, GENDER, AND LOCAL CONTEXT

To contextualize this session, reflect on the following:

- Are children generally expected to communicate more with their fathers or mothers? Why?
- Who is in charge of dealing with emotions in the family?
- Is there any topic which fathers or boys are not expected to talk about?
- What about girls?

Remember what we discussed in session 2, 3 and 8:

- Both fathers and mothers have a paramount role in the care of children - and this also involves communication.
- It is crucial to be aware of, and therefore tackle, any gender difference and stereotype in the family, also in the approach towards communication. For example, in some communities, boys and fathers are not expected to share their emotions. This can have a negative impact on the child's wellbeing, especially on his mental health and his resilience.

12. ASK:

- a. What are some of the difficulties we might have in communicating with our children who have been recruited by an armed group?
- b. How could we try to talk with our children about their experience?

13. SAY:

- Children who have been recruited by armed groups might find it hard to talk about their experience.
- It is important not to push our children to talk if they do not want to, but also to be open to listen to them any time they feel they want to talk to us.
- One strategy to facilitate communication on hard topics such as the experiences that our children might have had with an armed group, or the challenges they face upon their return home, is to move the focus away from the topic. For example, other parents in a similar situation have said that they found it easier to talk when doing other activities, such as a house chore together, or when walking or working together. Others said that it was easier to talk when enjoying something nice together, such as a treat.
- Remember to try and engage in a conversation about these issues only when both of you do not feel stressed or overwhelmed by intense emotions.



FACILITATORS' NOTES 10: "The story of Jemima" Feedback

Use the following questions to help you facilitate the discussion after each sketch. If time allows use all the questions. Otherwise focus on the key ones in bold at the beginning.

KEY QUESTIONS:

Do you think the mother engaged in good communication? What makes you say that?

- In what ways did the mother focus her attention only on the child?
- Did the mother ask open or closed questions?
If you have time, integrate the conversation using one or more of the following questions:
- How was the mother's tone of voice?
- How was the body language? Did the mother use body language, which encouraged the child to talk to her? How? What did she do? (think about the eye contact, the posture, etc.).
- How would the scene change if the father was there instead of the mother? How would the father react? How about the child?
- How would the scene change if the child was a boy instead of a girl? How would the communication change?
- What could some of the mother's challenges be that are preventing her from engaging in good communication (e.g. She is busy, Jemima is very introverted, she does not want to share, another child is claiming attention, etc.)?
- How does she address these challenges to have good communication?
(use this question to also reflect on the differences in communication between mothers and fathers, and sons and daughters, and which topics are harder or easier to address for each family member – see Tip Box: "Communication, gender and local context" and Tip Box: "Talking about difficult topics" for help in facilitating this part.



Talking about difficult topics

Talking about difficult topics or emotions can be challenging. It might be a good idea to engage the child in conversations about his/her experiences with the armed group, or his or her desire to join an armed group.

Here are some strategies to engage your child:

- Talk while doing some other activities, such as walking or working together.
- Share a treat or a good meal and use it as an occasion to start a conversation.

Remember:

- Respect the child's desire not to talk.
- Do not force your child to talk in conditions which he/she does not like, such as in front of other people, or looking at you straight in the eye. Let your child choose how and when to talk.
- ASK questions but do not always expect answers.

Closing the day: Home practice and evaluation (15 min)

Aims: To recap the day, introduce and discuss the home practice and assess the session.

Materials: Copies of the [Home practices handout: Good communication in the family](#);
(If possible) Flipchart with hopes and fears from [Session 1. Activity 4](#).

Modality:



Plenary

1. Hand out the [Home practice handout: Good communication in the family](#) to each participant.
2. Remind them to try to take 10 minutes every day to listen to their children without distractions.
3. Ask them to keep track of their daily practice: they can place a cross next to the weekday in the handout, every time they managed to listen and talk to their children. They can place some pebbles in a box. Alternatively, invite participant to suggest their way to track their practice.
4. **ASK** one or two volunteers to recap two things discussed today.
5. If you've had the chance to make notes of the [participants' hopes and fears on a flipchart](#), draw their attention to it and ask them to place a star or stars on hopes that are realized.
6. Next, ask them to take a marker and remove fears that are starting to be overcome.
7. Then, ask them to add new fears or hopes that might have emerged.
8. Finally, **ASK** the following questions to the group and make notes of the answers.
 - a. **Is there anything that you particularly liked about this session?**
 - b. **Is there anything that you found particularly useful?**
 - c. **Is there anything that you would do differently?**
9. Thank everyone for their participation and engagement.

GOOD COMMUNICATION IN THE FAMILY

R E M E M B E R T O :

Praise them



Say «Thank You»



Say «Sorry»



Integrate and continue practicing
any positive communication practice
that works for you!

WEEKDAYS	I TOOK 10 MINUTES TO TALK TO MY CHILD
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	

Session 11

Starting from ourselves: Self-care practices to deal with our emotions



Session 11: Starting from ourselves: Self-care practices to deal with our emotions

Time ⌚ 1h 45 min

Objectives: By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Be aware, recognize, express and deal with their own emotions.
- Talk about emotions with their children and with peers.

Activities Overview:

Session 11		105 min
Act. 1	Welcoming participants and reflecting on the home practice	10 min
Act. 2	Recognizing our emotions	30 min
Act. 3	Role play – how we communicate our emotions to our children	50 min or more
	Closing the day: Home practice and evaluation	15 min

Resources Needed:

- Referral Plan and related Referral Handout.
- Flipcharts and markers.
- (If possible) Flipchart with hopes and fears from Session 1. Activity [4](#).
- Draw a few emotion symbols or write the names of the emotions on pieces of paper and hang them in different places in the room. You can use the examples suggested in the [Pictogram for the facilitators 9: Feeling symbols \(see Activity 2\)](#).
- Copies of the Home practice handout: Communicating our emotions.

Session summary:

Participants will start by recognizing their own emotions. They will reflect on how communicating their emotions can help their own wellbeing, but also help create a supportive family environment and show trust and respect towards children and other family members.

They will reflect on the cultural norms around expressing emotions and especially talking about emotions with their children. They will then practice communicating their emotions. They will leave the day with a handout to remind them to talk about emotions and share their emotions with their children and other family members.

Activity 1. Welcoming participants and reflecting on the home practice (10 min)

Aims: To welcome participants, establish a positive atmosphere and share the home practice experience.

Modality:



Plenary

1. Welcome parents.
2. Smile and show a positive attitude! Thank everyone for being there.
3. Start with a short and engaging activity that will get everyone's attention, such as a local song, a quick game or a brief energizer. Below are two examples of energizers. You will find more suggestions in the Constant Companion. Also, you can invite some participants to volunteer and propose an energizer.
4. Ask everyone to stand up and walk around the room.
5. Whenever their eyes meet with someone else, they should mime an emotion, for example a person being frustrated, or sad, or happy. The person that they have met eyes with, should indicate which emotion the other participant is representing.
6. If this approach is not culturally appropriate in your context, you can change it as follows: invite participants to walk around the room, and explain that you will call out some emotions, and they should mime them.
7. Call out some emotions, such as "sad", or "angry" or "scared".
8. After calling one emotion, take a few minutes to walk around the room and invite participants to recognize what the emotion you just called out might look like, and how its expressions can look similar or different.
9. Next, thank everyone for their participation and invite them to take a seat.
10. **ASK:**
 - Is anyone willing to share how the **home practice from the previous session went?**
 - What have you found easy?
 - What have you found difficult?

Remind participants of the confidential nature of the sessions, and of your availability before or after the sessions if anyone needs additional help or support. Have the **Referral Handout** at hand to share if needed.
11. Always praise those brave enough to share!
12. ASK some volunteers to recall some key points discussed in the previous session.


Activity 2. Recognizing our emotions (30 min)

Aims: To develop the ability to identify and to express one's own emotions; to recognize the benefits of communicating one's own emotions; to recognize the cultural norms around communicating emotions.

Modality:

Plenary 

Materials: Draw a few emotion symbols or write the names of the emotions on pieces of paper and hang them in different places in the room. You can use the examples suggested in the [Pictogram for the facilitators 9: Feeling symbols \(see next pages\)](#). You do not need to use all the emotions suggested there! Choose the ones you find more common, relevant, or known in your context.

1. Show the group the **emotions symbols** and ask participants to identify the meaning of each symbol. Make sure everyone agrees.
2. Next, explain that you will mention a series of situations and each participant should individually reflect on how one might feel in that situation, and stand in front of the corresponding symbol in the room.
3. **Read** the following statements, and after each sentence, invite a few volunteers to reflect on the following (do not push anyone to participate if they do not want to):
 - How do you know when you are feeling that emotion?
4. **SAY:** 
 - a. You have completed a hard task at work, and you have some time off now.
 - b. You had an argument with your child, and he/she does not want to talk to you.
 - c. Your child comes home with a very positive result from a school test.
 - d. Your child has broken your watch.
 - e. Your child has always been very cheerful, but recently he/she is always grumpy.
 - f. You receive the news that your child has been released by the armed group and is arriving home.
 - g. There are rumors that a rebel group is getting closer to your village.
 - h. There are rumors that the person for whom you are working is in financial troubles and might lay off someone.

After each sentence, give time to participants to take a place in front of one emotion symbol, and ask the question above.

8. Next, invite everyone to take their seat again, and thank them for their participation.
9. **ASK:**
 - a. Are any of these emotions easier to recognize and deal with?
 - b. Which emotions are harder to deal with? Why?
 - c. Which emotions are easier to communicate? To whom? Which ones are more difficult to communicate? Why?

- d. In our culture, is there any emotion which we are supposed to keep to ourselves? Why?
- e. Is there any emotion that men are supposed to keep to themselves? What about women?
- f. Is there any emotion that adults are supposed to keep to themselves? What about children?
- g. What are the consequences of keeping emotions to ourselves?

10. SAY:

- Recognizing and understanding emotions is important for both children and adults. For example, when we recognize if we are feeling intense emotions, such as very angry or frustrated, we can learn to calm ourselves down. When we are calmer, it is easier to think, understand what is happening around us, and make better decisions.
- Intense emotions can make us “lose control” over our thoughts and actions.
- Understanding emotions helps us identify causes that trigger certain emotions and make choices that make us feel more positive (you avoid what makes you feel sad and choose what makes you feel happy).
- When we understand our emotions, we are also more able to ask for help when needed.
- Communicating emotions is also important, although it might be difficult sometimes.
- When we communicate our feelings, we build strong, trustful and healthy relationship, we show trust towards one another.
- When we communicate our feelings to our children, we help them understand the motives behind some of our actions, we teach them to be in tune with their own emotions, and we help them deal with them in a healthy way.



EMOTIONS, COMMUNICATION AND LOCAL NORMS

Recognizing and communicating emotions can be very challenging. In some contexts, local cultural norms can prevent or discourage some social groups from expressing emotions.

For example, in some context men are not supposed to express fear, or show sadness or show affection and care, especially when dealing with children. Men can be expected to be the ones who discipline, show strength, pride and anger.

Reflect on your context and on which emotions can be expressed in the family, and which are not. It is advisable not to leave these cultural norms unquestioned, to implement an effective gender transformative approach. This might be a very challenging topic to discuss and it is advisable that you discuss this with your co-facilitator and Supervisor of the Program to choose the best strategy to address this issue.

5 minutes break (Optional): Find a locally appropriate way to take a break and relax. You can invite some participants to volunteer and share a locally appropriate relaxation technique, such a song or a quick game. If no one volunteers, be ready to propose a short and energizing activity.

Pictogram for the facilitators 9: Feeling symbols



Here are some examples of emotions and emoticons to reproduce them: you do not need to copy all of them. Feel free to choose the ones you find more common, relevant or known in your context.



HAPPY



GUILTY



HOPEFUL



ASHAMED



PROUD



ANXIOUS



CONTENT



WORRIED



CALM



SCARED



CONFUSED



OVERWHELMED



UPSET



FRUSTRATED



SAD



ANGRY



LONELY



FURIOUS

Activity 3. Role play - how to communicate emotions to our children (50 min or more)



COMMUNICATING EMOTIONS WITH OUR CHILDREN

Should we communicate all our emotions to our children?
How much and what should we share?

Many people hide their emotions from their children to avoid them suffering with them, or to avoid worrying them. Suppressing emotions can have the opposite result: you cannot completely hide your distress, and your children will recognize signs of it, without really knowing what is happening.

The opposite extreme is also not healthy for the child: like in the example of the Open-Ended Stories in Activity 3, an uncontrolled expression of emotions - be that anger, like in that case - can result in yelling, and uncontrolled crying.

Also, sharing emotions when they are too intense, for example, anger or frustration, can result in conflict: we might end up yelling, or even hitting our children.

What we need to learn is to talk to our children about our emotions in a peaceful way. In the example provided, after Aldana has yelled at the child, she tries to explain her feelings to the child to restore the situation. When you tell your child how you are feeling, and explain the causes of your emotions, you also show him/her how to cope with his/her own distress in a healthy way.

If you feel that your emotions are too intense, that you are angry, frustrated, sad, or overwhelmed, that might not be the best time to peacefully communicate your emotions with your child. Use a relaxation technique that works and, once you feel the emotions are under control, you can approach your child.

Aims: To provide participants with a safe space to practice communicating emotions with their children; to understand the benefits of communicating our emotions to our children for ourselves and for them.

Modality:




Group work followed by plenary discussion.

1. SAY:


- Communicating our emotions with our children can be very challenging: shame, pride, social norms can make it difficult.

2. Invite participants to form 4 groups.

3. Read the following story: (Open-Ended Story) 

Aldana is the mother of 4 children. Jorge is her middle child, he is 10 years old. Today Aldana feels very frustrated and nervous: she had a very hard day at work, and her day was very long. Also, she has not received her last month payment/salary. She has just come home, and the house is dirty. Jorge was supposed to clean up a bit, and make sure the younger siblings have taken a bath, but it seems he has done none of that. On top of that, the moment Aldana calls Jorge to help her prepare dinner, he comes in running, accidentally trips, and breaks one of the chairs in the kitchen. Aldana turns to him and cannot control her rage any longer. She shouts at him, bangs her fist on the table and tells him to go and leave her alone.

4. Explain that two groups should work on this scenario, while the other two groups should change the scenario and imagine that **Aldana** is not the mother but the father, and Jorge is not a boy but a girl. The rest of the scene remains the same.
5. Explain that all four groups should imagine how the story continues, in a way that allows for the **parent to communicate his/her emotions** and **use a non-violent approach to address the situation**. Read the following questions to help participants reflect:
 - What do you think happens next?
 - How could Aldana communicate her emotions to her son? What might happen if she does?
 - How will her child react?

Here is an example of how the scene could continue: 

After having shouted at Jorge, Aldana takes a breath to calm herself down. Once she feels a bit less stressed, she goes to Jorge, sits next to him, puts an arm around his shoulders and says: "I am sorry if I shouted at you, the reason is that I am feeling very stressed and nervous right now, because there are some issues at work. It is important that you help me and take care of the tasks I ask you to deal with. Now, would you help me prepare dinner, and tell me how your day went?"

6. Explain that they should take 15 minutes to prepare a role play of the scene and its continuation. In this case, only two people per group will rehearse the characters, but they should all work together to agree on the development of the scene. The scene should not take more than 3 minutes.
7. Walk around the different groups to make sure that the task has been understood.
8. After 15 minutes, invite each group to perform their role play, taking no more than 3 minutes.
9. After everyone has presented their role play, use some or all of the questions in the [Facilitators' Notes 11: Communicating emotions feedback](#) to facilitate a discussion with all the participants. If needed, remind them that you are not there to judge the participant's performances, but learn the best approach to problem-solving together.



FACILITATORS' NOTES 11: COMMUNICATING EMOTIONS FEEDBACK

Use some of the following questions to help you facilitate the discussion after each sketch. If time allows use all of the questions. Otherwise focus on the Key ones in bold.

KEY QUESTIONS:

1. Do you think this scenario is realistic?
2. Did the mother/father manage to communicate her/his emotions to the child? If so, how do you think she/he feels after she/he has shared her/his anger and frustration with the child?
3. How do you think the child feels after the mother/father has shared her/his anger and frustration with her/her?

Additional questions:

4. How do you think the mother/father feels after shouting at the child? How do you think it affects his/her anger and frustration?
5. How do you think the child feels after being shouted at?
6. Do you think this approach could work in your family? Why?
7. Do you think this approach could work in the same way with children of any age?
8. Could it work for girls as well as boys? Why?
9. Could it work for fathers as well as mothers? Why?

10. After the discussion, add your own comments and summarize the main points that arose. If needed, use the information in the **Tip Box: “Communicating emotions with our children”**. Try to be positive but do not be afraid to suggest how you think things could be done better. Thank everyone after their performance!

11. Finally, **ASK:**

- a. How do you think that talking to our children about our emotions affects the risk of recruitment by armed groups?
- b. How does it help facilitate their reintegration if they have experienced recruitment by armed groups?

12. **SAY:**

- Recognizing our emotions helps us be in control. If we are anxious, worried, or sad, it has an impact on our family relationships and friendships.
- If we learn to recognize our emotions and share them, we help our children understand us better, we show them trust and respect and we help them learn to cope with their own feelings and emotions.
- Showing respect helps our children feel capable of solving problems, and when they trust us, they are more likely to come to us when facing issues.

Closing the day: Home practice and evaluation (15 min)

Aims: To recap the day, introduce and discuss the home practice and assess the session.

Materials: Copies of the [Home practice handout: Communicating our emotions](#); (If possible) Flipchart with hopes and fears from [Session 1. Activity 4](#).

Modality:



Plenary

1. Hand out the [Home practice handout: Communicating our emotions](#) to each participant.
2. Invite participants to mark on the handout every time that they manage to share their emotions with their children or with other family members or friends in a peaceful way. Invite them to use a symbol to indicate which emotion they communicated.
3. Remind them to continue practicing the skills which were the focus of the previous sessions - positive communication and stress reduction.
4. **ASK** one or two volunteers to recap two things discussed today.
5. If you've had the chance to make notes of the [participants' hopes and fears on a flipchart](#), draw their attention to it and ask them to place a star or stars on hopes that are realized.
6. Next, ask them to take a marker and remove fears that are starting to be overcome.
7. Then, ask them to add new fears or hopes that might have emerged.
8. Finally, **ASK** the following questions to the group and make notes of the answers.
 - a. **Is there anything that you particularly liked about this session?**
 - b. **Is there anything that you found particularly useful?**
 - c. **Is there anything that you would do differently?**
9. Thank everyone for their participation and engagement.

Home practice handout: Communicating our emotions

Weekdays	I had the chance to communicate my emotions to my child	I communicated my emotions to another family member or friend.
Day 1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		

Communicating emotions – remember to:

- Explain how you are feeling.
- Explain what is causing that emotion.
- Show how to cope with that emotion in a healthy way – e.g., take a deep breath if you are stressed, lay down, call a friend, talk.
- How did you feel after sharing your emotions? Reflect on it!
- Integrate what you have learned into your behavior and continue practicing any other strategy that you use to communicate your emotions to your child in a peaceful and nonviolent way!

Session 12

Parent-child relationship: Understanding and managing emotions



Session 12: **Parent-child relationship: Understanding and managing emotions**

Time ⌚ 1h 35 min

Objectives: By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Recognize their children's emotions.
- Empathize and deal with their children's emotions.
- Name and acknowledge their children's emotions.

Activities Overview:

Session 12		TOTAL 95 min
Act. 1	Welcoming participants and reflecting on the home practice	10 min
Act 2	Understanding our children's emotions and behaviors	20 min
Act 3	Role play - how to help our children understand and manage emotions	50 min or more
Closing the day and evaluation		15 min

Resources Needed:

- Referral Plan and related Referral Handout.
- Flipcharts and markers.
- (If possible) Flipchart with hopes and fears from Session 1. Activity [4](#).
- **Create the emotion thermometer:** Place a long piece of paper tape on the floor - if possible, going from one side of the room to the other. Place the symbols along the tape, as shown in the picture in Activity 2. You can draw the symbols on pieces of white paper and stick them to the floor, or you can draw them with some chalk on the floor (make sure to remove it afterwards).
- Copies of the Home practice handout: Helping our children communicate and manage their emotions.

Content

Now we will look again at the parent-child relationship: the parents will discuss ways of decoding children's emotions and reflect on how they can help their children manage and deal with emotions. The parents will reflect on the differences among children in how they express their emotions and that some children might not necessarily want to share their emotions with their parents but might find it easier to communicate with peers (especially older children). The participants will leave the session with a note highlighting one strategy to help children deal with emotions (i.e., naming and acknowledging children's emotion).

Activity 1. Welcoming participants and reflecting on the home practice (10 min)

Aims: To welcome participants, establish a positive atmosphere and share the home practice experience.

Modality:



Plenary

1. Welcome parents.
2. Smile and show a positive attitude! Thank everyone for being there.
3. Start with a short and engaging activity that will get everyone's attention, such as a local song, a quick game or a brief energizer that is appropriate in your context. You will find an example below, and some suggestions are also in the Constant Companion. Also, you can invite some participants to volunteer and propose an energizer or a song.
4. Ask everyone to stand in a circle. Start by miming an action.
5. Then, invite the person to your right to ask you "What are you doing?", you reply that you are doing something completely different, for example, the facilitator mimes swimming and says, "I am washing my hair".
6. The person to the facilitator's right then has to mime what the facilitator said that they were doing (washing their hair), while saying that they are doing something completely different.
7. Go around the circle in this way until everyone has had a turn¹⁶.
8. **ASK:**
 - Is anyone willing to share how the **home practice from the previous session went?**
 - What have you found easy?
 - What have you found difficult?

