Unlocking Children's Rights

Strengthening the capacity of professionals in the EU to fulfil the rights of vulnerable children

Participant's Workbook
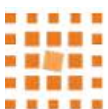
Module Two: Introduction to child development and communication

coram clc
Children's Legal Centre

CSALÁD, GYERMEK, IFJÚSÁG
KIEMELKEDŐEN KÖZHASZNÚ EGYESÜLET
FAMILY CHILD YOUTH ASSOCIATION

coram
Voice
getting young voices heard

errc
european roma rights centre

UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

THESE MATERIALS HAVE BEEN DEVELOPED BY:

Coram Children's Legal Centre, UK

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ADDITIONAL PROJECT PARTNERS ARE:

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The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of Coram Children's Legal Centre and project partners and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Commission.

"Above everything else, the professionals should be at peace with themselves. If you are not at peace with yourself, you cannot help the children".

Focus Group Participant, Greece

TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF USE

MODULE 2: INTRODUCTION TO CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNICATION

PROPOSED DURATION: 2 hours 15 minutes

AGENDA

❖ **PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION ON CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNICATON**

❖ **PRESENTATION, DISCUSSION AND EXERCISES ON IMPORTANT FACTORS IN CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNICATION**

❖ **CASE STUDY AND EXERCISE ON DEVELOPMENTAL, PERSONAL AND SOCIAL FACTORS THAT MAY AFFECT COMMUNICATION**

2.1 CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNICATON

This Module introduces basic concepts around child development and how it can affect behaviours and communication. It aims to develop awareness of the impact of child development on communication and what this means for professionals working with children, and to strengthen professionals' abilities to shape interactions with children accordingly.

Please note that this Module does not aim to provide detail on different theories or approaches to child development, although sources for further reading are enclosed in the Reader Module at the end of this handbook.

The term 'child development' describes the many ways in which children change throughout their childhood, and is used, in particular to describe their acquiring of additional skills, knowledge and maturity.

It is important to recognise that understanding of child development is a 'blunt tool' in that it provides information about children in general, rather than about specific children. However, it can be useful for professionals, parents and carers to know about child development stages (and the approximate age ranges for these stages) in order to be able to best support the childhoods of the children in their care or with whom they come into contact.

Child development and rights

- Child development is relevant to child rights because it relates to the child's evolving capacities and developing maturity, although perceived lack of development should never be used to deny a child rights.

- In some cases, a child's development may be hampered by denial of rights, and, therefore, lack of development can indicate a rights violation – but it is essential to note that this information must not become a vehicle for discrimination against either the child or the child's parents if, for example, the child is suffering from a developmental delay.

- From a rights-based perspective, there are three main arguments for taking child development seriously:

1) Every child has a right to development, which must be supported and facilitated by the State (and those working within the State structures). This is a right under Article 6(2) of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child: 'States Parties shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child.'

2) Development in childhood leads to better experiences in adulthood. From a rights-based perspective, this means that supporting child development helps the child to access all other rights.

3) Understanding child development can help professionals work more efficiently and effectively with children. From a rights-based perspective, this means that the professional is better able to empower the child to realise his or her other rights as well.

Child development and communication

- Child development is relevant to communication with children because communication is linked to all developmental areas, including socio-emotional, physical, behavioural, cognitive and linguistic development, as well as relationships, identity, self-care and health.

- Understanding a child's development can help a professional, parent or carer to communicate with the child in an appropriate way for that child at that particular point in the child's life.

Basic child development

Social   Learning to make good relationships

Physical   Growing and maturing, developing coordination and strength

Intellectual   Thinking and learning to link actions to words

Communication   Learning to talk and interact with others

Cultural   Developing customs and beliefs

Emotional   Learning to understand feelings and emotions and name them

What child development at different stages <u>may</u> involve (please note that not all children will do all these things at the same time):

0-3 years	**3-5 years**
- Eye contact - Turn taking and sharing - 'babbling' noises (pre-linguistic, i.e. Mama, dada, baba) - simple words and sentences	- Communicating simple facts and feelings - Simple story telling - Communicate through drawing, play and stories - Increased understanding of social aspects of speech
6-12 years	**13-18 years**
- Increased ability to relate to friends and others - More highly development language and communication skills - Increased cultural communication awareness	- Developing stronger sense of self-identity - Interest in emotional independence - Highly developed intellectual skills - Higher risk threshold - Hormonal changes

Using the child in the centre as the starting point, add to this diagram any factors that you think could affect development and communication.
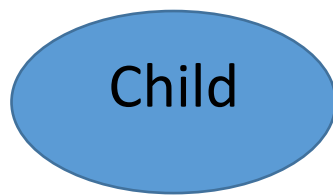
Child

