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

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“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
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MODULE 2: INTRODUCTION TO CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNICATION

PROPOSED DURATION: 2 hours 15 minutes

AGENDA

❖ PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION ON CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNICATION

❖ 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 COMMUNICATION

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social</th>
<th>Learning to make good relationships</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>Growing and maturing, developing coordination and strength</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual</td>
<td>Thinking and learning to link actions to words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Learning to talk and interact with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td>Developing customs and beliefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>Learning to understand feelings and emotions and name them</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>0-3 years</th>
<th>3-5 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Eye contact</td>
<td>- Communicating simple facts and feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Turn taking and sharing</td>
<td>- Simple story telling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- ‘babbling’ noises (pre-linguistic, i.e. Mama, dada, baba)</td>
<td>- Communicate through drawing, play and stories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- simple words and sentences</td>
<td>- Increased understanding of social aspects of speech</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6-12 years</th>
<th>13-18 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Increased ability to relate to friends and others</td>
<td>- Developing stronger sense of self-identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- More highly development language and communication skills</td>
<td>- Interest in emotional independence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Increased cultural communication awareness</td>
<td>- Highly developed intellectual skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Higher risk threshold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Hormonal changes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Using the child in the centre as the starting point, add to this diagram any factors that you think could affect development and communication.
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:**
  - Providing a Secure Base, Gillian Schofield and Mary Beek, University of East Anglia, Norwich, UK [http://www.uea.ac.uk/providingasecurebase/resources](http://www.uea.ac.uk/providingasecurebase/resources)

**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 al 1990)

○ Children who lack resilience:
  ● Succumb to or do not recover from adversities

○ Source and further information:

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Developmental, personal or social factor</th>
<th>Cultural norms</th>
<th>Communication disability</th>
<th>Has suffered severe trauma</th>
<th>Low self-esteem</th>
<th>High self-esteem</th>
<th>High resilience</th>
<th>Physical disability</th>
<th>Insecure attachment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication behaviour</th>
<th>Lack of eye contact</th>
<th>Shouting and swearing</th>
<th>Providing conflicting information</th>
<th>Silence</th>
<th>Joking and laughing, dismissive of seriousness of situation</th>
<th>Doesn’t sit still</th>
<th>Extremely communicative</th>
<th>Straightforward, unemotional communication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How this could be misinterpreted</th>
<th>Disinterest</th>
<th>Disrespect</th>
<th>The child is not traumatised</th>
<th>Lying</th>
<th>Incapable of communicating</th>
<th>The child has nothing to say</th>
<th>The child isn’t taking the process seriously</th>
<th>The child is completely confident and does not need support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

| 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

- Name
- Age
- Gender
- 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?

- 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?

- 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.

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.

Children and young person’s voices
Theories of Development

There are many different theories about how children 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

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

### Psychoanalytic theories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Psychoanalytic theories</th>
<th>Sigmund Freud (1856 – 1939)</th>
<th>3 stages of developing personality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Erik Erikson (1902 – 1994)</td>
<td>8 stages of psychosocial development</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attachment theory (social and emotional and behavioural development)</th>
<th>John Bowlby – (1907 – 1990)</th>
<th>Children need emotional attachments to key adults</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Donald Winnicott (1896 – 1971)</td>
<td>Separation anxiety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The importance of mother and child interactions in development. How deprivation can impact on development. A baby cannot exist in isolation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 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/](http://www.ican.org.uk/)
- Talking Point (children’s communication charity) - [http://www.talkingpoint.org.uk/](http://www.talkingpoint.org.uk/)
- Royal College of Speech and language therapists - [http://www.rcslt.org/docs/free-pub/helpyourchildtotalk.pdf](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](http://www.youngminds.org.uk)
- Five to Thrive (website with resources for positive parenting and neuroscience) - [http://www.fivetothrive.org.uk/](http://www.fivetothrive.org.uk/)