

PLAN International Sierra Leone

Teacher's Guide to RapidEd Project

UNDERSTANDING TRAUMA

<p style="text-align: center;">UNIT: 1 TOPIC: LOSS AND GRIEF</p>
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OBJECTIVES

- To understand how a child or adult might feel about death or Separation of loved ones.
- To be able to support children in going through their grieving process.

INTRODUCTION

Sierra Leonean children are growing up amidst civil unrest and armed conflict as well as disease and deprivation.

It is an everyday life for these children. But even children from less violent surroundings sometimes experience the death of a loved one, loss of properties and relatives. As one grieves over these losses, he/she goes through some stages.

STAGES OF GRIEF

1. Shock and denial – The child feels nothing and is shocked to learn what has happened.
He /she does not want to believe that the death has happened, because it is too painful. The child may even deny that the death occurred, as a way of coping.
2. Anger – The child gets angry easily and becomes aggressive with other children. He/she may also feel angry towards the dead person.
3. Sadness - Once the child accepts the death, he/she will feel deeply sad and unhappy for sometime.
Children will cry out for the dead person and miss him/her.
4. Hopelessness – Future looks bleak. What is the point of anything.

LOSS AND GRIEF

1. Teacher/Facilitator writes the word “Loss” on the blackboard and ask participants:
 - (a) What comes to your mind when you hear the word loss ?

- (b) Teacher/Facilitator asks participants to define loss.
 - (c) Participants are asked to make a list of some losses they have experienced since the 26th May coup in Sierra Leone.
2. Participants are asked the following:
 What is grief? How do you grieve in your culture?
 Grief is a deep or intense sorrow/mourning for a dead person.
 Grief is a normal response to the death of someone important in our lives. When responding to grieving children we need to:
- Ask ourselves what will bring comfort and at the same time allow them to understand what has happened.
 - Be prepared to explain death to children while taking into account cultural and religious differences.
 - Be honest in order to respect the integrity of the child.

WORKING THROUGH THE GRIEF PROCESS

1. Encourage the person to talk about her loss. Allow her to cry and express her sadness, pain anger and remorse.
2. Encourage family members to talk to each other about the loss.
3. The grieving person needs someone to listen. Don't interrupt, simply listen empathetically.
4. Let tears bring release and renewal. Tears are a normal part of grieving. They are not a sign of weakness but of strength. Our tears testify to our love and care. Tears that spring from our love can help us find healing and renewal.
5. Recognise the number of responses to grief and reassure yourself and others
 Grief feelings are temporary, but necessary for getting the work of grief done.
6. Express your love for the grieving person. Be available and accepting. Give space when the person needs it.

ACTIVITIES

1. Participants are asked to close their eyes and think about how they felt when someone close to them died. Now, have participants draw the outline of a body, if you have colours allow them to colour in parts of their body that felt a particular feeling. E.g. Sad-blue, afraid-black, happy-brown, angry-red, nervous yellow. Form groups of two and take turns telling the other person exactly what parts of your body felt a particular feeling, stay focused on feelings.
2. Ask Trainees to write a letter to a dead person who was very close to them. In the letter, trainees should tell the dead everything they would have loved to tell him/her before he died.
 These activities are meant to bring out grief feelings that might be making them sad. In talking about what has happened, the teachers or trainees themselves will learn to adjust better to their loss. In the Sierra Leone culture, people do not like to talk about the dead to the grieving person or child particularly. It is considered

mean and unfeeling to do so. Therefore discussions about the dead are usually carried out in whispers when the grieving person is not around. People may think that reminding the grieving person of the loss is a constant torment.

Mariama is nine years old. Her father was killed by armed men during a rebel incursion. Mariama's mother does not talk about the dead when she is around for fear of making her unhappy. Mariama also does not talk about her father and asks no questions. Her attitude is exasperating as she fights and uses abusive language in class.

