

Background

In emergencies, education is a key psychosocial intervention: it provides a safe and stable environment for learners and restores a sense of normalcy, dignity and hope by offering structured, appropriate and supportive activities. Many children and parents regard participation in education as a foundation of a successful childhood. Well-designed education also helps the affected population to cope with their situation by disseminating key survival messages, enabling learning about self-protection and supporting local people's strategies to address emergency conditions. It is important to (re)start non-formal and formal educational activities immediately, prioritising the safety and well-being of all children and youth, including those who are at increased risk (see Chapter 1) or who have special education needs.

Loss of education is often among the greatest stressors for learners and their families, who see education as a path toward a better future. Education can be an essential tool in helping communities to rebuild their lives. Access to formal and non-formal education in a supportive environment builds learners' intellectual and emotional competencies, provides social support through interaction with peers and educators and strengthens learners' sense of control and self-worth. It also builds life skills that strengthen coping strategies, facilitate future employment and reduce economic stress. All education responses in an emergency should aim to help achieve the *INEE Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies, Chronic Crises and Early Reconstruction* (see Key resources).

Educators – formal classroom teachers, instructors of non-formal learning and facilitators of educational activities – have a crucial role to play in supporting the mental health and psychosocial well-being of learners. Far too often, educators struggle to overcome the challenges that they and their learners face, including their own emergency-related mental health and psychosocial problems. Training, supervision and support for these educators enable a clear understanding of their roles in promoting learners' well-being and help them to protect and foster the development of children, youth and adult learners throughout the emergency.

Key actions**1. Promote safe learning environments.**

Education serves an important protection role by providing a forum for disseminating messages on and skills in protection within a violence-free environment. Immediate steps include the following:

- Assess needs and capacities for formal and non-formal education, considering protection issues, as well as how to integrate and support local initiatives. Formal and non-formal education should be complementary and should be established concurrently where possible.
- Maximise the participation of the affected community, including parents, and of appropriate education authorities (e.g. education ministry officials if possible) in assessing, planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating the education programme.
- Evaluate safety issues in the location and design of spaces, learning structures or schools:
 - Locate schools away from military zones or installations;
 - Place schools close to population centres;
 - Provide separate male and female latrines in safe places.
- Monitor safe conditions in and around the learning spaces/schools (e.g. by identifying a focal point in the school) and respond to threats to learners from armed conflict.
- Make learning spaces/schools zones of peace:
 - Advocate with armed groups to avoid targeting and recruiting in learning spaces/schools;
 - Ban arms from learning spaces and schools;
 - Provide escorts to children when travelling to or from education activities/school.
- Identify key protection threats external to the educational system (e.g. armed conflict) and those that are internal (e.g. bullying, violent punishment):
 - Identify key protection threats from within the educational system such as gender-based violence (GBV), child recruitment or violence in educational settings;

- Incorporate messages on how to prevent and respond to these and other protection issues (such as separated children and community-based protection measures: [see Action Sheet 3.2](#)) in the learning process;
- Set up education/protection monitoring efforts of individual children to identify and support the learners at risk of or experiencing protection threats;
- Use the *IASC Guidelines on Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Settings* to prevent GBV in and around learning spaces and schools.
- Rapidly organise informal education such as child- and youth-friendly spaces (*centres d'animation*) or informal community-based educational groups. Community members, humanitarian aid workers and educators may help organise these without physical infrastructure such as centres while the formal education system is being (re)established or reactivated. The staff of child-friendly spaces should have strong interpersonal skills, the ability to utilise active learning approaches and experience of working with non-formal education or community programmes. A background in formal education is not necessary in these settings.

2. Make formal and non-formal education more supportive and relevant.

Supportive, relevant education is important in promoting learners' mental health and psychosocial well-being during an emergency, while simultaneously promoting effective learning.

- Make education flexible and responsive to emergency-induced emotional, cognitive and social needs and capacities of learners. For instance, offer shorter activities if learners have difficulty concentrating; establish flexible schedules to avoid undue stress on learners, educators and their families by offering variable hours/shifts; adapt exam timetables to give learners additional time to prepare.
- Aim to provide education that helps to restore a sense of structure, predictability and normality for children; creates opportunities for expression, choice, social interaction and support; and builds children's competencies and life skills. For instance, establish activity schedules and post these visibly in the education facility/ learning space; avoid punishment of learners whose performance in class suffers due to mental health or psychosocial problems; use collaborative games rather than competitive ones; increase the use of active, expressive learning approaches; use culturally appropriate structured activities such as games, song, dance and drama

that use locally available materials.

