

TOOL



THE ALLIANCE
FOR CHILD PROTECTION
IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION

Child Labour Key Messages¹

The following key messages can be used and adapted to a variety of humanitarian contexts. Where it is safe and possible to do so, consult with children in child labour as well as with families and communities during the development of key messages for different target groups.

MESSAGES FOR PARENTS

- Child labour is work that is harmful to children’s development and growth because children are too young and/or should be in school.
- Children need to be educated to have a safe and stable future.
- Children are continuously developing physically, mentally and emotionally. Greater harm is likely to come to children when they are working as they are less developed than adults.
- Younger children are more likely than older children and adults to get hurt in the workplace.
- Be aware. It could happen to your son or daughter, even on their first day at work. When children are injured at work, increased costs for things like medical care make it more difficult to escape poverty.
- Education is a right. Children’s wellbeing is protected through learning and playing – not working.
- Attending and completing school brings long-term benefits to children and their families. Work that prevents school attendance exacerbates poverty and prevents children from gaining skills and getting a well-paid job.
- Educated children are healthier and will have greater earning potential in the future.
- Parents can keep young workers safe: as a parent, you play an important role. Your child is your responsibility. Take an active role in the employment decisions of your children, report hazards and follow any training that is given.
- By law, employers are responsible for protecting young workers and must provide a safe workplace and comply with national policy, but you and your child also need to be aware of health and safety issues when working.
- Discuss any problems or concerns with your children. Ask yourself these questions to see what you know about their work:
 - Where are your children working, and what are they doing?
 - What tasks is your child being asked to carry out?
 - How many hours does your child work each day?
 - What training, supervision and equipment is she/he receiving?
 - What health and safety measures are in place to protect her/him?
 - Does your child feel that he or she could report any health and safety issues to the employer? (She or he has a right to refuse to do unsafe work.)

- Are you concerned about anything? Has your child's performance at school been affected, or are they tired or bored with school? Is the physical or psychological strain of work showing – such as increased stress, anxiety, fatigue and depression?
- Learn about the child labour laws and policies that apply to young workers.
- It is illegal to employ children under the age of X unless they are under the sole responsibility of their parents or legal guardians, and where only members of their family are employed, provided that: (1) the work does not endanger their life, safety, health, morals or impair their normal development; and (2) they are provided with primary and/or secondary education. Employers who break the law should be reported to the Department..... (*insert relevant national legislation*).
- Children under the age of __ are not allowed to work for more than __ hours a day and not between the hours of __ pm and __ am. (*Insert relevant national legislation.*)
- Children aged between __ and 18 are only allowed to work for __ hours a day, no more than __ hours a week and not between __ pm and __ am. (*Insert relevant national legislation.*)
- Children should not be exposed to hazardous work which includes (*insert relevant types on hazardous work list*), and they are prohibited from using certain equipment, including ... (*insert relevant types here*).
- It is dangerous for children to work around/collect materials from rubbish and debris left by the (*insert emergency*).
- The worst forms of child labour can risk children's health and safety, resulting in injury and even death.
- Other forms of child labour can affect children's emotional, physical and developmental wellbeing.

MESSAGES FOR CHILDREN²

- Your employer is responsible for providing a safe workplace, and you are responsible for following instructions and safety rules carefully.
- Your boss must train you on these aspects of work:
 - how to do every task that is part of your job;
 - how to use materials;
 - how to handle things;
 - what to do if there is a problem;
 - making you feel that if you're not sure, you can ask!
- Be careful, be proud – you have a job, and are helping your family. You are worthy of respect and care. If someone bothers or threatens you, ask for help.
- Keep your eyes and ears open for dangers. If something seems unsafe, ask about it, or don't do it. Getting hurt will not help you to help your family.
- If you are younger than __ years old, you are not allowed to work for more than __ hours and not between the hours of __ pm and __ am. You must be with your parents. (*Insert relevant national legislation.*)

- If you are between __ and __ years old, you should only work for __ hours a day, no more than __ hours a week and not between __ pm and __ am.
- You should not be exposed to hazardous work. Hazardous work places you in danger, and might injure you.
- It is dangerous for you work around and collect debris and rubbish left by the (insert emergency).

