
Counselling for Caregivers

Unit 4:
Dealing with
Child Abuse Issues



COMMONWEALTH *of* LEARNING

Unit 4: Dealing with Child Abuse Issues

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Unit 4: Dealing with Child Abuse Issues

Introduction

Many children grow up in happy, loving homes, but others are harmed in various ways. Some children are mistreated, or left with no one to look after them. Some adults take advantage of children to have sex with them. Child abuse is especially common among family members. In fact, children are most often abused by adults close to them and who have power and authority over them. This problem is made worse by some cultural and social practices which do not allow children to talk in the presence of elders. This makes it difficult to tell someone they have been abused, so abuse often remains hidden within the family and the community.

Lesson 1 introduces five different kinds of child abuse from which a child may suffer. Lesson 2 discusses how cultural issues may influence and be reflected in how children are treated (or mistreated and abused), and Lesson 3 examines various ways that children may react when subjected to abuse. Lessons 4 and 5 focus on resilient children and helping to build and strengthen resilience. Lessons 6 and 7 talk about ways to help abused children cope and signs that an abused child is not coping well with his or her situation. Lesson 8 discusses ways that you can prevent child abuse in your community. Finally, Lesson 9 lists referral services that can provide help to children in abusive situations.

Objectives

By the end of this unit you should be able to:

1. Identify and describe various forms of child abuse.
2. Identify signs and characteristics of an abused child.
3. Explain the various coping strategies employed by survivors of abuse.
4. Develop effective intervention programmes for abused children.
5. Outline the referral system available for abused children in your community.

Lesson One



Forms of Child Abuse

Activity 1

Mainza is a 13-year-old girl whose parents died three years ago. She lives with her aunt in Monze village. She has two brothers aged 15 and 10 and one 6-year-old sister. The 15-year-old brother and aunt go out all day to fetch food while the younger brother goes to school, leaving Mainza to look after her younger sister. One day, her aunt comes back and finds out that Mainza has eaten the only food she had left for supper. The aunt is so angry that she dips Mainza’s right hand in boiling water. This is not the first time Mainza has suffered at the hands of her aunt. She has had beatings before that ended in her being admitted to the nearby health centre. Furthermore, the aunt often shouts at Mainza and blames her for everything wrong in the home—even for mistakes that she has not made.

What are some of the ways that Mainza is being mistreated (abused) in her aunt’s home?

What are some of the thoughts and feelings that Mainza might have about her situation? How might she be feeling about herself, for example?

What are some of the thoughts and feelings that you had as you read Mainza’s story?



There are many forms of child abuse. Mainza suffers physically from burning and beating. She also suffers emotionally. Her aunt's treatment makes her think that she is worthless and unloved. The abuse she endures in her childhood may affect her whole life.

It is difficult for us to read or think about children being harmed in this way but, as adults, we have a responsibility to help in whatever way we can.

Some of the many forms child abuse can take are shown in Mainza's story. Children may be abused sexually, emotionally, physically, or they may be neglected.



Activity 2

What are some ways that children are abused in your community?



Let us now look at different types of abuse and how each one affects children. We will also explore ways that you can help children like Mainza cope.

1. Sexual Abuse

Of all forms of abuse, child sexual abuse is perhaps the most difficult one for people to face. There are a number of reasons for this, some of which are shown in Chanda's story on the following page.



Activity 3

Chanda is a married woman. She has a 13-year-old daughter, Anita, from a previous marriage. One day Chanda left her home and went to visit a friend. While she was away, her husband raped Anita, who became pregnant. Anita told Chanda that she was pregnant and Chanda was so annoyed she beat Anita in the presence of her husband until Anita told her that her husband had done it. The husband accepted responsibility and asked for forgiveness and Chanda forgave him. Later on, Chanda left her ten-year-old daughter asleep while she went to see a doctor. Her husband, this time, raped the younger daughter. Chanda came back, found her having a bath, and asked her why she was bathing so early in the morning. Her daughter told her what had happened and said that her husband said, "If you tell anybody I will beat you."

In Chanda's story what type of abuse did her children suffer?



Child sexual abuse occurs when adults or older persons use a child for their sexual pleasure.