Remind participants of the confidential nature of the sessions, and of your availability before or after the sessions if anyone needs additional help or support. Have the **Referral Plan** at hand, if needed. Remember to be receptive of any signs that the parents might be in need of targeted assistance by a social worker in your team or an external agency. You can find more information on this aspect also in the **Constant Companion**. In any case, you should

¹⁶ Adapted from International HIV/AIDS Alliance, (n.a.). [100 ways to energise groups: Games to use in workshops, meetings and the community](#) ..

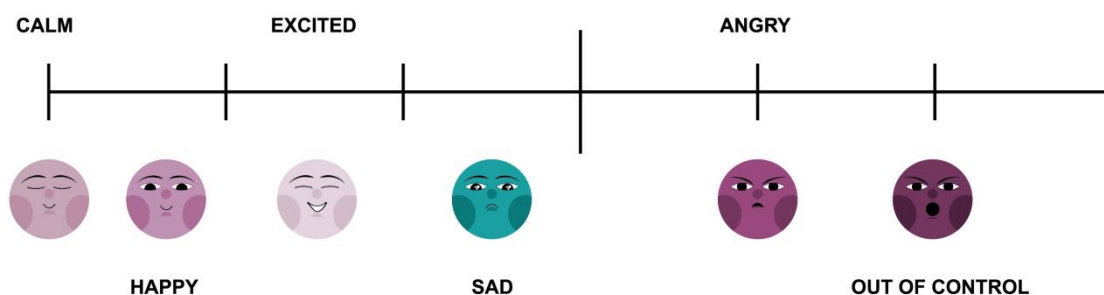
be able to discuss these issues with the **Supervisor of the Program** who can help you address them.

9. Always praise those brave enough to share! You can also acknowledge that others may choose to reflect on the response silently, and that too is okay!
10. Ask some volunteers to recall some key points discussed in the previous session.

Activity 2. Understanding our children's emotions and behaviors (20 min)

Materials:

Create the emotion thermometer: Place a long piece of paper tape on the floor - if possible, going from one side of the room to the other. Place the symbols along the tape, as shown in the picture below. You can draw the symbols on pieces of white paper and stick them to the floor, or you can draw them with some chalk on the floor (make sure to remove it afterwards).



Below you can read some examples of emotions and emoticons to reproduce on the emotion thermometer: you do not need to copy all of them. Feel free to choose the ones you find more common, relevant, or known in your context.



HAPPY



GUILTY



HOPEFUL



ASHAMED



PROUD



ANXIOUS



CONTENT



WORRIED



CALM



SCARED



CONFUSED



OVERWHELMED



UPSET



FRUSTRATED



SAD





ANGRY



LONELY



FURIOUS

1. Show the group the **emotion thermometer** on the floor and ask the group to identify the meaning of each symbol you placed on the line. Make sure everyone agrees on the meaning of the symbols.
2. **SAY:**
 - I will now read you some statements and I would like you to think about how the child in each scenario is feeling.
 - Then, stand up and stand on the emotion thermometer on the floor, in correspondence to the emotion that the child in the Open-Ended Stories is experiencing.
3. Read the following scenarios: 
 - Jerome comes home with a bad mark from school.
 - Alice has spent a nice afternoon with her friends.
 - Frida's dad has a day off and will take the children for a walk.
 - Abid wants to spend time with his friends, but his mother said he must do his homework first.
 - Ange has spilled all the milk on the floor.
4. Next, **SAY:**
 - Very often emotions can influence the way children and adults behave. Our children might be suddenly very quiet, or aggressive.
 - Now I will read you some statements about children's behavior, and I would like you to think about which emotions might be guiding the child's behavior.
 - Again, stand on the emotion thermometer on the floor, in correspondence to the emotion that you think the child in the Open-Ended Stories is experiencing.
5. Read the following Open-Ended Stories: 
 - Amina is very quiet and does not want to join everyone for dinner. She said she wants to go to bed.
 - At dinner, the mother asks Susan to help her set the table, she answers that she is busy with her homework. The father insists that she should help. She shouts that she needs to finish an assignment and shouts "Why do you never ask Hassan for help?".
 - Genevieve comes home from school and sits next to her mother and starts helping her prepare dinner while she tells her "you have no idea what happened today at school!".
 - Dieudonne struggles to sleep and is often rude towards his parents.
 - The parents tell Fiston that he is not allowed to leave the house after dinner, because it is too late. He shouts at them "this is unfair, I hate you!"
6. After each Open-Ended Story, give participants enough time to stand on the emotion thermometer. Reassure them that there is no right or wrong answer! Then ask some volunteers:
 - What makes you think that the child is feeling that emotion?
 - Can you think about what the reason might be for his/her behavior? What could have happened? Why does he/she feel that emotion?
7. Thank everyone and ask them to take their place once again.
8. **Then ASK:**

- What do you notice about your own emotions when the child in each scenario behaves the way they do?
- Can you think about what you as a parent do to address the behavior and emotions of your child?
- What are some strategies we can use to help our children deal with their emotions? How can we help them express their feelings in a positive way?

Use the notes in the [Facilitator's Notes 12: Helping children deal with emotions](#) to make sure that the relevant points are covered. Remember that **your role is to encourage participants' sharing and peer learning, rather than lecturing: use the notes only if you think some crucial aspects have not been conveyed.**

9. Next, recap their key points and integrate them with the notes below, SAY:

- To help our children manage emotions, we must start by understanding their emotions, and how these emotions could influence their behaviors.
- This helps us make the right decision about how to approach their behavior. For instance, if we respond to our child's aggressive behavior with punishment, we are not tackling the root of the problem, **why** is he/she being aggressive.
- Emotions have a huge impact on ourselves: emotions determine the way we make decisions and our actions/reactions, they affect how good we feel, our thoughts, our sleep.
- Emotions determine the atmosphere in the home.
- Positive emotions affect the relationship between the adult caregivers, which in turn affects how the children react to others.
- Remember: Our children do not behave in a certain way to hurt us. They do that because they have to find strategies to handle emotions. Once we have made sense of the emotions that guide their behaviors, we can try to tackle the root problems causing these emotions.
- Respecting our children's emotions show them that we value and respect them, building a trustful relationship with them and helping them come to us, should they face problems.
- Also, supporting our children to understand and manage emotions helps them build their ability to overcome challenges, feel more self-confident and positive about who they are.
- Remember that this session is linked to what we have learned before about our own emotions. If we learn to identify and appropriately deal with our emotions, we are already teaching our children to identify and appropriately deal with their emotions.



FACILITATORS' NOTES 12: Helping children deal with emotions

HELPING CHILDREN DEAL WITH EMOTIONS – SUGGESTIONS FOR THE FACILITATOR TO USE AS EXAMPLES

- Recognize your child's emotions: For example, say something like "I see you are feeling angry/frustrated".
- Help your child in talking about feelings and expressing feelings: for example, say something like "I see you are feeling frustrated, maybe you want to tell me what is bothering you?".
- Give your child space to share, but do not force him/her if she does not want to: "it is ok if you don't want to talk, I am here whenever you want".
- Teach your child the different ways we can deal with feelings and let him/her come up with ways to deal with feelings. Talk about positive and not so positive ways to express feelings. For example, you can invite your child to discuss with you what could be some ways that could make her feel better when she is angry, or frustrated. Ask her, rather than just telling her what to do. If she suggests some strategies that you think are not so positive or not appropriate, discuss why they are not appropriate. For example, if she says that she feels like punching someone every time she gets angry, invite her to think about what the consequences are of that. You can use the "problem-solving steps" indicated in Session 18, to find a way to appropriately deal with emotion in a peaceful and positive way.
- Share strategies to deal with overwhelming emotions, such as:
 - o Deep breathing when you are stressed, frustrated or angry (see Session 11)
 - o Learning a problem-solving approach: How can we solve this? (Session 14)
 - o Pausing (see session 13)
 - o Asking for help when needed
 - o Finding someone to talk to
 - o Getting a hug when sad
 - o Finding a quiet space to calm down when distressed
 - o Taking a walk
 - o Exercising
- Model your behavior: explain to them how you are feeling and show them how you deal with feelings in a positive way - avoiding violence, aggressive behavior, finding positive coping strategies.
- Avoid responding to your child's intense emotions with punishment, aggressive behavior, or violence. Your child will not learn to regulate his/her emotions and cope with them effectively, but rather will learn to hide his/her emotions from you (see Session 17. positive discipline).
- Recognize their efforts when they effectively manage to cope with intense emotions. For example, say something like "I know it must be hard to keep a positive attitude when you feel so frustrated!".

Remember: It can be very hard to respond in a calm, peaceful and understanding way to your child's intense emotions, but we have to try and understand the reasons behind these emotions to effectively tackle them. Getting angry and shouting will not help achieve this goal. If you feel you are losing your temper, step away and take a deep breath before reacting.

Activity 3. Role play - how to help our children understand and manage emotions (50 min or more)

Aims: To provide participants with a safe space to practice helping their children understand and deal with emotions; to reflect on how we help our children understand and manage their emotions; to identify how the local culture can influence the ways in which people of different ages and genders are expected to express or manage emotions.

Modality:



Group work

1. **SAY:**

- Now we will practice helping children understand and deal with their emotions.

2. Invite participants to form 4 groups.

3. Assign each group one of the following Open-Ended Stories:



- Yara [female name] has just been released by an armed group and is now living with relatives (or in foster care) as she waits for her parents to be found so that she can go back home. She has a shared room with other children in the household. She stays there all day and refuses to eat.
- At dinner, the mother asks Sarah to help her set the table, she answers that she is busy with her homework. The father insists that she should help. She shouts that she needs to finish an assignment and says: "Why do you never ask Zahid for help?".
- Dana is bullied by her friends in school, because of her past involvement with an armed group. In the morning she always looks exhausted. Her father asks what is going on and she says: "I just can't sleep, just leave me alone!".
- Lionel is 17. He has a new group of friends. His parents do not like them because they fear they are linked to the armed group and they could push Lionel to join it. It is dinner time, and the parents say to Lionel that he is not allowed to leave the house after dinner, because it is too late. He shouts at them "this is unfair, I hate you!"

4. Explain that each group should work on the scenario they have been assigned, making sure that each participant takes a different role.
5. Explain that they should imagine how the story continues, in a way that allows for the parent to **help their children recognize their emotions and deal with them, using the strategies identified in the previous activity**. Read the following questions to help them:
- What do you think happens next?
 - How can they better understand why their children are behaving in a certain way?
 - How can the parents help their children communicate their emotions?
 - How will the child react?

6. Explain that they should take 15 minutes to prepare a role play of the scene and its continuation. The scene should not take more than 5 minutes.
7. Do not forget to walk around the different groups to make sure that the task has been understood.
8. After 15 minutes, invite each group to perform their role play, taking no more than 5 minutes.
9. After everyone has presenting their role play, use some or all the questions in the ***Facilitator's Notes 12: Helping our children understand and manage emotions feedback*** to facilitate a discussion with all the participants. If needed, remind them that you are not there to judge the participant's performances, but share their approaches to managing children's emotions and learn from each other.



FACILITATORS' NOTES 13: HELPING OUR CHILDREN UNDERSTAND AND MANAGE EMOTIONS - FEEDBACK

Use some of the following questions to help you facilitate the discussion after each sketch. If time allows, use all of the questions. Otherwise focus on the Key questions in bold.

Key questions:

1. Why does the child feel like that?
2. How is the child behaving due to this emotion?
3. How did the parents help the child understand his/her emotion?
4. How did the parents help the child manage his/her emotions?
5. Do you think this approach could work in the same way with children of any age?
6. Could it work for girls as well as boys? Why?

If time allows you can integrate the discussion using the following questions:

7. How do you think the mother/father feels? How do you think she feels after having talked to her/his child?
8. Do you think this approach could work in your family? Why?

After the discussion, add your own comments and summarize the main points that arose. If needed, use the information in the ***Facilitator's Notes 12: Helping children deal with emotions***. Convey these points only if they did not emerge through the conversation among participants.

10. Try to be positive but do not be afraid to suggest how you think things could be done better. Thank everyone after their performance!

11. To conclude,

SAY:

- Do not forget that sometimes the problem is bigger than you! You and your child might need external help to deal with some emotions.
- As parents, you are the best judges of your children's behavior. If their behavior worries you for some reason, if you think that your child is showing intensified signs of stress, anxiety or sadness, you can always go to your support network in the community or come to us to guide you in finding the right service that can help you address this issue.
- Some signs that should warn us could be: self-harm, suicidal tendencies, expressing that our children seek to harm to others, being inconsolable, refusal of food, not speaking, engaging in risky behaviors.

(Have at hand the **Referral Plan** as developed and agreed with the **Supervisor of the Program**. Do not forget that the Referral Plan and its related Referral Handout are "live documents": do not just give the Referral Handout to the participants, but, if you recognize that there is any need that should be addressed outside the sessions, make every possible effort to find the appropriate agency and, if needed, guide participants towards the right actors in your context. Also, you should discuss any complex matter with the **Supervisor of the Program**, who should be able to help you find the best approach to solve the issues at hand.)



EMOTIONS AND GENDER



In some contexts, people can be expected to express or deal with emotions differently based on their gender.

For instance, in some communities mothers are mostly in charge of the “emotional burden” of the family: they are the ones who take care of their children’s emotions, while fathers are less inclined to express their emotions and to deal with their children’s emotions.

Similarly, boys are often expected to “act tough”, not showing insecurity, fear or sadness.

It is important to reflect on how gender influences the understanding and expression of emotion. Which emotions can boys express? Which ones are they supposed to keep to themselves? What about fathers? What role do they have in managing the emotions in the family?

Remember that everyone should be able to express a range of emotions, and that failing to do so can have negative effects on the management of emotions, that mean that these emotions become stronger and people can be more prone to issues such as aggressive behavior or depression. Have a look at Session 2. Activity 5, if you want to see again why a father’s involvement in the care of the children is fundamental and why they should also be involved in the care of their children’s emotions.

Closing the day: Home practice and evaluation (15 min)

Aims: To recap the day, introduce and discuss the home practice and assess the session.

Materials: Copies of the [Home practice handout: Helping our children communicate and manage their emotions](#); (If possible) Flipchart with hopes and fears from [Session 1. Activity 4](#).

Modality:



Plenary

1. Hand out the [Home practice handout: Helping our children communicate and manage their emotions](#) to each participant. Recall the following key principles, integrating them with what emerged from the conversations and discussions among participants.

Say:

- a. Helping our children recognize and deal with emotions helps them develop the skills they need to manage them effectively.

- b. Allowing space for them to share their emotions with us helps to create positive and trustful relationships in the family: if they face problems, they are more likely to turn to us.
- c. Helping them recognize and manage emotions can also help them deal with stigmatization and social isolation.
- d. When we recognize our children's emotions, we help them learn to accept their feelings, reducing the risk of stress and anxiety.
- e. When we empathize with our children, we approach them in a less violent, more sensitive way, which in turn reduces aggressive and negative behaviors in our children.



EMOTIONS AND OLDER CHILDREN

With older children it might sometimes be hard to understand how they are feeling and why they are behaving in a certain way. Here are some ideas to help them understand and manage their emotions:

*Stay calm and avoid aggressive or violent behavior.

*Give them space.

*Understand what is hidden behind anger – they might use anger to hide other emotions, such as fear, shame or insecurity. Help them reflect on what it is that they are feeling and what the anger is masking.

*Respect their feelings: because of the changes they are going through and their need for self-affirmation and individuality, older children might make a “big deal” of things that you find minor. Do not minimize their experiences or emotions but acknowledge and validate them.

*Model your behavior: behave towards your child as you would like him/her to behave towards you and others.

2. Invite participants to keep track of the times they manage to help their children express and manage their emotions. They can place a cross on the handout, or they can find other ways to keep track, for example placing a pebble in a match box every time they help their children manage and express their emotions.
3. Remind them to use the strategies that work best for them: they can use any approach they are already familiar with, and/or one that was shared by the participants or one that was suggested by you.
4. Remind them to continue practicing the skills which were the focus of the previous sessions - positive communication, stress reduction, dealing with emotions.
5. **ASK** one or two volunteers to recap two things discussed today.

6. If you've had the chance to make notes of the [participants' hopes and fears on a flipchart](#), draw their attention to it and ask them to place a star or stars on hopes that are realized.
7. Next, ask them to take a marker and remove fears that are starting to be overcome.
8. Then, ask them to add new fears or hopes that might have emerged.
9. Finally, **ASK** the following questions to the group and make notes of the answers.
 - d. **Is there anything that you particularly liked about this session?**
 - e. **Is there anything that you found particularly useful?**
 - f. **Is there anything that you would do differently?**
10. Thank everyone for their participation and engagement.

Home practice handout: Helping our children communicate and manage their emotions

Weekdays	We helped our child understand his/her emotions and manage them
Day 1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	

Helping your children understand and manage emotions – remember to:

- Validate your child's emotions: "I see you are feeling angry/frustrated".
- Help them share: "Do you want to tell me what has happened? How do you feel?".
- Give them space: "It is ok if you don't want to talk, I am here whenever you want".
- Share strategies to deal with overwhelming emotions:
 - Deep breathing when you are stressed, frustrated or angry (see Session XZ)
 - Learning a problem-solving approach: How can we solve this?
 - Pausing
 - Asking for a help when needed
 - Finding someone to talk to
 - Getting a hug when sad
 - Finding a quiet space to calm down when distressed
 - Taking a walk
 - Exercising
 - (Integrate with any stress reduction strategy that works for you!)
- Model your behavior.
- Avoid responding to your child's intense emotions with punishment, aggressive behavior or violence.
- Recognize them when they effectively manage to cope with intense emotions.
- Integrate and continue practicing any nonviolent and peaceful approach to understanding and managing emotions that works for you!

Session 13

Starting with ourselves: Self-care practices - taking a break



Session 13: **Starting with ourselves: Self-care practices - taking a break**

Time ⌚ 1h

Objectives: By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Recognize the need to take a pause during the day and do something for ourselves.
- Share their ways of taking a pause.

Activities Overview:

Session 13		TOTAL 60 min
Act 1	Welcoming participants and reflecting on the home practice	10 min
Act. 2	Getting distracted!	15 min
Act 3.	Taking a break	20 min
	Close the day: Home practice and evaluation	15 min

Resources Needed:

- Referral Plan and related Referral Handout.
- Flipcharts and markers.
- (If possible) Flipchart with hopes and fears from [Session 1. Activity 4.](#)
- Copies of the [home practice handout](#) “taking a pause” for each participant.

Session summary:

The parents discuss whether, and when, they take a break during the day, and identify the benefits of it. They will leave the day with a handout to remind them to take a break every day and do something good for themselves.

Activity 1. Welcoming participants and reflecting on the home practice (10 min)

Aims: To welcome participants, establish a positive atmosphere and share the home practice experience.

Modality:



Plenary

1. Welcome parents.
2. Smile and show a positive attitude! Thank everyone for being there.
3. **ASK:**
 - a. Is anyone willing to share how the **home practice from the previous session went?**
 - b. What have you found easy?
 - c. What have you found difficult?
4. Remind participants of the confidential nature of the sessions, and of your availability before or after the sessions if anyone needs additional help or support. Have the **Referral Plan** at hand if needed.
5. Always praise those brave enough to share!
6. ASK some volunteers to recall what was discussed in the previous session.

Activity 2. Getting distracted! (15 min)

Objectives: To introduce the participants to the need to pause to better achieve our daily tasks in a fun and engaging way.

Materials: Depending on your selected approach in step 1.

Modality:



Plenary

1. Explain that this is a fun energizer.
2. Ask someone to volunteer and give him/her a secret instruction. He/she has 1 minute to complete the task assigned. Here are a couple of examples, depending on the group composition and the participants' abilities and literacy skills: (Provide the material and logistics as needed)



TRY IT OUT FIRST!

This activity can sound confusing, but it is extremely simple: the trick is to try it out a couple of times when you are rehearsing, so you will be confident in giving the instructions when you are actually facilitating.

- List the names of all the football players of your favorite team, or the previous presidents of your country, or ingredients of two of your favorite recipes (be creative, any list of names, things or dates will work)
- Find all the 20 newspaper balls that have been scattered and hidden in the room.

The key thing is that the activity needs a good amount of concentration to be completed. Be creative!

3. Next, ask the volunteer to leave the room for a minute and instruct the rest of the group. Explain that their goal is to prevent the volunteer from achieving his/her task by keeping him/her as distracted as possible. They can do that by making sounds, or body movement, or asking him/her plenty of questions. They should be creative and find their own strategies to keep him/her from achieving the task.
4. Once the group has agreed on the “disturbance strategy”, invite the volunteer to join the group again and start the game.
5. After one minute, stop the game. If the activity worked well, the volunteer will be puzzled but will not have achieved much of his/her task.
6. Thank everyone for participating and **ask everyone:**
 - a. What do you think this game was about?
 - b. How do you think the volunteer felt? (first, ask him/her directly)
 - c. Do you ever find yourself in a similar situation? When? How does it make you feel?
7. Summarize the main point that emerged from the conversation among participants

and **SAY:** 

- In our lives we are constantly busy with tasks, questions, expectations and challenges. It is like living in a chaotic, overwhelming and noisy space, just like our volunteer experienced right now.
- The external environment might put additional strains on ourselves: we might be living in conflict zones, and this can add stress to our lives.
- Sometimes we hardly have the time to take a moment for ourselves.
- Most of the time we have no time to be grateful for something positive that might be happening.
- For our wellbeing, it is important to learn to stop and take a moment for ourselves.

