

MODULE 8

Involving children in planning for their futures



Trainer's introduction

This module helps participants explore how to actively involve their children in planning their futures. The activities encourage participants to try to put themselves in the place of children of different ages, from young children to teenagers. It helps the group improve their awareness of children's changing needs and desires at different ages, and learn how adults and children can work together. The session is relevant to parents living with HIV as well as future guardians and carers, who will also need to understand and talk with children at some stage about future plans.

Approximate length of module 2 hours 30 minutes

Aims

The aims of this module are to:

- help participants understand the viewpoints of children of different ages
- show that children base their decisions on different factors from adults, and this will affect how to involve them in planning
- enable parents and carers to involve children in planning for their futures.

Key learning outcomes

By the end of this session participants will:

- have a greater understanding of children's viewpoints at different ages
- understand that children base their decisions on different factors from adults and how this might affect involving them in planning
- understand that children are likely to focus on their immediate needs rather than think far into the future
- recognise that all children have something important to contribute if they can be involved appropriately
- be aware that as adults, parents and carers keep the responsibility to decide which wishes and requests from children are reasonable and which decisions they should take themselves.

Trainer's preparation

Module plan (with suggested times)

- Understanding children's viewpoints at different ages – **35 minutes**
- Looking at how children use different factors from adults to make decisions – **50 minutes**
- Dealing with difficulties when planning with children – **45 minutes**
- Reflection – **10 minutes**



Materials you will need

Activity cards you prepared for Module 7
 Overhead/flipchart 1: Outline of Module 8
 Handout 1: Being prepared to deal with difficulties when planning with children

Trainer's guidance

Introduction

Introduce the module by explaining that its purpose is to help participants involve children appropriately in planning for their futures. Go through the topics to be covered in the module and how it is structured.

Overhead/flipchart 1: Outline of Module 8

Please use the list in the module plan on page 73, but without the suggested times.

Remind the group that together you looked at stages of child development and children's changing characteristics and needs in Module 2. You also covered ways to communicate effectively with children of different ages in Module 4. Briefly remind the group of key points from those sessions. You will need to read modules 2 and 4 again in preparation for this module, so that this information is fresh in your mind.

Explain that young children and teenagers are usually able to participate in planning their futures. Even very young children between four and six years will be able to express likes and dislikes. From these ages to 18, children and teenagers may play an increasing part in working with parents or carers to plan what will happen to them. How much they take part will depend on their age and maturity, as well as the quality of the relationship. It is important to stress that each child is individual and different, and that their specific needs and wishes must be considered.

Ask parents to keep in mind the ages and different needs of their own children. They should also think about what does and does not work when they speak to their children about important things.

Understanding the viewpoints of children of different ages

Explain that it is important for participants, whether they are parents or not, to try to put themselves in the place of a child. They can use what they know about children to try to see things from their viewpoint. This will help them understand a child's contributions and think of ways to empower them to take part in planning for the future.

Activity 1 – Seeing things from a child's viewpoint

Suggested time: 35 minutes

Explain that the aim of this exercise is to encourage participants to put themselves in the place of children of different ages, to try to understand a child's viewpoint.

1. Tell the group they are going to try to put themselves in the place of a child of a particular age. Divide participants into three small groups. Give each group a different age: 6, 10 or 14.
2. Ask each group to pretend that they are children of the age they have been given and that they have to go to the local shop to buy lunch for a school trip. Tell them how much money they have to do this. As trainer, adapt this exercise to make it relevant to the

local context and the group you are working with. Work out what amount of money is appropriate locally. You will need to prepare this before the module.

3. Give each group 10 minutes to make a list of what they might buy at the shop. Ask them to choose one person to feed back to the larger group.
4. Next bring everyone back to the whole group. Give each group representative two minutes to read out their list.
5. Discuss the differences between the lists and what they suggest. Bring out the fact that the younger children or more immature older children are more likely to think about what they want right now, rather than what might be good for them. Generally, they do not think about planning for the future. For example, young children might buy sweet things, while older children might hold back some of the money to spend on something else.

Emphasise that every child is different and participants need to take the likes and dislikes of each child into account when making a decision about their future. Allow 10 minutes for discussion and summary.

Looking at how children use different factors from adults to make decisions

Activity 2 Using role-play to explore how children make decisions

Suggested time: 50 minutes

Explain that the aim of this activity is to help participants explore how children choose factors that make sense to them to make decisions about their future. For this activity you need the cards you made for Module 7 (see page 71).

Children can easily decide what food they like or which games they want to play. However, it might be more difficult for both younger and older children to think about their future and their future needs. So it is important for parents and carers to consider how to decide which of the children's wishes and requests are reasonable and which decisions they should take as parents.

1. Ask participants to form small groups. Say that you are going to ask them to prioritise the cards as they did in the previous module, but this time they will do so while imagining that they are seven years old. Give participants 10 minutes to do this.
2. Next, give the group 10 minutes to:
 - discuss the differences between how they graded the cards as seven-year-olds and how they graded the cards as adults in the last module
 - consider how the list might be sorted if they made the decisions as an adult together with their seven-year-old. What points of agreement and disagreement might there be?
 - be ready to report back to the whole group.
3. Ask the groups to volunteer brief feedback to everyone. Allow five minutes for discussion. Make sure participants pay attention to some of the things that are important to a seven-year-old. Ask them to think about how they could achieve a balance between what is important to the child and what can be done to meet their wishes, and an adult's understanding of the realities of the situation and what needs to be done.
4. Repeat the exercise from the viewpoint of a 16-year-old. Allow another 25 minutes for this.