Adults often do not want to talk or think about child sexual abuse because sex is considered to be something secret and taboo, not to be talked about. This view of not talking about sex has left children unprotected and adults feeling helpless. Unfortunately, children may be sexually abused by anyone—because someone is a father, uncle, aunt, cousin, niece, priest, or teacher does not mean they are incapable of sexually abusing children. There are several things that make children especially vulnerable to sexual abuse. Traditionally, children are taught to respect and obey elders and other adults. This is one reason why children do not say "no" to an adult. In addition, children are dependent on adults for many things including love, affection, food and other basic needs.

In Chanda's story we learn how in some cultures, traditions tend to encourage child sexual abuse. Women are supposed to obey their hus-

bands in all things. Children are not allowed to answer back or express opposing views to elders, which would be seen as a challenge and could lead to punishment. In some rural areas of Africa, countries such as Kenya, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, women are not allowed to own land or have any possessions in their name. This view of women may exist even in urban areas where women's property is seen as belonging to their husbands who have control of everything. This leaves a woman depending on her husband for financial support and a woman who has no way of supporting herself would find it difficult to oppose her husband.

In the story, Chanda was more concerned about her husband and saving her marriage than she was about her children's pain and suffering. She chose to forgive him instead of taking action against him. Chanda was also afraid of what the community would say. The situation would be seen as shameful. She also did not want to be seen as going against everyone's expectations. Her culture demands that she remain committed to the marriage. If she spoke up against her husband, some members of the community would think of her as a bad wife who cannot keep "family issues" private.



Activity 4

Child sexual abuse has many forms. Can you think of any?



Sexual abuse can be:

- Sexual intercourse or rape.
- Incest or sex within families (father with daughter, mother with son, sister with brother, uncle, cousin, or niece, etc.).
- Touching a child's private parts.

- Showing pictures of a sexual nature to a child that he/she does not want to see.
- The adult showing his/her private parts to the child.
- Letting the child watch or hear an act of sexual intercourse.
- Forced early marriages.
- Child prostitution (where children are paid to have sex).



Activity 5

How will you know that a child has been sexually abused?



A caregiver may suspect that a child has been sexually abused from observing the following signs and types of behaviour.

Curiosity behaviour

- Child asks almost endless questions on topics related to sex.
- Knows too much about sex for age and stage of development.

Self-exploration

- Self-stimulates herself/himself publicly.
- Sexually stimulates other people.
- Causes harm to own genitals, rectum.
- Has adult arousal qualities in response to self-stimulating behaviour.

Behaviour with others

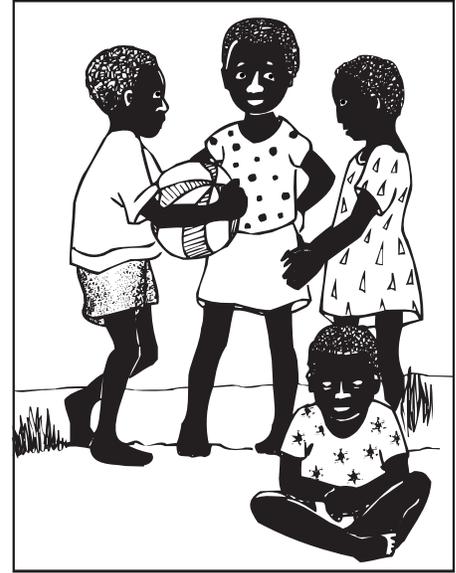
- Forces or bullies other children to engage in sexual behaviour.
- Demands to see the genitals of other children or adults.
- Forces other children to touch genitals.
- Dramatic play consists mainly of sad, angry, or aggressive behaviour.

Bathroom/toilet behaviour

- Continuously smears faeces on genitals.
- Continuously urinates in inappropriate places.
- Does not allow others privacy in the bathroom or bedroom.

Relationships

- Imitates adult sexual behaviour.
- Physical contact with others causes anxiety.
- Talks about sex with adults, including strangers.

*Other signs include the following*

- Generalised fear and mistrust of adults.
- Child feels sad.
- Child usually refuses to be touched by adults.
- Child shows destructive behaviour such as pulling out her own hair or biting himself or herself.
- Child starts avoiding the company of others.
- Child develops eating problems such as refusing to eat or eating more than usual.
- Child may have difficulties in getting sleep, sleep too much, or have bad dreams and wake up in the middle of the night crying.
- Child may change behaviour; for example, a normally confident and outgoing child becomes shy and withdrawn or a normally shy, quiet child becomes aggressive and goes out looking for trouble.
- Child might tend to return to earlier childish behaviour such as wetting the bed at night or sucking a thumb.
- Child develops a habit of running away from home, school, or place of care.
- Child may want to kill herself (common among teenage girls).
- Child may hurt or avoid certain types of individuals; for example, men with certain characteristics such as facial hair.