Activity 3: Taking a break (20 min)


Aims: To identify some approaches to taking a break and doing something good for themselves that works best for each participant.

Modality:



Plenary

1. Invite participants to share (do not push anyone to answer!),
ASK:

- a. When was the last time that you took a moment to reflect on what was going on around you? A moment in which you were not running around with your daily tasks and worries?
 - b. What do you do to take a break from your stressful routine, to do something for yourself?
2.  Depending on the local customs and on the responses that the participants provide, invite some volunteers to model the approach they have to taking a break and practice it as a group.
3. If this is not an option, then continue to the next point.
4. **ASK:**
 - a. Why is taking a break important for you and for your family?
 - b. Do you think you could find a way to take a few minutes for yourself every day? How?

Some possible answers can be:

- Going for a walk
 - Talking to a friend, a family relative
 - Make a cup of tea or coffee
- c. What could some challenges be in finding time for yourself every day? How could we overcome these challenges?
 5. **SAY:**
 - Taking a break is important for our wellbeing. It helps us regain our energy, reduce stress, and ensure that we take care of ourselves and that we manage our emotions.
 - You can create a bit of time for self-care, to do something that does good for you, to reflect on the day and your feelings, or to celebrate and acknowledge positive events.
 6. **ASK:**
 - a. How could our family relations benefit from us taking a break and doing something good for ourselves?
 - b. How does it impact the risks that our children could be recruited by armed groups?
 - c. How does it help their successful reintegration in the family, if they have been recruited by armed groups?
 7. **SAY:**
 - Remember that if we feel good, this has a positive impact on our family.
 - If we are stressed or overwhelmed, our children perceive the tension in the home.
 - If we feel good about ourselves, we are more able to build a loving and supportive family environment, we think more carefully about our actions and we make better daily choices.
 - Positive family relationships have a big impact on reducing our children's risk of recruitment by armed groups.
 - You do not need a lot of time to take a break, a couple of minutes are enough. This is very beneficial for us and the people around us.

Close the day: Home practice and evaluation (15 min)

Aims: To recap the day, introduce and discuss the home practice and assess the session.

Materials: Copies of the [home practice handout](#) “taking a pause” for each participant; (If possible) Flipchart with hopes and fears from [Session 1. Activity 4](#).

Modality:



Plenary

1. Thank participants for their openness and availability to try new things together!
2. Distribute the [Home practice handout: “Taking a pause”](#).
3. Explain that they should try to find a way to take a few minutes for themselves every day and take note of it. For example, they can place a pebble in a tin or a match box every time they manage to take a few minutes for themselves.
4. You can also invite participants to share ideas on ways to track how often they manage to take a break and do something for themselves.
5. Remind them to continue practicing the skills which were the focus of the previous sessions.
6. **ASK** one or two volunteers to recap two things discussed today.
7. If you’ve had the chance to make notes of the [participants’ hopes and fears on a flipchart](#), draw their attention to it and ask them to place a star or stars on hopes that are realized.
8. Next, ask them to take a marker and remove fears that are starting to be overcome.
9. Then, ask them to add new fears or hopes that might have emerged.
10. Finally, **ASK** the following questions to the group and make notes of the answers.
 - a. **Is there anything that you particularly liked about this session?**
 - b. **Is there anything that you found particularly useful?**
 - c. **Is there anything that you would do differently?**
11. Thank everyone for their participation and engagement.

Home practice handout: Taking a pause

Remember: Take a moment for yourself every day and do something good for yourself.

For example, you can



Go for a short walk



Exercise



Talk to a friend



Sing



Rest and relax

Integrate and continue using any approach to taking a pause that works best for you!

Track your pauses: Place a pebble in a box, every time you manage to take a break and do something for yourself.



Session 14

Parent-child relationship: Solving problems together to support reintegration & prevent recruitment



Session 14: **Parent-child relationship: Solving problems together to support reintegration and prevent recruitment**

Time ⌚ 3h

This session is quite long and rich: you can consider splitting it into two parts and covering it in two sessions of 1.5h each. For example, you could cover activity 1-2-3 in one session, and activities 4 and 5 in another one. If you do so, make sure you always start the sessions with a welcoming moment (activity 1) and close by reviewing what was discussed during the day.

Objectives: By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Recognize the role of problem-solving in supporting reintegration and preventing recruitment.
- Practice the techniques of problem-solving in the home and outside at least once a week.

Activities Overview:

Session 14		TOTAL 180 min
Act. 1	Welcoming participants and reflecting on the home practice	10 min
Act. 2	Six steps to solve problems	30 min
Act. 3	Role play solving a problem	65 min or more
Act. 4	Problem-solving to facilitate reintegration	20 min
Act. 5	Problem-solving to reduce the risk of abduction	40 min
	Closing the day – home practice and evaluation	15 min

Resources Needed:

- Referral Plan and related Referral Handout.
- Flipcharts and markers.

- (If possible) Flipchart with hopes and fears from [Session 1. Activity 5.](#)
- Copies of the [Home practice handout: solving problems together.](#)

Session summary:

Very often problems are the reason for our intense emotions and conflicts in the home. Learning to solve problems can help us better deal with our emotions, learn to solve conflicts together and gain more resilience, which is the ability to “bounce back” and recover quickly from difficulties. Also, engaging in problem-solving activities with the children can be a way to acknowledge their skills and abilities, empowering them and fostering their individuality.

Building children’s resilience, learning to solve problems, seeing alternatives to challenging situations and feeling empowered and self-confident are necessary skills to prevent the risks of engagement with armed groups and promote their reintegration into the family and community (see [Session 8](#)). Also, learning to support our children as they deal with their problems is a key skill to help them reintegrate into the family and community, after having been involved with an armed group. Children who return to their community will face new challenges and it is crucial that the family supports them in learning the key skills to address these challenges.

Participants share the approach they use for problem-solving. Also, some steps to reflect upon in order to solve problems are demonstrated (identify the problem, brainstorm solutions, infer consequences, pick one, try it out, assess, try again if needed). Participants leave the day with a handout to remind them to use this strategy, or a strategy to solve problems that works best for them, with their children at home.

Activity 1. Welcoming participants and reflecting on the home practice (10 min)

Aims: To welcome participants, establish a positive atmosphere and share the home practice experience.

Modality:



Plenary

1. Welcome parents.
2. Smile and show a positive attitude! Thank everyone for being there.
3. Start with a short and engaging activity that will get everyone’s attention, such as a local song, a quick game or a brief energizer. Below is one example. You will find more suggestions in the Constant Companion. Also, you can invite some participants to volunteer and propose an energizer.
4. **Example of energizer:** Explain to the group that they are going to create an ‘orchestra’ without instruments. The orchestra will only use sounds that can be made by the body. Players can use hands, feet, voice etc., but no words, for example, they could whistle, clap, hum, sigh or stomp their feet.
5. Each player should select a sound.

6. Choose a well-known tune and ask everyone to play along, using the 'instrument' that they have chosen¹⁷.
7. **ASK:**
 - a. Is anyone willing to share how the **home practice from the previous session went?**
 - b. What have you found easy?
 - c. What have you found difficult?
 - d. Remind participants of the confidential nature of the sessions, and of your availability before or after the sessions if anyone needs additional help or support. Have the **Referral Plan** at hand, if needed.
8. Always praise those brave enough to share!
9. Ask some volunteers to recall some key points discussed in the previous session.

Activity 2. Six steps to solve problems (30 min)

Aims: To recognize the benefits that learning to solve problems together with our children can bring to ourselves and our children's development; to share any constructive and nonviolent problem-solving approach parents use; to discuss the six steps plan of action to solving problems at home.

Modality:



Plenary

1. **SAY:**
 - In our lives we constantly face different kinds of problems, and we all have tools to address and solve problems.
 - Some problems can be easier to solve than others.
 - Let's have a look at ways to solve problems at home with our children and reflect on how involving our children in problem-solving can help them make better choices, feel positive and build stronger relationships in the home.



2. **Read the following scenario (Open-Ended Story):**

Akanksh is a 15-year-old boy, who belongs to a minority group that has always suffered rejection and discrimination in the local community. Because of the war, he could not finish his studies, and he has also lost contact with the few friends he had made in class. His family is very poor, and he has tried to find a job to help, but without success. He feels very isolated and lonely, but one day he is approached by some peers who are also members of the armed group and suggest he could find work if he joined. He likes his new friends, they make him feel less lonely and he would really like to help his family, so he starts planning to join the group. One day his parents find out about his plans.

¹⁷ Adapted from Alliance, (n.a.). 100 ways to energise groups: Games to use in workshops, meetings and the community. <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/library/100-ways-energise-groups-games-use-workshops-meetings-and-community>.

1. ASK the whole group:

- a. How do you think Akanksh feels? How do you think his parents feel?
- b. What do you think will happen next?
- c. Akanksh wants to join an armed group to solve other problems that he has in his life. Which other problems can you identify, behind his desire to join an armed group?
- d. How could his parents help him solve these problems?
- e. Do you have a problem-solving approach that you use, that is constructive, respectful and non-violent, which we could try to apply to this case?

4. If participants share their own strategy to solve problems, use it together to address the story of Akanksh. Make sure the approach is constructive, respectful, and non-violent. It means that the approach should be based on listening to each other, and looking for possible solutions, without enforcing any approach on others, and without the use of any form of violence. If someone suggests a strategy which does not have these characteristics, invite the whole group to discuss the approach. You could ask: is this approach respectful? How do you think everyone involved in this problem-solving activity feels? Is it likely that the people involved will follow the suggested strategy? Why?

5. If someone is willing to share a respectful problem-solving strategy, invite him/her to explain the steps used.

6. Next, apply it to the story of Akanksh together.

7. Once done, you can continue with step 9. Remind participants that the approach you will show is not better or worse than any they might already be using. Invite them to continue using whichever approach works best for them.

8. If no one is willing to share a problem-solving approach, continue with step. 9.

9. SAY:

- To help Akanksh solve his problems, and prevent his recruitment by the armed group, we will try to apply one **problem-solving approach** together, **the six steps to solving problems at home.**

1. Identify the problem: What is the problem or problems here?

2. Brainstorm solutions: What are the different possible solutions?

3. Imagine what the consequences of each solution could be: What are the advantages and disadvantages of each solution? How will each person involved feel afterwards?

4. Choose one solution.

5. Try it out.

6. Reflect on whether it worked: Did it work? Is the problem solved? How does everyone feel?¹⁸

¹⁸ Adapted from Parenting for lifelong health for teens, Sinovuyo caring families program for parents and teens, 2013, p. 110-111.

If needed, try again!

2. It might be the case that participants feel more comfortable about sharing their own strategy to solving problems after you have demonstrated the six step approach. Therefore, to conclude **SAY:**
 - a. As mentioned, this is only one possible approach to problem-solving. If you have a different approach to solve problems, which is respectful and nonviolent and that works for you, please continue using what feels more comfortable for you! If you want, you still have time to share your approach now.
3. If any volunteer is willing to share their technique to solving problems, let him/her take the lead and share it with the group.

Activity 3. Role playing to solve problems (65 minutes or more)

Objective: To provide participants with a safe space to practice a problem-solving approach; to reflect on how to involve children in solving family problems together; to recognize how problem-solving can help reduce the risk of recruitment and how engagement to solve problems together can affect everyone's feelings and relationships.

Modality:



Group work followed by plenary discussion.

1. **Ask** everyone to form four groups.
2. Explain that each group should take 20 minutes to prepare a role play based on the scenario that we have discussed in Activity 2. Two groups will pretend that the child in the story is a boy, while two groups will pretend that the child in the scene is a girl. Read the story again if necessary.



TIPS: ROLE-PLAYING DIFFERENT GENDER ROLES

If possible, invite participants to swap gender roles during the role play – for e.g., sometimes the mothers will play the father's role in the role play, and vice versa.

3. **Before starting to work in groups,**

SAY:

- Talking to your children about their desire to join an armed group is not easy. To address this issue, start by finding the right moment to talk to them: talk to them when you are both calm – avoid talking when one of you is angry or irritated.
- As it is a hard conversation, find a strategy that reduces the tension, for example, talk when you are both engaging in another activity together, such as doing some house chores, or walking.
- If your child wants to join an armed group, it is because he/she thinks this will solve other problems that are hidden behind this decision.

- As a group, think about which problems the child in the story thinks he/she will solve by joining an armed group, and, together, think about strategies to solve these issues. For example, in this story Akanksh feels lonely and isolated.
 - Also, your child might not really know what joining means, and what the consequences for him/her could be. Try to reflect on these aspects together. Think about the communication strategies we have discussed in the previous session.
 - Remember: There are some problems that you can directly address with your child, while others might be too big for you, and you might also need external support from specialized agencies (give some examples from the Referral Plan developed with the Supervisor of the Program).
4. Explain that each participant should take up one of the roles in the scene. Explain that they can use any problem-solving strategy that best works for them, including the 6 steps of the problem-solving plan of action, to identify a possible solution together for the problems identified and role play the solution.
 5. Read the six steps again or ask a volunteer to recap the steps.
 6. The scene should not take more than 3 minutes.
 7. Let participants work in groups. Walk around the different groups to make sure that the task has been understood.
 8. After 20 minutes, invite each group to perform their role play, taking not more than 3 minutes.
 9. After each role play, use some or all of the questions in the [Facilitators' Notes 14: Problem-solving feedback](#) to facilitate a discussion with all the participants. If needed, remind them that you are not there to judge the participant's performances, but to learn the best approach to problem-solving together.



FACILITATORS' NOTES 14: PROBLEM-SOLVING FEEDBACK

Use the following questions to help you facilitate the discussion after each sketch. If time allows use all of the questions. Otherwise focus on the **KEY QUESTIONS** in bold.

KEY QUESTIONS:

1. The child wants to join an armed group to solve other problems that he/she has in his/her life. What other problems has this family identified behind the child's desire to join an armed group?
2. Do you think the family in this role play realistically solved the problem?
3. Was there any problem for which this family could have asked for the support of an external agency?
4. How does every character in the sketch feel before the problem? And after?
5. Do you think that the parents have tried to engage the children in solving the problem together? If so, how?

If you have time you can integrate the conversation with the following additional questions:

6. How do you think our culture expects fathers to react in this situation? How does he feel?
7. What about mothers? How is the mother expected to react? How does she feel ?
8. How did the scene change when the child was a girl?
9. How would the scene change if one of the children had a disability? (Suggest different types of disabilities).

10. After the discussion, add your own comments and summarize the main points that arose. Try to be positive but do not be afraid to suggest how you think things could be done better. Thank everyone after their performance!

11. **Finally,**

ASK:

- a. Can you think of other examples where you could use this approach to solve problems with your children?
- b. How do you think that involving children in solving problems together can make them feel? Which skills and values do they learn? How can this help them in life?
- c. How do you think that learning to solve problems can help prevent children from joining an armed group?

12. SAY:

- Learning to solve problems is not just important in allowing us to fix issues we encounter in our life. It is also a necessary skill to help us deal with overwhelming situations, to learn to face challenges, deal with difficulties, be creative in finding alternative paths and be more confident in yourself.
- Even when it is not directly about the child's involvement with an armed group, solving daily problems together helps them learn the skills that can reduce the risk of involvement with an armed group: confidence, the ability to make the right choice and strength to overcome difficulties.
- Also, working together to solve problems means showing them that we **value their ideas**, that we **respect them**, and that we **trust each other**. This means that they are more likely to come to you and seek your help if they face challenges or problems, for example if they are thinking of joining an armed group.

13. ASK:

- a. In some cases it is better to let our children try to solve problems on their own rather than intervene. When do you think parents should intervene and help children solve problems? When is it better not to intervene?

- 14.** Let participants discuss. Reflect on the answers given and integrate the following points as needed, making sure you refer to what parents have just suggested.

SAY:

- There are some problems that caregivers can let children solve on their own. Letting children solve their problems alone shows them that we trust them. Also, if they express the desire to solve their problems alone, by letting them do that we show them respect.
- This is very important for children who have been recruited by armed groups: Through this experience, they have learned to be independent. We should acknowledge this and respect their desire.
- It is very hard to say when a parent should respect their children's will to take care of their own problems and when they should intervene. Reflect on the possible harm that the child could face if they are left to deal with some problems alone and think about whether your intervention is really necessary.



AGE, COMMUNICATION AND SOLVING PROBLEMS

In most contexts younger children are considered less capable, their views are largely ignored because we think that they are not developmentally ready to understand what happens around them.

Research has shown that most of the time this is not actually the case: young children understand much more than what we assume they do, and they simply lack the tools to engage with us. Therefore, their voices are often ignored because of their age. In some communities, parents might be unwilling to discuss problems with the children and are inclined to impose their own solutions or points of view and expect children to accept their decisions.

Reflect on your context and what challenges this session might pose, but make sure that one important message arises: Children have the right to be involved and heard, and the more we do that, especially in matters that involve them, the more we gain their respect, we support their confidence and self-esteem and we help them thrive.

Activity 4. Problem-solving to facilitate reintegration (20 min)

Aim: To reflect on how solving problems together can facilitate the reintegration of the child within the family and community.

Modality:



Plenary

1. SAY:

- So far we have explored how problem-solving can help the child learn to make the right decisions and avoid the risk that s/he might want to join an armed group.
- But we have not explored the case of children coming back home, and whether problem solving could in any way facilitate their reintegration into the family and community context.

2. ASK:

- a. What do you think? Can learning to solve problems together help us facilitate the reintegration of our child?
- b. Which problems might girls and boys who are returning to their family and community face?

Some possible answers here could be:

The child feels excluded and rejected because of her situation. We can sit together and try to work on finding a solution to this problem.

A girl might come home with a child for whom she struggles to find enough money for doctors and medicines.

3. SAY:

- There are many instances in which problem-solving together can help our child address issues related to her return to the family and community.

4. ASK:

- a. Besides helping the child tackle specific issues that might emerge as a consequence of her experience with an armed group, which skills and values does the child learn by practicing problem-solving together with her family?
- b. How can these skills and values help her in her reintegration within the family and community?

Some examples of answers might be:

By sitting together as a family and solving family issues together, we are showing her that we value her, her ideas and opinion, that she has a voice and a place in the family.

We could invite the child to solve age-appropriate family issues together, so that she feels she has responsibilities within the family and she can affect family decision, which in turn will contribute to making her feel more confident and secure and be able to address her own challenges.

5. Reflect on what emerges through the conversation, and if it is needed, SAY:

- Sitting together as a family to work on solving age-appropriate family problems or taking time with your child individually to help him/her address the challenges s/he might face as s/he rejoins the family, is a practice that shows the child that we **love and support** him/her, that we are there for him/her.
 - It allows **quality time** together with your children, where you can focus on communicating and listening to them.
 - This also shows children that we **value their ideas**, that we **respect them, and that we trust them**, helping them recognize that they have a place where they **belong**, they are **accepted as members of the family, and they can contribute to the family and community**.
 - If you remember, recognizing these skills and values can significantly help the child feel welcomed at home in the family and community, and consequently facilitate both reintegration within the family and prevention of the risks of re-recruitment.

Activity 5. Problem-solving to reduce the risk of abduction: Safety planning to reduce risks (40 min)

Aim: To share safety planning ideas to reduce the risk of abduction and forced recruitment.

Modality:



Plenary

6. **SAY:**

- Now let's move to another case which might seem difficult to address via problem-solving.

7. Invite participants to discuss the following questions with the person sitting to their right.

ASK:

- a. Do you think that the family can help reduce the risk of children being abducted, or forced to join an armed group?
- b. Can problem-solving help us tackle this issue? How?

8. Give a few minutes for the pairs to discuss, and then ask some volunteers to share their responses.

9. Next, **SAY:**

- While it might seem that we do not have so much influence over the risk of abduction or forced recruitment, let's see whether problem-solving can help us here.

10. Invite participants to work in pairs again – or working in family units if it is possible.

11. Recall the 6 steps of the problem-solving approach or invite the participants to use any respectful and nonviolent problem-solving strategy that they use and works for them.

12. Start by stating the problem: **SAY (Open-Ended Story):**

Issa is a 13-year-old boy. In the village there are rumors that an armed group is abducting children to make them work for them. Issa and his family are afraid that they might force Issa to join.

13. Explain that they should take 10 minutes to list some strategies to reduce the risk of abduction. They should also imagine how they can effectively involve Issa in the discussion and evaluate the strategies that he also proposes.

14. Invite each pair to reflect on the following questions:

- Is there any place that could put Issa at risk of abduction?
- Is there any time of the day that could be more dangerous?
- Are there any behaviors that could put Issa at risk?
- What kind of suggestions could we give to Issa to reduce the risk of abduction?

15. After 10 minutes, invite each pair to share the approaches that they have identified to reduce the risk of recruitment.

Some examples of strategies could be:

- Avoiding dangerous places.
- Walking in pairs or in groups, especially when crossing places which might be more dangerous.
- Making sure that the parents are aware of where the child is, and with whom, and when she/he is expected to come home.