3. Ask children to draw a dead parent or person who was close to them. Also ask them to colour the picture. Some cultural songs in Sierra Leone are sung to remind people of their loss. Children should be encouraged to sing these songs in class.
4. Pre- school children (3-5 yrs.) do not understand death. They think death is reversible. That is they think the dead person will come back some day. Teacher may ask children to bring a leaf to class. These leaves will be placed somewhere in the class, children will observe the leaves everyday to see how they shrink and rot. Teacher will explain to them that people who die also shrink and never come back to life.
5. Young children (6-12yrs.) need to know the details about death. Children this age understand the concept of death. They need to know how people die, and all about funerals and receive condolences. The rituals are important to help children adjust to the loss. If a child's sadness does not lighten after a few months, refer him/her to a specialist i.e. Psychiatrist, counsellor etc.

UNIT 2 TOPIC: STRESS AND STRESS MANAGEMENT.
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OBJECTIVE

- To increase your understanding about the nature of stress.
- To expose you to the characteristic reaction of stress.
- To provide you with skills useful in managing stress.

BACKGROUND

When everything around us seems chaotic, when every change seems radical, when the body is being pressured, stress is what results, War is full of stress.

WHAT IS STRESS ?

Trainees are asked to brainstorm the meaning of "Stress" in the various local languages. After that they are asked to define stress in English:

Responses from trainees will include:

- Tension
- Pain
- Pressure
- Discomfort
- Force
- Strain

STRESS – is what one experiences when a person feels unable to cope with the demands of the environment, when an individual faces a situation that threatens to harm him physically or psychologically, when a person begins to feel tense and uncomfortable.

It is common to assume that stress is always bad, or that a complete lack of it is ideal. “To be totally without stress is to be dead” (Glass and Singer, 1972).”

It is because of stress people learn how to adjust or adapt to the environment. Some events are naturally stressful such as wars, work pressure, marital problems, loss of family members, loss of all properties, financial troubles, etc. All of these produce stress.

SIGNS OF STRESS

1. Anger
2. Fears
3. Self-doubts
4. Negative Self-talk
5. Repeated “danger” thoughts
6. Pre-occupations
7. Worry about body reaction and health
8. Escape
9. Avoidance
10. Indecision
11. Aggression
12. Poor judgement
13. Tense muscles (etc.)

Teacher/Facilitator ask participants which of the following life events produce stress?

1. Being forced out of your home by armed men.
2. Being told by your boss that because of your good performance on the job, your salary will be raised 100%.
3. Being told by your boss that a piece of assignment be completed under a very short notice.
4. Finding it difficult to get daily meals for family members.
5. Death of spouse.
6. Being told that you have won a prize of twenty-five thousand US dollars.
7. Taking a vacation
8. Trouble with boss
9. Divorce
10. Pregnancy
11. Retirement

Pleasant situations as well as unpleasant ones produce stress. People are therefore under some level of stress as long as there is life.

SOME CHARACTERISTIC REACTIONS TO STRESS:

1. **IRRITABILITIES:** - One becomes easily irritated or angered over simple things, e.g. father who losses an expected promotion on a job gets home and may yell at his children for no reason.
2. **ANXIETY:** - Refers to feelings resembling fear, but without identifiable source.
3. **CONFUSION:** - An individual under stress finds it difficult to concentrate or think clearly (e.g. what happened to most people during the 6th of January 1999 crisis when they had to run from their homes without closing their doors).
4. People also react to stress through changes in what they eat and drink.

Teacher/Facilitator asked trainees to brainstorm on factors that influence people's behaviour under stressful conditions. The following are some of the factors that influence how one behaves under stressful conditions.

1. **HOW MUCH DANGER THE PERSON PERCEIVES:**
E.g. the child who has been frightened by a soldier has learned to be terrified every time he sees a soldier.
2. **PRESENCE OF OTHER STRESS:**
While each stressful event produces its own reactions in the individual, it also makes him/her more unbearable to other stresses.
3. **SOCIAL SUPPORT:**
Good relation with friends and associates is a healthy exercise. This implies that your reaction to stress is badly affected when you lack social support.

