

This manual is designed as a resource guide for teachers and volunteers working with children who have been exposed to natural disasters or traumatic experiences. It includes some simple activities to enhance children's participation in helping themselves and reaching out to other children who have been affected.

This manual was developed with the help of teachers and volunteers in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh and its underlying philosophy is to help adults as well as children realize that it is within their control to rebuild their lives.



Life has Changed



Teachers' guide

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LIFE HAS CHANGED

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Chapter I

Introduction



About the story



Objectives of the story



How to use this manual



How to use the comic book
and video



Materials needed
for activities with children

Introduction

Natural and human made disasters are part of **our** lives today. These events affect adults as well as children and may have deep impact on their feelings and behaviour. If detected early and helped, children can come to accept that while their lives have been disrupted, they can still find some hope for the future. Even when they have lost family members, they can be helped to be resilient.

Children should be exposed to information that they can handle. Adults can respond to children's fears without over alarming them, by listening to and answering their questions and by using language which is appropriate to their age. Children need to be given enough information to answer their questions, but not too much which would be difficult to understand. Sometimes to protect children from further pain, parents may not want to be fully truthful. They need to be honest while talking to children in order to help them heal. Teachers or volunteers working with affected people should explain this matter to the parents. In many cases encouraging children to draw (*if they are able to*) about their experiences has helped them express their feelings and fears.

This manual has been designed to be used by formal or non-formal school teachers, community and NGO workers and volunteers at times of disaster. Some guidelines have been provided here to help the facilitators but they will have to adapt these to the local situation. There may be many effective local approaches that should also be included, based on need.

About the story

Meena's village and some other places are struck by an earthquake. Though the impact of the quake is not so great where Meena lives, in other villages houses collapse, trees are uprooted and there is widespread destruction. As a result, many people become homeless and come to Meena's village for temporary shelter. They are housed in a government building near the health clinic. Meena goes to visit these people with her parents and grandmother, her brother Raju and her pet parrot, Mithu. Meena is very sad to see their suffering. The health worker and Meena's teacher are also there to help the people. Meena meets a young girl at the camp named Neela, who looks totally lost and confused. She was separated from her parents when the earthquake happened.

After a few days, the children from the camp are admitted to Meena's school. Among them is Neela, who barely talks or plays with anyone but is busy drawing in her note book. Meena learns from the teacher that Neela is still suffering from the shock of being separated from her parents and needs friends to help her. She also says that Neela does not know her address, so her parents cannot be traced. Meena promises to help Neela and become her friend.

With the help of Meena and her family, Neela slowly begins to share her story and her drawings with them. Finally, one day they find out from the newspaper that her parents are looking for her and, with the help of the village headman and Meena's father, Neela is reunited with her family.



Objectives of the story

The story has an entertainment-education approach. In an appealing way, the story unfolds the key educational messages to help adults and children in coping with a disaster situation.

Research has shown that this story can be used effectively to:

- Help children understand that natural disasters can happen anytime to anyone, quickly and without warning and that their lives can be affected. No one is to be blamed.
- Show that when disaster strikes parents will do as much as possible to help their children, and others. Also, that the adults are affected and can be afraid as well.
- Encourage children to speak out and share their experiences and feelings with adults (teachers/parents/relatives) and their friends.
- Create awareness regarding the need to prepare children for possible natural disasters (by helping them to remember the names of their parents, the village and street where they live, town/village health centres, etc.).
- Help children to understand that life will eventually return to normal.
- Enhance participation of children to reach out to other children who have been affected.

How to use this manual

Note: Role of the teacher

A teacher will need some training on psycho-social healing to use this manual effectively. S/he will have to understand and go through each activity and practice them before using them with children.

In this manual, guidelines are provided to teachers regarding what possible behaviours to expect from distressed children and some suggestions on how to deal with such children. Various activities for engaging children have been recommended here. There may be more ways to deal with such children but considering the level of teachers' experience and training in the area of psycho-social healing, the manual presents some key steps that teachers should be able to manage.



A natural disaster will impact all, including teachers themselves.

Teachers play three crucial roles during and after disasters:

- i) **Taking care of themselves:** a teacher's ability to understand her/his own response to the disaster is the first step. Only then s/he can take on the greater responsibility of helping children and their parents regain their strength and a sense of trust in their lives.
- ii) **Emerging as a team member:** we encourage teachers to form a support network among themselves and with community members to create a supportive environment and a means to leverage help, strength, and arrive at practical solutions for dealing with the crisis.
- iii) **Facilitator and a leader's role:** A teacher can play a crucial and important role in bringing the community together for rebuilding of homes and schools, ensuring good hygiene and health seeking practices, addressing protection issues related to children separated from families and creating trust and team work within the community as s/he is the link between the child, parents and the larger community.

Children who go through a difficult, shocking or fearful experience or event for the first time before they are eleven years old are three times more likely to develop symptoms of distress than those who experience such events as a teenager or later. Children's reactions depend on many factors, including their age, ability to understand, and experiences. Adults can play a big role in helping children to cope with stressful times.

Some specific steps to remember while dealing with distressed children:

- **Do not give false reassurances:** do not say disasters will not happen again; children know this isn't true. Don't minimize the event but reassure them that the disaster was not their fault in any way. No false hopes should be given to children that their lost family members will come back.
- **Emphasize on the importance of staying as a family:** children should not be given away for adoption right after the disaster. Parents struggling economically may consider this as an option for a better life for their children. As a

teacher you can discourage this and advise parents (see *details on page 45*). Also, discourage parents wanting to send children away from their homes and families to work at other people's houses or even to stay with friends or relatives (for example: for security reasons, and the feeling that we can go through this with courage if we are together, etc.).