- Talking to a trusted adult whenever the child feels that she might be exposed to danger.
- Run away and scream for help if in danger.
- Practice the scenario to get a routine so that the response to danger becomes automatic – it might be especially relevant to learn to scream for help as a response to danger, rather than freeze.
- Studies show that the more people are around when a person is in distress, the less likely it is that anyone will intervene. In these circumstances it is key to identify one specific person within the crowd and single that person out when asking for help. For example, rather than just scream for help, the child could scream something like “Hey, you with the black t-shirt, help, please!”
- Try to avoid being predictable: avoid always using the same route at the same time of day.
- Know the houses, places or shops along your route where you could run for help or find shelter. For example, on the path from school to home, identify together the shopkeepers who would offer help, if the child is chased by someone.
- Carry a signalling device, something that can make you be heard easily, like a whistle, especially if you struggle to scream when in danger.

16. SAY:

- We have identified some possible strategies to address the risk of abduction, we need to reflect on how we can share these ideas and advice with our children, and how we can be receptive towards our children’s ideas and suggestions. Be careful: your child might have a different sense of the danger he/she might be facing, but this does not mean we should not be open to his/her ideas and accept his/her suggestions.

17. ASK:

Could these strategies work, if we do not involve Issa in defining a plan to reduce the risk of abduction?

- a. What can we do to involve him in defining a plan to reduce the risk of abduction?
 - b. How should we talk to him?
18. If time allows, invite two volunteers to role play the conversation between a mother, father and Issa, in which the three discuss the risk of abduction and try to find a plan to reduce the risk together.
 19. Give the volunteers 2/3 minutes to prepare and imagine what they would say to each other. Explain that the role play should not take more than 2/3 minutes.
 20. After the role play, **ASK** the whole group:
 - a. Do you think that the parents managed to involve Issa in solving the problem of the risk of abduction? How?
 - b. How was the tone of voice of the mother and father? What kind of questions did she ask/he ask?
 - c. How did Issa feel during the conversation?
 - d. Is he likely to follow the advice discussed together? Why?
 21. Reflect on what the participants say, and, if needed, convey the points below which have not been shared by the parents. **SAY:**
 - Involving your child in finding strategies to reduce the risk of abduction is the only way to make sure that your child will understand and accept the strategies that you will identify.

- Make sure you are in a calm state of mind: be open and calm when talking to your child. Threatening will not encourage your child to listen to you, nor follow your advice.
- Also, rather than starting from what you think is the best approach to reduce the risk of abduction, ask your child what he/she thinks.
- Use a problem-solving strategy to identify the problem **together**, and think of possible solutions, recognize the pros and cons of each solution, and, together, pick the ones you think are most appropriate.
- If you work on tackling the problem together, you have more chances of effectively reducing the risks of abduction.
- Also, be open and frank about the issues, also when the topic might be difficult to address. In this way you are encouraging your child to be open towards you and come to you whenever she might feel she is facing a threatening situation, or she might need help solving a problem.

Closing the day: Home practice and evaluation (15 min)

Aims: To recap the day, introduce and discuss the home practice and assess the session.

Materials: Copies of the [Home practice handout: Solving problems together](#); (If possible) Flipchart with hopes and fears from [Session 1. Activity 4](#).

Modality:



Plenary

1. Hand out the [Home practice handout: Solving problems together](#) to each participant.
2. Remind them to try applying the six steps plan of action to solving problems at home with their children. Recall the steps:
 - Identify the problem
 - Brainstorm solutions
 - Imagine consequences
 - Pick one solution
 - Try it out
 - Assess if it works
 - Try again if needed
3. Remember that if you have a different strategy to solving problems, which you find effective for you, and which is constructive, respectful and non-violent, use what works best for you!
4. Invite the participants to record every time they utilize the problem-solving approach at home with their children. Invite participants to suggest ways to record their practice.
5. Remind them to continue practicing the skills which were the focus of the previous sessions – positive communication, stress reduction, taking a pause.
6. **ASK** one or two volunteers to recap two things discussed today.

7. If you've had the chance to make notes of the [participants' hopes and fears on a flipchart](#), draw their attention to it and ask them to place a star or stars on hopes that are realized.
8. Next, ask them to take a marker and remove fears that are starting to be overcome.
9. Then, ask them to add new fears or hopes that might have emerged.
10. Finally, **ASK** the following questions to the group and make notes of the answers.
 - a. **Is there anything that you particularly liked about this session?**
 - b. **Is there anything that you found particularly useful?**
 - c. **Is there anything that you would do differently?**
11. Thank everyone for their participation and engagement.

SOLVING PROBLEMS TOGETHER

6

Steps

plan of action to solve problems together:

1. Identify the problem: What is the problem here?
2. Brainstorm solutions: What are the different possible solutions?
3. Imagine what the consequences of each solution could be: What are the advantages and disadvantages of each solution? How will each person involved feel afterwards?
4. Choose one solution.
5. Try it out.
6. Reflect on whether it worked: Did it work? Is the problem solved?



Remember to:

- Use the nonviolent and respectful problem-solving approach that works best for you! If you already have one approach that you use and that works for you, continue using it!
- Involve your children (How: answer the questions above together with them)
- Be open to their suggestions.
- Always use a constructive, respectful and non-violent approach: do not impose your ideas on others.
- Always try to find the appropriate moment to discuss problems with your children or with other family members: make sure you are in a calm state of mind, do not use threats or violence.
- If you talk to your child and discuss ways to solve problems together, they are more likely to come to you whenever they face issues, and also welcome your advice.

Session 15

Self-care and caring for our children: Dealing with stigmatization



Session 15: Self-care and caring for our children: Dealing with stigmatization

Time ⌚ 2h

Objectives: By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Identify stigmatization and how it affects their wellbeing and relationships, as well as the wellbeing of their children.
- Share strategies to deal with stigmatization and break the cycle of stigma.

Activities Overview:

Session 15		TOTAL 120 min
Act. 1	Welcoming participants	15 min
Act. 2	Recognizing group categorizations and stereotypes	20 min
Act 3	Stigmatization and social isolation	20 min
Act 4	The consequences of stigmatization	30 min
Act 5	Addressing stigmatization	20 min
Closing the day: Home practice and evaluation		15 min

Resources Needed:

- Referral Plan and related Referral Handout.
- Flipcharts and markers.
- Shaped badges – paper cut-outs of different colors and shapes. For example, for a group of 15 participants, prepare:
 - 4 green squares
 - 4 yellow squares
 - 4 blue squares
 - 4 yellow triangles
 - 4 blue triangles
 - 4 green triangles
 - 4 green circles

- 4 blue circles
- 4 yellow circles
- Paper tape.
- (If possible) Flipchart with hopes and fears from [Session 1. Activity 4.](#)
- Copies of the [Home practice handout: Recognizing and addressing stigmatization](#)

Content:

In this session participants focus on stigma and discrimination and identify the root causes of stigmatization that they and their children can be subject to, as a consequence of the involvement with an armed group. They will reflect on the implications of stigmatization for their child's wellbeing and for their own. They will reflect on how they contribute to reducing the risk of stigma towards their children and, consequently, towards themselves.

Activity 1. Welcoming participants and reflecting on the home practice (15 min)

Aims: To welcome participants, establish a positive atmosphere and share the home practice experience.

Materials: Shaped badges – paper cut-outs of different color and shape. For example, for a group of 15 participants, prepare:

- 4 green squares
- 4 yellow squares
- 4 blue squares
- 4 yellow triangles
- 4 blue triangles
- 4 green triangles
- 4 green circles
- 4 blue circles
- 4 yellow circles

Paper tape.

Modality:



Plenary

1. Welcome parents.
2. Smile and show a positive attitude! Thank everyone for being there.
3. **ASK:**

- Is anyone willing to share how the **home practice from the previous session went?**
- What have you found easy?
- What have you found difficult?

Remind participants of the confidential nature of the sessions, and of your availability before or after the sessions if anyone needs additional help or support. Have the **Referral Plan** at hand, if needed.

4. Always praise those brave enough to share!
5. Ask some volunteers to recall some key points discussed in the previous session.
6. Next, explain that you will do a short and engaging activity that will introduce the topic of the session.
7. Give each participants a set of shaped badges: it does not matter which color and shape of badges each person receives, but each participant should get more than 1 badge, and the badges should be different.
8. If appropriate, provide them with some paper-tape and invite them to stick the badges somewhere visible on the front of their t-shirt, shirt, or dress. If this is not possible, make sure they hold their badges in their hand so that they are visible to everyone.
9. Explain that you will give them a series of instructions. There is no talking allowed at this stage.
10. Next, instruct them that to split into groups of 5. Remind them not to talk and to just find a way to form groups. You should not give instructions regarding how the groups should be formed.
11. Give them 1 minute to form groups. It is OK if someone is left outside the groups.
12. Next continue by inviting them to form groups of 3. As before, remind them not to talk.
13. Give them 1 minute to form groups, then continue by inviting them to form groups of 6.
14. Thank everyone for their participation and invite everyone to go back to their places.

Activity 2. Recognizing group categorizations and stereotypes (20 min)

Aim: To help participants understand what social groups are; to recognize our own stereotypes and understand the danger of stereotypes.

Modality:



Plenary

1. ASK:

- e. Think about the activity we just did. What kind of groups have you formed?
 - f. What do you think this game is showing us?
2. Most likely, participants formed groups based on the shape or color of the badges that they were assigned. Reflect on what participants mention and on the way in which the game developed in your case, and convey the following points as needed. **SAY:**

- During the game you have mostly (or only) formed groups which were based on the color or shape of the badges assigned.
- Generally, when doing this game, it is very unlikely that participants form groups in which many different shapes or colors were represented, or that people form groups that have nothing to do with their badges.
- **This happens because, when we interact with other people, we automatically place people into different groups, and these groups help us define who is “us” and who is “them”.**
- For example, in this case, the groups we created were based on the color and shape of our badges. In some cases, “us” were all the yellow squares, while in others it was all the squares, no matter their color.
- **In these cases, these groupings were pretty harmless: being part of the “yellow squares” group was not better or worse than being part of the “blue squares” group.**
- **But categorizing people, or splitting them into groups, is not always harmless.**

3. ASK:

- a. Can you identify any way in which we categorize groups of people, in our context?

Some examples of answers here could be :

Men, women, teenagers, older people, children, mothers, fathers, people with disabilities, people belonging to a certain religious, ethnic group, people living in certain areas etc.

4. Next, explain that you will do a brainstorming activity.

5. Explain that you will say a word.

6. Pick a starting person: he/ she should say the first thing that comes to his/her mind when hearing that word, followed by the person to his/her right, and so forth, until everyone has had a say.

7. Explain that it is key that they do not think: they need to say the first thing that comes to their mind right after the person before them has said it.

8. Do a first trial by saying the word “FLOWER”, or any other word you like.

9. Let everyone quickly say a word which they associate with “Flower”.

10. Thank everyone for participating and explain that you will mention another word and they should do the same thing. Remind them not to overthink it, and just say the first thing that comes to their mind.

11. Pick one of the social groups mentioned by the participants before (Step 3), for example women, or teenager. Avoid using a category that you know will cause conflicts or discomfort among the participants. For example, if you are aware that some of the participants belong to different religious groups, and there the tensions among these groups, avoid using the category “religion”.

12. Next say the word that you have selected. For example, you can mention “Person with disability”. (Edit the parts in bracket below to fit with the example you have selected)

13. Let everyone have a say. Most likely some of the words that will emerge from the brainstorming will reflect some typical stereotypes associated with that social group. For example, in the case of a “person with disability” it might be the case that some say things like “in need, poor, lonely, dependent”). Next **SAY:**

- As you see, some of the things that came to your mind when mentioning this social group, are quite similar.
- This happens because, when we categorize people into groups, we are generally attributing some similar characteristics to people belonging to the same group.
- If you remember, in one of the previous sessions (Session 8) we talked about stereotypes: stereotypes are oversimplified, partial or mistaken ideas or beliefs many people have about a group of people who we believe share similar characteristics.
- The way in which we often think about the members of a social group, often reflects some commonly held stereotypes about that group.

1. ASK:

- a. What is the danger of this approach? What is the danger of categorizing people and attributing to them similar characteristics?

14. Reflect on what emerges from the conversation and convey the following point as needed. **SAY:**

- Stereotypes are often based on mistakes, on inaccuracy or partial information. We are seeing the person who is part of that category only for one single aspect that we interpret in a certain way.
- (Edit the [parts in brackets] to reflect the example that you have used in the brainstorming activity! For example, in the case of the [person with disability], anyone belonging to that social category is often only judged by [his or her disability. People view a disability, be that a physical or a mental one, and only think of it as a negative characteristic. That person might not recognize herself in this picture that we have constructed of him/her].
- We judge every person belonging to a particular social category via these distorted lenses, and we completely forget that there is a unique human being, with unique characteristics.
- This is why stereotypes are negative. Even if we have a positive attitude towards a certain group, for example when we think that men are strong and courageous, the stereotype has a negative impact on the individuals because it forces all people belonging to that group to fit into that picture.



THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE HOUSEHOLD WITH THE REST OF THE COMMUNITY

The relationship of the household with the rest of the community might be more or less harmonious. In some contexts, parents and children might face harsh stigmatization, while in others, community-leaders and neighbors can enjoy a relationship of trust with parents of children associated with armed groups, which can strongly reduce stigma against children and facilitate the children's reintegration into the family and community.

Reflect on your contexts and on the need to adapt the session.

Activity 3. Stigmatization and social isolation (20 min)

Aims: To understand what stigmatization and social isolation is and how it can affect children who have been involved with armed groups and their parents.

Modality:



Pair work

1. **SAY:**
 - A stereotype can be so negative that it excludes people from being part of society. In all social groups some people are excluded and isolated because the community decides who should be part of it, and who is on the outside.
 - This may be due to physical characteristics, but can also depend on things they believe in, or things they do or have done. In these cases, we talk about stigmatization.
2. **ASK:**
 - b. Is there any social group in your community which is excluded or who are not easily accepted by the community?

Some example could include:

- a. Children with disabilities.
- b. Girls who have been recruited by armed groups.
- c. Children who have been recruited by armed groups.
- d. Parents of children or girls who have been recruited by armed groups.
- e. Girls returning from armed groups pregnant or mothers.
- f. Boys or girls running away from armed groups and returning home.

- g. Parents who refuse to let their children join armed groups.
- h. People with a chronic disease.
- i. People from a different ethnic group.

Coordinate with your co-facilitator to take notes of the answers in your notebook.

3. Ask the participants to form pairs, and **ask** each pair to answer the following questions:
 - How does your community describe children who have been associated with armed groups?
 - What do people in your community think of them?
 - How do they behave towards them?
 - How does it make the children feel?
 - Why do you think they choose to treat children like that?

4. Ask each pair to share their responses.

5. Next **ASK:**

- a. How does your community describe parents of children who have been associated with armed groups?
- b. What do people in your community think of them?
- c. How do they behave towards them?
- d. How does it make the parents feel?
- e. Why do you think they choose to treat parents like that and is it fair? Why?¹⁹

4. **SAY:**

- Parents of children at risk or associated with armed groups, as well as the children, can be a target of stigmatization and suffer from social isolation.
- In the next activities we will look at the consequences of stigmatization, how to help our children deal with it and how to address it ourselves.
- Remember: Stigmatization is never acceptable. Children and parents suffer unjustly under community rejection.

Activity 4. The consequences of stigmatization (30 min)

Aims: To identify the consequences of stigma for the children associated with armed groups and for their parents; to recognize the vulnerability of girls and children with disabilities.

Modality:



Plenary

1. Read the following two Open-Ended Stories:

¹⁹ This session focuses on stigmatization. The facilitator will need to make any necessary adjustments for contexts where parents whose children have joined armed groups are considered heroes/praised.

- a. Maria is a 10-year-old girl, she was recruited by an armed group and has been away from the family for two years, working as a cook, and to recruit other children for the group. Now she is back, and she joined a foster family because her family does not accept her. Her old friends do not want to engage with her. She also struggles to find a job because people do not want to have her working with them.
- b. Diego is a 17-year-old boy. He was recruited by an armed group and has spent two years working as a combatant. The other children and their families do not want to engage with him because they fear he might lead them to join the armed group, or he might be violent.

2. ASK:

- a. Why do you think the community rejects these two children?
- b. What are the consequences of stigmatization and social isolation for these two children?

3. SAY:

- Stigmatization and social isolation have an impact on the way we see ourselves.
- When a person feels socially isolated, they may feel lonely, sad, depressed, hopeless and unsupported.
- It can generate a negative image of oneself.
- Children and adults who are subject to stigmatization feel invisible.
- They see themselves as different, “less than”, and unworthy.
- Social isolation also means that the person is less likely to seek help when needed, and in the case of children it can lead to further recruitment.
- Also, stigma prevents recovery from trauma.

4. ASK:

- a. Do you think that girls and boys are both equally likely to be stigmatized by the community after their recruitment by armed groups?
- b. How does the community think about girls who were associated with armed groups?
- c. How does the family and community react to girls who come back home pregnant or with a baby?
- d. What about boys?

5. Reflect on what emerges from the conversation among participants and, if necessary, integrate it with the following points. SAY:

- Girls associated with armed groups are at risk of stigmatization and isolation.
- They can be blamed for what they have experienced.
- They risk not being prioritized to return to school, while their male peers are encouraged to go or helped to take up jobs.
- Also, girls might have enjoyed autonomy and freedom in the armed group, and it might be very difficult for them to go back into more traditional roles.
- Girls who return home pregnant or with a baby are at great risk of stigmatization and isolation. This can have dramatic consequences for the girl, and also for her baby. She might struggle to access work, health services, she might struggle in her new role as a mother.
- Failing to address their needs and help their reintegration, can lead them to join armed groups again, and the exclusion and isolation can also have long term consequences for their wellbeing and development.

6. ASK:

- a. How does the community address or think about children with disabilities?
- b. How do community members interact with and treat children with disabilities?

7. SAY:

- Children with disabilities are another group that is often subject to stigmatization.
- The family has a big role in avoiding stigmatization, accepting the child and ensuring that his/her needs are addressed.
- Finally, by modeling this behavior and supporting the engagement of the child in community activities – education, training, local events – the family can help reduce the stigmatization against the child.

Activity 5. Addressing stigmatization (20 min)

Aims: To reflect on the strategies that parents can adopt to reduce stigmatization in the community and within the family.

Modality:



1. Invite participants to form pairs.
2. **SAY:**
 - Stigma generally comes from community fear and wrong beliefs about someone or something.
 - In the case of children associated with armed groups, the stigma comes from a fear that the child might be violent, or that he/she might try to influence the other children.
 - We need to dismantle stigma and understand that the community and family is the key first step to bringing the child back home and to help them feel they belong.
2. **ASK:**
 - A. How can the family intervene to sustain the child, dismantle stigmatization, and promote acceptance and reintegration?
2. Invite each pair to give some suggestions. Coordinate with your co-facilitator to take notes.
3. Reflect on what emerges from the pair work and integrate their ideas with any of the following points as needed. **SAY:**
 - We can support the engagement of our child in positive activities in the community, such as going back to school, taking up training or a job (based on their age), or participating in social events or sport activities in the community.
 - Through these engagements, stigma is reduced, and children are welcomed back into their society.
 - Also, these contacts reduce the consequences of stigmatization for the children and their parents: children and parents gain a more positive self-image.

- A positive self-image and a feeling of belonging starts within the walls of the home.
 - Family practices can strongly determine whether the child feels accepted or rejected and can influence the success of the reintegration process, as well as reduce chances of (re)-recruitment.
4. **ASK:**
- a. What can the family do to sustain the child and reduce the stigmatization at home?
 - b. What intervention by community leaders in favor of the children can also reduce stigmatization in the community?
5. Reflect on what emerges from the pair work and integrate their ideas with any of the following points as needed. **SAY:**
- By welcoming your child back home you have already made a big step towards his/her reintegration. The next step is accepting the child without judging and shaming him/her. Ask yourself: how can I show him/her that she deserves my love and attention?
 - Model your behavior: Treat your child in the way that you know is best for a child to be supported, cared for and able to be happy in the community.
 - Communication and listening to the child are a key step to letting him/her feel accepted at home.
 - Assigning the child household tasks, asking the child to solve problems together, asking him/her for his/her opinion, contributing to family decision making and giving him/her opportunities to contribute to family life are all essential steps to supporting the child in his/her reintegration process, avoiding stigmatization and building a positive self-image.
 - Remember: Girls and children with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to stigmatization and rejection: are you treating your girls as you are treating your boys? Are you respecting and valuing your child who has a disability like you are respecting and valuing the others? Are you addressing his/her needs?
 - The involvement of the community in the process of reintegration is also key to reduce the risk of stigmatization. One approach could be to identify someone we know who is well known and are held in high regard by the rest of the community. Do we know who this could be in our community? We can try to get some help from this person who could advocate in our favor towards the rest of the community members.

Closing the day: Home practice and evaluation (15 min)

Aims: To recap the day, introduce and discuss the home practice and assess the session.

Materials: Copies of the [Home practice handout: Recognizing and addressing stigmatization](#); (If possible) Flipchart with hopes and fears from [Session 1. Activity 4.](#)

Modality:



Plenary

1. Hand out the [Home practice handout: Recognize and addressing stigmatization](#).
2. Recall the following key principles and integrate them with any aspect that emerged through the conversation with the parents,
SAY:
 - Dismantling stigmatization of us and our children starts from accepting our children, communicating with them, and showing them that we value them.
 - Acceptance by families and communities is the most important element that can determine successful and long-term reintegration for children formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups.
 - Girls and children with disabilities can be particularly at risk of stigmatization, at home and outside.Explain that in the handout they will find a reminder of actions that they can take to reduce the risk of stigmatization for them and for their children.
3. Remind the parents to continue practicing the skills which were discussed in the previous sessions – positive communication, stress reduction, taking a pause, etc.
4. **ASK** one or two volunteers to recap two things discussed today.
5. If you've had the chance to make notes of the [participants' hopes and fears on a flipchart \(or any other format\)](#), draw their attention to it and ask them to place a star or stars on hopes that are realized.
6. Next, ask them to take a marker and remove fears that are starting to be overcome.
7. Then, ask them to add new fears or hopes that might have emerged.
8. Finally, **ASK** the following questions to the group and make notes of the answers.
 - a. **Is there anything that you particularly liked about this session?**
 - b. **Is there anything that you found particularly useful?**
 - c. **Is there anything that you would do differently?**
9. Thank everyone for their participation and engagement.