STRESS MANAGEMENT/COPING SKILLS

Some of the stress management skills are:

1. **EXERCISE:**
- Stress prepares the body for action, therefore it is helpful to engage in a series of exercises. Swimming, dancing, jumping rope, and walking are valuable outlets.
Exercising for stress management is most effective when it is done daily.
2. **ORGANISE:**
- Disorganisation creates stress. Try to take a fresh look at your situation and get organised. Setting priorities can be a real stress fighter.
3. **RECOGNISE AND ACCEPT YOUR LIMITS:**
Set realistic limits on what you try to do on any given day.
4. **SEEK SOCIAL SUPPORT**
Support from families and friends serves to control stress.
Talking out problems and expressing tensions can be incredibly helpful.

5. REPLACE UPSETTING THOUGHTS WITH COPING STATEMENTS:

We should learn to fight fear and anxiety with an internal monologue of positive coping statements.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES AND ADVICE:

DRAWING/ART

Children usually express their feelings while drawing pictures of people, animals, things etc.

Teacher may ask children to draw anything of their choice. Drawing helps crying babies concentrate and stop crying.

Teacher can make puppets out of Clay/play dough and can also help children make local toys. Drawing and all forms of art and craft help children who cannot verbalise their needs properly.

Interpreting children's drawings will help Teacher understand some problems affecting child at home/school or past experiences.

DRAMA/ROLEPLAYS AND STORY TELLING

Old children enjoy Drama or roleplays and in these activities provide opportunities for them to express themselves and show their talents. Ask them to dramatise stories they tell. Also ask them stories about spider, monkey, lion, cunning rabbit. These stories also teach moral lessons and the children have a lot of fun when acting them out.

Teacher/Facilitator could also ask children to role-play the rebel war Scenarios they experienced. A lot of stressful experiences are let out during these role-plays.

MOVEMENT AND DANCE

Teacher/Facilitator asks children to perform a cultural dance. Simultaneous movement can also be used to unlock memories and emotions related to stressful reactions.

Movement and dance can help release lodged feelings in parts of the body which makes our muscles rigid and tense.

Teacher will encourage, cultural games with music and action dances. An example of one is the local 'Animal dance'.

Example

Teacher asks children to choose an animal. Each child is asked to imitate the sound of his/her chosen animal in a circle formed by the rest of the group and dance to music played in the background. This game creates a lot of excitement among children and even adults.

PLAY AND GAMES

Play is to children as work is to adults. It is vital and a necessary part of a health child's life. Play brings children back to emotional, social and spiritual health.

Encourage children to play their local games like:

- Amo sheku sheku
- Are die
- Akra
- Kookoo (Hide and seek) etc.

Suggested 'Tools' or materials teachers may need for children's activities.

- Car, Dolls, Trucks (locally made or imported)
- Paper and crayons
- Paints
- Clay
- Books
- Musical instruments (drums, shegbureh, kelei etc)
- Play area
- Sticks
- Pencils and pens
- Skipping rope
- Ludo
- Snakes and ladder

<p style="text-align: center;">UNIT 3 TOPIC: TRAUMA HEALING</p>

OBJECTIVE

- To increase the understanding of trauma.
- To know the types of events that are traumatic.
- Guidelines to help a trauma victim (especially children)

BACKGROUND

Trauma can result from a wide variety of events; these range from natural disasters, to accidents, to Intentional violence perpetrated by people, children are especially susceptible to the negative effects of trauma. In its mildest forms trauma causes an temporary disturbance in a child's normal functioning.

Trainees are guided to grasp the meaning of Trauma by allowing them to brainstorm what Trauma means in the various local languages. After that they are asked to define trauma in English.

Responses from Trainees will include:

- Shock
- Painful experience
- A shocking, painful and bitter experience which overwhelms the individual's capacity to cope or master at the time.