MESSAGES FOR EMPLOYERS³

- Work must never interfere with children's education or training. Children must complete their primary and high school education, which finishes at __ years.
- Children between __ and __ years cannot work for more than __ hours. (Insert relevant national legislation.)
- Children between __ and __ years cannot work between __pm and __pm/am. (Insert relevant national legislation.)
- The minimum working age is __ years.
- Work for children aged over __ years (minimum working age) must not affect their schooling.
- Children under __ years (minimum working age) cannot work except __ (insert local conditions, e.g. under the sole responsibility of their parents/legal guardians/number of hours/times of day, etc.).
- By law, employers are responsible for protecting young workers. This includes providing training and any safety equipment needed.
- You are responsible for knowing the child's age, registering each child with the authorities and checking their birth certificate.
- You must only give the child work that is safe according to their age.
- Give adequate training and supervision to young workers before they start as well as while they are working and whenever they start a new task. Training should include job hazards and safe work practices in a language they understand.
- Do not verbally or physically abuse a child or let others do so.
- Children must never be involved in work that is dangerous for them and puts them at risk of injury or abuse.

MESSAGES TO ADDRESS SOCIAL NORMS THAT CONDONE CHILD LABOUR⁴

These messages are developed for practitioners to address common myths and misconceptions about child labour and to address harmful social norms that are often heard within communities where child labour is prevalent. They should be contextualised with information relevant to the local context. Practitioners will need to consider the audience; not all messages are suitable for all audiences.

MYTH	KEY MESSAGES
<p><i>“Child labour is necessary because families are extremely poor.”</i></p>	<p>NOT TRUE: Child labour only exacerbates poverty. By working all day and not attending school, children are not gaining skills to help them get a well-paid job. Work that affects their physical and mental health impacts their short- and long-term health and limits their opportunities in the future. It also increases urgent costs for things like medical care, making it more difficult to escape poverty.</p>
<p><i>“Girls are better off and safer working at home.”</i></p>	<p>NOT TRUE: Keeping girls at home to cook and clean and look after young children denies them the right to an education, and this can have a serious and negative impact on their future. With limited or no opportunities to develop literacy and skills, girls are at risk of dependency and poverty due to socio-economic exclusion. They are also at risk of isolation, working long hours and sexual and physical abuse.</p> <p>Where girls work in domestic labour and their freedoms are restricted, they are often isolated from their families, friends and communities, with little access to services, increasing their risk of sexual and domestic violence and abuse.</p>
<p><i>“I worked as a child, so it’s good for children and doesn’t do any harm.”</i></p>	<p>NOT TRUE: Child work and child labour are very different from each other. Many children are involved in work that is appropriate to both their age and development. Work that does not prevent them from going to school, for which they are not too young or that does not affect their health or wellbeing can provide them with important skills and experiences to help prepare them to be responsible and productive during their adult life.</p> <p>Child labour, on the other hand, refers to work that deprives children of their childhood, potential and dignity. Child labour interferes with schooling and is mentally or physically harmful to children, negatively affecting their long-term development and prospects for a better future.</p>
<p><i>“The work that children do isn’t very demanding for them, so it’s not very harmful.”</i></p>	<p>NOT TRUE: Many of the types of work which children are commonly found in are seriously harmful to their development and health. Such work includes agriculture, where they are exposed to toxic pesticides or fertilisers, work with dangerous tools and machinery, are abused in hidden and stuffy greenhouses or carry heavy loads; clothing and shoe manufacturing, where they are exposed to toxic chemicals and solvents, perform repetitive tasks, work in unhealthy conditions, sit for long periods in harmful positions and risk injury from sharp tools; in workshops and auto-repair shops, where they are exposed to heavy loads, welding, high temperatures, chemicals and dangerous machinery and tools. Children are also more susceptible to the same dangers faced by adults, as young bodies are still growing and underdeveloped. For example:</p>

Children are smaller in size and strength: Children are often asked to perform tasks beyond their physical strength and build. Their bodies are developing throughout adolescence.