[Home practice handout: Recognizing and addressing stigmatization](#)

Remember to:

*Talk to your child and listen to him/her.

*Avoid stigma in the family: Treat all your children equally, independently from whether they have been recruited by an armed group, their gender or ability.

*Model your behavior: Treat your child as you would like others to treat him/her; treat your child as you would like others to treat you.

*Give your child household tasks.

*Solve problems together.

*Ask him/her for his/her opinion so that they can contribute to family decisions making.

*Help him/her go back to school/do training/participate in community activities.

*Ask for the intervention of a community leader.

*Be extra careful of the needs of girls and children with disability: Treat them equally, address their needs and help them feel welcome in the home and community.

*Integrate and continue utilizing any approach to address stigmatization that might work for you!

If we help them overcome stigmatization:

- We benefit ourselves: we are less likely to be the target of community stigmatization.
- The children gain a positive self-image.
- Family acceptance is the key element for long-term reintegration of children formerly associated with armed groups.

Session 16

Parent-child relationship: Practicing positive discipline and avoiding violence



Session 16: **Parent-child relationship: Practicing positive discipline and avoiding violence**

Time ⌚ 1h 45 min

Objectives: By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Describe the difference between punishment and discipline, understand the risks and consequences of harsh punishment for their children, and avoid returning to these practices.
- Share their understanding of positive discipline.
- Share strategies to co-construct house rules with their children.
- Practice positive disciplinary strategies.

Activities Overview:

Session 16		TOTAL 105 min
Act. 1	Welcoming participants and reflecting on the home practice	10 min
Act. 2	The story of the giants	30 min
Act. 3	Child recruitment and the importance of using positive methods to guide your child's behavior	50 min
	Conclusion: What should we bring home?	15 min

Resources Needed:

- Referral Plan and related Referral Handout.
- Flipcharts and markers.
- (If possible) Flipchart with hopes and fears from [Session 1. Activity 4.](#)
- Copies of the Home practice handout: Positive methods to guide your child's behavior.

Content:

This session builds from the knowledge and skills acquired through the previous sessions: Anger, stress, as well as certain cultural norms around children's upbringing and development can lead us to react with harsh disciplinary methods for our children's behavior. The participants will investigate the difference between punishment and discipline, the importance of avoiding violence against children at all costs and what the consequences of violence are. Then participants will discuss their nonviolent discipline methods, explore what positive discipline means and why it is more effective and more respectful than punishment.

Activity 1. Welcoming participants and reflecting on the home practice (10 min)

Aims: To welcome participants, establish a positive atmosphere and share the home practice experience.

Modality:



1. Welcome parents.
2. Smile and show a positive attitude! Thank everyone for being there.
3. Start with a short and engaging activity that will get everyone's attention, such as a local song, a quick game or a brief energizer.
4. **ASK:**
 - a. Is anyone willing to share how the **home practice from the previous session went?**
 - b. What have you found easy?
 - c. What have you found difficult?
5. Remind participants of the confidential nature of the sessions, and of your availability before or after the sessions if anyone needs additional help or support. Have the **Referral Plan** at hand, if needed.
6. Always praise those brave enough to share!
7. ASK some volunteers to recall some key points discussed in the previous session.

Activity 2. The story of the giants (30 min)

Objective: To help parents empathize with their children when faced with harsh punishment methods; to understand the consequence of harsh punishment on a child.

Modality:



1. Read the following Open-Ended Story:



STORY of the GIANTS: Aral is a 13-year-old boy. One day Aral wakes up and finds himself in a new, unexpected world: He is in a huge house, everything is big, twice the normal size. He quickly discovers that the house is inhabited by two giants. Aral understands immediately that the giants are caring and loving: They welcome him, hug him often, feed him good food and give him presents.

The only problem is that they sometimes react to his behavior in a way that he does not understand and that he finds scary: For no clear reason they start shouting at him. They are huge, and they look very scary when they get angry, even if they do not really hurt him. Aral notices that there are many things that trigger the giants' anger, but the rules and the reasons why they get angry is very often unclear.

At a certain point, the giants also start hitting Aral, especially when they look very busy or stressed. They are still loving and caring when they are not angry, and they still hug him and give him a lot of attention and nice presents. But very often they lose their temper unexpectedly, and get really angry at him, shouting or hitting him. Aral would like to ask for help, but there is no one to turn to, and he starts thinking of running away.

2. ASK:

- a. What do you think this story means? Who are the giants?
- b. How do you think Aral feels in that situation?
- c. What do you think Aral learns from the giants?

3. SAY:

- This example helps you wear your child's shoes: this is what happens when we use harsh punishment methods and violence.
- Harsh punishment – such as shouting or hitting – is meant to make our children behave through fear. Often violence is also used to make children respect their parents or adults.
- But fear and violence are not good for a child's brain and do not lead to respect or discipline!

4. ASK:

- a. Do you recall what happens to the brain when we are under stress?
- b. Can you recall what were the elements that contribute to the healthy development of the child ?

5. Let participants discuss and support the discussion by making reference to the points highlighted in Session 1 Part 2, Activities 1 and 3. If needed, you can integrate the responses of the participants with the following points. SAY:

- In the story, Aral is constantly worried that the giants will get angry, but he does not exactly know why or how to avoid that.
- If the stress happens every now and then, it is not dangerous. But when a child is exposed to frequent harsh punishment, this state of stress is prolonged and intense, he/she can be in a sort of constant "alarm-state". This condition can have a deep and long-term negative impact on the child (if you have time, here you can follow up with the information in the **Tip Box: "Fear and brain development"**).
- To grow up well, as healthy and happy human beings we need to be in a stress-free, loving and caring environment.

6. ASK:

- a. Why do you think that in the story the parents are depicted as "giants"?

- b. Is there any difference when we use harsh discipline on a younger child, for example an 8 or 9 year old, or on an older child?

7. SAY:

- Just like for Aral, adults are like giants for children, **no matter their age!** They can be physically bigger and threatening when the child is small, but they will always be psychologically “bigger”: they have more power, and they represent the source of **security**. This security is lost when parents become the source of stress and there is fear of violence.
- When a parent uses punishment, he/she is showing the child that he/she has the power, and that means having the power to make the rules and use violence.
- This approach does not teach the child what these rules are and why they are there, it does not help the child make the right choices.
- Home violence, and lack of security can be elements that push a child to join an armed group.

8. ASK:

- a. What can we do to guide our children’s behavior instead of using harsh punishment?
- b. How should our approach be different, if we are dealing with children or with adolescents?

If needed, complete the suggestions of the participants with the list from the **Tip Box:** “**Positive methods to guide your child’s behavior**”.



FEAR AND BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

When people are afraid, scared or under stress, the brain goes into a sort of “automated mode” to help us deal with the scary situation in an effective and fast way. We are on a high alert and therefore we “silence” the prefrontal-cortex or thinking brain.

If the stress continues or we are constantly in this state of alert, this can cause long term damage to the brain.

A stress free and fear free environment, helps the person learn, grow and develop effectively and make better choices.

9. ASK:

- c. Do you think you could apply this approach in your home? Why? Why not?

10. SAY:

- This approach requires more energy and effort from the parents than using harsh discipline, but keep in mind what you want for your children, and how you want them to grow.

- Using positive methods to guide your child's behavior, and avoiding the use of threats and violence, stimulates his /her independence, critical thinking skill and confidence in herself/himself.
- These are all key skills to help prevent the risk of recruitment and to support the reintegration of the child into the family and community.
-



REITERATE THE FOLLOWING MESSAGE OFTEN DURING THIS AND OTHER SESSIONS

- If you notice that your children have begun to behave in challenging, new or unexpected ways, the best way to help is to show that you care and provide extra reassurance and affection, try to talk to him/her and be open to listening.
- If needed, re-establish, and reiterate regular routines and rules in the house.
- You are the person that knows your child best: if your child's behavior worries you for some reason, seek help within your community networks or, depending on the issue, external help (make a reference to the Referral Handout as needed).



HELPING CHILDREN DEAL WITH EMOTIONS – SUGGESTIONS FOR THE FACILITATOR TO USE AS EXAMPLES



- Reflect on the causes of negative behaviors: Never assumes that your child misbehaves because he/she wants to bother you. She/he might be trying to deal with an issue, or a challenge, and might struggle to express it and address it.
- Be a role model! If you want your child to stop shouting, do not shout yourself; If you want your child to be respectful, be respectful; If you want him/her to listen to what you say, start by listening to him/her.
- Use positive communication (see Session10): Listen and talk, to find the root cause of a problem.
- Solve the problem together: Once you have found the issue, discuss how to address the problem together, explain the natural consequences of behaviors. (see session 14)
- Involve the child in setting a rule and deciding the consequences: Set basic and clear rules to be followed in the house. (see the box "Create house rules"); Explain the reasons behind the rules; (Co) create consequences for breaking the rules (make them proportionate!); Be consistent: Make sure that if you set a rule you will always apply it in the same way – the rule and consequences need to be predictable; Consider gender and age: Make sure that the discipline is the same among all of your children and among children of different genders; Consider the age of the child: Set expectations which are appropriate to the child's age, set consequence which are age appropriate.
Avoid violence!
- Assess and regulate your emotions: If you are feeling particularly overwhelmed, stressed or frustrated, take a pause before acting (see session 9 and session 13).

Strategies which can be useful with younger children:

- Praise! Praise the child when she/he behaves in the way you asked her/him to, acknowledge and celebrate good behaviors. Do not only focus on negative behaviors but acknowledge positive ones. The psychology of attention tells us that ignoring negative behavior and focusing on positive behavior reinforces positive behavior -
<https://www.cdc.gov/parents/essentials/consequences/ignoring.html>.
Provide a warm and structured environment for the child: Make sure you regularly show him/her signs of physical and verbal affection, that you spend time with her/him, play with him/her. Provide structure, by keeping things happening in a predictable and regular way.

Strategies which can be useful with older children:

- Adolescence is a tumultuous time, where the child needs to "learn" to be an adult. You provide him/her with all the encouragement, support, and availability that he/she needs. S/he might ignore you, or shut you out of her/his world, but if you keep an open line of communication s/he will find a way to talk to you and communicate her/his struggles and challenges with you.
- Involve the child in decisions which might affect the child: she/he needs to be taken seriously and be acknowledged as a valued family member.

Activity 3. Child recruitment and the importance of using positive methods to guide your child's behavior (50 min)

Objective: To discuss the consequences of harsh punishment for children who have been recruited by an armed group; To identify the approaches that reflect positive methods to guide the child's behavior.

Modality:



Plenary

1. Read the following Open-Ended Story:



"Sahin was recruited by an armed group when she was 14. One of the reasons why she joined was to escape the frequent abuse from her mother. Life with the group was hard and she wanted to leave, but at the same time she felt very independent within the group, she earned some money, and being part of the group made her feel that she had a place and people she belonged to and a purpose in life.

After two years, she managed to go back to her family, but shortly after she got back, her mother started hitting her, yelling at her and preventing her from leaving the house every time she made a mistake or behaved in a manner that didn't please her family.

Sahin became quieter and quieter and she often escaped the house and stayed away for long hours and sometimes days. Every time she would come back her mother would shout at her and lock her in the house.

2. ASK:

- a. How do you think Sahin felt while she was in the armed group?
- b. How does she feel now that she is back at home?
- c. How has she changed after her experience with the armed group?
- d. Why do you think Sahin is often escaping the house?
- e. What could the reasons be why her mother is angry at her?
- f. How do you think the parents could use positive methods to guide Sahin's behavior?

3. Reflect on what emerges from the conversation and integrate the following with the points raised by the participants. SAY:

- Harsh punishment does not help a child who misbehaves because the child learns to fear the parents and adults, rather than trust them and follow their advice.
- Punishment **humiliates children**: they do not feel respected, and they learn that violence is an acceptable strategy to cope with conflicts.
- When we show respect towards our children, and we show that we value them and teach them to make the right choices by using positive discipline, we can prevent their engagement with armed groups (showing them alternatives to violence are tangible) and facilitate their reintegration into the family and community, making their family life a good life.

4. ASK:

- d. Using harsh punishment with children who were recruited by an armed group can put the child at risk of re-recruitment. Can you think why?

5. Reflect on what emerges from the conversation and integrate the following with the points raised by the participants. SAY:

- Children – and especially girls – can gain new power and independence when they join an armed group: they can receive money; sometime girls can take up roles which are not very different from their male peers.
- Girls might come back as mothers and see their role in the home as different from before – they are now parents with responsibilities and do not see themselves as the child/adolescent they were before.
- This change, freedom and independence can be very different from what they had experienced at home and in the community before their recruitment.
- When they come back, we cannot ignore what they have experienced and the freedom they enjoyed.
- It is crucial that we avoid violence and harsh punishment against all children, including children who were formerly recruited. When we use harsh discipline and violence, we are highlighting that we are the giants, and they have no power, no autonomy and no independence. We are telling them that we do not respect them.
- All this can be difficult for the parents too! Rather than using harsh punishment to address our children's misbehavior, we should focus on positive methods to guide our children's behavior, showing respect towards our children, and helping them feel valued and appreciated:
 - ✓ Be a role model!
 - ✓ Use positive communication
 - ✓ Solve the problem together
 - ✓ Praise your child, focus on good behaviors
 - ✓ Co-create house rules and consequences
 - ✓ Avoid violence!
 - ✓ Assess and regulate your emotions
- Most of these aspects have already been discussed in other sessions. Let's focus now on the construction of house rules.

6. ASK:

- a. What are house rules?

7. Invite participants to form pairs and discuss the following questions together. ASK:

- a. Do you have house rules at home? What rules do you have?
- b. To whom do these house rules apply? Do they apply to the children or also to the parents? Do they apply to both boys and girls?
- c. How have you defined them? Who has decided what the rules where?
- d. How have the house rules that you have defined worked for you so far?

- 8. Give each pair 5 minutes to discuss, and next invite some volunteers to share their ideas.

- 9. Integrate what has emerged through the pair work using the **Tip Box: "Create house rules"** to facilitate this discussion. At the end, **ASK:**

- a. Why is it important to establish house rules together with our children?

7. If the following does not emerge from the conversation among participants, SAY:

- b. When well built, family rules help children understand which behaviors are acceptable, and why. This helps children predict the consequences of their actions, reinforces their self-discipline, and helps them learn to make appropriate choices.
- c. Constructing house rules together shows our children that we value and respect them, and that we recognize their need for independence. This is a crucial aspect for children who were recruited by armed groups.
- d. House rules should be valid and applicable for everyone, including parents. They should reflect the needs and values shared by the members of the household. There should not be gender distinction in the rules and consequences for breaking the rules.



CREATE HOUSE RULES

- Create them with your children – this makes sure they are more likely to respect these rules, and also that they feel acknowledged and respected.
- Discuss and explain the reasons behind each rule. It is not enough to say “curfew is at 8 pm”: Explain why you are setting each rule.
- Everyone should be expected to follow these rules!
- Be open to revise the rules from time to time (you change, children change, circumstances change).
- Have clear and proportionate consequences (choose them together).
- If one rule is often broken, sit down together and use a problem-solving approach to tackle the issue – see session 16.
- Make a few rules and make them clear and simple. Make sure everyone understands them.
- It is more helpful to the child if the rules explain what the child should do: instead of saying do not shout, say talk in a calm and low voice.

E.g.:

- *Respect other people’s belongings – ask permission to borrow things from others.
- * Talk in a calm and low voice.
- *Inform the family members of where you are going and when you will return.
- * We all have dinner together.

Closing the day: Home practice and evaluation (15 min)

Aims: To recap the day, introduce and discuss the home practice and assess the session.

Materials: Copies of the Home practice handout: Positive methods to guide your child's behaviour. (If possible) Flipchart with hopes and fears from [Session 1. Activity 4.](#)

Modality:



Plenary

- a. Hand out the [Home practice handout: Positive methods to guide your child's behavior](#) to each participant. Recall the following key principles:
 - ✓ Be a role model!
 - ✓ Use positive communication
 - ✓ Solve the problem together
 - ✓ Praise your child, focus on good behaviors
 - ✓ Co-create house rules and consequences
 - ✓ Avoid violence!
 - ✓ All this can be challenging for you too as a parent. From time to time, assess and regulate your emotions
- b. Remind participant to continue practicing the skills which were the focus of the previous sessions – positive communication, stress reduction, taking a pause, etc.
- c. **ASK** one or two volunteers to recap two things discussed today.
- d. If you've had the chance to make notes of the [participants' hopes and fears on a flipchart](#), draw their attention to it and ask them to place a star or stars on hopes that are realized.
- e. Next, ask them to take a marker and remove fears that are starting to be overcome.
- f. Then, ask them to add new fears or hopes that might have emerged.
- g. Finally, **ASK** the following questions to the group and make notes of the answers.
 12. **Is there anything that you particularly liked about this session?**
 13. **Is there anything that you found particularly useful?**
 14. **Is there anything that you would do differently?**
- h. Thank everyone for their participation and engagement.

Home practice handout: Positive methods to guide your child's behavior.

- ✓ Be a role model!
- ✓ Use positive communication
- ✓ Solve the problem together
- ✓ Praise your child, focus on good behaviors
- ✓ Co-create house rules and consequences
- ✓ Avoid violence!
- ✓ Assess and regulate your emotions
- ✓ Integrate and continue using any nonviolent and respectful discipling method that works for you.

Session 17

Starting from ourselves – self-care practices: Taking care of ourselves in our daily lives



Session 17: **Starting from ourselves – self-care practices: Taking care of ourselves in our daily lives**

Time ⌚ 1h 25 min

Objectives: By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Recognize barriers towards self-care practices and solutions to overcome these barriers.
- Reward themselves for their hard work as parents.

Activities Overview:

Session 17		TOTAL 85 min
Act. 1	Welcoming participants and reflecting on the home practice	10 min
Act 2	Identifying our way to take care of ourselves	40 min
Act 3	Giving ourselves a compliment	20 min
Closing the day: Home practice and evaluation		15 min

Resources Needed:

- Referral Plan and related Referral Handout.
- Flipcharts and markers.
- (If possible) Flipchart with hopes and fears from [Session 1. Activity 4.](#)
- Reproduce on two flipcharts the **Picograms for the Facilitators 10: Self-care practices** (see activity 2) integrating, if possible, the self-care practices that were suggested by participants to deal with stress in [session 9 Activity 4.](#)
- Copies of the [Home practice handout: Feeling good about yourself.](#)

Content:

This is the last of the self-care sessions. At this point, parents should have had enough opportunities to discuss and practice various approaches to take care of themselves. The aim of this session is to give parents the opportunity to acknowledge and celebrate their daily efforts to create a positive and supportive environment in the household while enduring stressful conditions and dealing with daily sources of worry and anxiety.

The focus of this third self-care session is for each parent to take this moment to identify the self-care practices that they think really work for them. They acknowledge the difficult conditions in which they live and recognize how these experiences can affect their own needs and lives as a whole. They will also discuss which barriers might prevent them from practicing their self-care practice and how to overcome these barriers. This session will also serve as a reminder of how important it is to praise each other.

Activity 1. Welcoming participants and reflecting on the home practice (10 min)

Aims: To welcome participants, establish a positive atmosphere and share the home practice experience.

Modality:



Plenary

1. Welcome parents.
2. Smile and show a positive attitude! Thank everyone for being there.
3. Start with a short and engaging activity that will get everyone's attention, such as a local song, a quick game or a brief energizer. You will find some suggestions in the Constant Companion. Also, you can invite some participants to volunteer and propose an energizer or a song.
4. **ASK:**
 - Is anyone willing to share how the **home practice from the previous session went?**
 - What have you found easy?
 - What have you found difficult?

Remind participants of the confidential nature of the sessions, and of your availability before or after the sessions if anyone needs additional help or support. Have the **Referral Plan** at hand, if needed.

5. Always praise those brave enough to share!
6. Ask some volunteers to recall some key points discussed in the previous session.

Activity 2. Identifying our way to take care of ourselves (40 min)

Objectives: To recognize possible challenges to the regular implementation of self-care practices and identify solutions to tackle these challenges; to identify self-care approaches that work best for each participant/family unit.

Materials: Reproduce on two flipcharts the **Pictograms for the Facilitators 10: Self-care practices** (below) integrating, if possible, the self-care practices that were suggested by participants to deal with stress in [session 9 Activity 4](#).

Modality:



Pairs

Pictograms for the Facilitators 10: Sample Self-care practices:

- **Take a walk.**
- **Sing a song.**
- **Be creative:** play music, draw, dance, cook (if it is something that makes you feel good).
- **Find a quiet corner and breathe deeply.**
- **Rest, or take a nap.**
- **Do sports.**
- **Read a book.**
- **Keep a journal/diary.**

Talk to someone.