- **Talk to children and use language that they understand:** speak at the children's language level, giving simple, clear and short explanations. Children learn to value themselves through the eyes and words of others. What you say or don't say to a child has tremendous impact. Encourage children to speak (about their sadness, fears, anxiety), ask questions and help them tell you their feelings. Try to respond to their worries, confusion and fears. If you don't have the answers, admit you don't know. Try to get the answers from NGO workers or people who you think are knowledgeable or from the news papers, radio or TV. Tell them stories of other children who have gone through disaster. This will help them to speak out.
- **Check children's understanding:** find out what the children are thinking. Engage them in activities through which they can express themselves and their fears. This can be done through games, drawing, story telling, role plays, letter writing to friends describing their feelings, etc. (see *pages 25-34 for details*). These may help them to understand something of their experiences. After each activity, ask them "Why do you feel this way (angry, afraid, sad?), what do you think you can do about it?" Address the issues based on their responses, focusing on personal safety issues (see *below for details*), loss of family members and homes, etc. Children need to be assured that recovery needs time.
- **One to one discussions:** some children will talk more openly when they are alone with a trusted adult/teacher. The worst possible fear that children experience after any disaster is that it will happen again and that they will be left alone. Encourage them to speak about it. Help them to learn to use words that express their feelings: happy, sad, angry, confused, scared. Children who are experiencing loss or are left alone may constantly refer to this and will need patient

hearing. It is not possible to fill the loss in their lives but they can be helped to deal with their losses possibly through activities mentioned in this manual.

- **Correct misunderstandings:** children who have access to electronic media (TV/radio) may misunderstand broadcasts about disasters. This can add to their fear and confusion. Listen carefully to what they have to say and try to explain the real situation to them. You may have to patiently repeat your responses many times in the course of the week/month till the child's fears subside. Advise parents to keep children away from broadcasts which may further confuse or scare them. It is best to watch TV with adults who can explain what is happening. Protect them from rumors.
- **Address concerns about safety:** discuss safety issues with children. Talk about the key steps they need to follow in times of any disaster (earthquake/cyclone/flood - *see pages 40-43 for details on specific calamities*). Inform them about what the authorities are doing to help (tracing families, re-establishing sanitation and water supply, encouraging children to come back to school, training teachers to help affected children, reconstructing houses or setting up camps, helping communities to support those affected, sending out danger signals prior to possible natural calamities, etc). This may help to calm their fears to some extent.
- **Advise parents:** on the importance of giving balanced food to children, helping them to take rest, play and get adequate sleep. Also, parents need to address children's health needs as soon as possible as healthy children cope better in stressful situations. Suggest that parents find ways to emphasize to the children that they love them (story telling, playing with children, etc). Tell parents to inform children beforehand in case they have to be away from home for longer periods of time and to keep their promises. This will help children to trust the adults again.
- **Re-establish contact with extended family members:** in case a child is separated from her/his family, seek help from the local leaders. They may be able to contact Red Cross/Red Crescent, UNICEF or other organisations working in

child protection areas, which can help in tracing the families.

- **Engage children in positive activities:** children's participation in regular activities can hasten their recovery process. They can assist the teacher to reorganize and clean up the classrooms. At home they can play with younger siblings or help with collecting water, fire wood, etc. The children can learn how to prepare ORS (oral rehydration saline) for anyone with diarrhoea. They can also learn about hygiene and help young children in washing hands correctly. Children can pass on these messages to other children as well as their parents. This may give children the feeling that they are included in the adult world and can contribute something.
- **Emphasize on the importance of routine:** advise parents to encourage children to attend school regularly. Children perceive coming to school as a routine activity. Make sure they participate in normal school activities like playing, eating snacks/lunch together. Encourage them to hold hands and go together to school with other children. They de-stress faster when they feel they are living in a normal environment.
- **Always listen to and observe how children behave:** through their behaviour or while playing children will express their real feelings. These may emerge at unexpected times. As a teacher, you may have to be prepared for such happenings.



Possible behaviours shown by children after a disaster

During disasters people may have to leave home and daily routine. Adjusting to a new environment (e.g. living in a camp among strangers, without their toys and belongings, etc.) and adjusting to a different routine may also increase the stress in children.

School-age children (5-11 years) may exhibit some of these behaviours:

- Worries about the safety of loved ones.
- Fear that the event will happen again.
- Withdrawal (depressed/dejected) or too active to the limit that they are difficult to handle. This may also mean they run around too much, and get into mischief to draw attention.
- Change from being quiet, shy, obedient and caring to loud, noisy and aggressive. Engage in fights and quarrels with other children.
- Become easily upset, crying, whining, clinging and not wanting parents out of sight.
- Repetitious play: they may try to re-enact or retell their fearful experiences over and over again.
- Lack of concentration.
- Develop night time fears: sleep disturbances and nightmares.
- Sadness.
- Lose trust in adults: feeling that parents have failed to protect them from the pain and fear experienced during and after the disaster.
- Revert to younger behaviour: wetting the bed, thumb sucking asking parents to feed them or sleep with them.
- Feel guilty that they had caused the disaster because of something they had done or they were “bad”.
- Become afraid of wind, rain or sudden loud noises.
- Have symptoms of illness, such as headaches, nausea, or fever.
- Worry about where they and their family will live. Worry about their friends and ask for their toys and other belongings.
- If in a shelter, fear of separation from friends, school, familiar teacher, etc.

What makes children cope better with stressful experiences?

- ♦ **Communication** with a trusted adult - *Children need to have an adult with whom they can talk*
- ♦ **Opportunities to contribute** positively to their community - *when children are involved in useful activities their self-esteem is boosted*
- ♦ A sense of **spirituality** - *having faith; understanding what is good (values); understanding and discussing what life and death mean in their faith*
- ♦ **Opportunities to express their emotions** - *Children can talk about their feelings and fears*
- ♦ A **positive sense of the future** - *Children are able to identify good and realistic hopes for a better future*



How to use the comic book and video

Note: *Talk to the children about the story to prepare them. Some children who are badly affected by disaster may bring difficult memories and may feel disturbed while watching the video. It is best to invite another adult who has some experience with children to accompany you during such a session so that s/he can take children out and talk to them individually should the need arise.*

Before you start

Teachers using this story in video film or in the comic book format need to consider the following:

- Why do you want to show the video or expose children to the comic book?
- Who is your audience? (age, gender, children, parents).
- Where do you want to show the video? (office, school, seminar, community).
- What facilities are available for showing the video? (power supply, TV/projector, seating space, chairs, etc).
- Where do you want to use the comic book? (class room, shelter, camp, community).
- How do you want to use the comic book? (one to one reading, reading it out yourself, group reading by children in the classroom, followed by discussions or activities).