How can understanding child development lead to better practice?
- Making individualised assessments of the child's situation
- Identifying potential challenges to communication
- Understanding the child's communication needs based on their individual knowledge, development and skills
- Developing communication plans for the child
- Preventing harm against children by identifying factors that may affect the child's development
- **My additional ideas…**

How can understanding of child development lead to poor practices?
- Treating all children according to a 'template'
- Failure to see children as individuals
- Judging or discriminating against children based on whether they have reached the 'correct' developmental stage
- Making decisions based on the child's age and 'what they should be doing' rather than the child's individual circumstances
- Misunderstanding personality traits as developmental issues
- Using knowledge of development as an excuse to discriminate against poorer families, for example
- **My additional ideas…**

What developmental factors are important when doing an assessment?
- Don't make assumptions
- I should ask myself:
  o What is best for this individual child in his or her individual circumstances?
  o How might the child's developmental needs affect the way I should communicate with him or her?
  o How might the child's developmental needs affect the decision I make?
  o Can I answer these questions or do I need to turn to another professional for help?
- It is important to have an open mind to what the individual, unique child has to say
- **My additional ideas…**

2.2 IMPORTANT FACTORS IN CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNICATION

This section of the Module focuses on some important factors in child development and communication and the risk and protection factors around each of these:

- Attachment;
- Self-esteem;
- Resilience.

In this part of the workbook, there is a short factsheet of information for each key factor. This is supplemented by additional links and resources set out in the participant's Reader Module at the end of this workbook.

ATTACHMENT

- ○ **Definition:**

  - According to attachment theory, the relationship between a child and his/her primary caregiver in the first 2-3 years of life shapes future development and outcomes

- ○ **Children with secure attachment in early years:**

  - Have increased independence, social and behavioural development, have higher self-esteem and are more resilient

- ○ **Children without insecure attachment in early years:**

  - Lower self-esteem, more reliant on others, isolated and distant from others, higher rate of depression and anxiety.

- ○ **Sources and further information:**

  Getting attached: Parental attachment and child development, http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/social-mobility-memos/posts/2015/04/21-attachment-theory-parents-reeves

  Providing a Secure Base, Gillian Schofield and Mary Beek, University of East Anglia, Norwich, UK http://www.uea.ac.uk/providingasecurebase/resources

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Notes from discussion: what helps or hinders secure attachment?
Examples:
+ Consistency of at least one primary caregiver in early years
- No single caregiver (or inconsistency over time)
+ Caregiver responds to needs
- Caregiver ignores child

SELF-ESTEEM

- ○ **Definition:**

  - Confidence in one's self worth and/or abilities

- ○ **Children with high/positive self-esteem:**

  - Are confident, have a positive self-worth, respond well to change, believe they deserve love and support

  - Others?

- ○ **Low/negative self-esteem:**

  - Lack confidence, feel ugly, unloved and unlovable, dislike change, feel unworthy of love and support, may find it hard to communicate, are at risk of developing depression, anxiety, etc.

  - Others?

- ○ Source and further information:

  - Youngminds (www.youngminds.org.uk)

Notes from discussion: what helps or hinders self-esteem?
Examples:
+ Feeling loved by family and friends
- Being subjected to criticism
+ Receiving encouragement and praise
- Not feeling listened to

RESILIENCE

○ **Definition:**

● The ability to 'bounce back' from set-backs

○ **Children who are resilient:**

● 1) Have high risk status but do not succumb to adversities

● 2) Develop coping strategies in situations of chronic stress

● 3) Suffer extreme trauma, e.g. disasters, bereavement, or abuse, and recovered and prosper

● (Masten et all 1990)

○ **Children who lack resilience:**

● Succumb to or do not recover from adversities

○ Source and further information:

● Action for Children, Resilience in children and young people review: https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/resources-and-publications/research/resilience-in-children-and-young-people-review/

Notes from discussion: what helps or hinders resilience?
+ Support from adults outside of the family
- Isolation from community
+ Family harmony
- Family dysfunction
+ Close bond (attachment)
- Lack of attachment

2.3 DEVELOPMENTAL, PERSONAL AND SOCIAL FACTORS THAT MAY AFFECT COMMUNICATION

Developmental, personal or social factor							
Cultural norms	Communication disability	Has suffered severe trauma	Low self-esteem	High self-esteem	High resilience	Physical disability	Insecure attachment

Communication behaviour							
Lack of eye contact	Shouting and swearing	Providing conflicting information	Silence	Joking and laughing, dismissive of seriousness of situation	Doesn't sit still	Extremely communicative	Straightforward, unemotional communication