- Child may hate own genitals and/or demand privacy in an aggressive manner.
- Child may sexualise all relationships (think of all relationships in a sexual manner).
- Child might hate being his/her own gender.
- Child may continuously use inappropriate language or socially unacceptable slang.

It is important for you to note that these signs are only a guide. You cannot assume that one or several of these types of behaviour always mean that a child is being sexually abused.

Furthermore, it is important to realise that some types of sexual behaviour are normal for children at certain ages. For example, toddlers and preschoolers often explore their own bodies or touch their own genitals to soothe themselves. They are curious about other people’s bodies, and may show their genitals to others. However, if children of this age show more extreme behaviour such as continuously self-stimulating, simulating sexual activity with their clothes off, or if they seem to know too much about sexuality for their age and stage of development, sexual abuse is a possibility.



Activity 6

What are some of the results of child sexual abuse?



Child sexual abuse has serious consequences. A child who has been sexually abused may:

- Contract sexually-transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS.
- Have an unwanted pregnancy.
- Be afraid of the opposite sex.
- Have too much interest in sex or become prostitutes.
- Have poor sexual relationships when they grow up.



- Become sexual abusers themselves.
- Develop low self-esteem.
- Become overprotective of their own children or fail to show enough love.

Activity 7

Think of a child in your community that has been sexually abused. What did the child go through? How was the child affected?



Child sexual abuse may remain hidden due to the following:

- The child could have been threatened, bribed, or tricked to keep quiet.
- The child may be too young to talk.
- The child feels so guilty that she is ashamed to tell anyone.
- The child might have tried to tell someone but the person would not listen or believe her (unfortunately this is very common).
- The child may have blocked the sexual abuse out of her mind as a way of dealing with the problem.
- Some cultural and traditional practices make women and children vulnerable to abuse.

2. Physical Abuse

Physical abuse occurs when children are hurt or injured, usually intentionally, by caregivers or other people entrusted to take care of them. It can also occur when a child is given substances such as alcohol or an overdose of medicine to make the child sleep while a couple goes out with friends.



Activity 8

How would you know if a child has been physically abused?



You may have mentioned any of the following:

Bruises

- Bruises on children who are not old enough to hurt themselves while trying to walk.
- Bruises on the backs of legs, the upper arms and chest, neck, head, or genitals.
- Bruises in areas covered by clothing and showing, by their pattern, that a child has been hit with a hand, belt buckle, rope, or cord.
- Choke marks, pinch marks, grab marks, or fingernail scratches.

Fractures

- Fractures in children under the age of one are often caused by abuse.
- Improperly healed fractures and/or many old or new fractures can indicate repeated abuse, especially if the parents or guardians say they didn't know about the injuries.

Head and Internal Injuries

- Head injuries often indicate abuse, especially in infants.
- Abused children may have injuries to their internal organs, such as their spleen, liver, intestines, kidneys, bladder, or pancreas.

Burns

- Burns are difficult to assess because they can occur when a

child falls against a stove or is accidentally put into bath water that is too hot. However, intentional burning also occurs. Pay attention to the explanation that the parent or guardian gives and see if it makes sense given the location and shape of the burn.

- Cigarette burns that occur on the abdomen, genitals, and bottoms of feet are often intentional.

3. Child Labour

In many African countries children are traditionally supposed to do some work for the family such as cooking, collecting firewood, helping to look after younger brothers or sisters, and herding cattle.

The United Nations Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) says that child labour happens when the work given to a child is more than what that child can do considering his/her age and can cause harm to the child. Child labour happens when the child is treated unfairly so as to make money out of him/her. Child labour includes:

- Forcing an underage child to work full time.
- Paying less than an adult gets paid for the same work.
- Putting too much responsibility on a child.
- Forcing a child to work/live on the streets.

Child labour usually causes serious harm to children’s physical, psychological, and mental health.

In Mainza’s story, we see Mainza doing jobs that require too much responsibility for her age. This would be considered child labour.

4. Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse occurs when children are denied the love, security, and company of friends and caring relatives. This happens when children are constantly criticised, belittled, and ignored. They do not receive praise and affection from caregivers or other people entrusted to take care of them. Their possessions or pets may be destroyed. Emotional abuse is different from physical abuse, as there are no phys-

ical injuries or bodily harm. Therefore, caregivers often do not realise or recognise this type of abuse.



Activity 9

How will you know that a child has been emotionally abused?



Your answer may have included different kinds of behaviour. Children that suffer from emotional abuse lack self-confidence. They have feelings of being unworthy, unwanted, and unloved. They may respond to this in one of two ways: They may become aggressive and hostile, with many behavioural problems, or they might turn their anger inward and become depressed, withdrawn, and even consider suicide. They may develop health problems such as headaches, asthma, nervous habits, and sleep disturbances. Children who are emotionally abused usually do not feel free to be in the company of others and may perform poorly at school.

Besides Mianza being physically abused, she is also emotionally abused, as her aunt continues to insult and rebuke her. By keeping her away from school, the aunt prevents her from having normal experiences with children her age.

5. Neglect



Activity 10

How will you know if a child has been neglected?



Neglect occurs when children are not provided with the basic needs of life. For example, not taking a sick child to a clinic when you are able to do so and the clinic is free of charge is considered to be neglect. Denying children meals, shelter, or clothing or leaving them alone for a long period of time are also forms of neglect.

Parents may neglect children because they:

- Lack knowledge of how to look after children.
- Are not able to plan properly for the family's needs.
- Have low self-esteem.
- Were neglected or abused as children.
- Suffer from a mental handicap or illness.
- Drink too much alcohol or are involved with drugs.
- Lack support from their family and community.

Neglect is different from other forms of abuse. Where in other forms of abuse a caregiver does something he/she is not supposed to do, in neglect the caregiver fails to do what he/she is supposed to do.

Signs and Characteristics of Child Neglect

A child who is neglected may:

- Be untidy or dirty.
- Be sickly.
- Look sad and unusually withdrawn from others.
- Perform badly at school.
- Feel out of place among friends and other people.



Usually if one child in a home is being neglected, the others will be too.



Activity 11

Now that you have learned about the various forms of abuse, let us reflect and think through this issue of child abuse. Have you ever known a child who was abused—whether physically, emotionally, or by neglect? How was the child affected?

Have you ever done something to a child that could have been considered abusive? When you think about that now, why do you think you did that? What might you have done differently?

How might your personal experiences affect the way you deal with a child who is abused?

How might your personal experiences affect the way you would deal with an adult who is abusive to a child?

Lesson Two



Child Abuse and Community Standards

Each community has different customs and ways of raising children, so what is considered maltreatment in one place might not be in another. For example, in many countries any physical punishment of children at any age is abusive and against the law. On the other hand, in some African and Asian countries it is regarded as neglect if one does *not* ever beat or hit a child. So it is important that we consider the practices of a particular community before we conclude that a particular behaviour/practice represents maltreatment or child abuse.

However, it is also important to understand that even though some practices are culturally acceptable, they may still be harmful to children. For example, in Zambia beating a child for misbehaving is common and is taken as showing parents' concern for the child. But for these children, as well as for children elsewhere, frequent and severe physical beatings will result in injury, as well as feelings of rejection and worthlessness.

In some cultures girl-children are supposed to stay home and do house work rather than go to school. For this reason they do not get an education.

Most children are abused because of poverty, unemployment, and other social problems. In addition, diseases such as HIV/AIDS have worsened the burden of care for families.

There are many children who look after their younger brothers and sisters as a result of deaths of their parents or become caregivers themselves for ill parents before the parents die. The problem of HIV/AIDS has made children particularly vulnerable to all forms of abuse, with the problem made worse by the burden on the extended family support system, which can no longer cope with the burden of care (as seen in Mainza's story).

In addition, day-to-day caregiving is influenced a lot by broad cultural values. Some common values are as follows:

1. Children are highly valued as a joy to the family and fulfilment as well as economic assets.

2. Childcare is considered the responsibility of the community. If parents are unwilling or unable to care for the child, other relatives or neighbours can take over.
3. Young children are not expected to be responsible for their actions. In some cultures almost any punishment of children younger than three, four, or even seven is considered abusive and unnecessary.
4. Violence of any kind between adults, between children, and between caregivers and children is not approved.

In some countries it has been found that children are considered a financial and personal burden, so it is not a surprise that child abuse occurs more often as family incomes fall. This is particularly true for neglect and physical abuse and especially for children below the age of six.