1. SAY:

- In session 9 and 13, you have had various opportunities to share the ways in which you take care of yourself and your wellbeing.
- Despite our efforts, we might face various challenges to effectively take care of ourselves in our everyday life.
- It is important that self-care does not feel like an extra burden, but rather as part of our daily routines.

2. ASK:

- a. What have you been doing normally from time to time to take care of yourself?
- b. What have you been doing, which makes you feel good?

10. Once participants have shared, show the [Pictograms for the Facilitators 10: Self-care practices](#), or read the list of self-care practices below, making sure to highlight what has already been shared by participants in step 2 above.

Self-care practices:

- Take a walk
- Sing a song
- Listen to music
- Being creative: play music, draw, dance
- Find a quiet corner and breathe deeply
- Rest, or take a nap
- Do sports

- Read a book
 - Keep a journal
 - Talk to someone
 - Quiet time
3. **SAY:**
 - Each of us uses different self-care techniques for himself/herself. Sometimes we do not realize that we have this strength until we look back and see what we have already accomplished so far.
 4. Next, invite participants to form pairs or small groups based on the family unit, if possible. In mixed group sessions, if women/men do not feel at ease to discuss personal challenges with their husbands/wives/partners or with other men/women, use another grouping system.
 5. Invite each group to take 15 minutes to discuss each of the self-care practices that they have been practicing.
 6. Invite the groups to answer the following questions together:
 - a. What are the challenges that can prevent you from doing something good for your wellbeing every day?
 - b. What could you do – as an individual and as a family unit – to overcome these challenges and make sure that you do something good for your wellbeing on a regular base?

An example of an answer here could be: I do not find time but maybe if I practice a relaxation technique while doing another routine activity, such as brushing my teeth or working the land, then I would not have that problem.
 7. Once done, invite each pair or group to share and discuss their ideas with the rest of the group in max 3-4 minutes.
 8. Thank everyone for they contributions.

Activity 3. Giving ourselves a compliment (20 min)

Aims: To recognize their successes as parents and as individuals; to understand the importance of feeling good about themselves.

Modality:



Plenary

1. **SAY:**
 - You work really hard every day to take care of your family: by being here you show that you care for your children and family members.
 - We are reaching the end of our Program, and this is the last one of our self-care sessions. It is time to give ourselves a big applause for all the work done and all our achievements, for our children and for our family, and learn to recognize our efforts.
 - It is important to feel good about ourselves and our families: not just because we deserve it, but because this will also improve our family relationships. Things might not always go as we would like, and sometimes we might be closer or further away from what we imagine as a loving, supportive and healthy family. But this should not discourage us!

2. **Ask** everyone to take a moment to reflect on the following questions individually:
 - a. What is one thing that has happened during the last months that you are happy about?
 - b. What is something you did well with your child during the last months?
3. Invite some volunteer to share their thoughts but do not force anyone to share. Respect their desire not to share their ideas.
4. After each comment, thank the volunteers for their input.
5. Conclude by praising everyone for their hard work, as parents and as individuals.
6. Thank the whole group, and

SAY:

- It is important to learn to recognize the efforts and achievements of your family. It helps you grow into a happy and confident person.
 - By taking care of yourself, respecting yourself and learning to feel good about your family, you help your child learn to respect herself/himself too, and build a positive image of herself/himself.
 - Try to praise yourself, acknowledge your success and do something nice for your wellbeing every day.
 - Finally, remember that not all challenges can be handled and addressed alone: we live in an extremely difficult and stressful environment (*here make direct reference to some of the challenges that people are generally exposed to in your context, such as living in a conflict area, struggles to find jobs etc.*).
 - We cannot expect to always have the strength to deal with all of this on our own. Be open to recognize when you need help and be ready to ask for help, from a family member, a friend, someone you trust.
 - Also, we are always here to provide you with additional support: should you need any specific help, you can always come and talk to us and we will try to address you to the agency that could provide you with more targeted support. (*Here it is crucial that you always have your **Referral Plan** at hand. Also, remember to always be vigilant and aware of the situation of the participants: if you think that some might need specific help, but they do not approach you directly, it is a good idea to speak with the **Supervisor of the Program**.*)
11. Reassure everyone that you will spend the following session looking into ways in which we can seek external help, when the challenges are too big to be handled independently.

Finally, praise them once again, for managing to be such caring and attentive parents, even within all these challenging situations.

Closing the day: Home practice and evaluation (15 min)

Aims: To recap the day, introduce and discuss the home practice and assess the session.

Materials: Copies of the [Home practice handout: Feeling good about yourself](#); (If possible) Flipchart with hopes and fears from [Session 1. Activity 4](#).

Modality:



Plenary

1. **ASK** one or two volunteers to recap two things discussed today, hand out the [Home practice handout: Feeling good about yourself](#).
2. Explain that in the handout they will find a reminder of actions that they can take to acknowledge their efforts and successes as a family member and as an adult. Remind them that it is important to find ways to feel good about themselves and recognize and praise their own efforts. Remind them to continue practicing the skills which were the focus of the previous sessions – positive communication, stress reduction, taking a pause.
3. If you've had the chance to make notes of the [participants' hopes and fears on a flipchart](#), draw their attention to it and ask them to place a star or stars on hopes that are realized.
4. Next, ask them to take a marker and remove fears that are starting to be overcome.
5. Then, ask them to add new fears or hopes that might have emerged.
6. Finally, **ASK** the following questions to the group and make notes of the answers.
 - a. **Is there anything that you particularly liked about this session?**
 - b. **Is there anything that you found particularly useful?**
 - c. **Is there anything that you would do differently?**
1. Thank everyone for their participation and engagement

Home practice handout: Feeling good about yourself.

What could we do to improve how we feel about yourself?

*Do something nice for you and your loved ones every day.

*Acknowledge your successes as a parent: **What is something you did well with your child during the last weeks/months.**

*Acknowledge your successes as a person: **What is one thing that has happened during the last weeks/months that you are proud of?**

*Do not worry if things are not always as you would like them to be! Be proud and encouraged for doing your best!

Session 18

Parent-child relationship: Making a family budget and saving money



Session 18: **Parent-child relationship: Making a family budget and saving money**

Time ⌚ 2h 50min

This session is particularly long, and it might be extended further, depending on the experience that participants have with budgeting and saving processes. You could either conduct this activity in one meeting, making sure you integrate a few breaks within the flow of the session. Alternatively, we would recommend you split this session over two meetings. For example, you could conduct Activities 1 to 3 in one meeting, and activities 4 to 6 in another one. Should you choose to make this split, consult the parents so that the break between part 1 (activity 1-3) and part 2 (activity 4-6) is not too long.

Make sure you always start a meeting with a welcoming moment (activity 1) and a closing one.

Objectives: By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Describe the benefits of involving their children in decision making.
- Define what a family budget is and list its benefits.
- Create and update a family budget .

Activities Overview:

Session 18		TOTAL 170 min
Act 1	Welcoming participants and reflecting on the home practice	10 min
Act. 2	Brainstorming around needs and wants	20 min
Act 3	Creating a family budget	40 min
Act 4	Saving and spending	20 min
Act 5	Practicing making a budget and saving plan	50 min
Act 6	Involving our children in making a budget and saving plan	15 min
	Closing the day: Home practice and evaluation	15 min

Resources Needed:

- Referral Plan and related Referral Handout.
- Flipcharts and markers.

- (If possible) Flipchart with hopes and fears from [Session 1. Activity 4.](#)
- Create a flipchart with two columns, headed “Expenses for Needs” and “Money earned”. You can substitute these headers with the pictograms that you can find in the [Pictogram for the facilitators 11: Family budget](#) (see Activity 3).
- 11 copies of the pictograms contained in the [Pictogram for the facilitators 11: Family budget \(two copies per group, plus one for the facilitators\)](#) (see activity 3).
- 30 Pebbles (see examples in the [Pictogram for the facilitators 11: Family budget](#)) (see activity 3).
- Two/three tapes or glues (place them on a table in a corner of the room).
- 2/3 scissors (place them on a table in a corner of the room).
- 5 handfuls of pebbles or beans (one handful per group).
- Some old newspapers or magazines (place them on a table in a corner of the room).
- 5 cardboard boxes or jars (one per group).
- Copies of the [Home practice handout: Making a family budget together.](#)

Session summary:

By working on developing a family budget together, parents and children try to address one of the family’s frequent causes of stress – money. At the same time, through this activity, children’s abilities are recognized, and they feel more acknowledged and valued in the family.

Making and keeping a family budget can also represent a daily routine that allows focused time with the children, provides a space for effective communication as well as an opportunity to practice problem-solving together.

This activity can work for families with children of all ages – with older ones, the parents can involve the child in the creation and maintenance of the family budget while with younger ones, parents can work on smaller amounts of money or other resources.

Activity 1. Welcoming participants and reflecting on the home practice (10 min)

Aims: To welcome participants, establish a positive atmosphere and share the home practice experience.

Modality:



Plenary

1. Welcome parents.
2. Smile and show a positive attitude! Thank everyone for being there.
3. Start with a short and engaging activity that will get everyone's attention, such as a local song, a quick game or a brief energizer. Below is one example. You will find more suggestions in the Constant Companion. Also, you can invite some participants to volunteer and propose an energizer.
4. Ask participants to sit in a circle. They send a clap around the circle by facing and clapping in unison with the person on their right, who repeats the clap with the person on their right, and so on. Do this as fast as possible. You can send many claps, with different rhythms, around the circle at the same time²⁰.
5. **ASK:**
 - a. Is anyone willing to share how the **home practice from the previous session went?**
 - b. What have you found easy?
 - c. What have you found difficult?
 - d. Remind participants of the confidential nature of the sessions, and of your availability before or after the sessions if anyone needs additional help or support. Have the **Referral Handout** at hand to share if needed.
Do not forget that the Referral Plan and its related Handout are a "live documents": do not just refer participants to them, but if you recognize that there is any need that should be addressed outside the sessions, make every possible effort to find the appropriate agency and, if needed, guide participants towards the right actors in your context. Also, you should discuss any complex matter with the **Supervisor of the Program**, who should be able to help you find the best approach to solve the issues at hand.
6. Always praise those brave enough to share!
7. ASK some volunteers to recall some key points discussed in the previous session.

Activity 2. Brainstorming around needs and wants (20 min)

Aims: To distinguish between needs and wants.

Modality: Plenary

²⁰ Adapted from Alliance, (n.a.). 100 ways to energise groups: Games to use in workshops, meetings and the community. <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/library/100-ways-energise-groups-games-use-workshops-meetings-and-community>.

1. **SAY:**
 - Money can be one of the biggest sources of stress in the family.
2. **ASK:**
 - a. Making a family budget together can contribute to reducing the risk of recruitment and facilitate the reintegration of a child into the family. Do you agree or disagree? Why?
3. **Reflect on what emerges through the responses of the participants and, if needed, integrate the conversation with the following points. SAY:**
 - Challenges in contributing to the family budget can be one of the factors that leads a child to join an armed group.
 - When returning to the family after recruitment, being able to support the family can facilitate the child's reintegration into the family and community.
 - Even if making a family budget does not generate more money than what we earn, it is an activity through which children can find a purpose and role in the family. By allowing them to participate in the family budget, the family shows respect and appreciation towards the child.
 - Also, making a family budget helps the family manage their money better, and reduce the stress linked to money.
 - Today we will discuss strategies to keep track of our expenses and identify ways to involve our children in this practice.



ADAPTATION FOR ACTIVITY 2. BRAINSTORMING NEEDS AND WANTS

If you want to make the activity more visually engaging, provide each group with some old newspapers, scissors, cardboard and glue, and invite them to identify the images that can represent needs and wants, and create their own poster of needs and wants.

4. **ASK:**
 - a. Do you use any budgeting system at home? Do you do anything to regularly keep track of the money that you earn and the money that you spend?
5. Give participants some time to share and take notes of their answers: you can use them as examples of good practice when you are explaining how to make a family budget.
6. Explain that all their ideas and practices are valuable. Here you will present one way to keep a budget at home, and certainly the strategies that they already use overlap in many ways with the one you will present here. At the same time, invite them to point out any significant difference that they notice during the course of the activity.
7. **ASK:**

Can you name one thing that you find necessary, without which you could not live?
8. Give some volunteers the opportunity to share their thoughts. Some examples of answers here are: water, food, house, menstrual hygiene items, health, a wheelchair, medicines, etc. People might also say things like children, peace, education. There is

no right or wrong answer here! The key thing is to recognize that some things are more important than others for our survival.

9. **Next, SAY:**

- We can call these things we cannot live without **NEEDS**.

10. **ASK:**

- a. Can you now name some things that you desire, or like, but which are not necessary for your survival?

11. Give some volunteers the opportunity to share their thoughts. Some examples here can be: TV, friends, phone, nice clothes etc. Again, there is not right or wrong answer, and it is just important to recognize the different value of things.

12. **Next, SAY:**

We can call these things that we desire but that are not necessary for our survival **WANTS**.

Identify the benefits of involving their children in decision making.

13. **ASK:**

1. What are some needs for girls? What about boys?
2. What are some wants for girls? What about boys?

14. Invite some volunteers to share their ideas.

Use the information from the **Tip Box: “Define needs and wants”** to guide the discussion.



DEFINE NEEDS AND WANTS

Wants are desires for things that we would like to have but do not need. Needs are a special kind of want, and refer to things we must have to survive, such as food, water, and shelter. Many wants may seem like needs.

Here are some examples:

- Wants: Car, tv, phone, etc.
- Needs: Food, water, shelter, menstrual hygiene items, health, a wheelchair, etc.

CAREFUL: Some things are hard to classify, for example: Education. While it might look different from food, education is a human need, for without education society does not thrive. Needs often correspond to rights. For example, children need food to survive; providing them with nutritious food enables their human right to life.

Activity 3. Creating a family budget (40 min and more)

Aims: To explain what a budget is and the steps to create a budget; to practice budgeting.

Materials:

- Create a flipchart with two columns, headed “Expenses for Needs” and “Money earned”. You can substitute these headers with the pictograms that you can find in the [Pictogram for the facilitators 11: Family budget](#) (see next pages).
- 6 copy of the pictograms contained in the [Pictogram for the facilitators 11: Family budget](#).
- 5 flipcharts and markers (1 per group).
- 30 pebbles (see examples in the [Pictogram for the facilitators 11: Family budget](#)).
- Tape or glue.
- 5 handfuls of pebbles or beans.

Modality:



1. **ASK:**

- a. Why do you think it is important to be able to distinguish between your needs and wants when dealing with money?

2. **SAY:**

- We need to spend our money on our needs first, before spending money on wants.

3. Now, **read the following Open-Ended Story:**



Pajika (mother) and Labh (father) are the parents of Saada, an 8-year-old girl, Devine, a 14-year-old girl, and Abeo, a 16-year-old boy. They have a house that they rent, two goats and three chickens.

4. **ASK:**

5. What do you think are **needs** that Pajika and Labh spend money on **every week?** **Every month?** **Every year?**



WEEKLY OR MONTHLY BUDGET AND EXPENSES

In some contexts, it might be easier to work on a weekly budget rather than a monthly one – it depends on the types of sources of money earned and expenses, such as rent, loans or tontines. Adapt the activity to better fit your context. Also, adapt the sources of money earned and expenses to reflect your context.

6. To visualize participants' answers, stick the relevant pictograms that you find in the [Pictogram for the facilitators 11: Family budget](#) on the left column of the flipchart (Expenses for Needs), or make a drawing if the participants provide suggestions which are not included among the pictograms.

Use the information in the [Pictogram for the facilitators 11: Family budget](#) if you think some elements need to be added.

7. **SAY:**

- Next, we have to figure out whether Pajika and Labh can cover all these expenses.
- Can you list all the ways in which Pajika and Labh earn money?

8. To visualize the participants' answers, stick the relevant pictograms that you find in the [Pictogram for the facilitators 11: Family budget](#) on the right column of the flipchart (Money earned). Make a drawing if the participants provide suggestions which are not included among the pictograms.

9. Use the information in the [Pictogram for the facilitators 11: Family budget](#) if you think some elements need to be added.

10. **ASK:**

- a. Now, we need to see whether Pajika and Labh have any money left, after having paid for all their **needs**. How do you think we can do that?

11. **SAY:**

- What we need to do is sum up all the **money spent on needs (first column)**. Then we sum up all the **money they earn (second column)**.
- Then we need to subtract the second amount from the first one.

12. Practice this together. Show participants the pebbles.

13. **ASK** participants to help you assign a certain number of pebbles to each element you have listed under the first two columns (Expenses for Needs). For example, airtime can be 4 pebbles, while washing powder is 2 pebbles. Put together the agreed amount of pebbles next to each element on the flipchart. **Keep this flipchart at hand for the next activity.**

14. Have a look at the [Example of family budget: Needs and Money earned](#) (next pages) to see an example of how the budget can be constructed with the pebbles.

15. Now follow **step 7** using the pebbles.

16. **SAY:**

- What we need to do is sum up all the money/pebbles spent on needs (first column).
- Then we sum all the pebbles which represent money earned (second column).
- Next, we need to subtract the second amount from the first one.

17. To help you facilitate this part, have a look at the [Example of family budget: Needs and money earned](#). In the last row, you will see how much remains for Pajika and Labh after they have spent their money to cover their needs: they will have 8 pebbles left after having covered the costs of their needs (see last row of the table).

18. Next, invite participants to form groups of 4.

19. Distribute one flipchart and marker to each group, together with some pebbles and a copy of the pictograms contained in the [Pictogram for the facilitators 11: Family budget](#).

20. Invite them to repeat step 8 to 12 in groups. Invite them to think about which needs Pajika and Labh have, using the pictograms, and how they will cover these needs.

Invite them to draw pictograms of elements they think are not included in the ones distributed.

21. Invite them to reflect on how many pebbles each element might cost.

22. Then they should think about what ways in which they earn money, how much they earn and how much remains for Pajika and Labh after having covered the costs of their needs.

23. Walk around the groups to make sure the task has been understood.





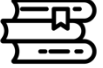







24. Finally, **SAY:**


- What we have done so far is creating a family budget. Budgeting means making plans around money.

Pictogram for the facilitators 11: Family budget



Cut out the pictograms indicated below and stick them to the flipchart to record participants' responses. Use this information to suggest any element that you think did not emerge through the discussion.

Examples of NEEDS	Examples of MONEY THEY EARN
 AIRTIME (intended as phone credit to use for phone calls)	Mother's work
 Washing powder	Father's work
 School fees	Devine's work
 School uniform	Abeo's work
 School books	Goat milk
 Electricity/bills	Chicken eggs
 Food	Tontine/saving group
 Food for animals – goat and chickens	
 Rent	
 Doctors/medicines	
 Clothes	
 Debts	




 Female hygiene products – e.g., sanitary pads	
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Pebbles

Distribute 30 pebbles of this size:



Example of family budget: Needs and money they earn.

Expenses for Needs	Money earned
Airtime – 3 pebbles 	Pajika and Labh's work = 20 pebbles
Washing powder – 1 pebble 	Selling goat milk = 5 pebbles
Education – school fees – 2 pebbles 	Abeo and Devine's work = 5 pebbles
Food – 4 pebbles	
Education – books and uniforms – 1 pebble	
Rent – 5 pebbles	
Electricity /bills – 1 pebble	
Taxes – 1 pebble	
Doctors/medicines – 2 pebbles	
Clothing – 1 pebble	
Debts – 1 pebble	
TOTAL = 22 pebbles	TOTAL. 30 pebbles
WHAT REMAINS to cover WANTS/SAVINGS: 30-22= 8 pebbles	

Activity 4. Saving and spending (20 min)

Aims: To recognize the importance of saving; to understand how to save and how to spend money on “wants”.

Material: Poster of the [Family budget](#) with pictograms developed in Activity 3.

Modality:



Plenary

1. SAY:

Pajika and Labh have heard that a big flood is coming, and they are afraid that they will not be able to harvest as much crops as they expected. Also, the flooding might make the price of some food rise significantly.

2. ASK:

- What do you think Pajika and Labh should do?
- How can making a budget help them deal with the situation?

3. SAY:

- Saving money is a good idea to make sure one can face situations when resources are scarce or deal with unexpected expenses, such as medical costs due to an accident.

4. ASK:

- How can Pajika and Labh save money? What should one do to save money?

5. SAY:

- Let's look again at the [family budget](#) that we created in Activity 3.
- As we have seen, Pajika and Labh have some money left after they have covered the costs of their needs (the house, the food, etc.). In our example, they had **8 pebbles left** (*edit this number if you have used different amounts in the previous activity!*).
- They do not need to spend the whole amount of money every month! From this amount, they can put aside some money that they will be **saving**.
- Even saving a few cents a month can be helpful, and create a safety net against unexpected events, and it is a way to cultivate the habit of saving money. We should always try to spend less than what we earn.

6. ASK:

- After having covered the costs of their needs, Pajika and Labh have 8 pebbles remaining. How many do you think they should put aside?
- How many of these 8 pebbles do you think they could spend on something they want, which is not a need?
- What do you think they could buy?

7. To help you facilitate this part, you can see an example of the money saved and spent on some "Wants" – see [Example of a family budget: Saving and Spending on WANTS \(next page\)](#).

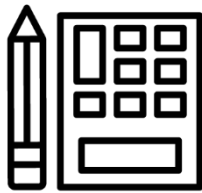
8. ASK:

- Do you try to put some money aside every month/week? How?
- What are other things we could save money for?
Some examples can be: to stay safe in case of unexpected events, for medical expenses, for future education.
- Can we also save money for some of our "wants"? How can we decide how much to spend on "wants"?