How this could be misinterpreted							
Disinterest	Disrespect	The child is not traumatised	Lying	Incapable of communicating	The child has nothing to say	The child isn't taking the process seriously	The child is completely confident and does not need support

What could really be happening?							
The child doesn't trust the process/ the adult has not supported the child to trust the process	The child has a communication disability/ the adult is not accommodating the communication disability	The child is following social norms relating to communication with adults/ the adult is not sensitive to cultural norms	The child is scared/ the adult is not responding appropriately to this fear	The child doesn't feel supported to speak/ the adult has not created a sufficiently safe environment	The child has learned to appear calm, but is highly traumatised/ The adult may be too eager that the child is 'happy', without questioning this	The child expects nothing from the process/ the adult has not explained what may happen

Group work – developing a case study

- o Name

- o Age

- o Gender

- o Background

    - ▪ Who does the child live with? Has this changed? Why is the child in a 'justice setting'/ residential care centre/ detention centre? What is happening in this child's life?

- o Developmental, personal and social factors that may affect communication

    - ▪ Does the child have any developmental concerns that could affect the way he or she communicates? Does the child have any particular behaviours relating to communication that professionals should know about?

- o Communication needs

    - ▪ Based on the above, does the child need any additional support for communication? Are any communication techniques particularly important?

Ideas and examples:

- - A girl is accusing a teacher of abuse
- - A boy's parents are divorcing
- - A child has lived in several different care homes and is now facing a further change in placement
- - A child is a refugee from conflict zone and is in conflict with the law
- - A child has a disability that affects his language comprehension and is unable to communicate easily verbally

They think that if we do not talk that we do not have an opinion but that is often not the case – they should understand that we have bad days and sad days and we do not want to open up to everyone.

Children and young person's voices

They think that children are okay if they do not cry – they should ask more how we truly feel and not try to guess and speculate so much about our feelings.

PARTICIPANT'S READER – MODULE TWO

Further information about child development

Theories of Development

There are many different theories about how child learn and what impacts on their development. Key people involved in psychology and education have observed children and published their theories about what is natural development and how nurture can impact on a child's development. Different theorists have come to various conclusions about how exactly children develop across the different areas of development. When a theory is accepted by those involved in the care and education of children it can change practice. Some theorists have been very influential.[1]

Type of theory	Theorists	Theory in practice
Behaviourist	Ivan Pavlov (1849 – 1936) Burrhus Skinner (1904-1994)	Behaviour can be changed by stimulus (experiment with dogs and bell) Behaviour can be changed by rewards or punishment. This gives positive or negative reinforcement.
Social learning (behaviour)	Albert Bandura 1925 -	Behaviour can also be learned from copying others (Aggression 'Bobo doll' experiment)
Constructivist	Jean Piaget (1896 – 1980) Lawrence Kohlberg Lev Vygotsky (1896 – 1934) Jerome Bruner 1915 – Margaret Donaldson 1926 – Chris Athey	4 logical stages of cognitive development and schemas Also 3 stages of moral development Subdivided Piaget's 3 stages of moral development. The importance of language in learning – 'zone of proximal development' (adult involvement to scaffold learning) 3 modes of thinking and the importance of culture in learning Embedded and disembedded (abstract) thinking Developed Piaget's work on schemas

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[1] How Children Learn From Montessori to Vygotsky – educational theories and approaches made easy – Linda Pound (2005) Step Forward Publishing.

Psychoanalytic theories	Sigmund Freud (1856 – 1939) Erik Erikson (1902 – 1994)	3 stages of developing personality 8 stages of psychosocial development
Attachment theory (social and emotional and behavioural development)	John Bowlby – (1907 – 1990) Donald Winnicott (1896 – 1971)	Children need emotional attachments to key adults Separation anxiety The importance of mother and child interactions in development. How deprivation can impact on development. A baby cannot exist in isolation.

CHILD LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES

For further information in relation to child language development, the following websites have a range of resources.

I CAN (children's communication charity) - http://www.ican.org.uk/

Talking Point (children's communication charity) - http://www.talkingpoint.org.uk/

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association - http://www.asha.org/public/speech/development/Parent-Stim-Activities.htm

Royal College of Speech and language therapists - http://www.rcslt.org/docs/free-pub/helpyourchildtotalk.pdf

CHILD DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES AND INFORMATION

Young Minds (charity for young people's mental health and wellbeing) - http://www.youngminds.org.uk

Five to Thrive (website with resources for positive parenting and neuroscience) - http://www.fivetothrive.org.uk/