Children have thinner skin: A child has 2.5 times more skin per kilogram of body weight than an adult, and children have thinner skin; both these factors can result in greater absorption of toxins. Skin structure is only fully developed after puberty.

Children breathe more deeply and more frequently: A child breathes more deeply and frequently than an adult and thus can take in more pathogens and toxic substances/pollutants. A resting child has twice the volume of air passing through the lungs compared to a resting adult over the same period.

Children's brains are still developing: Brain development continues until a person is 24 years old. Alcohol, drugs, diseases, metals and toxic substances can severely harm developing brains, especially during the two critical windows of rapid brain development which take place between birth and 5 years and 9 to 14 years.

Children's bodies process toxins slower: Children's enzyme systems are still in development, resulting in a lower ability of a child's body to break down toxins and other hazardous substances that they are exposed to.

Children's internal systems are still developing: Gastro-intestinal, endocrine, and reproductive systems and renal function are still maturing during childhood and are therefore less efficient in breaking down hazardous agents. Moreover, exposure to toxins can also hinder the full development of internal systems. The endocrine system and hormones play a key role in growth and development, and can be especially vulnerable to disruption by exposure to chemicals.

Children have higher energy consumption: Because children are growing, they consume high levels of energy, water and air. As their intake is greater, they receive higher doses of whatever diseases, toxins and contaminants are present in the air, water or food.

Children are more likely to dehydrate: Children lose more water per kilogram of body weight than adults, through their lungs (greater passage of air through them), skin (larger surface area) and kidneys (less able to process concentrated urine).

Children require more sleep: 10- to 18-year-olds require about 9.5 hours of sleep a night for proper development.

Children are more sensitive to heat and cold: Children have increased sensitivity to heat and cold as the sweat glands and thermo-regulatory system are not fully developed.

Physical strain can lead to injuries and impairments: Physical strain, especially when combined with repetitive movements, on growing bones and joints can cause stunting, spinal injury and other life-long impairments.

Children are still developing cognitively and behaviourally: Children's ability to assess their own safety, recognise health risks at work and take decisions about their own protection and wellbeing is still developing; younger children especially may not be able to keep themselves safe from harm at work.

Working children have a lower life expectancy: While difficult to quantify, the earlier a person starts working, the more premature the ageing that will follow.

“The economy is doing well because of child labour. It is inevitable that there is child labour when the economy is strong.”

NOT TRUE: Child labour is harmful to a country’s economy and acts as an obstacle to growth by driving down wages and increasing adult unemployment. Children are forced into doing the same jobs for less pay. Work for adults is harder to find and so adults are less able to contribute to the economy – which is essential for ensuring ongoing economic prosperity.

There is a negative correlation between the existence of child labour and per capita GDP. Child labour lowers national income and slows technological investments and developments. Enabling people to advance, in terms of their skills and capacities, is vital for a country’s economic development. Yet using child labour undermines this because workers are not invested in, and children – who will drive future economic growth – are denied an education.

“Children can easily return to school after they have finished working.”

NOT TRUE: In many humanitarian contexts, transitions from school into the worst forms of child labour are one-way, and disruption to educational progress associated with conflict is more difficult to reverse because of the movement of children into the WFCL. Once in child labour, children face significant barriers to returning to school. A far greater investment is then needed to support children’s learning in a way that is appropriate to their level of knowledge and suitable for their needs and wishes, given their vastly different experiences in the workplace and time away from school.

- 1 These messages were initially developed by the International Rescue Committee in Lebanon. They have been used and adapted in other countries responding to the Syria crisis as well as in the Philippines in 2014.
- 2 Additional messages for young workers can be found in the ILO “Safe work for youth” kit: https://www.ilo.org/ipec/areas/Safeworkforyouth/WCMS_120426/lang--en/index.htm
- 3 Additional messages for employers can be found in the ILO “Safe work for youth” kit: https://www.ilo.org/ipec/areas/Safeworkforyouth/WCMS_120426/lang--en/index.htm
- 4 These messages are adapted from materials developed in Turkey in the response to the Syria crisis.