- Include life skills training and provision of information about the emergency. Life skills and learning content that may be particularly relevant in emergencies includes hygiene promotion, non-violent conflict resolution, interpersonal skills, prevention of GBV, prevention of sexually transmitted diseases (e.g. HIV/AIDS), mine or explosive awareness and information about the current situation (e.g. earthquakes, armed conflicts, etc.). The content and facilitation of life skills training should be informed by a risks assessment and by prioritisation of need.
- Utilise participatory methods that involve community representatives and learners in learning activities. Adolescent and youth participation in conducting activities for younger children is particularly valuable. Peer-to-peer approaches should also be considered.
- Use education as a mechanism for community mobilisation ([see Action Sheet 5.1](#)). Involve parents in the management of learning and education and engage the community in the (re)construction of education facilities (which may be temporary and/or permanent structures). Organise weekly community meetings with child/ youth/community representatives to facilitate activities that are appropriate to the local context and that utilise local knowledge and skills.
- Ensure that any education coordination or working group takes into account mental health/psychosocial considerations. Designate a point person to link the mental health/psychosocial coordination group ([see Action Sheet 1.1](#)) to the education coordination mechanism.
- Include opportunities in child- and youth-friendly spaces for children and young people to learn life skills and to participate, for example, in supplementary education, vocational training, artistic, cultural and environmental activities and/or sports.
- Support non-formal learning such as adult education and literacy and vocational training to provide learners with skills that are relevant for the current and future economic environments and that are linked to employment opportunities. For children under 15, non-formal education should serve as a complement to, not a substitute for, formal education.
- Use food-for-education programmes to promote mental health and psychosocial well-being, where appropriate. Providing food (on-site or as take-home rations) in educational settings can be an effective strategy for increasing attendance and

retention, which in itself contributes to mental health and psychosocial well-being (see [Action Sheet 9.1](#)). In addition, food in education can directly benefit psychosocial well-being by increasing concentration, reducing social distinctions between ‘rich’ and ‘poor’, etc. The provision of food or feeding programmes in educational settings should occur only when this can be done efficiently, does not harm the nutritional status of the learners and does not significantly undermine social traditions (e.g. the role of the family in providing appropriate nutrition for children).

3. Strengthen access to education for all.

- Rapidly increase access to formal and/or non-formal education. This may require creative and flexible approaches, such as opening schools in phases, double-shifting or using alternative sites.
- Temporarily ease documentation requirements for admission and be flexible about enrolment. Emergency-affected populations may not have certificates of citizenship, birth/age certificates, identity papers or school reports. Age limits should not be enforced for emergency-affected children and youth.
- Support the specific needs of particular learners e.g. provide child-care services for teenage mothers and siblings tasked with caring for younger children; provide school materials to learners in need.
- Make educational spaces accessible to and appropriate for different groups of children, especially marginalised children (e.g. disabled or economically disadvantaged children, or ethnic minorities). Develop separate activities for adolescents and youth, who often receive insufficient attention.
- Where appropriate, provide catch-up courses and accelerated learning for older children (e.g. those formerly associated with fighting forces or armed groups) who have missed out on education.
- When appropriate, conduct back-to-school campaigns in which communities, educational authorities and humanitarian workers promote access for all children and youth to education.

4. Prepare and encourage educators to support learners’ psychosocial well-being.

Educators can provide psychosocial support to learners both by adapting the way they

interact with learners, creating a safe and supportive environment in which learners may express their emotions and experiences, and by including specific structured psychosocial activities in the teaching/learning process. However, they should not attempt to conduct therapy, which requires specialised skills. Providing support for educators’ own psychosocial well-being is an essential component of supporting learners.

- Adapt interaction with students by:
 - Integrating topics related to the emergency in the learning process;
 - Addressing the cause of problem behaviours in the class (e.g. aggressiveness);
 - Helping learners to understand and support one another.
- Provide educators with continuous learning opportunities, relevant training and professional support for the emergency, rather than through one-off or short-term training without follow-up (see [Action Sheet 4.3](#)). Key topics may include:
 - Encouraging community participation and creating safe, protective learning environments;
 - Effects of difficult experiences and situations on the psychosocial well-being and resilience of children, including girls and boys of different ages; ethics of psychosocial support (see [Action Sheet 4.2](#));
 - Life skills relevant to the emergency (see key action 2 above for suggestions);
 - Constructive classroom management methods that explain why corporal punishment should not be used and that provide concrete alternatives to the use of violence;
 - How to deal constructively with learners’ issues such as anger, fear and grief;
 - How to conduct structured group activities such as art, cultural activities, sports, games and skills building;
 - How to work with parents and communities;
 - How to utilise referral mechanisms to provide additional support to learners who exhibit severe mental health and psychosocial difficulties (see key action 5 below);
 - How to develop plans of action for implementing psychosocial support in educators’ work;
 - Helping educators to better cope with life during and following the emergency, including the effects of stress on educators, coping skills, supportive

supervision and peer group support.