9. SAY:

- We should also spend money on our wants.
- The most important thing is to learn to prioritize and plan: first we cover our **needs**, then we see how much we still have left and we set a part of that amount aside as a **saving**, and some we can spend on our **wants**.

Example of a family budget: Saving and Spending on WANTS

	<p>What remains after family members cover their NEEDS: $30 - 22 = 8$ pebbles</p> <p>NEEDS = 30 pebbles</p> <p>Money earned = 22 Pebbles</p>
<p>Saving: 5 pebbles Saving</p>	
<p>Money for WANTS: $8 - 5 = 3$ pebbles → family members buy themselves a new radio!</p>	

Activity 5. Practicing making a budget and saving plan (50 min and more)

Aims: To provide participants with a safe space to practice making a family budget; to understand the value of making a family budget and involving our children in this activity.

Materials:

- Prepare some old newspapers, some markers, and two/three glue sticks and scissors on a table in one of the corners of the room.
- Copies of the [Pictogram for the facilitators 11: Family budget](#) (one per group).
- Cardboard boxes or jars (one per group).
- Flipcharts (one per group).
- A set of 30 pebbles per group.

Modality:



Pairs (if possible, family units)

This activity can be quite complex for the participants, do not forget to walk around the room and try to help each group with their task.

1. **ASK** participants to work as a family unit – if there is more than one family member present – or to work in groups of 4 if there is only one family member present.
2. Provide each group a flipchart and markers, one copy of the [Pictogram for the facilitators 11: Family budget](#), one jar or box, and show them the newspapers, scissors and glue stand.
3. Explain that they can choose to draw, write or cut out images from the newspapers, or use the images from the [Pictogram for the facilitators 11: Family budget](#). If they cannot find a suitable image, they can make a drawing on the flipchart.
4. Invite the groups to divide the flipcharts into two parts, drawing a vertical line.
5. In groups, ask them to list all the things that they think they **need to spend money on** each week, month or year and note them down on the left side of the flipchart.
6. Explain that they have 15 minutes to complete this task.
7. After 15 minutes, give 30 pebbles to each pair in the group.
8. **SAY:**
 - Imagine that your country has pebbles as its currency. Discuss together how many pebbles for each of the **needs** for which you have identified costs. Try to think how much each element costs in reality and use more pebbles for more expensive things, less pebbles for less expensive things.
9. Give participants 10 minutes to complete this part of the task.
10. After 10 minutes,

SAY:

 - a. Next, think of the ways in which you earn money, and use cut outs, drawings or note them down on the **right side of the flipchart**. Imagine that the 30 pebbles that you have received is the total amount of money you earn.
 - b. Remember that you do not need to spend all of your money/pebbles on your needs. You can keep something as **savings** and for some **wants**.

Give participants 5 minutes to complete this task.
11. After 5 minutes,

ASK:

 - a. Who still has some money/pebbles left?
 - b. How many pebbles do you still have?
 - c. In pairs, discuss together what you want to do with the money/pebbles left. Decide together how much you want to **save** and if you want to **spend on some of your wants**, how much. Also, agree on what you would spend the “want” money on!
12. Invite participants to place what they want to save in the box or jar you have provided.
13. Explain that they have 5 minutes to agree on their plans.
14. Once done, invite each group to present their poster and their discussion. Use the question in the [Facilitators’ Notes 15: Making a family budget feedback](#) to facilitate the discussion with the whole group after each presentation.

Facilitators' Notes 15: Making a family budget feedback

Use the following questions to facilitate the discussion after each sketch.

1. **Is there any item that you think has been left out? That needs to be added?**
2. **Is there a good balance between the money spent on needs, saved and spent on wants? (Remember: You need to cover ALL the needs before saving and save something before spending on wants!)**
3. **Do you think you could apply this approach at home?**
How have you reached an agreement on how you spend your “wants” money? Was it difficult to reach an agreement within the pair/group? Why?



MONEY MANAGEMENT AND GENDER

In some contexts, women and girls are not allowed to deal with money management.

If this is the case, consider conducting the Activity 4 and 5 not as pairs but rather in gender-homogenous groups. It could also be advisable to have a discussion on the topic with the participants and try to question this gender stereotype, as part of a gender transformative approach. Nonetheless, this is very much context specific and it requires sensitivity and contextual awareness on the side of the facilitator. Such a discussion would need to be planned together with the Supervisor of the Program.

Activity 6. Involving our children in making a family budget and saving plan (15 min)

Aims: To recognize the value of involving all family members in making a budget and saving plan.



GENDER AND FAMILY FINANCES

In many contexts, girls (and women) are excluded from the management of the family finances.

This can be a very hard aspect to fight, but as a facilitator you should and can help address this inequality, by reminding participants of the benefits that this approach could bring to the girls and to the family as a whole. Remember that parents can work on financial aspects with young children also: they can use smaller amounts of money if the child is too young to work on the actual family budget (see Session 20. Parent-child relationship: Making a family budget and saving money)

By allowing girls to help take care of the family finances by working together on the family budget, and defining saving and spending goals, we are:

- *Empowering the girls, showing them that we value and respect them, as much as we value and respect our sons.
- *Showing we value them and giving them an equal voice in the family means building mutual trust relationships: our girls will be more likely to turn to us when facing challenges, such as the risk of recruitment.
- *Building their problem-solving skills, which also implies the ability to analyze events and learn to make the right choices.
- *Giving girls the chance to help manage the family finances, and in turn allowing them to have more life opportunities, putting them in the position to escape poverty.

Modality:



Plenary

1. **SAY:**
2. **ASK:**
 - a. What could some of the benefits be of involving our children in doing our family budget?
 - b. How can you involve younger children? What about older children?
 - c. Could we also involve girls? Why? Why not?
3. **Reflect on what emerges from the conversation with the participants and integrate the following points only if necessary. SAY:**
 - Saving and making a budget can help us reduce family stress, as we have more control over our resources.
 - Involving our children can provide them with a sense of purpose, make them feel valued, respected and empowered. This aspect is particularly relevant for children who are at risk of recruitment and for these who have experienced recruitment: having a sense of purpose and feeling valued can have a strong impact in facilitating a successful and lasting reintegration into the family and community.
 - Allowing our children to help us deal with our family budget is a great way to show that we trust them and acknowledge their skills. This is especially important for older children who have been recruited, and especially girls. Through recruitment, they may have experienced a new autonomy. By letting our daughters contribute to the family budget we show them that we do not want to deprive them of this kind of independence.
 - We can take a few minutes every evening or once a week to note down all our expenses and work on our saving and spending at the end of the week together. This activity creates an opportunity for quality time together, communication and problem-solving.
 - Also, remember that stress around money can be one of the reasons that can push children to join an armed group.



Deepening the topic

Some discussion topics that can arise, can be the following:

- a. What is the best way to save money? Some options might include saving at home/hiding the money at home; saving in a bank; investing in property (be it housing, cattle/animals etc); saving in various schemes (e.g. tontine, village saving group, or stokvel etc). ASK what some of the pros and cons of each method could be.
- b. Borrowing money: Is it a good idea to borrow money? When and for what should we borrow money? When and from whom should we avoid borrowing money? What happens when we borrow money?



Money management, gender and age

You could work on making a budget with children of all ages: If they are young, you can use smaller amounts and practice saving and spending together, while the parents work on the actual family budget. Practicing together with smaller amounts of money is still a great way to learn the habit of saving!

Nonetheless, in some contexts the head of the family will not easily be willing to share the money management task with the rest of the family, especially with younger children and with female members of the household.

If this is the case, adapt the activity 6. And the home practice: Do not ask the parents to work on the budget together with their children, but invite the parents to work on a family budget and saving plan, share the plan with the family members and assign each family member a task in keeping the budget.

Closing the day: Home practice and evaluation (15 min)

Aims: To recap the day, discuss the home practice and assess the session.

Materials: Copies of the [Home practice handout: Making a family budget together](#); (If possible) Flipchart with hopes and fears from [Session 1. Activity 4](#).

Modality:
















Plenary

1. Hand out the [Home practice handout: Making a family budget together](#) to each participant.
2. Explain that either as a family, or as parents, they should try to complete their family budget as they have done during the session together, using real amounts of money.
3. Also, make a **saving and spending plan**: as a family, decide how much you plan to save every week or month, and involve all family members in keeping track of the saving plan once a week.
4. Decide how much you want to **spend in wants** and agree on what you will use the money for.
5. Show them the “needs” list and explain that they can use that as a guide to fill in the budget.
6. If possible, invite them to complete the budget and keep it regularly updated with the help of their children. One idea is to sit together once a week and revise and update the budget.
7. If this is not possible, invite them to assign a specific saving task to their children and help them save money every week.
8. **ASK** one or two volunteers to recap two things discussed today.
9. Remind them to continue practicing the skills which were the focus of the previous sessions - positive communication, stress reduction, taking a pause.
10. If you’ve had the chance to make notes of the [participants’ hopes and fears on a flipchart](#), draw their attention to it and ask them to place a star or stars on hopes that are realized.
11. Next, ask them to take a marker and remove fears that are starting to be overcome.
12. Then, ask them to add new fears or hopes that might have emerged.
13. Finally, **ASK** the following questions to the group and make notes of the answers.
 - a) **Is there anything that you particularly liked about this session?**
 - b) **Is there anything that you found particularly useful?**
 - c) **Is there anything that you would do differently?**
14. Thank everyone for their participation and engagement.



Home practice handout: Making a family budget together

 AIRTIME (intended as phone credit to use for phone calls)	Mother's work
 Washing powder	Father's work
 School fees	Devine's work
 School uniform	Abeo's work
 School books	Goat milk
 Electricity/bills	Chicken eggs
 Food	Tontine/saving group
 Food for animals – goat and chickens	
 Rent	
 Doctors/medicines	
 Clothes	
 Debts	
 Female hygiene products – e.g., sanitary pads	

Saving and spending plan: Discuss it with your family members!

Every week we will save....At the end of the month, we will spend... and we will buy....

Session 19

Families are not alone

- what else is out there to support the children and the parents?



Session 19: **Families are not alone - what else is out there to support the children and the parents?**



Time ⌚ 2h 5 min

Objectives: By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Recognize their limits: identify problems/behaviors which need specialized help and support from external experts.
- Identify people close to them to seek help - family members, peers, trust figures and relatives.
- Identify specialized agencies to seek help.

Activities Overview:

Session 19		TOTAL 125 min
Act. 1	Welcoming participants	10 min
Act 2	Recognizing our limits	20 min
Act 3	Recognizing signs of mental health issues that may need support	25 min
Act 4	Recognizing signs of Gender-Based Violence	25 min
Act 5	Seeking help	20 min
Act 6	Sharing your Referral Handout	15 min
Act 7	Closing the session and evaluation	10 min

Resources Needed:

- Referral Plan and its related Referral Handout.
- Flipcharts and markers.
- (If possible) Flipchart with hopes and fears from [Session 1. Activity 4.](#)
- Copies of the Referral Handout(if possible!).

Session summary:

It is crucial to help parents understand that the responsibility of their children's wellbeing is not all on their shoulders.

Neither you as a facilitator nor the parents have the ability to solve all the problems that the family might face. Therefore, this session will be dedicated to recognizing issues or problems which exist or might arise in the family, that cannot be tackled through this Program, and that need to be addressed by specialized institutions.

The group will also discuss strategies to seek help and overcome stigmatization when seeking support. The facilitator will share the **Referral Handout developed with the Supervisor of the Program** and guide the participants in identifying the external agencies that could support them with specific problems.



REFERRAL PLAN AND REFERRAL HANDOUT

Before facilitating this session, you should have prepared a Referral Plan with a related Handout with your co-facilitator and the Supervisor of the Program. The Referral Plan contains all the indications for you, as facilitator, in case some particular issues arise, and gives you suggestions on if and how to intervene. The Referral Handout is a document related to the Referral Plan but meant for the participants. It includes a list of agencies operational in your local context and it describes the kind of support each agency can provide, as well as how participants can easily contact each specific agency.

Remember: the aim of this session is not to do a screening of the families, but rather to help them understand what problems might arise which they need to seek specialized help and support for, and where to find this help! Reiterate your availability to support families in seeking help, if needed.

Activity 1. Welcoming participants and reflecting on the home practice (10 min)

Aim: To welcome participants, establish a positive atmosphere and share the home practice experience.

Modality:



Plenary

1. Welcome parents.
2. Smile and show a positive attitude! Thank everyone for being there.
3. Start with a short and engaging activity that will get everyone's attention, such as a local song, a quick game or a brief energizer. You will find some suggestions in the Constant Companion. Also, you can invite some participants to volunteer and propose an energizer or a song.
4. **ASK:**
 - Is anyone willing to share how the **home practice from the previous session went?**
 - What have you found easy?
 - What have you found difficult?

Remind participants of the confidential nature of the sessions, and of your availability before or after the sessions if anyone needs additional help or support. Have the **Referral Plan** at hand, if needed.

5. Always praise those brave enough to share!
6. Ask some volunteers to recall some key points discussed in the previous session.

Activity 2. Recognizing our limits (20 min)

Aims: To recognize problems/behaviors which go beyond our capacities and need help and support from specialized agencies.

Modality:



Plenary



TALK ABOUT CHALLENGES

In some contexts, participants may find it hard to openly talk about their own challenges. Stigma around certain topics – such as mental illnesses – or power dynamics – women having less power than men, older people less than younger ones – can make some subjects hard to discuss as a family unit and in a plenary. Therefore, reflect on your contexts and how the cultural norms, stereotypes and power dynamics might affect the discussion. Decide what is the best approach to address these issues and whether it is best to work as a family unit, a gender-homogeneous group or a plenary.

1. **SAY:**

- As parents and as individuals, we cannot expect ourselves to solve all types of problems that might arise in our life and in the lives of our loved ones.
 - As we have said many times, it is important for your wellbeing and that of your family that you learn to recognize your limits.
 - It is also equally important that we learn to seek help when needed, and we know how to do that.
2. Explain that you will mention some scenarios, in which a child is experiencing some abuse, violations or challenges.
 3. Remind participants of the confidential nature of the session and explain that they do not need to share their answers if they do not feel like doing that.



REFLECT ON YOUR PARTICIPANTS!

If you are only working with families of children who have been recruited by armed groups and are being reintegrated in the family, it is very likely that the children will be accessing case management and are provided with the needed support already. In this case, eliminate/edit all the elements that would be already addressed by specialised agencies.

4. Invite participants to stand up if they believe that the issue needs to be addressed by a specialized agency or specialist. They should remain seated, if they think that the issue can be addressed within the family and does not need the intervention of a specialist or specialized agency.
5. Reassure them that for some of the examples the answer will be very subjective and dependent on how they understand your sentences, since they will not have enough information for an accurate interpretation. Nonetheless, this is a good opportunity to discuss these issues.
6. To help you facilitate the session, the sentence in bold represents a situation that may not necessarily require specialized support and could be addressed by the family directly, while all others may require external help. External help might mean a child protection case worker, or a community worker that helps link the caregiver to a service provider in order for the caregiver to see possible pathways for a solution. Nonetheless, if participants feel differently about it, respect their ideas and discuss it together: This is only a suggestion!
7. Read the following sentences and take a few minutes after each sentence to ask some volunteers to explain why they think external help may or may not be needed.
 - a. The child is very quiet, he hardly talks at all, he never wants to leave the house and he does not have any friends. This has been going on for some months now, and the parents have tried but have not been successful in understanding what the problem is.
 - b. The father notices some seemingly self-inflicted cuts on the child's arms, some seem to be newer while others are older scars. The father tries to talk to the child, but the child doesn't share what happened.
 - c. **For a couple of weeks, the child talks very little, and she does not want to leave the house. After the mother tries, the child opens up and explains that she feels rejected from her school friends and she is being bullied.**
 - d. The uncle, who lives in the same household, is frequently threatening to hurt, shouting, belittling and harassing his nephew. The mother notices that her son is quieter and quieter, and that he gets very nervous when the uncle is around.
 - e. **The mother notices that her daughter is recently very clingy, she does not want to leave her side, and it gets worse when there are men around. She notices some bruises in different parts of her daughter's body, which the girl does not explain. She also notices that she has some discharge in the genitals. The mother tries to talk to her, to understand what the problem is, but without success.**
 - f. The child has been skipping school. She has new friends that she got to know in the new school she is attending. The parents don't really like her new friends. Recently the girl became more distant towards her parents. She is often critical of the parents' ideas, tastes and behavior, and there are frequent tensions in the household.
2. Thank everyone for their involvement.
3. **SAY:**
 - The issues pointed out above reflect challenges that our children could experience, but that we could also experience as parents and adults.

- In the next activities we will discuss two issues that we should be aware of 'mental health concerns' and 'sexual abuse and exploitation'. We will discuss some warning signs that we should be aware of.
 - Also, remember that any form of harm against children needs to be effectively and immediately addressed.
 - Our children's safety concerns and challenges might also affect you as a parent. Therefore, remember to also be aware of your own feelings, emotions and when needed, to seek support from your support network.
4. To conclude,

ASK:

- a. Is there any other issue or challenge that you think parents might face, which needs to be addressed by a specialized agency?

Activity 3. Recognizing signs of mental health that may need support (25 min)

Aim: To list some signs of possible mental health problems that might need specialized attention.

Modality:



Plenary

1. **SAY** that you will read some of the phrases you have shared and discussed before.
2. **Read the scenarios a. and b. once again:**
 - a. The child is very quiet, he hardly talks at all, he never wants to leave the house and he does not have any friends. This has been going on for some months now, and the parents have tried but have not been successful in understanding what the problem is.
 - b. The father notices some seemingly self-inflicted cuts on the child's arms, some seem to be newer while others are older scars. The father and other members of the family try to talk to the child, but the child doesn't share what happened.
3. **ASK:**
 - a. What kind of issues or problems do you think the children are experiencing in these scenarios?
4. **SAY:**
 - In these two scenarios, the children may be experiencing some safety or emotional problems, which may require the attention of a case worker or specialist.
5. **ASK:**
 - a. What do you think could be the signs of a child's distress or emotional problem that needs help and support from a case worker or specialist?
6. **SAY:**
 - Some signs that need to worry us can be:
 - a. Self-harm

- b. Suicidal tendencies (for example, child says they would wish to die)
- c. Expressing that the person seeks to do harm to others
- d. Being inconsolable
- e. Engaging in risky behaviors, including using drugs and alcohol abuse
- f. Excessive anger, irritability, hostility, also resulting in violence, for issues apparently insignificant to others (including children like him/her)
- g. Detachment from reality (delusions), paranoia or hallucinations
- h. Incomprehensible, apparently illogical speech
- i. Any other emotion or feeling that is so strong and protracted that the person does not manage to go about his/her daily life normally

7. SAY:

- If you recognize any of these signs or if your child's behavior worries you for some reason, do not feel ashamed! Remember that many other people have found and will find themselves in the same situation. The quicker the response, the more efficiently you will manage to help your child!
- In the next activity we will explore where to go to seek help, and we will leave you with guidance or a handout as suggestions of where to seek help when needed.
- Just as you need to take care of your children and family, do not forget about yourself!
- If you feel that any emotions or thoughts are becoming overwhelming, and that these emotions or thoughts prevent you from going about your daily life in a normal way, you need to recognize you need to seek help yourself!

Activity 4. Recognizing signs of sexual abuse (25 min)

Aim: To list some possible signs that can help parents recognize if one of their children is a survivor of sexual abuse.

Modality:



Plenary

1. Read the scenario below once again:
 - a. The mother notices that her child is recently very clingy, she does not want to leave her side, and it gets worse when there are men around. She notices some bruises in different parts of her daughter's body, which the girl does not explain. She also notices that she has some discharge in the genitals. The mother tries to talk to her, to understand what the problem is, but without success.
2. **ASK:**
 - a. What kind of issue or problem do you think the child is experiencing here?
3. **SAY:**
 - a. The child in this scenario may be a survivor of sexual abuse.
4. Think of the best words to use to talk about sexual abuse in your context. Edit the question and signs of sexual abuse mentioned below accordingly. **ASK:**

- a. What do you think some signs that could help us recognize if one of our children is a survivor of sexual abuse could be?
5. If this topic is too hard to openly discuss, read out loud the following signs that a child/person could be a survivor of sexual abuse - contextualize as needed.
6. **SAY:**
 - a. Here are some signs that could indicate that a child is a survivor of sexual abuse. Remind everyone that some of these signs could also mean other child protection problems! Trust your feelings and contact a social worker, specialist or specialized agent if you are worried about your child's behavior. (Note: The list below starts with the signs that are more likely related to sexual abuse and are followed by signs that are likely to be more general to other forms of child abuse including sexual violence. You can read only some of the signs from each of the two categories, and ask participants what they think of these examples or if they would like to add others).

Signs related to sexual abuse:

- Pain or itching in the genital area. Possible signs of a venereal disease, such as sores or discharge.
- Signs of pregnancy, such as nausea, lack of energy, increased appetite, growing belly.
- Multiple bruises that are all in different stages of healing.
- Infections in the genital areas, especially associated with sexually transmitted infections (STI's).
- Discomfort/difficulty in walking or sitting.
- Stained underwear, soiling or wetting.

Signs which are more of a general issue, and require attention, but that could be related to sexual abuse, especially if more than one emerges at the same time.

Signs that show that the child is in a situation of permanent discomfort can be potential indicators of mental health issues. However, especially if they are accompanied by other specific signs, they can indicate the child is or has been a survivor of sexual abuse.

