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WORKING WITH PRESCHOOL CHILDREN
e-Toolkit on Early Childhood

Empowering Caregivers:
Raising Awareness in Mothers and Fathers

by Francesca Ballarin

Terre des hommes Italia Foundation (Tdh-It) (www.terredeshommes.it) is an international non-governmental organisation intervening in twenty-two low-income countries, irrespective of political, racial or religious considerations, in defense of the rights of children. Tdh-It has been operating in the occupied Palestinian Territories since 2000, where it implements actions aiming at responding to a number of basic needs of children and vulnerable people in Palestinian society while promoting children's and vulnerable people's basic rights, as stated in the international conventions, namely the right to education, health and expression as well as the right to a balanced psychosocial development. Attaining these rights will empower and enable Palestinian children and vulnerable people to become active citizens in their communities.

Tdh-It implements this strategy in partnership with Palestinian NGOs, contributing to their institutional building and development by providing them with technical and financial capacities.

Tdh-It has been working since 2008 in Gaza Strip, where, in partnership with the Palestinian Medical Relief Society, it has implemented several projects in the Northern Governorate focusing on prevention and treatment of malnutrition and Iron Deficiency Anaemia. From September 2009 Tdh-It, again in partnership with PMRS, has implemented two Psychosocial Projects funded by the European Commission Humanitarian Aid & Civil Protection (ECHO) in the Southern Governorates of Gaza (Khan Younes and Rafah), where the nutritional component plays an important, yet subsidiary, role in supporting children's wellbeing. The methodology adopted during the first two phases of the action *"Psychosocial and nutritional support to preschool-age children and their siblings in Gaza Strip"*, adheres to the *integrated support systems and multi-layered supports* envisaged by the IASC Guidelines on MHPSS in Emergency Settings, giving a prominent role and importance to the caregivers in addressing children's difficult behaviours and special needs.

Palestinian Medical Relief Society (PMRS) is a grassroots, community-based Palestinian health organisation. PMRS **(www.pmrs.ps)** was founded in 1979 by a group of Palestinian doctors and health professionals seeking to supplement the decayed and inadequate health infrastructure caused by years of Israeli military occupation. In the Gaza Strip PMRS operates with four Primary Health Care Centres (PHCs), two ambulances and two mobile clinics providing preventive and curative services to the most vulnerable members of Palestinian society, specialised women's and children's health, health education services, physiotherapy and assistive equipment to the disabled.

PMRS works for the attainment of physical, mental and social wellbeing of Palestinians. Health is viewed as an entry point for social change and community development.

PMRS has been a partner of Tdh-It since 2008.

Francesca Ballarin has worked as Early Child Development – Psychosocial Consultant for Terre des hommes Italia since 2009. She has extensive experience in developing, managing and monitoring humanitarian aid projects and programmes focussing on child protection and education. In the past thirteen years she worked in emergency and post-conflict environments in several countries, among which are Afghanistan, Jordan, Iraq, Occupied Territories of Palestine, Pakistan, Syria and Sudan. She holds a Masters Degree in Psychology with a focus on Clinical Psychology and is an INEE qualified trainer.

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Foreword

There are 1.85 billion children under fifteen years of age in the world today. Tens of millions of them live and grow in contexts of poverty, violence, war and protracted crises. Terre des hommes Italia, founded in 1994, works today in twenty-two countries where it assists and protects 100,000 of the most vulnerable. Since 1979 the Palestinian Medical Relief Society has provided medical services to Palestinian people in the West Bank and Gaza with focus on children's health.

Although humanitarian programmes target all children equally, experience shows that preschool children are the most difficult to have access to. Being too old to benefit from mother-and-child-care programmes and too young to be reached through schools, children from three to five are rarely specifically targeted.

The experience of Terre des hommes Italia and the Palestinian Medical Relief Society in Gaza presented an exceptional opportunity to work with preschool children within an Early Childhood Development approach. In an effort to share the lessons learned, as well as the working tools and methodologies, this e-Toolkit was designed to provide an overall framework and examples of strategies and tools that were found useful in addressing some of the recurring issues when dealing with preschoolers.