Activity 12

Think of the way children are raised in your community. Explain any practices that might be unacceptable in another community.

Lesson Three



Coping Strategies

Children are deeply affected by abuse and find various ways to deal with their feelings of unworthiness, inadequacy, and hopelessness. Some of these are:

- Child mistrusts adults.
- Child refuses to be touched by adults.
- Child shows destructive behaviour.
- Child avoids the company of others.
- Child becomes aggressive and goes out looking for trouble.
- Child develops a habit of running away from home, school, or place of care.
- Child wants to kill herself (common among teenage girls).

Any situation or problem can affect the child in more than one area of the child's life. The effect in one area can also spread to other areas.

As caregivers, we need to know how to help children cope as well as possible with the abuse that has happened to them. When we think of helping children or how they are coping we need to know in which area or areas they need help.

To remember the various potential areas of need, we can use the acronym HELPING:

- H Health, diet/food, sickness.
- E Emotions, feelings, expression, coping.
- L Learning, study, education.
- P Personal relationships—how they relate at home and school, socialisation.
- I Interests, imagination, hobbies, recreation, self-image, how they feel about themselves.
- N Need to know, thinking capacity, intellectual level.
- G Guidance in behaviour: Is the behaviour age-appropriate, does the behaviour get the children into trouble?

Each letter in the word HELPING reminds us of a different area where children may have needs and we might be able to help.



Activity 13

Masese is an 8-year-old girl who lost her mother 6 months ago. She is living with an aunt. When she goes to visit her grandmother, the grandmother is concerned that she looks very depressed, refuses to eat, looks thin, and does not talk much. She is not interested in doing anything. She sits quietly most of the time. When the grandmother asks her about her recent grades in school, she learns that Masese’s performance at school has dropped.

As a caregiver how will you assess Masese’s needs using the term HELPING? What could be done to help her?



Did your assessment include these items?

Health: Does not eat, looks thin, needs food.

Emotion: Depressed—needs to be encouraged to talk and share her problems.

Learning: Grades in school dropping—needs encouragement and extra help to study.

Personal: Does not talk much—relationships need to be encouraged with others, including the caregiver.

Interest: The child does not look interested in anything. The caregiver could interest her in expressing her feelings through drawing or stories.

• Need to know: Does not talk much, looks depressed—needs to explore her thinking through play and drawing. If necessary, refer for specialised care.

• Guidance in behaviour: If the child remains withdrawn after your support, you can refer her to a counsellor

• This HELPING model of needs assessment helps us look at the different areas of need of the child. However, it is important to remember that all these needs are interrelated and we must see the child as a whole person. This model helps us to focus our helping efforts on immediate needs to help the child cope well.

Lesson Four

Resilient Children



A child’s ability to cope seems to have much to do with resilience. To be resilient means being able to recover quickly from the adversities of life, even to be strengthened or transformed by them. Researchers believe that all children have the capacity for resiliency and that certain life conditions strengthen that capacity. This means that one of the jobs of caregivers is to provide children with conditions that help them develop resiliency.

How does a child become resilient?

Children cope better with problems, including abuse, when they have three capabilities:

- The ability to understand the adverse effects of a given situation (such as abuse or the death of a parent) on themselves.
- The ability to believe that they can cope with a given crisis because they know they have some control over what happens.
- The ability to give a deeper meaning to what has happened in their lives.

These capabilities do not just happen. They depend on the child’s outer and inner resources and they have to be encouraged by the caregiver.



Activity 14

Can you think of three outside resources or things that could help build resilience in a child?

Did you think of the following?

1. A close and secure relationship with the same caregiver.



2. If the child has lost parents, having a close relationship with the remaining family members.
3. Enough food, shelter, clothing, and health services.
4. Access to education.
5. A stable income and financial base for the household.
6. Links to his or her cultural community and beliefs.
7. A stable and safe home/living environment.

Research has found that feeling close to one dependable adult—whether a caregiver or family member—is the most important factor in a child’s resilience.

Children that have been abused, especially orphans, need to have access to resources to build their resilience. Their inner strength helps them understand, deal with, and resolve the traumatic events that have happened in their lives.



Activity 15

Could you think of some possible characteristics or resources that might help build a child’s inner strength?