- Unexplained or vague medical complaints.
- Inability to concentrate or focus on a specific task, depression, withdrawal or suicidal tendencies, aggressive behavior, self-destructive behaviors such as cutting, sudden or extreme shifts of moods or emotions, increased irritability, anger or rage, etc.
- Fear of going home after school (or fear of going to school).
- Excessive crying.
- Broken bones.
- Bed-wetting, nightmares, fear of going to bed or other sleep disturbances.
- A fear of certain places, people, or activities, especially being alone with certain people. Be alert to signs that your child is trying to avoid someone and listen carefully when your child tells you how he or she feels about someone.

- Lack of trust in adults or over trusting.
- Fear of medical examinations.
- Fear of being alone.
- Refusal to be comforted by anybody else.
- Have stopped talking. If signs of normal development were there before – and have gone – something may be wrong.
- A child who has done well in school starts to get behind in her/his schoolwork.
- A child drops out of school.
- Abuse of drugs and alcohol²¹.

7. SAY:

- Remember, different circumstances make it easy or very hard for both girls and boys to share when they have experienced violence or harassment.
- As parents, you know your child best: if her/his behavior worries you for some reason, reach the appropriate agency!
- Do not forget that other family members may also be survivors of sexual abuse. Do not hesitate to address these issues as well.

Activity 5. Seeking help (20 min)

Aims: To identify ways to seek help; to overcome barriers to seeking help.

Modality:



Plenary



1. Read the following Open-Ended Story:
 - a. Gabriel is a father of two. The oldest child, Carlos, is very quiet, he hardly talks at all, he never wants to leave the house, he does not have any friends. This has been going on for some months now. Gabriel feels worried. He goes to his wife, Lubna, and asks her what she thinks of Carlos, whether she also shares the same worries. They talk for hours and agree that they feel very worried about him. They both try to approach the child and talk to him, but the child gets even more distant, he tries to avoid his parents. He spends most of his time in bed. At a certain point he starts also refusing to eat. Gabriel and Lubna agree that they have to find a way to help him, but don't know how. They are also worried because these issues are seen in a suspicious way by the local community, involving extreme prejudice and discrimination.
2. ASK:
 - a. What do you think Gabriel could do to seek help?
3. SAY:
 - It is understandable to feel confused, powerless and experience a huge range of emotions in a situation like the one Gabriel is facing.
 - It is important to find strategies to overcome stigma and any other obstacle that might prevent us from seeking the appropriate help.

²¹ WomenWin.org

- If you think that reaching the right agency might be too hard for you, try to find a close person with whom you feel safe to share your burden, and who can help you reach the right agency. In this example Gabriel first went to his wife.
- Make sure you find a person with whom you feel safe and that you trust.
- Do not expect this person to solve the problem for you, but let the person help you seek help, and identify the right agency to address the problem!

Activity 6. Sharing the Referral Handout (15 min)

Aims: To help participants identify and refer to the agency that could help address their challenges.

Materials: The Referral Plan as developed with the **Supervisor of the Program**



Copies of the Referral Handout(if possible!)

1. Use this time to share with your participants the Referral Handout that you have developed together with your co-facilitator and with the **Supervisor of the Program**.
2. Indicate to the participants:
 - **The existing services that they could reach.**
 - **Which issues, challenges, or problems each service could address.**
 - **How they can reach these services.**
3. Hand out the [Referral Handout](#).
4. Explain that in the handout they will find a reminder of the agencies that they could reach if they detect in a family member any of the issues discussed during the session, or if they are themselves exposed to any of these risks. (Note: In case you have a case worker on standby, you can introduce the case worker or provide their contact details at the end of this session).
5. Reiterate your availability to discuss any personal issue after this session, and the confidential nature of the sessions.



ASSESS THE RISKS!

The Referral Handout with agencies/services that participants can contact and access can be a source of conflict in the household if both parents have not attended the sessions. For example, if you are only working with mothers, going home with a handout that explains whom to go to in case of violence in the home or asking for financial support might trigger negative reactions in the family. The Referral Handout should therefore be written in a safe way, e.g. women's center instead of Gender-Based Violence support center. Consider the composition of you participants and the local cultural norms and asses the risks and equality, eventually discussing them with the Supervisor of the Program in advance. In case of risk of harm, do not distribute the handouts!

Closing the day: Closing the session and evaluation (15 min)

Aims: To recap the day and assess the session.

Materials: (If possible) Flipchart with hopes and fears from [Session 1. Activity 4.](#)

Modality:



Plenary

1. **ASK** one or two volunteers to recap two things discussed today.
2. Remind them to continue practicing the skills which were the focus of the previous sessions - positive communication, stress reduction, taking a pause.
3. If you've had the chance to make notes of the [participants' hopes and fears on a flipchart](#), draw their attention to it and ask them to place a star or stars on hopes that are realized.
4. Next, ask them to take a marker and remove fears that are starting to be overcome.
5. Then, ask them to add new fears or hopes that might have emerged.
6. Finally, **ASK** the following questions to the group and make notes of the answers.
 - a. **Is there anything that you particularly liked about this session?**
 - b. **Is there anything that you found particularly useful?**
 - c. **Is there anything that you would do differently?**
7. Thank everyone for their participation and engagement.



REFERRAL HANDOUT

This handout needs to be developed by you, together with your co-facilitator and the Supervisor of the Program.

The handout should include:

- The existing services that the parents could reach.

- Which issues, challenges or problems each service could address.

- How they can reach these services.

Remember: When developing this handout keep things as clear and simple as possible!

If the Supervisor of the Program has not told you anything about the Referral Plan and its related Handout yet, contact him/her immediately!

Session 20

FAMILY TOGETHER - Setting goals together to build a positive and supportive family environment



Session 20: **FAMILY TOGETHER** - Setting goals together to build a positive and supportive family environment



Time ⌚ 2h 35 min or more

Objectives: By the end of this session, each family unit will be able to:

- Define their strategy to create a family plan for a positive and supportive family environment with their children.
- Acknowledge and celebrate their successes as a family and as parents.

Activities Overview:

Session 20		TOTAL 155 min
Act 1	Welcoming participants	10 min
Act 2	Getting ready to do the family planning at home	15 min
Act 3	Guiding parents in the construction of a Family Plan: defining our goals	20 min
Act 4	The pathway to embrace our goals	30 min
Act 5	Closing the Program: sharing time	20 min
Act 9.	Celebrating our success!	60 min or more

Resources needed:

Materials:

- [Family Plan Handout \(see next pages\) – one copy per household.](#)
- Certificates for the participants.

Session summary:

During this last session, facilitators help and guide parents in the development of a family action plan that they will draft independently, at home, with their children.

Also, the group will conclude the Parenting Program by acknowledging their successes and celebrating their efforts.

Note:

- This session concludes the Parenting Program: the facilitator explains how to develop the Family Action Plan, on which **each family unit will work independently, together with their children, at home.**
- **Remember: as a facilitator, you are not expected or supposed to work with the children directly but guide the parents to use the skills they have learnt so far to lead this action planning themselves at home.**
- If possible, and if the family agrees, the facilitator can conduct a **family visit** to follow up on the Family Action Plan that they have developed and provide support to each family individually. You will need to analyze risk factors versus benefits of visiting a family and ensure you do no harm when accessing the home. Instructions on how to arrange and lead family visits can be found in the Family Visits Guide.
- You will find detailed instructions on how to organize and conduct Family Visits in the Family visits Guide.
- Remember that conducting visits in households where children have been involved with armed groups can be extremely challenging and, based on the context, if the due amount of care is not taken, it can do more harm than good for the child and family, such as risks of stigmatization or re-recruitment. For this reason, it is of paramount importance that the Action Plan is developed by the families independently, and , if you do conduct follow up home visits, make sure you follow and implement all the safeguarding and risk reduction strategies indicated in the Family visits Guide.

Activity 1. Welcoming participants (10 min)

Aims: To welcome participants and establish a positive atmosphere.

Modality:



Plenary

1. Welcome parents.
2. Smile and show a positive attitude! Thank everyone for being there.
3. Start with a short and engaging activity that will get everyone's attention, such as a local song, a quick game or a brief energizer. You will find some suggestions in the Constant Companion. Also, you can invite some participants to volunteer and propose an energizer or a song.

Activity 2. Getting ready to do the family planning at home (15 min)

Objectives: To prepare participants for the final session in which they will be developing a Family Action Plan as a family unit.

Modality:



Plenary

1. **SAY:**
 - We are at the end of our Program. Now that we have explored the ways to build healthy, loving and supportive family relationships, it is time to find the approach that works best for you as a family unit and commit to it together.
 - To do this, and to make sure we achieve our family goals, we should get all family members on board and work together.
 - For this reason, through this last session we want to support you to have an exchange of ideas with your family members, including your children, and develop your Family Action Plan together, independently, at home.
2. **ASK:**
 - a. What do you think a family plan is?
 - b. Why do you think it can be important for a family to build a family plan?
 - c. What worries you about discussing ways to support each other and including all household members in this discussion?
 - d. What will make it easier for you and what tips do you have?

If possible, ask some volunteers to share their thoughts and try to tackle any issues together.
3. Reflect on what emerged through the exchange among participants and if needed integrate the following points by **saying:**
 - A family plan is a roadmap in which we identify what we can achieve as a family, and what is the best way to achieve this goal.
 - It is a plan we develop together as a family involving all family members, in which we identify the interventions, the actions and the behaviors that each family member will undertake and embody to realize our own ideal family.

- So far, we have discussed various strategies to create a healthy, supportive and loving family environment. Now it is time for you and your children to reflect on what works best for you as a family.
- Now we will reflect on how to engage our children and other close family members to set our objectives together, to define the individual actions and behaviors to achieve them, and to identify support networks.
- You will work on the Action Plan at home, independently. Should you need any help after you have developed the Action Plan, we are happy to support you and come to your home for a visit. Ideally the Home Visit will only involve the adults who have been participating to the Parenting Program.
- Please come and talk to us at the end of this Session, or reach us afterwards, if you would like to discuss this Home Visit or if you need any individual support with the Action Plan.

Activity 3. Guiding parents in the construction of a Family Plan: Exploring the structure of the plan and ways to engage children (20 min)

Aims: To explore the structure of the Family Action Plan; to discuss ways to facilitate a conversation with their children during the development of the Family Action Plan.

Materials:

[Family Plan Handout \(see next pages\) – one copy per household.](#)

Modality: Individual or working in pairs per family unit if possible

1. Ask participants to form pairs based on their family unit. If this is not possible, ask participants to work individually or with a pair they are comfortable with if they want to.
2. Distribute the Family Plans Handouts to the participants (one per family unit, if the family unit is working as a group, otherwise one per person).
3. **SAY:**
 - A few weeks ago, you started a journey to explore ways to build a supportive and loving family environment.
 - Now, we would like to help you share this commitment with your children (and with your partner if s/he is not here) and build a plan that will guide all family members towards this goal.
 - We would like to invite you to plan one hour in one of the next few days, in which you can sit together with your partner and children at home, or wherever you feel comfortable and safe to discuss ideas with your family members.
 - Choose a moment in which all family members feel sufficiently free from stress and that they have as little distractions as possible. For example, avoid setting up the gathering when smaller children need to be fed or sleep, or when you might expect visits.
 - If possible, make sure you conduct this activity only with your close family members (your children, your partners, and any other person who lives with you) avoiding external people who have not been taking part in the Parenting Program,

unless you believe that they have an important role in your child's life and that you will feel at ease and ready to share and discuss also in front of them.

- Make a list of the "close family members" you would like to include in your Family Action Plan.
2. Explain that together you will discuss one approach to the development of a Family Action Plan: if they have other ideas or would like to use a different approach to achieve the same result, they should feel free to follow what works best for them. Also, you can invite them to share their ideas before proceeding with the next steps.
 3. Once participants have shared their approach to the development of a Family Plan, **SAY:**

- The approach we will explore here is based on an exchange of ideas between family members. At home, you should have an open conversation with your close family members, following the Action Plan handout that you have just received.
- This means that you will be playing a role similar to what we, as facilitators, have been doing here with you during the last weeks. You should encourage a conversation by asking open ended questions, avoiding any judgment and making sure everyone has a say.
- Let's start by looking at the various elements of the action plan we are proposing here. (Show the Action Plan).
- To start working on your Family Plan, the first step will be to understand what your shared goals as a family are.
- To help you set these goals, you can ask yourself and all other family members:
 - i. **What are our goals for our family?**
- **Show the Family Action Plan and indicate the space on the Family Action Plan where the question is located.**

4. SAY:

- Here you, and the rest of the family members, should answer using **one words**. If possible, everyone should note their word on the Family Action Plan (using pictograms if needed).
 - On the Family Action Plan handout, you can find suggestions of some words that could represent your goals (indicate the space on the Family Plan where these words and their pictograms are located).
 - After the goals, you and the rest of the family members present can discuss the **actions that you can embrace to realize these goals**. We will see this aspect in detail in the next activity.
 - Now that we have an overview of the content of this Action Plan, let's see how we could **facilitate the conversation about the Action Plan at home**.
 - The Family Action Plan will work only if everyone is onboard, if all members of the family agree.
 - We strongly encourage you to conduct this activity only with your children, and with family members who have participated to this Program.
 - It is key, at this point, to have an open and respectful conversation and engage our children in a conversation: they should neither be forced to participate, nor be silenced if they want to express an opinion that is different from yours.
4. Invite the participants to suggest strategies through which they can help and encourage their children to participate in the exchange and express their ideas.
 5. Some examples of what they could say could be:

- a. The word you have chosen is very important and complex. What does this word mean for you? What does a “**loving**”/“**respectful**” family look like for you? (Substitute the words in red with the ones that have been selected). Make sure that everyone has a say.
 - b. Is there anyone that strongly disagrees with any of the words chosen? Why?
6. Remind participants to emphasize the need to reflect on each aspect as a family unit, rather than as individual members. Avoid any blaming or shaming, any sentence that starts with “I” against “them” or any discussion which creates a separation between children and parents. Remind everyone to start their sentences with “We, as a family” rather than “I” or “They”.
7. Ask if the task is clear and whether they have any suggestions, or they see any challenge in the implementation.
8. Remind them that this is only a suggestion on how to develop a Family Action Plan: if they have any other ideas or strategies that they think would work better, invite them to share them with the rest of the group.

Activity 4. Practicing using the Family Action Plan (30 min)

Aims: To practice using the Family Action Plan and how to facilitate the conversation with the children at home.

Modality: Individual or working in pairs per family unit if possible, individually or in pairs they choose.

1. Explain that, now that we have an overview of what the Family Action Plan is, we should practice how to use it together.
2. Invite participants to work on the Family Action Plan in pairs per family unit if possible, to practice how they will develop it when they will be working on it at home.
3. Ask participants to start from setting the **goals**.
4. **SAY:**
 - Let’s imagine you are sitting at home with your children. In pairs, try to complete the Action Plan together.
 - Start by asking yourself and your partner:

What are our goals for our family?
5. Show the Family Action Plan again and indicate the space on the Family Action Plan where the question is located.
6. **SAY:**
 - At home, remember to only use one word to answer the question.
 - Also, you should make sure that everyone has a say.
7. Give participants 5 minutes to discuss the task, next invite some volunteers to share the goals they have identified, if they want to.
8. Next **SAY:**

You have defined your goals as a family.

What do you think the next steps to the development of the Family Plan should be?

9. Remind them that, after having set the goals, it is a good idea to discuss with their children how to achieve these goals as a family (Show the part on the Family Action Plan under “Here is what we will do to achieve our goals”).

10. ASK:

How could you discuss with your children the strategies to achieve these Family goals?

11. SAY:

Some examples of discussion points you could share to trigger a conversation are:

- i. How can we commit to achieve the goals we have identified for our family?
- ii. Which behavior should each of us embrace?
- iii. Which practical daily actions can each of us do to achieve this goal?

Show these questions and the corresponding pictograms on the Family Plan handout.

12. Invite each pair to take 5 minutes to try and answer these questions. Some examples might include “I will build a loving family by spending time with my child every day for at least 30minutes, finding out how their day was”.

12. Invite participants to try and be as specific as possible. Stress again the importance of focusing on shared efforts and not using this opportunity to blame anyone or impose any viewpoint on others.

13. Remind them that this is only an exercise to familiarize them with the Family Action Plan: they should make sure that they re-work the Action Plan at home, with their children!

15. SAY:

- Remember to keep the focus of the conversation on a shared effort to achieve the Family goals.
- Always start your answer with “I would do...” and avoid pointing fingers at other family members, by saying things like “I think YOU should do, etc.”.
- To encourage children to participate, start with yourself: share your ideas of things you would do to achieve the family goals.
- Always be respectful and open towards any other viewpoints.

16. Explain that they should try to reach a common agreement, and not ignore disagreements. If there are disagreements and voices are left unheard, the Action Plan will not work.

17. SAY:

- To make sure you reach a common agreement, you could say something like:
 1. Is there anyone that strongly disagrees with any of these suggestions?
 2. Is there anyone that strongly disagrees with one or more elements of this Action Plan? If so, why?

18. SAY:

- Do not forget that if any conflict arises, you should use the problem-solving strategy we have explored in session 14: “Solving Problems Together”.

19. ASK: Can anyone recall these steps?

- Remember that the sum of your commitments is your action plan to build a loving and supportive family: the goals can only be achieved if they are shared. Everyone accepts and agrees to them, and everyone engages actively to implement the behaviors that will help reach the goal!
- Also, do not forget to be patient: it is a journey that you are embarking on together, and sometimes the waters will be calm, other times they will be rough, at times someone might lose sight of the goal, and this is when it is important for the others family members to help him/her regain the road.
- Finally, the Action Plan is only the starting point of this journey. It is not set in stone, and your goals and objectives will surely change and evolve as you and your family will change and evolve.

20. **ASK:**

- Do you feel confident doing this activity at home with your children?
- What challenges or issues do you think could emerge? How could we address them?
- Do you have any other approach that you would like to use to create a Family Action Plan with your children? Would you like to share your suggestions with the rest of the group?

21. Finally, thank everyone and praise everyone for their effort and commitment. Invite participants to talk to you after the end of the Session, should they have any concern that they want to discuss privately. Remind them that, if they want, you are willing to conduct individual Family Visits with each household once they will have completed the Action Plan with their children. The Family Visit will only involve the adults who have taken part to the Parenting Program, and it will not involve the children. Explain that you can discuss the details of this Home Visit at the end of the Session (instructions on how to conduct Family Visits can be found in the Family Visits Guide).

Family Plan Handout

i. What are our goals for our family?

We want to build a Family together

Loving



Supportive



Communicative



Understanding



Respectful



Helpful



Strong



Courageous



Inclusive



Trustful



Here is what we will do to achieve our goals:

- How can we commit to achieve the goals we have identified for our family?
- Which behavior should each of us embrace?
- Which practical daily actions can each of us do to achieve these goals?

Example of a completed Family Action Plan

We want to build a LOVING and TRUSTFUL Family together

Here is what we will do to achieve our goals:

How can we commit to achieve the goals we have identified for our family?

Which behavior should each of us embrace?

Which practical daily actions can each of us do to achieve these goals?

I – the father – will make time to sit and talk with my children for at least 10 minutes every day

I – older son – will tell my parents where and with whom I am spending time every time I leave the house.

I – mother – will count to 10 whenever I am losing my temper with a family member.

I – younger daughter – will be responsible for doing my homework without having to have my parents reminding me to do that.

Etc.

Activity 5. Closing the program: Sharing time (20 min)

Aims: To share some of the positive outcomes of the Program.

Modality:



Plenary

1. Explain that now we will work again as a plenary, as we are reaching the conclusion of the session and of the Parenting Program.
2. Ask each parent to present his or her favorite self-caring practice.
3. Ask each participant to present the parent/child practice that they find most useful.
4. Ask each participant to present the home practice that they find the easiest to implement.
5. Ask each participant to present the home practice that they have used more often during the last weeks.

Activity 6. Celebrating our successes! (60 min or more, depending on how you decide to celebrate)

This activity/celebration can be conducted at the end of the last session or as a separate celebration day – it is completely dependent on how you and the parents choose to celebrate! Together with the parents, you can choose to keep the celebration within the group, or also invite others (e.g. family members, community). This is all up to you and the parents to plan. The steps below only refer to the certificate ceremony, and they are merely a suggestion. After spending 20 sessions with the parents, together you will know how best to celebrate “Growing Strong Together”!

Objectives: To celebrate the completion of the Parenting Program.

Materials: Certificates for the participants (or any other symbol appropriate in your context to show appreciation and graduation/completion).

Modality:



Plenary or different modality depending on the way you choose to celebrate the end of the Program.

1. Thank everyone for their engagement.
2. Ask everyone to share one thing that they feel proud about!
3. Give everyone a round of applause for their hard work.



4. If possible, you can use this last moment to distribute the certificates while also giving parents an opportunity to congratulate and support each other:
 - a. Randomly distribute the certificates to participants.
 - b. In a circle, invite the person to your left to assign the certificate to the person it belongs to, while also congratulating him/her for his/her hard work as a parent and as an individual. Invite them to find unique ways of praising and congratulating others.
 - c. Note that this approach might not work in contexts in which a certain formality is expected at the moment of distributing the certificates. Discuss with the Supervisor of the Program and your co-facilitator how to best carry out the certification deliver ceremony.

Close.

THE END

GROWING STRONG TOGETHER



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THE ALLIANCE
FOR CHILD PROTECTION
IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION