

EXERCISES FOR CHILDREN

“ A woman came to me with her 10-year-old niece whom she had been taking care of since her sister died 6 months ago. The girl had been very withdrawn and hardly spoke to anyone. Some of the other relatives claimed that she was rude and stubborn. The teacher at school said she would not participate in the class. I asked the woman to stay but to sit quietly in the corner of the room, while I spoke to the child. I gave the girl some crayons and asked if she could draw a picture of how she was feeling. She drew a big box, colored in brown. She said it was her mother’s coffin and that she missed her mother so much.

In the corner, I saw that the Auntie had tears in her eyes. She said that she too missed her sister. She came and hugged the girl. The girl was weeping. I suggested that she tries to talk to her niece about her mother whenever she can. She said she did not know that the girl could be so affected.”

Child Counselor, Zambia

These exercises were designed to use with children by people who are working with children in a range of settings. They would be particularly suited to teachers, social workers and caregivers. The exercises are also suitable for use in a support group for guardians and orphans together. We hope that by doing the exercises with children, or observing them, it may help guardians to better understand the needs, wishes, dreams and fears of their orphans.

AIDS has had a huge impact on children in Africa and stigma is an extra burden for them to bear alongside many hardships: caring for sick parents, coping with death, orphanhood, rejection, fear, loneliness.

From the research we learned that many orphans had no chance to talk about fears and anxieties, grief and loss, often because of stigma. They were staying in families where they had little contact with adults or were living on the streets and shunned by most people.

However many children find ways of coping and get tremendous strength and support from friends and siblings. By teaching children about stigma, we hope to build on this.

Several of these exercises have been adapted from The Peace Kit (247 Activities for Primary Schools) by Brenda Stebbing & Paddy Holey-Pacey. UNESCO 2000.

These exercises are designed to give facilitators ideas- they will need to be adapted to suit different age groups, abilities, literacy, etc.

Some of the topics covered are difficult: please ensure they are tackled with thoughtfulness and compassion.

It may be important for facilitators to work with another trainer so that you can support each other and discuss any difficulties that you may face in your own experiences of some of the topics. Remember you do not need to do any exercises that you are not comfortable with.

The aim of these exercises is to help children to:

- Express their feelings
- Build self-esteem
- Understand how stigma hurts other children
- Build cooperation and mutual support to fight stigma
- Strengthen compassion and respect towards each other