Dealing with difficulties when planning with children

Activity 3 Looking at ways to deal with difficulties when planning with children

Suggested time: 45 minutes

Explain that the aim of this activity is to consider how to deal constructively with the difficulties and challenges that might arise when planning with children and teenagers of different ages.

1. Ask participants to divide themselves into groups of three or four, and take 10 minutes to consider what difficulties they expect to face when they try to plan future care with children. Be aware that participants living with HIV might raise different issues from other group members, because they might foresee planning sessions affected by shared sadness and other emotions. Ask the groups to choose a representative to be ready to feed back the main points of their discussion.
2. Ask each small group to take two minutes to feed back to the whole group. Record their points on a flipchart.
3. Ask the whole group to discuss:
 - what might help overcome the difficulties and challenges in the way parents and carers understand and communicate with children
 - what friends, family and other people could do to help with the difficulties identified
 - possible sources of support for parents.

Record responses on the flipchart. Take five minutes to summarise the discussion.

4. Go through the points below, which also form Handout 1 (see page 78). Allow 20 minutes for this part of the activity. Say that the points draw on learning from earlier modules.

Being prepared to deal with difficulties when planning with children

- Choose a time when the child is calm and responsive and you will not be interrupted.
- Know what point of planning you want to discuss and that it is a realistic possibility. Do not try to cover too much at once.
- Actively listen and reflect back the main points. Make sure the child knows you are taking in what she or he says, and what she or he thinks is important.
- Be honest. Do not make promises you cannot keep. Be prepared to say gently that a wish is not realistic, giving a reason. Be ready to say: "I can't give you an answer right now, but we'll talk again when I find out what is possible."
- Try to fulfill the child's wishes whenever possible. Be ready to explain why you need to do something differently from what the child suggests.
- Offer choices of what is possible to younger children and younger teenagers. Try not to ask them open-ended questions such as: "Who would you like to live with?"
- Older and more mature teenagers are often frustrated, because they think parents and carers continue to treat them like children and do not give them responsibility. They might have a clear idea of who they get on with and what they want to do. With teenagers like this you can ask open-ended questions that show that you are ready to trust them. But be careful, because you are talking about emotional concerns and teenagers may begin to feel overwhelmed as the discussion continues.
- Be ready to comfort children of any age if they become distressed.
- If a child of any age gets angry or confrontational, try not to get angry yourself. If possible, try not to interrupt and do not raise your voice. Frustration comes partly out of not feeling heard, so let the child say what she or he wants to say. Speak calmly and try to explain your view. Be ready to stop and say that you both need to take time to think, and that you will talk at another time.

- Some children might find it helpful to talk to someone you both respect and trust, either on their own or with you. This can defuse anger and allow the child to say difficult things she or he might otherwise avoid saying.
- Remember to explore all the possible local options for support to help plan and to provide future support for your children. These include friends and family, the local church, teachers, community groups and AIDS support groups.
- Finally, remember that as a parent and carer you have to make the final decision. If you are a parent living with HIV, you are responsible for arranging a secure plan for the future of your child. If you are a guardian or carer, you will be responsible for looking after the child and carrying out the plans her or his parent(s) made, as well as making other decisions that arise from everyday life.

After you have finished presenting these points, give Handout 1 to each participant.

You could close this activity by reading out the following words, from a lady who involved her children in planning for the future:

“Choice for the caretaker was made together with my first-born, based on the existing good relationship between my family and the person she selected.”

Reflection

Activity 4 Reflecting on the module

Suggested time: 10 minutes

Explain that the aim of this activity is to help participants reflect on what they have done in this module and to share key learning points with each other.

1. Ask the group to work in pairs and talk about what they have learned from this module. What ideas or thoughts are they are taking from it? Give them five minutes to do this.
2. End the activity with three or four participants sharing what they have learned. Allow five minutes for this.

Close the module by saying you hope the participants feel better prepared to start talking to children about planning their futures. Thank the group and say you are looking forward to working with them on the next module.



Handout 1

Being prepared to deal with difficulties when planning with children

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- Know what point of planning you want to discuss and that it is a realistic possibility. Do not try to cover too much at once.
- Actively listen and reflect back the main points. Make sure the child knows you are taking in what she or he says, and what she or he thinks is important.
- Be honest. Do not make promises you cannot keep. Be prepared to say gently that a wish is not realistic, giving a reason. Be ready to say: "I can't give you an answer right now, but we'll talk again when I find out what is possible."
- Try to fulfill the child's wishes whenever possible. Be ready to explain why you need to do something differently from what the child suggests.
- Offer choices of what is possible to younger children and younger teenagers. Try not to ask them open-ended questions such as: "Who would you like to live with?"
- Older and more mature teenagers are often frustrated, because they think parents and carers continue to treat them like children and do not give them responsibility. They might have a clear idea of who they get on with and what they want to do. With teenagers like this you can ask open-ended questions and show that you are ready to trust them. But be careful, because you are talking about emotional concerns and teenagers may begin to feel overwhelmed as the discussion continues.
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- Some children might find it helpful to talk to someone you both respect and trust, either on their own or with you. This can defuse anger and allow the child to say difficult things she or he might otherwise avoid saying.
- Remember to explore all the possible local options for support to help plan and to provide future support for your children. These include friends and family, the local church, teachers, community groups and AIDS support groups.
- Finally, remember that as a parent and carer you have to make the final decision. If you are a parent living with HIV, you are responsible for arranging a secure plan for the future of your child. If you are a guardian or carer, you will be responsible for looking after the child and carrying out the plans her or his parent(s) made, as well as making other decisions that arise from everyday life.