- It is the name for the quality of a relational act between a subject (The individual) and an object (The event) e.g. war disaster, death of loved ones.
 - It is a normal reaction to an abnormal situation.
 - Psychological Trauma can cause an individual to feel that there is complete disorderliness and lack of continuity in life.
 - “Trauma occurs when one loses the sense of having a safe place to retreat within or outside oneself to deal with frightening emotion/experience” (Van derkolk 1987)
 - Trainees are asked to brainstorm examples of traumatic events. After writing a long list of events, Trainees put all in three categories.
1. Natural disasters (earthquakes, floods etc)
 2. Accidental man-made disasters (fires, oil-spills, chemical spills etc.)
 3. Intentional harm by people (physical/emotional abuse, wars etc.)

Facilitator asks Trainees : “Who experiences Trauma”?

Trainees answers include:

The wounded in war

Those who are raped

Those who hear the gruesome stories etc.

Facilitator explains the difference between **PRIMARY AND SECONDARY VICTIMS** of Trauma and categories the answers into these two groups:

PRIMARY

This is when the traumatic event (such as a crime or natural disaster) is perpetrated against or happens to an individual. The individual himself receives the pain. Such an individual is a primary victim. For example, if Joe Sandy is either intentionally or unintentional shot in the arm, he may recover completely from his physical injuries, yet he may remain emotionally scared by this experience. Joe Sandy, in this example, is a primary victim.

SECONDARY VICTIMS

When an individual has witnessed an event in which someone else is victimised or has a relationship with the primary victims, that individual is a secondary victim. For example, Sallay, a ten year old girl from Pujehun, was at the riverside laundering the family clothes when the rebels attacked their village. As she ran back home to her parents. She came across many bodies in a pool of blood along the roadside. One of them was her little sister. This terrified her greatly and for a long time, the thought of it discouraged her about life in general. Sallay in this example, is a secondary victim.

Trauma can occur in people who are either primary or secondary victims. For secondary victims, the individual’s proximity to the traumatic event plays a significant role in determining the cause and severity of their psychological and behavioural reactions.

Facilitator asks Trainees to divide into groups and **ROLEPLAY** a Traumatic event in each group.

Event may include:

- A rebel attack on a village

- A sudden death
- A fire accident.

In these role plays the **characteristics of traumatic event** are clearly shown. That is:

Shocking

Sudden

Unexpected

Overwhelming

Also in these roleplays, the Reactions to Trauma are shown.

Teachers/Facilitator then asks trainees to discuss some of the **reactions to Trauma**:

They may include:

Panic

Confusion

Hysteria

Spontaneous flight

Behaviour out of Control

Immediate Reactions

PSYCHIC NUMBING AND DESENSITISATION. (DELAYED REACTION)

Conscious and Unconscious attempts to avoid all thoughts, activities and symbols of traumatic events and thus avoid being flooded with the powerful feelings that come back when the traumatic event returns. Numbing is an adaptive response to a difficult situation but it can affect a child's development due to loss of curiosity, a decreased ability to concentrate, and a desire to avoid certain situations or places. A general withdrawal from activities may take place.

REGRESSIVE BEHAVIORS:

A child goes back to behaving the way that is not commensurate with his age. E.g. Bed wetting, thumb sucking, stuttering, play, and work that is not age-appropriate.

NIGHT MARES

Most people relieve their trauma in their dreams either as an extract representative of the traumatic event or symbolically. In dreams, people subconsciously attempt to gain mastery or control of events that in reality are out of their control.

REPRESENTATIVE PLAY/ARTWORK

Children draw/play what is on their minds, e.g. Children exposed to armed conflicts usually play war, shooting etc.

INCREASED AROUSAL

Sleep disturbances

Inability to concentrate

Angry outbursts

Hypervigilance

Exaggerated startle reactions.

e.g. Jumpiness, Nervousness.