Preparation before screening the video

In case of video screening, make sure before hand that the equipment is working. If you are using a generator power ensure the generator is placed at a reasonable distance from the group to minimize noise level. Make sure that there is enough cable wire for this.

When the audiences arrive or gather, explain to them that the story is about helping children to cope with emotional (psycho-social) distress as a result of experiencing stressful events. Inform them that there will be a discussion on the film afterwards. This will help them to stay focused on the issues of the story.

After showing the video film or reading the story from the comic book

You may begin the discussion by asking general questions.

Note: *These questions should be used only as a guideline for facilitating the group discussion. They are not meant and should not be used as a rigid questionnaire.*

Allow the discussion to be as natural as possible, ensuring maximum participation from everybody in the group. Use simple language, pauses, make eye contact (where culturally relevant,) engaging voice, appropriate gestures, movements and keep a pleasant approach to encourage everyone to talk.

Questions for all

- How do you feel about the story?
- What did you like and what did you dislike? Why?
- Who are the people in this story?
- Who is the main character in the story?
- Who did you like most in the story?
- Is there anyone you didn't like?
- Have such things happened in your community?
What happened? When?

Note: *you may need a substantial amount of time to help children go through the first six questions. Give them time to understand and enjoy the story. Ask the last question after the children are comfortable with the story.*

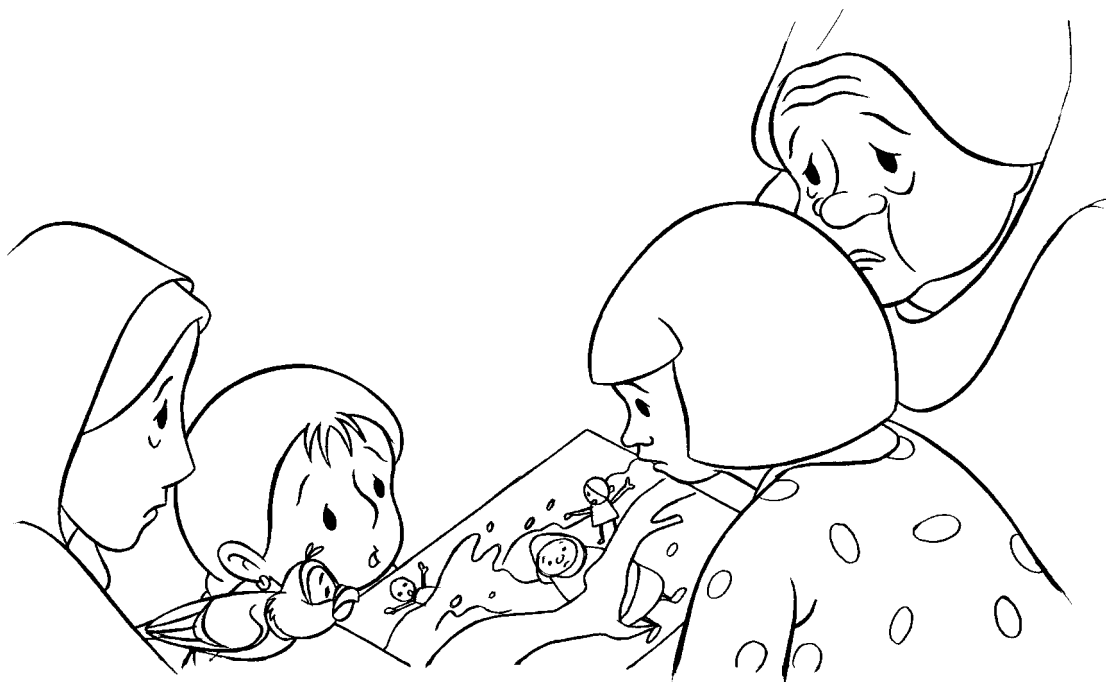
You may want to ask some specific questions on the comprehension of the story

- What happened one day in Meena's school?
- What happened to the goat?
- What did the teacher say about the earth quake?
- Why did father come to the school to take Meena and Raju home?
- Why did people take shelter in the government building?
- Who went to visit them?
- Who did Meena meet at the shelter?
- Why wouldn't Neela play or talk with other children?

- Why couldn't she go home?
- What happened to Dil?
- What happened to Ruby?
- Why was Neela sad to hear Ruby's story?
- What was Neela drawing? Who did she show it to?
- What is Neela's story?
- How did the children find out about Neela's parents' looking for her?
- Who helped Neela to reunite with her parents?

Questions for Children

- What do you think of Meena? Do you like her? Why? Why not?
- Do you want to be like Meena? Why? Why not?
- Can you do what she did in this story? What will you do?
- What did you learn from the story? (*probe*)
- Can this story help other children? What kind of children?
- How can this story help such children?
- Do you think you can tell this story to someone who is distressed?
- What will you tell her/him?



Questions for parents

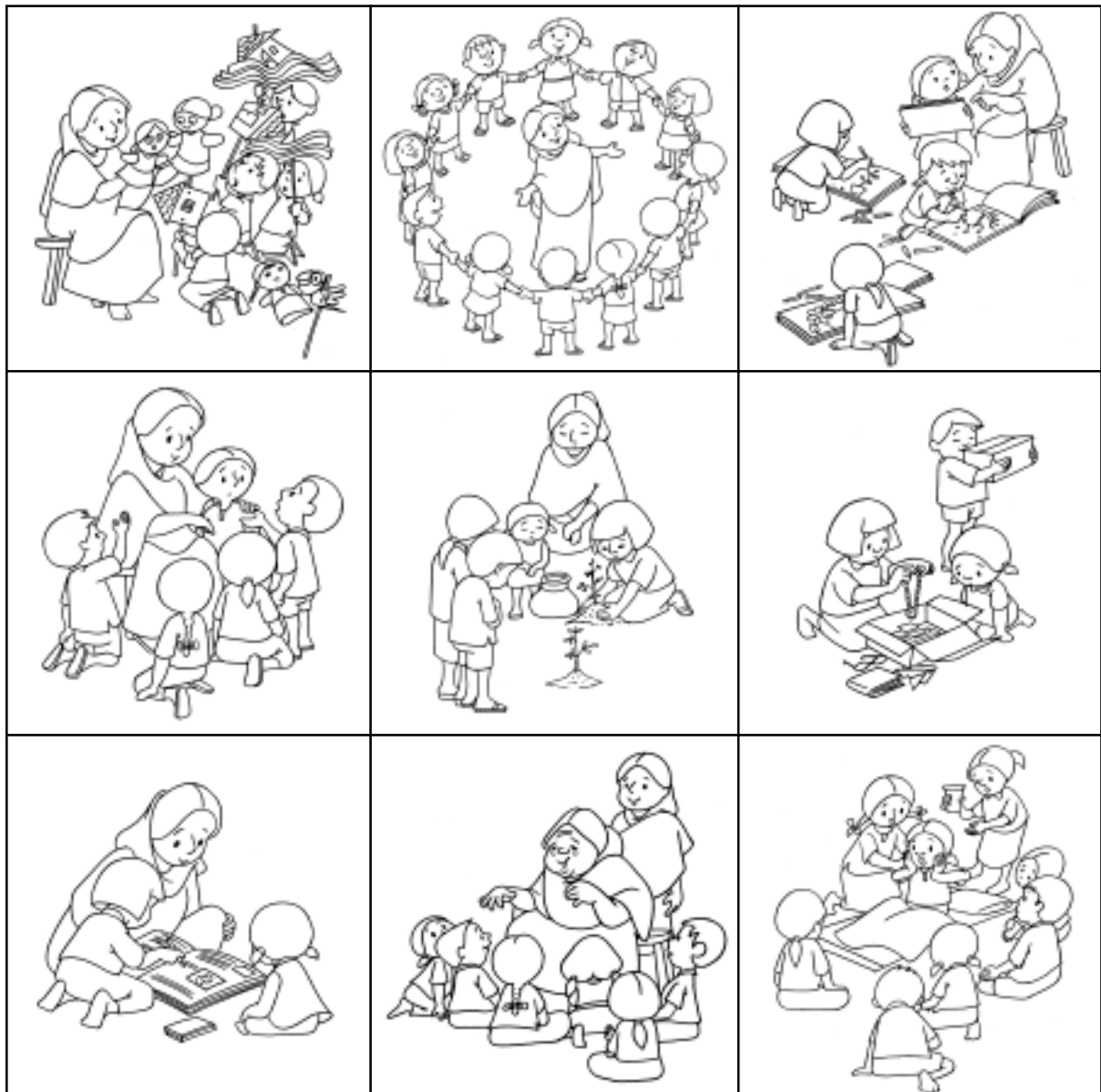
- What do you do when your children are distressed?
What do you tell them?
- Are you able to answer all their questions? If not, what do you do?
- Do you prepare them for possible disasters beforehand?
How/what do you tell them?
- Do you think this is needed? Why?
- What can you do to help children to get back to a normal life after a disaster has happened?
- Can the Meena story help children? How?
- What happens if proper sanitation and hygiene are not maintained after the disaster? Why is this important?
- Do you think children should stay with their families after disaster? Why? Why not?
- Why was Dil's mother keeping an eye on Neela?

Note: *you may need to do this exercise with the parents first in order to help them to understand and deal with their emotions. Only then they will be able to constructively help their children.*

Note: *teachers/volunteers/community or NGO workers can use this Meena package to open up discussions with children on other tragic issues - loss of parents due to an accident, disease, etc. Though the context may be different but the pain or a sense of insecurity faced by a child at the loss of a parent or other loved ones would be very similar.*

Materials needed for activities with children

In the next chapters, a number of activities are detailed out which can be undertaken with active involvement of children within the class room situation. Most of these do not need extra efforts or incur any costs. You (teacher) with the help of the children can do these activities in the class. For reading exercises, you may need sufficient number of comic books. For drawing activities, you will need colour pencils/crayons, paper, eraser, etc. You can hang the drawings on the class room wall after the children complete them. This will make them feel that they have contributed and that their stories are important for everyone to see.



Chapter II

Dealing with distress



Distress symptoms in children
and activities to help them cope



The need for referral

Dealing with distress

This chapter will help you to understand about symptoms of distress in children and their underlying causes. Some activities are recommended below which can be used to help children. Such activities have worked in some situations and you may want to try out some of these in your class. These are based on the Meena story. Children may find it easier to relate their own lives with the characters and situations as portrayed in Meena's story.

Research shows that such stories are a way to teach social knowledge and skills to children. Meena's story describes a situation in which children struggle to deal with the trauma of a natural occurrence. The story, while exploring children's fears and concerns, also provides examples on how to respond to these fears with love, compassion, and by building psycho-social life skills.

Keeping/reverting to faith in difficult times has helped in all generations. As a teacher you should be able to help children draw on the beliefs that are accepted/common in your locality/community. Each faith has its own beliefs about what happens after death. While dealing with loss and death there may be a need to draw from this belief. Children may gain strength from this and heal faster with a positive approach to their pain.

Facts of a disaster

Included in this guide are simple explanations to help children understand the scientific facts of various disasters, and what they can do to protect themselves, be safe and be prepared in the event that the disaster may occur again. Please see the section on preparedness for suggested activities (*pages 37-43*).

Use this as your guide to explain to children about some natural calamities.

What are the needs of children in crisis?

Love: Children need to understand that adults - parents, teachers, guardians love them.

Reassurance: They need to be reassured of their own safety.

Expression: They need to express their feelings - fear, sadness, anger.

Take the lead in creating activities where children can talk about their feelings. Listen to comments of children when they play and determine if they need to talk more. Let children know that what they feel is normal and they can talk with you.

Note: *There is evidence to suggest that at times adults in wanting to protect their children do not allow them to talk about the tragedy and thereby make them suppress their feelings. This may delay the healing process and increase the chance of the child being mentally scarred forever.*

Distress symptoms in children and activities to help them cope

Understanding loss and fear

I

Symptoms: Grief, clinging, fearful (unable to understand death as permanent).

Associated Behaviors: Children who are distressed or disturbed by the intensity of the event or have experienced loss (death of guardians/parents/siblings) will try to look for them, hoping that they will come back; other children may cling to and follow their teachers, or guardians constantly for safety and a sense of security. A child may cry periodically without even knowing why s/he is crying.