Your answer could include the following:

1. Understanding and expressing emotions.
Resilient children usually understand their emotions and are free to express their emotions in words or actions (for example, a child will say, “I am sad”).
2. A good autobiographical memory.
The autobiography memory is the memory in which we save personal memories about life and our life histories. A resilient child can easily remember the good relationships, times of

kindness, and his/her role models, for example teachers or parents. The child is even able to remember some of the achievements of the past that made the child feel good about him or herself.

3. Feeling a sense of belonging.

Resilient children know where they belong. Such children are rooted at home and in the community and have a sense of their own culture, whether past or present. These children are able to fit in with a family, small group, or community. Resilient children are able to look for and find emotional support from other people. They are self-confident and also confident of other people's support; for example, from peers and the caregiver. The support required changes with time and need.

4. Interest in others.

A resilient child feels the need to help others. The child has feelings for others and offers help.

5. A strong value and cultural belief system.

Resilient children know what is right and wrong and they sense what is unacceptable and acceptable behaviour. They also may have a strong spiritual belief which may include faith in a higher spiritual being (whether God, several gods, or the power of the ancestors). This belief system is usually influenced by the child's upbringing and culture. Some children will develop and identify themselves with belief in a certain culture or political leader. This is common with older children.

6. Self confidence.

A resilient child has confidence in his/her own abilities and identities and has a good sense of humour. She will say "I can" instead of "I can't".

7. Creativity and curiosity.

Children that are resilient are curious and eager to learn. They are creative and use their imagination. They are able to use available materials in their environment to ensure their sur-

vival. Resilient children are able to imagine the future and this gives them hope for something to live for.

As caregivers, we must understand that resilient children get their strength from their inner being and our role is to encourage and promote the development of this inner being.



Lesson Five

Developing Resilience in Children



Resilience should be encouraged and developed in all children. All children are born with the ability to be resilient, but resilience has to be developed, just like any other capabilities.



As caregivers we need to promote and encourage resilience in the children we care for. Resilience also helps children cope with hardships and suffering that they may come across in the future when they are adults.

Activity 16

Can you think of any ways in which you can help a child in your care develop resilience?



Here are some points you might have included in your answer:

- Provide a safe, nurturing environment in which the child's needs are met.

A child should have an environment in which basic needs are met, like access to health care, education, and other social services. It is important for the child to feel a sense of safety and belonging at home.

- Spend time with children, listen to them instead of talking about them, and show interest in them and what they do, think, and feel.

Play is a good way of communicating with children and is important for child development. By showing interest in them and answering questions we encourage children to discover their own potential, creativity, and interests.

- Teach children how to communicate with other people.

Children usually learn from adults. By showing children how to express feelings and solve problems, we encourage them to

become responsible for what they do and say. We are also helping them to understand other people's feelings and learn respect for others.

- Allow children to be children and to make mistakes.
Children learn from mistakes just as adults do. Help children to recognise and understand their mistakes. Encourage them to correct what they did wrong. Children will often repeat the same mistakes, but continue to encourage them to correct their mistakes. Support them as they deal with negative thoughts, feelings, and behaviour.
- Involve children in day-to-day activities.
We need to involve children in all day-to-day activities including family rituals, cultural and religious rituals. We also need to involve them in decision-making about matters involving them.
- Teach the child family routines.
It helps the child if the caregiver provides a routine for the day and expects the child to stick to that. If the child moves from one home to another the child's routine needs to follow.
- Support children's spiritual lives.
Children who have a strong spiritual life are said to become more resilient than those who do not. Encourage and support children in the spiritual or religious beliefs of their family.
- Acknowledge children for what they are, not for what they do.
Give praise to the child and express acknowledgement of the child as a wonderful person.
- Trust the child.
Show that you trust the child as they confide in you, especially about child sexual abuse. You can make statements such as "I believe you".

A resilient child is better able to cope well with child abuse and other problems they may experience.

Lesson Six

Helping Abused Children Cope



There are many ways that a caregiver can help children cope with the abuse they have suffered.

1. Counselling

Good counselling can help a child who has been abused feel better again. A child who has been abused—especially sexually—needs you to help him/her regain self-control, rebuild self-esteem, and live a more satisfying life. In a case where a child has been sexually abused, saying the following can help:

- I believe you.
- I am sorry that this happened to you.
- I am going to try to help you. Thank you for telling me.
- I want you to know that it is not your fault. The person who did this to you is the one who is wrong and needs to be punished.

