

MODULE 2

What we need to know about child development



Trainer's introduction

This module looks at what it means to be a child and the different development stages children go through up to the age of 18. It explores what children's needs are at these different stages and encourages participants to think about how they might meet these needs.

In this module one of your roles as trainer is to emphasise the value of participants' existing knowledge and experience. In this session build on this know-how and help participants understand how their responsibilities as parents, guardians or carers might change.

Approximate length of module: 2 hours 20 mins

Aims

The aims of the module are to:

- enable participants to explore their understanding of what a child is and how children develop
- improve participants' understanding of children's development and how children's needs differ at each development stage
- help participants think about how to meet their own children's needs more closely by being open with them.

Key learning outcomes

By the end of this session participants will:

- have a better understanding of what a child is and how children develop
- know more about children's development stages and children's changing needs at each stage
- have an improved understanding of how to meet their own children's needs more closely
- recognise that each child is unique: they rarely fit precisely into the stages of development covered in the module, which are given as a general guide only.

Trainer's preparation

Module plan (with suggested times)

- Exploring our understanding of what a child is – **35 minutes**
- Understanding children's development and how children's needs differ at each development stage – **55 minutes**
- Recognising your children's needs and being open with them – **35 minutes**
- Reflection – **15 minutes**



Materials you will need

Overhead/flipchart 1: Outline of Module 2
Overhead/flipchart 2: The law relating to children

Trainer's notes

The trainer's notes at the end of this module (page 25) will give you useful background on child development and will help you bring out learning points during the session and guide you to answer participants' questions.

Trainer's guidance

Introduction

Start the session by saying that you are going to look at the ways children develop as they grow up and how their needs change. Tell the group that with parents and guardians among them, they have a lot of very useful experience to draw upon and share with each other. Explain that by the end of the session, they will be able to use all the contributions that participants make and the new information the module will give them. They will feel more confident about dealing with children's needs and the problems and difficulties that children face.

Go through the topics to be covered in the module and how it is structured.

Overhead/flipchart 1: Outline of Module 2

Please use the list in the module plan on page 19, but without the suggested times.

Exploring our understanding of what a child is

Activity 1 Looking at participants' understanding of what a child is

Suggested time: 35 minutes

Explain that the aim of the activity is to explore participants' understanding of what a child is. This activity will draw on their own experience.

1. Start with a brainstorm in the whole group on the word 'child'. Write this word on a flipchart and ask participants to call out thoughts, words and phrases that come to mind. Write all responses on the flipchart. Make sure you include everyone. Participants can say more than one thing. Allow about five minutes for this.
2. Go through what is on the flipchart. Point out that some of the differences between what the participants have said might be because they are thinking of children at different ages. For instance, the words we associate with a baby will be very different from those associated with a child of 6 or 16 years.
3. Bring out the following points. Explain that as parents, guardians and carers they are concerned about the safety and protection of all their children. How they approach difficult topics such as HIV will be different depending on the age of the child and the child's ability to understand. Say that HIV makes it necessary to talk with children, including the very young, about complex and serious issues that you may not normally discuss with them. These might be issues to do with sex, serious illness or death. Subjects like these need to be handled very carefully in a way the child can understand and begin to accept.

Spend about 10 minutes on this. End by summarising that the group has shown that how we think about children depends upon their age and stage of development.

Follow up this activity by showing participants what the legal definition of a child is in their country. Before the course begins, make sure that you have prepared an overhead/flipchart like the one below, adapted to the law of the country in which you are working.

NACWOLA's *Guide to legal information for parents living with HIV/AIDS in Uganda* provides helpful information – see page 123, Appendix 1: Key course materials for more details.

Overhead/flipchart 2: The law relating to children

This is an example from Uganda that you can adapt – replace the words in brackets with the relevant information for the country in which you are working.

Under the law of [Uganda] a child is a boy or girl from birth up to the age of [18].

It is not legally permitted for anyone to have sex with a child [under 18], and a child [under 18] cannot be legally married.

Go through the points of the law carefully and, taking around 15 minutes, facilitate a group discussion on the topic. Point out that there are usually important differences between the laws of the country and local customs and practices among different tribes and clans. For example, in some areas female children may be promised in marriage or married at a much younger age than the official law recognises. Ask the group about local beliefs and practices relating to sexual activity, marriage and childbearing. Note also that teenagers sometimes become pregnant. This creates new relationships for the young person and changes the way parents interact with their children.