Putting into context: We experience profound grief because we feel the loss of love, security and happiness felt with our loved ones. Crying may sometimes be a refuge without knowing why. Children need to be able to express what they are feeling and be reassured that those feelings are normal, in order to move on gradually from loss towards life.

Activities to rebuild strength

Puppets: Puppets can help a small child express feelings that s/he may have difficulty putting into words. You could make puppets of characters in the story: Meena, Neela, Ruby, Dil, Grandma ... and choose a favorite scene to enact.

Some examples are:

- Dil's or Ruby's story recalling the disaster. You may ask them questions following the enactment of the story, such as: Can you tell us what happened to Dil/Ruby? What helped her/him be safe? (Ans: Dil could swim; Ruby knew the name of her village).



- Neela's story
- Meena and Teacher's conversation trying to understand what happened to Neela and why she is so sad and the importance of being friends with others who are sad.

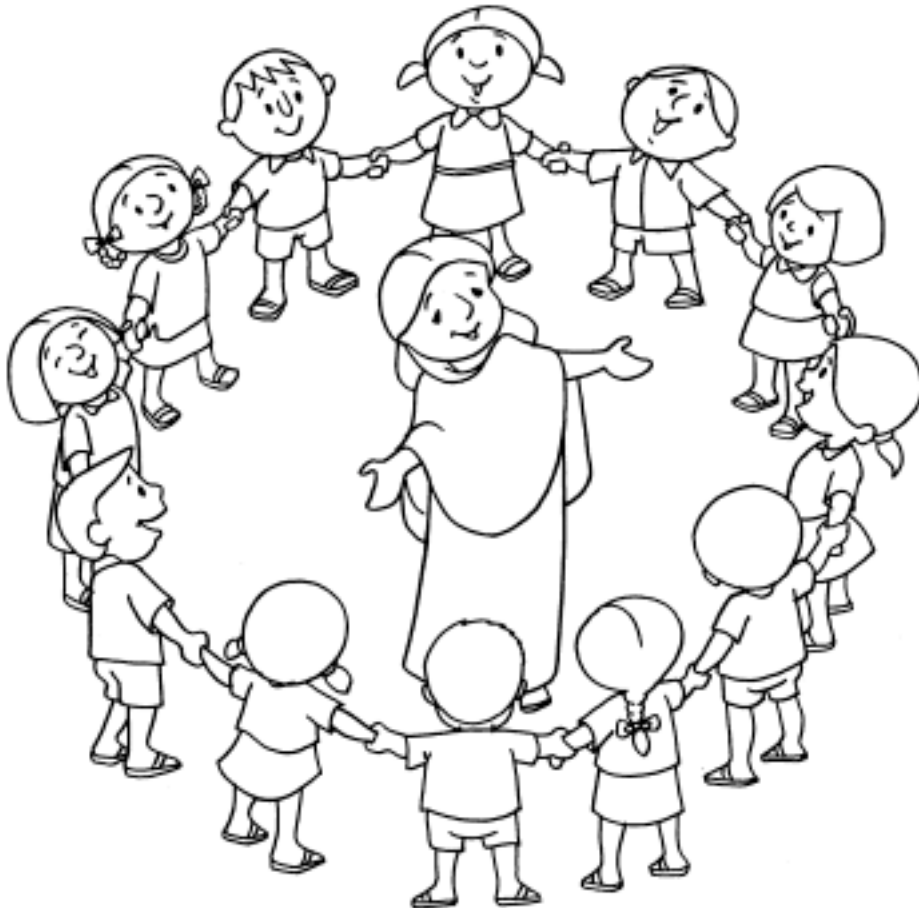
Building Friendship: Children could form a circle, hold hands and sing the "Strength Song" from the Meena video. After this activity, ask them to enact the scene of Meena and Neela becoming friends or you can ask the children to think of alternate ways the girls could become friends.

After the exercise ask:

- Why was Neela shy at first?
- What had happened to her?
- Why did Meena want to be Neela's friend?
- If you were Meena, what else could you do to help Neela feel better?

Note: Children can also discuss how Dipu or Dil could be Neela's friend.

You may want to set up a “buddy system” where each child has a buddy friend. Ask the children whose buddy they would want to be. They look after one another and notify the teacher for help if they feel their buddy is crying, or feeling sad or not doing well. The buddies may help one another do school work too.



Understanding death to embrace Life - drawing: It is not easy to explain about death to children. You can give examples from your own culture. For example, people in Bangladesh believe that humans bring with them a limited number of years on this earth and this is their destiny. When the time is over, God calls them back with a lot of love. Though dead, our loved ones would like us to live for those who are still alive and who continue to love us so much. This can help children understand somewhat the concept of a life cycle and that death is a part of life. Kindly note that this is an example from one context. You may draw on your local ways in faith and culture of explaining death. For example, in some cultures people believe that the dead watch over us from wherever they are, etc.

You can ask each child to draw a tree/plant. Ask them what happens to its leaves, the flowers, and the seeds? First a flower blooms and then dies to give birth to a fruit ... the fruits bear seeds which will start growing again into beautiful plants when the rain comes ... even though a loved one dies, life continues through you ...



II

- Symptoms:** Anxiety, anger, withdrawal, irritability.
- Associated Behavior:** Breaking or throwing things, displaying tantrums, not able to concentrate, fidgeting, refusal to go back to school, hurting siblings, refusing to eat or sleep.
- Putting into context:** Encourage children to talk about their fears, anger, why they are unhappy or uncomfortable. Help them sort out what is

real from what is unreal. Encourage them to draw or write about their feelings. Children are less afraid of things that they understand. Anxiety may be a reflection of the stress the child perceives at home, from their siblings and parents/guardians. It is important that you as a teacher understand where this anxiety is coming from.

Activities to rebuild strength

Strength Team: Ask children to draw members of their families. Encourage them to talk about what they think the family members are feeling and going through. Help children understand that it is normal for their parents/siblings/relatives to feel afraid. Then ask them to draw the ideal scenario - how would they want this current situation to end?

Use these two drawings to help children come up with things they can do to help their parents and themselves. Help them understand the actions that are in their control. They can come up with a list of “things they can do to help in the house and at school”. Place this “commitment to a strength” list on the wall to remind children of all they can do as the “strength team” after a disaster to make themselves and others stronger.