In addition, you can:

- Encourage the child to talk about it. Talking about what has happened is very important for the child's recovery. The child can express this in various ways. Young children like drawing to express what has happened to them.
- Treat the child gently and answer the child's questions honestly.
- If the child is physically hurt, help him/her to get medical attention.
- Support and encourage the child to express his/her feelings.
- If you feel angry about the situation, make it clear to the child that you are not angry with him/her.



- Encourage the child to make his/her own decisions as far as possible and respect those decisions.
- Support her/him but do not take over her/his life.

2. Support Groups

A support group is made up of people who were abused as children and others interested in helping abused children. The members of a support group meet regularly to talk about their experiences and what it means to live with them.

Support groups can play an important role in helping children cope with the effects of abuse.

The caregiver must know that support groups require sensitive and careful handling to help people feel free to talk about their personal issues.



Activity 17

What support systems are there in your community to help abused children?



3. Specialised Care

As a caregiver you may not be able to deal with an abused child's problem. In that case it will be necessary to refer to someone else with specialised training in helping such children. Refer to the list of organisations offering services to abused children at the back of this unit. Do some research yourself, so you will have the information and contact details close at hand when/if needed.



Activity 18

Now that you have learned about helping a child cope, how will you know if the child is coping well?



Children who are coping well will:

- Feel good about themselves.
- View themselves and their work in a positive light.
- Have healthy relationships or make friendships.
- Tolerate frustrations.
- Ask for help when needed.
- Communicate properly with others.
- Think of life positively and have hope for the future.

If the child is coping well then the child is becoming resilient (refer to the notes on resilience).

Lesson Seven : Recognising Danger Signs That a Child Is Not Coping

A child who is not coping may show signs or types of behaviour that are very different from “normal” reactions.



Activity 19

Can you think of any signs and types of behaviour that would show the child is not coping well?



As we have learned, some children are more resilient than others. Sometimes children experience severe reactions to abuse. These are reactions that are deep or intense and are prolonged.

The following are some serious danger signs:

1. The reaction to abuse is very intense or very strong.
2. The reaction lasts for a long time and does not change in its intensity.
3. The child’s behaviour changes dramatically.
4. The child does not seem to have any inner strength or resources to protect her/himself.
5. The child might become depressed—feels sad all the time and cries a lot, may refuse to eat altogether. May talk a lot about wanting to die, having suicidal tendencies.
6. The child may also act in an anti-social manner: sexual promiscuity (sex with many partners), exhibiting adult sexual tendencies, or abusing substances like drugs and alcohol.
7. The child becomes ill. The child’s sickness might be unexplainable or have no medical reason.



Activity 20

If you notice these dangers signs what can you do to help?



Did your answer include these ideas?

- Talk to the child and offer help.
- Suggest that the child needs specialised care.
- Refer the child to a trained counsellor.

It is important as a caregiver to identify the danger signs so that you are able to help the child cope well. Children need a lot of meaningful support from people around them in order to cope well. These people include family and community and they should be sensitive to children’s needs.



Activity 21

Fill in the blanks.

I need to tell you something. My uncle caught me and did something to me.

I _____ you.
I'm _____ that this _____ to you.
I'm _____ to _____ and _____ you.
Thanks for _____ me.



Your answer might be something like this: “I believe you. I’m sorry that this happened to you. I’m here to help and support you. Thanks for telling me.”

Lesson Eight : Interventions on Child Abuse



How to Prevent Child Abuse

How can you prevent child abuse in your community?

Below are some of the activities that you can do to help prevent child abuse:

- Form community groups to find means of protecting children from abuse.
- Watch over children when their parents have gone out.
- If you know that your neighbours and their children are out, ask the children to let you know if they return home earlier than their parents.
- Talk to children about where they can go for help.
- Form links (come together) with and reach out to families in difficult situations.
- Organise activities to improve good neighbourliness and look at issues that contribute to child abuse, such as unemployment, alcohol abuse, etc.
- Find out about other services with which you and the community can work.
- Organise community awareness campaigns against child abuse.
- Establish community support groups for abused children and their families.
- Look for good ways to bring up children.
- Ask governments at all levels to provide essential services such as housing, water, and playgrounds for children.
- Establish safe homes—safe places for children to go in case of abuse.
- Work with schools, churches, and other individuals and groups in the community to build awareness about child abuse.



Activity 22

Name two specific actions that you will take to help keep children safer.