This discussion may bring up sensitive issues and opinions that participants might not agree on. You may need to remind participants of the group agreement and that they need to listen without judging the person speaking. If necessary, they may challenge the view, but not the person.

Tell the group that when parents and carers are talking with, or making plans for, their children, it is very important for them to be clear with the child which laws or practices affect them.

Finally, ask participants if they have any comments or questions.

Understanding children's development and how children's needs differ at each development stage

Please make sure you have read the trainer's notes (page 25) before you tackle this key topic. It will help you facilitate the discussion and add to what participants already know.

Introduce this topic by explaining that the group will build on the first activity by looking more closely at children at different ages or stages of development. By sharing what the group knows and adding to it, participants will have a better awareness of how children's needs differ at different ages. One of your roles as trainer is to build the confidence of parents and guardians.

Activity 2 Looking at children's stages of development

Suggested time: 55 minutes

Explain that the aim of this activity is to help participants look back at their own feelings and levels of understanding as a child, and how these changed as they grew up, so that they can try to imagine how children – their own and those of others – feel now.

1. Divide the group into three smaller groups and explain that each will consider children of a different age group: 0-6; 7-12; and 13-18. Ask participants to decide which group is most relevant to them based on their children's ages. Make sure that each group includes someone who can write the main discussion points on flipchart paper.

2. Ask the groups to take 15 minutes to think about the behaviour and understanding they expect from children in their given age group. Ask participants to think of themselves as children at those ages and about how their own children behave. Acknowledge that the age ranges are very broad and there will be great differences in expected behaviour within. Nonetheless, ask the groups to try to identify:

- the main characteristics of children in that age group
- the key issues for parents who need to impart something of importance to children in that age group.

Ask the groups to record the main characteristics and key points on the flipchart paper, before a representative feeds back to the whole group.

3. Give each group five minutes to feed back.

4. Allow another five minutes for whole group comments and discussion. Introduce the idea that things will be different in an unsettled and uncertain environment, and discuss how this may affect the behaviour of children.

This is a potentially emotional activity. As trainer you need to be aware that some parents and carers may find it difficult to talk and think about their children if they do not expect to be alive to share these development stages with them. Some parents and carers may have children who are living with HIV and might have strong feelings about how they may or may not develop. These participants might feel that parents with HIV-negative children cannot fully understand what they are going through. Others may have children who have already died.

For these reasons it is important to remain sensitive to how participants are reacting. Be especially sensitive when you ask people to contribute. Do not force anyone to speak. Participants may not be able to speak, but they may wish to listen. Take a break for a few minutes if participants become upset.

We recommend you summarise the behaviours and differences between the age groups in the following presentation. Make sure you have read the trainer's notes (page 25) thoroughly in your preparation for the module. If possible, relate relevant points back to what the group representatives have said. Be ready to answer questions.

Presentation

Allow 15 minutes for this. Before you start, say that the boundaries between the different stages are very flexible. They are given for broad guidance only. Each child is unique and development along this scale varies according to the child, and social and cultural influences. Children might be intellectually and physically mature, but emotionally young for their years.

0-6 years

In the first year of life a baby's world revolves around the loving care of its mother (or someone else who becomes a consistent primary carer).

From one to three years, a toddler begins to explore its surroundings and widen its relationships to include other very familiar figures such as its father or grandmother, brothers and sisters. The toddler begins to develop a sense of independence.

From birth to three years there is very little understanding of time, or the fact that people who go away might or might not come back.

Between the age of four and six years, intellectual, physical and social skills develop rapidly. These children tend to play with other children. Independence increases and they begin to make sense of the world.

Children at this stage increasingly understand rules of behaviour and begin to understand the concept of time.

This age group tends to rely on the family, particularly the primary carer, for security. Explain gently that children can thrive with anyone who provides consistent loving care, someone they can trust and come back to. A person other than the birth mother can also enable the child to develop into a well-balanced, happy young adult.

7-12 years

This is a stage where development is generally not as fast as in the other age ranges described here.

Children continue to build their intellectual, physical and social skills. This is a time for improving their competence in each of these areas.

Children begin to have much wider contact with people outside the family, building links in the community and school. Independence increases.

At this stage adults other than the parents become more influential in the children's lives: for example, teachers or people they admire.

Children of the same age can be a major source of self-esteem.

Children at this age can have a basic understanding of time, illness and death.

13-18 years

This is a stage where development speeds up again.

The changes of puberty often bring a sense of uncertainty about what type of adult they might be.

Teenagers often push away from their family and authority figures as they test their independence.