Role Play: Take a scene from the Meena story such as the conversation between father and Raju when Raju asks father if adults are also scared. Use this story as a discussion for the above.

III

Symptoms: Hostility, repetitious behavior, recurring nightmares.

Associated behaviors: The child may talk about recurring nightmares or re-enact the experience constantly. A child may become quarrelsome fight with friends repeatedly or display aggressive behavior, argue a lot.

Putting into context: Help a child to express why s/he is feeling that way. Listen carefully. Explain that sometimes some things happen that can make us angry afraid or sad. We have no control over these happenings. However, we do have control over things like how to respond to a situation, how to help others. We also need friends to help us. Encourage the child to play with others but be ready to intervene and help if the child becomes aggressive.

Activities to rebuild strength

Role play: Ask children to enact the scene of where Neela meets Meena's family. Then conduct a discussion with the help of the following questions:

- What had Neela drawn in her note book?
- What did grandma and mother do to comfort her?
- When you feel sad what do you do?
- Do you feel better when you talk to someone? Whom do you talk to?

You may also ask children to draw their fears and discuss them.



Role Play: Ask children to create a skit of internally displaced people (IDP) and village children just as in Meena's story. Ask the village children to find ways of helping the IDP children. The IDP children should enact what they were feeling and why and to come up with ways in which they would like to be helped and cared for by the village children. Emphasize on what the IDP children themselves can do in their recovery and rehabilitation. Your discussion would include coming up with a list of "our needs" so that they can understand their own needs and feelings and a corresponding list of ways in which they can help one another address these needs. Children can draw a mural of how they will help one another. For example, making friends and talking with one another, playing with one another, comforting one another.

One to one discussion: sometimes a child finds it easier to open up if there is one-to one discussion on issues which cannot be brought up in a group situation or just with anyone. There are deeper emotions that need to be looked at with utmost care and tenderness. Before beginning this session you can invite another adult who has some background of working with children from your support group or from an NGO or a volunteer engaged in similar kind of work to help you if a situation requires it.

IV

<i>Symptoms:</i>	Guilt and feeling of betrayal
<i>Associated behavior:</i>	Asking whether they were doing something bad and because of that this disaster happened? Feeling guilty for having survived or not doing enough to help a sibling, etc. A child may be angry with the lost relative or even a living relative who was not able to protect her/him.
<i>Putting into context:</i>	Explain to children that natural disasters are natural phenomena. This has no connection with someone being good or bad. Disasters can happen from time to time but we should be prepared to deal with it.

Activities to rebuild strength

The Memory Tree: Have children plant a tree in memory of those whom they have lost. Children can circle around the tree and tell it all they want their loved ones to know. Children can promise the tree that they will care for the tree, they will care for themselves, each other and the family members who are still living.

Children may share with the tree all that they have decided to do to help rebuild their communities and one another. If for some reason a child's plant doesn't grow, s/he should be encouraged to plant another one.



The Memory Box: You can ask children to make memory boxes that can help them to positively think about the person they loved and have lost. Each child can have her/his individual box. S/he can keep some things there associated with the loved ones they have lost - photograph, pen, bangles, a necklace, letters, a coin, an old school book. From time to time they can visit their boxes and this can help them feel close to the loved ones as this also helps them to remember the good memories or happy times spent with this person. This is a positive way of trying to overcome loss and letting go by remembering the good things.

Initially they may be sad and cry from time to time but as the time passes they will fondly remember the happy things.

Note: *It may be important to help the children to establish connections with those who knew the loved ones before the tragedy happened. Children need to reconnect with existing relatives to get a sense of belonging.*



The Memory Book: Memories are important to understand how we became who we are. Both happy and sad memories shape up people's lives. Explain this to children. You can invite an elderly person, especially a grandmother, to visit the class. The children can ask her about different memories she had - it could be how she felt when she joined or left school, or had a pet for the first time, or planted vegetables or flowers, or had her first baby, etc. What memories have been the happiest for them? Have their good memories sometimes helped them through bad times? How did she deal with her sad memories? Was it easy or difficult to move forward in life with these memories? The children can go out to the community and ask their neighbours or relatives about the

loved ones they have lost. They can write this down in a book and call it “The Memory Book.” Some examples may include: Who chose my name when I was born? What does it mean? Who took me to school on my first day? Who taught me to stitch/plant/draw? Who would I run to at night if I had nightmares? Who would take care of me when I was sick? What are the happiest memories of my childhood? Ask children what other things they would like to find out about. Encourage them to add to this list as the healing progresses.



Sharing life with loved ones: All parents, guardians, surviving relatives of the child can be invited to come and spend time not only with their own child but with all the children to develop a community responsibility for taking care of children. This should be combined with community/group singing/dancing.

Grandma and Mother: suggest that they can play a crucial role in helping the child by playing with them, telling them stories, etc. They can be invited to the class from time to time to help with various activities as mentioned above.

The need for referral

When symptoms are prolonged, then referral to professional help for the child is important. If any of the symptoms we have discussed so far occur for a prolonged period of time consistently that prevent the child from functioning normally, or affects the child in a way that s/he becomes disruptive, then you need to refer the child to a health worker for professional psychosocial support.

Helping Parents

Parents will frequently look to you for advice. Help them understand their children's behavior. Some parents get angry or upset when their children act frightened or "abnormal". Tell the parents that the behavior is a natural response to the disaster and explain to them what the child needs from them. If the child continues to be disturbed for a long period of time, the family and you may need to seek professional help for the child.

Parent's reaction to the disaster and child's behavior is strongly linked with the child's ability to deal with distress. Parents may also be so upset that they may not be aware of their child's troubles. Help parents to realize how important it is that they take care of themselves and their own needs so that they are better able to help the child to cope with the situation. If you as a teacher feel that a parent is not able to provide a secured environment for their child, then you may suggest professional help to support the parent in their coping process.

Chapter III

Disaster preparedness



Information on some
natural calamities

Disaster Preparedness

Disaster preparedness involves creating a strong community where individuals are equipped and confident that each person will have his own ability and power to deal with difficult situations. This entails providing appropriate information on safety when disaster strikes, being prepared with basic resources, and developing plans of action to ensure safety in the event that a disaster occurs in your community. Bear in mind that the younger and older children may not be able to understand or interpret information in the same manner. You have to decide who needs to be told how much.