What to Do When a Child Has Been Abused



Activity 23

We saw in Chanda's story how her husband sexually abused both her children. What steps would you take as caregiver to help Chanda and her children?



A caregiver should be well informed about child abuse issues. This information or knowledge can be obtained through training, meetings, and other sources. There are a number of things that a caregiver can do when a child has been abused. A caregiver can:

- Call the police or a social worker. In this case, the caregiver should record the particulars of the case such as case number, name of the officer taking up the case, and other relevant details.
- Report the case to and work in conjunction with relevant authorities such as social welfare and other agencies interested in child welfare issues.
- Secure any evidence in cases where a child has been sexually abused or raped.
- Become an activist or a change agent for child safety.

- Call for help from the neighbourhood whenever necessary.
- Offer psychosocial support to people who have been abused.
- Avoid asking difficult questions, as this might make the victim feel guilty and make the situation worse.
- Give practical help to your neighbour in times of emergency.
- Give information to people affected by child abuse on child support grants, medical examinations, and treatments; for example, HIV prevention or pregnancy tests.
- Offer care and support in times of sickness to your neighbours and watch over their children.
- Offer your services honestly and with the respect due to all.



Activity 24

Develop a programme to help abused children in your community, using some of the interventions mentioned above.



Lesson Nine : Referral Systems



Activity 25

Where do you and other caregivers refer children who have been abused and need help? List a few organisations below:

There are many agencies and organisations that offer help of different kinds in the area of child welfare. Some of these exist in your country or neighbourhood. Did you think of some of these?

- Young Men's/Women's Christian Association (YMCA/YWCA)
- Police Victim Support Units
- Care International
- World Vision
- AMREF
- Social Welfare Department and other government line ministries
- Children in Crisis Centre
- Save the Children Fund
- PLAN International
- Catholic AIDS
- Family Health Trust
- Women's Hospitals



Summary

- Child abuse is common and can have many types or forms. They include physical, neglect, emotional, child labour, and sexual abuse.
- There are many signs and characteristics that can help you to identify child abuse according to the type or form that happened.
- Children who are abused will cope in different ways. However, some children may cope well and be resilient, while others may not. For children to cope well they will need help and support from you, the caregiver.
- A caregiver can take action against child abuse in the community. For some actions you will need help from others in the community.
- You cannot deal with the problem of child abuse alone. You will need to work with different people, organisations, the government, community, and other service providers.



Self-Assessment Exercise

Question 1

Name five types or forms of child abuse discussed in this unit.

Question 2

List four signs that may make you suspect a child has been sexually abused.

Question 3

List four reasons why child sexual abuse remains hidden.

• Question 4

• Name the care and support systems in your community to help abused children.

• _____

• _____

• _____

• _____

• Question 5

• List four ways of preventing child abuse in your community.

• _____

• _____

• _____

• _____

• Question 6

• What would you do if you learned that a child you know has been sexually abused by her father?

• _____

• _____

• _____

• _____

• _____



Suggested Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise

Question 1

Physical, neglect, emotional, child labour, and child sexual abuse.

Question 2

You should have identified at least four of the signs and types of behaviour listed on pages 6-8 of this unit.

Question 3

You should have identified at least four of the reasons listed on page 9 of this unit.

Question 4

Care and support services are described under the following headings:

- Counselling
- Support groups
- Specialised care

Question 5

You should have identified at least four of the activities listed on page 31 of this unit. You may also have thought of some additional activities.

Question 6

You should have identified some of the actions listed on pages 32-33 of this unit. You may also have thought of some other appropriate actions.



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Glossary

Child abuse: Occurs when an action or failure to act by a parent or caregiver results in death, serious physical/emotional harm, sexual abuse/exploitation, or presents a risk of serious imminent harm.

Child labour: Employment of children under the age of physical maturity in jobs requiring long hours of work.

Emotional abuse: Happens when a parent or other person responsible for a child's well-being uses words and feelings to strike out, embarrass, shame, insult, or reject the child.

Neglect: Occurs when a child's basic needs for love, food, warmth, safety, education, and medical attention are not met by parents or caregivers.

Physical abuse: Happens when a parent or someone else responsible for a child willfully or negligently injures the child.

Resiliency: The ability to recover quickly from adversity and even to be strengthened or transformed by it.

Sexual abuse: Occurs when a parent or other person responsible for a child involves the child in any kind of sexual activity.