It is well known that this can be a difficult time for parents and carers: the young person can reject ideas and advice at one moment, and be very calm and accepting the next.

Some teenagers find it difficult to concentrate. Some might be anxious about the future and find it hard to plan.

It is important for parents and carers to be firm and predictable during this period.

When parents and carers have something important to say, they should choose their time carefully, looking for a time when the teenager is going through a calm and receptive period.

Be ready to answer questions at the end of your presentation. Allow five minutes for this.

Recognising your children's needs and being open with them

Introduce the next activity. Explain that now the group has covered some of the characteristics of children at different development stages, it is important to consider how to recognise their needs. One of the ways to do this is by being open with them.

Activity 3 Exploring the impact that keeping secrets has on children

Suggested time: 35 minutes

Explain that the aim of this activity is to consider the possible impacts that keeping secrets or withholding information might have on children.

1. Explain that this is a whole group exercise. Ask participants to reflect on their childhood to remember if changes happened in their family that they were aware of, but were not told about by their parents and carers. Encourage them to ask themselves:

- How did I feel about it at the time?
- How do I feel about it now?
- What does this teach me about being parents and carers?
- What support would I have liked at the time?

Allow five minutes for this.

2. Next ask if anyone would like to share any of these experiences and their feelings about them, or what they have learned from them. Please note this is only appropriate if participants choose to do so. Otherwise, individual reflection is enough. If anyone volunteers, give them five minutes to speak.

3. Now ask participants to take five minutes and consider individually what it would feel like to be one of their own children who is worried about his or her parent's health.

4. Divide participants into three smaller groups. Give them five minutes to discuss the signs that show a child is ready or anxious to receive more information. Then choose someone from each group to summarise the main signs their group has identified. When all groups have contributed (taking no more than 10 minutes in total) make sure the following points have been brought out. Signs that a child is ready for information include:

- asking questions
- sleeping badly and having nightmares
- withdrawing from other people into their own world.

5. Close the activity by telling participants that Module 5 deals with disclosing HIV status to children and looks at these issues in more detail.

Reflection

Activity 4 Reflecting on the module and sharing key learning points

Suggested time: 15 minutes

Explain that the aim of this activity is to share their thoughts on the module and what they have learned.

1. Ask the group to work in pairs and share with each other:

- what they thought about the content of the session
- what ideas or thoughts they are taking away from it
- how they feel about the structure of the day
- whether they felt included and able to take part.

Allow five minutes for this.

2. End the session by asking three or four participants to share their views on the module and what they have learned. Ask for suggestions to improve the module if people are critical. Allow five to 10 minutes for this.

Close the module by thanking the group for their hard work and say that you are looking forward to working with them on the next module.

MODULE 2 – Trainer's Notes

In preparing for Module 2, you will first need to familiarise yourself with the broad **stages of child development**. Please refer to the information in the presentation on pages 22-23.

These notes provide a general introduction to the significance of separation and loss, and how they may affect children at different stages of development.

The significance of separation and loss

Separation and loss are distressing and may affect how children develop emotionally. Research across cultures shows that separation and loss are likely to be most distressing for children under six and particularly in the 0-3 age group. There are two peak phases of sensitivity in this age range. These are at six to seven months, when the baby's attachments have just developed, and between 12 and 18 months, as they begin to explore their surroundings and rely on a loving and secure base (generally the mother) to return to.

If the mother is no longer there, young children, who have limited understanding of language, may believe their mother no longer loves them and that they are somehow to blame for her disappearance. It is essential to try to make up for this lack of understanding by giving the child a photograph, a tape recording of the mother's voice or an article of her clothing to keep the child's memory alive.

The following points are generally true for children at all stages of development.

Try to bring out these points in discussion during the module:

- The more stable and less tense the relationship is before separation or loss, the better the child may cope. However, this should not be confused with never letting the child out of your sight. Separation and loss in these circumstances will be even more traumatic.
- There is good evidence that well-prepared short trial separations help the child cope with later separation and loss, and enable the child to become more self-sufficient.
- If a child has multiple attachments, for example, to a carer such as an aunt, grandmother or father as well as the mother, this can help to make the total absence of the mother less stressful. This is particularly true if the child stays in the home environment or other setting she or he knows well.

Research also shows that:

- Losing a primary carer in childhood may not necessarily have lasting effects on the person. Individuals can show resilience to adverse events and circumstances.
- Healthy emotional development is more likely when parents have prepared well to arrange lasting, loving care, and strengthened their own relationships with their children, so that they feel confident they were loved before they experience loss.