PSYCHOSOMATIC REACTIONS

Bodily aches/pains e.g. headaches, stomach-aches

A change in future orientation,

Loss of self- esteem.

Children under stress may react in different ways and their reactions depend on many variables such as:

- Age and developmental level of the child.
- Disposition, personality and genetic endowment.
- The child's gender
- The nature of the trauma.

Facilitator asks trainees to brainstorm on “How to identify traumatised children”.

Trainees respond and they are guided to categories into age groups.

0 – 5yrs

HOW DO YOU KNOW THIS CHILD IS TROUBLED?

Reactions typical to this age group.

- Cries a lot
- Is often frightened or sad
- Clings to particular people
- Has night mares
- Sits in one place for long
- Can be very active and troublesome
- Chews clothes or sucks thumb
- Bedwetting
- Witches (imagine things) that visit them in the night.

WHY DO THEY BEHAVE THIS WAY:

Children usually react this way because at this age:

- a. They need to feel safe and secure with someone
- b. They do not understand when people go away and do not come back
- c. They understand only what they see.
- d. Children of this age are the easiest to help because they do not think deeply about wartime stresses.

ADVICE FOR TEACHERS FACILITATORS

1. Show love and appreciation
2. Hold and comfort them
3. Speak gently and reassuringly
4. Be patient as it takes time for children to feel better.
5. Help children draw pictures and talk about them.
6. Use games, toys, sticks, play etc. to help children talk/express themselves.
7. Songs and dance are a powerful way of expression for children who can't talk properly.

6-12yrs.

HOW DO YOU KNOW THIS CHILD IS TROUBLED?

Reaction typical to this age group:

FEAR OR ANXIETIES:

1. Frightening experiences can make children feel very scared, helpless and out of control. They develop nervous habits (nail-biting, stuttering, rocking).
1. Cries a lot
2. Plays soldier/war games
3. Poor concentration
4. Defiant behaviour (Refuses to do work).
5. Child won't talk
6. Sleeping problem
7. Bedwetting.
8. Fight a lot
9. Nightmares
10. Aches and pains
11. Aggressiveness (Fight, uses bad language, rough play etc.)
12. Depression (quiet, well behaved, never express their feeling, loose interest in play etc.).
13. Lack of grooming
14. Regression (e.g. behaves like a baby or younger child).
15. Behaving like adult
16. Drug abuse
17. Low/high appetite
18. Withdrawal (stop taking part in normal activities e.g. visiting friends, playing, singing etc. school work).
19. Restlessness (Cannot focus on one thing at a time).

ADVICE FOR TEACHER/FACILITATORS

Teachers should help create a “therapeutic environment” in the classroom, such an environment is characterised by an effort to understand and emotionally support children, answer their questions honestly, attend to their concerns, fears and help them overcome difficult situations.

Teachers should also give children unconditional love, i.e. accepting the child as he/she is. At times this can be difficult, given some of the challenging behaviours that traumatised children exhibit.

Unconditional love and support generates trust on the part of the child. It also facilitates the bonding process that is the key to forming a healthy and therapeutic relationship.

The importance of expressing feelings in an effort to heal psychological wounds which are often more harmful than physical injuries, can be more long-lasting, and need to be addressed for development to continue in an optimistically healthy manner.

SUGGESTED ADVICE AND ACTIVITIES THAT ENCOURAGE EXPRESSION OF FEELINGS OF CHILDREN

1. LACK OF CONCENTRATION:

The looloh ‘ game. This local (Mende) game is in the form of a song which helps children co-operate in groups and still have fun. In this game children form a circle and leader sings song followed by children:

Lo Lo Lo Lo (2 times)
Bonday pee ma (2 times)
Ta lolo wa ni (2 times)
Na ga pieh ba pieh lo (2 times)
Ke a mugbi a mu ke hin (2 times)

Leader then does a dance or posture and others imitate. In this game children learn to concentrate.