As part of your preparedness plan, equip the children with the following information. We have designed illustrative activities to help children develop these skills and remember important safety information. Your role as a teacher is critical during the disaster. It is very important that children remain informed about what is happening and what they should do. Take time to explain everything clearly and simply, clarify any questions they may have, reassure them of ways to be safe, and especially make them feel that they are a part of the group.

The following are a few essential tips for you and the children which will ensure prompt response to any disaster.

Preparation for Teachers

- *Keep your preparedness bag ready to go* (in some cases this may not be possible): This bag will contain torch/light, dry food, water, blanket, some money, and matches with candles.
- *Create an evacuation plan to ensure safety of children*: Hold a meeting with community leaders to arrive at the appropriate and safe evacuation plan for the school (*see below for details*). If possible, do the planning with the involvement of the school principal, all teachers and the parents.

Help children to

- **Recognize danger signals:** Tell them to be alert if there is a slight earth quake or rattle; if there is the possibility of a storm or flood to listen to radio or the miking done by NGOs; to inform parents about the danger. Encourage children to share the information they have learnt in school with their parents and to remind them what they can do at home prior to a disaster or a calamity.

Tell children to remember where to go when disaster strikes. Prepare children beforehand and tell them to proceed towards the shelter or higher grounds immediately (see *below for details on specific calamities*). For higher recall, after every few days make children repeat the messages they have learnt in class. You can divide the class in smaller groups and each group can draw one activity that they need to follow when disaster strikes. Hang the drawings on the class room wall (sequentially) as a reminder. You can develop a song with the key messages and the children can sing it together with you. Make them practice it every few days. You can call it “our strength song” or name it in the local language of where you live. This may be an easier way for younger children to remember the messages. Make sure to tell children what can happen at your local context and how to prepare for that. There will be regional variations which are beyond the guidelines provided in this manual.

- **To know the name of their village/street and parents:** Help children learn and remember the names of their parents, school, near by college or hospital, street where they live, any mile stones that people would recognize in the event that they are separated from the family. Make each child prepare a badge with their names and some important information and pin the badges on their (school) dresses. They can wear the badges every day. This may help them to remember better. Tell them why it is important to remember these basic facts. Give references to the Meena story “Life Has Changed. “Ask children what happened to Neela and why it took her so long to reunite with her family.

- **Know an evacuation plan to the safety point:** Plan for periodic parent-child days where children understand and practice evacuation plans established in the event of a disaster. Practice and drill should be done from time to time. Help children to understand that in a disaster situation, everyone needs to be calm, stop a minute, think about what plan and course of action has been decided by all, and act accordingly. The effort is to stay together.
- **Know that in the event that they are separated from the group/family:** They should go to a safe place. Some options could be a nearby police station, school, health clinic or hospital, NGO office, etc.
- **Know that they should only drink from a source where there is safe water:** Explain to the children regarding safe water, i.e. water from hand pumps, water treated with purifying tablets, or boiled for twenty minutes at boiling point. Younger children may not be able to understand the concepts behind these but they will be empowered to ask the right questions about safe water.
- **Know that it is very important to use sanitary latrines:** Because it helps to keep our environment clean and prevents spreading of any diseases including diarrhea and worms.



The following section focuses on preparedness and some possible safety tips during four specific disasters: earthquake, tsunami, floods, and cyclones. Explain to children that these disasters occur just like other natural events such as the rain or a thunder storm. Preparedness can help save lives!

Information on some natural calamities

What is an earthquake and why does it happen?

The earth is made of big pieces of land called plates. You may imagine the various plates to be pieces of the puzzle called earth. These plates form the continents on the earth and give the shape of our earth as you see it on the map. Since years, the earth's plates have been moving slowly and giving our earth its shape. Usually these plates slide past one another as they move. Some times, however, when they move, there is a violent shifting of the plates where they meet each other. This may cause them to collide against one another or get locked so that they cannot move. This causes a sudden release of energy in the rocks or the boundaries of the plates, thus causing an earthquake. An earthquake can also happen both on land and under the sea.

Note: *Explain to children that there have been big earthquakes from time to time in many places that have caused loss of life and property but people have trusted their own strengths and helped each other to reconstruct their lives.*



What should you do if an earthquake occurs?

- ***If you are inside a building***

Go to a doorframe and stay there until the shaking stops OR go under a strong furniture/table, sit and protect your head by covering it with both your hands and ducking, until the shaking stops.

Keep away from mirrors or windows, glass or lamps which may fall and cause harm.

Do not run around.

- ***If you are outside the building***

Stay in the open area, away from electrical cables, trees or anything that could fall on you.

Do not go near steep slopes because landslides could occur.

Go to the planned meeting point.

- ***Once at the meeting place***

(As a teacher you may have to) conduct a head count to check for all who are there. Check for any injuries.

If anyone is injured apply first aid and seek immediate medical assistance when possible.

If anyone is missing contact a police station, fire station, nearby NGO office and the parents/relatives of the child.

What is a Tsunami?

A tsunami is a very big wave which can be caused by an earthquake that happens under the sea. We can protect ourselves and our families by being ready if another earthquake or a tsunami occurs. We do not have to be afraid if we are well prepared. Tell children to remember that due to the disturbances in the sea bed, in case of a Tsunami the water may recede from the shore for some time. If this happens, everyone should evacuate the neighbouring locations immediately and go to high ground. They should not try to catch fish or watch this and wait for the water to return. The water will return after a while with a fatal force.

What should you do when a tsunami occurs?

- You should identify a high place such as a hill or strong buildings and know the quickest route to get to these places.
- Involve the parents and the children in making evacuation maps and plans.
- Organize periodic parent and children learning days when you practice the evacuation plan with them.
- Move away from the areas close to the sea (or other water ways connected to the sea) towards higher ground according to the evacuation plan.
- Listen to the radio for any information if possible.
- Do not wait to collect the belongings. Life is more precious.

Floods

Heavy rainfall and an abnormal rise in the water levels cause rivers to overflow. The water floods into the streets, our house at times and can cause damage. Here are a few ways in which you and the children can ensure safety.