- Use participatory learning methods adapted to the local context and culture. Ensure that educators have opportunities to share their own knowledge and experience of local child development and helping practices and to practise new skills. The appropriateness and usefulness of training must be evaluated periodically. Ongoing support, including both professional supervision and materials, should be provided to educators.
- Activate available psychosocial support for educators. For instance, bring educators together with a skilled facilitator to start talking about the past, present and future, or put in place a community support mechanism to assist educators in dealing with crisis situations.

5. Strengthen the capacity of the education system to support learners experiencing psychosocial and mental health difficulties.

- Strengthen the capacity of educational institutions to support learners experiencing particular mental health and psychosocial difficulties:
 - Designate focal points to monitor and follow up individual children;
 - If school counsellors exist, provide training on dealing with emergency-related issues.
- Help school staff such as administrators, counsellors, teachers and health workers understand where to refer children with severe mental health and psychosocial difficulties (this may include children who are not directly affected by the emergency but who may have pre-existing difficulties) to appropriate mental health, social services and psychosocial supports in the community (see [Action Sheet 5.2](#)) and to health services, when appropriate (see [Action Sheet 6.2](#), including the criteria for referral of severe mental health problems). Ensure that learners, parents and community members understand how to use this system of referral.

Key resources

1. Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance (ALNAP) (2003). *Participation by Affected Populations in Humanitarian Action: A Handbook for Practitioners*. Chapter 12, 'Participation and Education', pp.331-342. <http://www.globalstudyparticipation.org/index.htm>
2. Annan J., Castelli L., Devreux A. and Locatelli E. (2003). *Training Manual for Teachers*. <http://www.forcedmigration.org/psychosocial/papers/WiderPapers/Widerpapers.htm>

3. Crisp J., Talbot C. and Cipollone D. (eds.) (2001). *Learning for a Future: Refugee Education in Developing Countries*. Geneva: UNHCR. <http://www.unhcr.org/pubs/epau/learningfuture/prelims.pdf>
4. Danish Red Cross (2004). *Framework for School-Based Psychosocial Support Programmes: Guidelines for Initiation of Programmes*. <http://psp.drk.dk/graphics/2003referencecenter/Doc-man/Documents/2Children-armed/PSPC.Final.Report.pdf>
5. IASC (2005). *Guidelines on Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Settings*. http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/content/subsidi/tf_gender/gbv.asp
6. Inter-Agency Network on Education in Emergencies (INEE) (2004). *INEE Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies, Chronic Crises and Early Reconstruction*. http://www.ineesite.org/minimum_standards/MSEE_report.pdf
7. Inter-Agency Network on Education in Emergencies (INEE) (2005). *Promoting INEE Good Practice Guides – Educational Content and Methodology*. <http://www.ineesite.org/page.asp?pid=1238>, then the following links:
<http://www.ineesite.org/page.asp?pid=1134>
<http://www.ineesite.org/page.asp?pid=1137>
<http://www.ineesite.org/page.asp?pid=1146>
8. Macksoud M. (1993). *Helping Children Cope with the Stresses of War: A Manual for Parents and Teachers*. UNICEF. http://www.unicef.org/publications/index_4398.html
9. Nicolai S. (2003). *Education in Emergencies: A Tool Kit for Starting and Managing Education in Emergencies*. Save the Children UK. http://www.ineesite.org/core_references/EducationEmertoolkit.pdf
10. Save the Children (1996). *Psychosocial Well-Being Among Children Affected by Armed Conflict and Displacement: Principles and Approaches*. Geneva. <http://www.savethechildren.org/publications/technical-resources/emergencies-protection/psychosocwellbeing2.pdf>
11. Sinclair M. (2002). *Planning Education In and After Emergencies*. UNESCO: International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP). http://www.unesco.org/iiep/eng/focus/emergency/emergency_4.htm

Sample process indicators

- Percentage of learners who have access to formal education.
- Non-formal education venues are open and accessible to girls and boys of different ages.
- Percentage of teachers trained in and receiving follow-up support on how to support learners' psychosocial well-being.