2. ACHES AND PAINS

Do not pay too much attention to aches and pains. Pay more attention when child is well. This can be a way of getting sympathy or attention.

3. DEPRESSION

A local creole game/ song called “Little Sally Walker” is normally played to help children who are shy. It is a circle game/song where children choose each other in turns to lead. Children sing:

Little Sally Walker sitting in sun, sitting and crying
or someone.
Fly around the papaw tree,
Fly to the east and fly to the west
Fly to the north and choose your best.

During this game the child feels good when he/she is chosen to lead the group. Such games help children overcome their depressed mood.

SONG/MUSIC

Depressed children usually stay by themselves and refuse to socialized with other children. They seem sad and cry easily. These children should be encouraged to listen and sing songs that reconnect them to their past, homes, families and friends they have left behind some where .It also brings out feelings of home sickness.

An example of such a song is:

A mu ya oo, nu mue lo nu yea (2 x)
Kway ji hun beh, nu mue lo nu yea.
Soft music works well with depressed feelings.

ART

Children's artwork represents the mental pictures and perceptions they have of the world. Favourite subjects are people, animal and houses.

- Teachers may ask depressed children to draw their family, home school, village, themselves etc. In these drawings children show their experiences and teacher uses them to start discussions about their traumatic experiences
- Depressed children may also use clay to make puppets

4. AGGRESSION

GAMES

Rough games like Football, wrestling etc. can be used to help aggressive children express their feelings physically.

Sports of all forms can be encouraged. Athletics competitions and among aggressive children also helps them express frustrations verbally.

MUSIC, MOVEMENT/DANCE

Have children perform cultural dances. E. g. A local Creole dance song called "Sembem" is characterised by shaking the hips and beating the chest violently. Song:

Na pas abin dae pas
Ah yeri den day cry
Ah ask wau tin do
Densa na salami die
E die Congo tong
Den berr am Sembem
Sembem Sembem

5. FEARS AND ANXIETIES

Group discussions and story telling can help children find comfort in knowing that other children have similar fears.

Reassurance and emotional support is the best you can give the anxious child.

6. CLINGING

Try not to be apart from child for a long period of time. Sleep with child and then gradually make her sleep alone if you are a parent. For teachers, ask children to do colour drawing, play and other enjoyable activities. In drawing, ask child to draw family members and help them talk about the pictures.

7. BEDWETTING

- Try to find reasons behind bedwetting.
- Reassure child and never scold or punish
- Reduce Fluid intake
- Allow frequent visits to the Bathroom
- Allow child to talk about sources of upset.

- Explain to class that wetting is normal and that it can happen to any child. Be sure to stop any attempts on part of students to make fun of or embarrass those who wet-bed.

IMPORTANCE OF PLAY

Play is to children as work is to adults, it is a vital and necessary part of a healthy child's life. One tragic consequence of violent childhood trauma is that it often impedes a Child's ability to play. At this time, play takes an even greater importance and can be used to bring a child back to emotional, social and spiritual health. Play services a dual function, it helps children learn about "reality" by allowing them to experiment with their physical environment and it also provides an escape from "reality" allowing them to create a space of their own design that helps them integrate the information that comes to them from the environment and process the emotions that are provoked by that environment. Play reflects a child's subjective inner World. In play children can express ideas and feelings for which they have no words.

This is especially true for young children, or children with poor verbal skills. In play Children can move from passivity to activity in response to their life experiences; play allows Children to exert some control over their lives.

The following example clearly shows how Children use play to process difficult, confusing, emotions and express them.

At the stream where children fetch drinking water in a small village in Pujehun, the children played funeral almost every week. They would wrap a stick with white clothing or take turns in wrapping themselves like a body ready for burial in the predominantly Muslim culture. They will take roles of Imam or Preacher, Family members, mourners etc. and will weep and cry out for the person who died.

These Children are living in the war front where funerals are one of the few social activities they attend.