What should you do during a flood?

- ***Messages for Teachers***

In preparation, teachers should encourage children to learn swimming under the supervision of an adult.

Arrive at a common plan of evacuation to a higher and safe ground.

When flooding occurs, if you are in a building with electricity, disconnect the power before the water level rises and makes contact with plugs, wires, or breakers. Do not let children carry out this task.

- **Messages for Children**

Remain calm and go to a higher ground as planned with the teacher.

At home in case of prolonged water logging, stay at higher places inside the house. In extreme cases you may have to stay on roof tops till help arrives.

Do not try to playfully jump in the water under any circumstances.

At night fall, keep away from water to avoid snake or insect bites.

Cyclones

A cyclone is a storm where there may be strong winds, thunder, lightening and rain. When a storm has lightening, remember that lightening strikes the tallest standing object first. Cyclones can cause tidal waves and floods. Keep this in mind when you are preparing for a storm/cyclone.

During a storm, here are a few things you should not do:

- **Danger signs**

Never go under a tree or close to wire poles

Do not go out

Do not touch the lamp post

- **What to do**

If you are in an open field like a paddy field, lay down flat as you may be the tallest object there. Lightening usually strikes the tallest thing.

Chapter IV

Disaster management:
key actions



Activities with children:
Child-to-Child approach



References

Disaster management: key actions

- ***Keeping the family together***

Inform parents about the importance of keeping the family together after disaster strikes. Absence of any family member may increase a child's anxiety, fear or depression. The child needs security after the world around her/him has been suddenly changed. Being with the family can restore that sense of security and safety as time progresses. It has been found that playing with siblings and story telling may also normalize a child faster.

- ***No quick adoption***

Alert parents/guardians against dangers of quick adoptions. There are people who want to use disaster situations to their advantage as everyone is vulnerable. Such people may use this opportunity to adopt children for trafficking. Discuss these issues and dangers with parents at parents' meetings prior to or after the disaster. Help them to understand that children need the love of the family to deal with their psychological distress. Sudden changes can impair their normalcy and traumatize them more.

- ***No domestic jobs***

Re-emphasize why the children would be further traumatized if they are taken away from their parents to work and live with total strangers. In many communities the parents may be very poor but even if it is difficult for them to support their children after they have lost everything in the disaster, they should not let the children work at other peoples' homes. In times of duress, the possibilities of exploitation usually increases. In case children have to work as domestic helps make sure that the parents are aware of the following:

- Parents should check out the work places.

- Children should be provided with addresses of parents and relatives.

The community leaders/teachers/etc. should be consulted. They can seek support from the police to check the background of people who offer jobs to children.

- ***Include children and explain the situation***

In times of disasters children are anxious to know what is happening around them. Encourage parents to include children in their discussions. This may be regarding how long they need to live in the shelter, how to rebuild their homes, when to resume attending school, etc. It may help the child if her/his opinion is taken in such matters.

- ***Give children responsibilities***

When children are engaged in chores they get busy which usually would take their minds off the fears they are experiencing. They can be encouraged to play with their younger siblings or help parents in their daily chores.



- ***Listen to children and be honest about reality***

Advise parents to listen to children and share the real situation with them in a language that they understand. When in school, you can tell them what could be further possible impacts of the disaster in their lives and how they can deal with the after math of the disaster. This may mean dealing with sickness, changes in living standards/life styles, etc



- ***Teachers / Health Workers to look for children separated from their families***

In some extreme situations children may be separated from their parents due to death or during emergency evacuations. As a teacher, you must try to identify such children in your community and seek support from the local leaders to report such children to the Red Cross/Red Crescent, UNICEF, agencies/NGOs working in protection areas. Create awareness in the community regarding how to prevent possible exploitation of such children.

Activities with children: Child-to-Child approach

What can children do?

As a teacher, encourage children to show kindness to those children who have suffered most due to the disaster. Tell children that they can contribute to their well being by regularly attending the school and practicing classroom activities with other children to help themselves as well as their friends. Also, remind the children about their responsibilities at home, that is, in addition to preparing their lessons to help their parents with chores that they can manage. You can also use the Child to Child approach to encourage children's participation.

CHILD-TO-CHILD SIX STEP APPROACH

Step 1

Help children choose the health or social issue that is a priority to them, and ensure that they understand it well.
In this case it may be maintaining sanitation and hygiene after a disaster.

Step 2

Help them find out more about the issue, particularly how it affects them as children, as well as their family and their community.
Children can discuss among themselves and with adults to find out what practices may cause diarrhea.

Step 3

Children discuss results of what they have discovered and plan action they can take. (This action can either be taken individually (I can) or together with other children (we can).
They can decide on what they can do to help - making sure food is covered at home; that everyone including grandmothers use a sanitary latrine; if there is no sanitary

latrine discuss with parents about how to make a pit latrine (the teacher can teach in class).

Step 4

Take action, individually and together.

Help family to install a pit latrine or maintain hand washing, food hygiene, and use safe water for all purposes.

Step 5

Discuss action taken, to see how effective it was.

Check whether everyone in the family followed the rules.

Identify what was easy and difficult to do and the reasons.

Step 6

Learn from experience and do it better next time.

Discuss with family how things could be improved. Who needs to be more alert.

The Six-Step Approach in action

The following example shows how the child-to-child steps can be used in a school setting in helping to prepare or manage a disaster situation. Some examples have been given here but you can add new ideas. Encourage children to participate in identifying what more can be done.

▪ **Survey: Who needs what?**

The children can form groups and visit households in their community to find out who is not attending school, whether any households are not using sanitary latrines or safe drinking water or if any child is sick or injured in the disaster. They can make a list of these households, record names of drop out children and report back to the teacher. The teacher will have to guide children adequately to do the survey.

- ***The teacher and children work together to illustrate activities***

With the children, brainstorm on activities they can address regarding the findings of the survey. Each group can draw what they would do to help. Hang the drawings on the wall for greater understanding of who would do what. The children can sign up at the bottom of the drawings to pledge commitment to help other children.

- ***Children and teacher monitor their activities***

What action have the children taken? Who have they helped? What problems did they face? What are the solutions to those problems?

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