We hope that the e-Toolkit will prove valuable to all professionals who would like to explore how principles of Early Child Development can be translated into projects and activities that may enhance the effectiveness of programmes targeting children in complex emergencies.

Piera Redaelli   **Dr. Aed Yaghi**
Terre des hommes Italia   *Palestinian Medical Relief Society*

Acknowledgments

This e-Toolkit would not have seen the light of day without the determination of Francesca Ballarin, Terre des hommes Italia PSS Consultant, and Davide Amurri, Terre des hommes Italia Project Manager in Gaza. Both of them grasped the significance for the various actors working with children in Gaza – the Palestinian organisations and institutions as well as the international ones – of documenting the experience of two years of work with preschoolers in the Southern Governorates of Gaza.

Terre des hommes Italia very much values the perseverance and dedication of all the members of the Tdh-It/PRMS project team. Reema al Haj, the Project Coordinator, deserves a special mention for her daily indefatigable field leadership in implementing the project activities.

Finally, Terre des hommes Italia is deeply grateful to its Palestinian partner, the Palestinian Medical Relief Society in Gaza, which made the project possible, and particularly to its director, Dr. Aed Yaghi, for his continuous support and assistance.

Thanks are due also to all those who supplied the pictures for the e-toolkit, and in particular to photographer Alessio Romenzi, who documented the activities of the project.

Piera Redaelli
Terre des hommes Italia
Desk Officer for the Middle East
*Senior Programmes Manager*

Introduction

In June 2010, together with Francesca Ballarin I was preparing the final presentation to the stakeholders of the results of the project " Psychosocial and nutritional support to preschool-age

children and their siblings in Gaza Strip."[1]

The intervention had aimed at supporting the healthy growth and development of children by empowering caregivers to address children's physical, emotional, cognitive, linguistic and social needs, promoting healthy life styles within their families and addressing anaemia and malnutrition - all based on a holistic vision of Early Childhood Development (ECD).

We wanted to provide the audience with a pictorial and immediate representation of the whole project's approach and strategy, and we worked out this one:
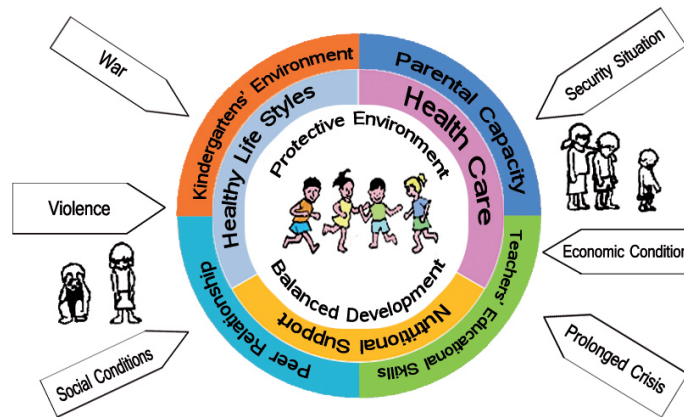
In order to achieve the right protective environment contributing to the balanced development of the child, the key point is to work with the parents, teachers and KG directors in improving their knowledge of the ECD principles, and their attitude and practice, within the context of the Gaza Strip, which is undergoing a prolonged and complex humanitarian crisis.

The same strategy has characterised both phases of the intervention:[2] Terre des hommes Italia and Palestinian Medical Relief have pursued this strategy through a programme of training and follow up, utilising awareness materials and tools to monitor the effective impact on and progress within the target community and its children aged up to six years. By the middle of the second phase we realised that the material our team had gathered so far was worth more than a simple project training and Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) tool and could instead provide a strong base to build upon, develop and share an ECD toolkit potentially suitable for the whole Gaza context, and, beyond that, a methodology potentially replicable and adaptable in crisis/post-crisis contexts working with similar communities.

We therefore decided to systematise and revise the work, taking advantage of the networking and participation utilised in the construction of an M&E system for the mental health and psychosocial interventions in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, coordinated by the Cluster (humanitarian coordination system) and the line ministries (currently ongoing), and further motivated by the fact that one of the main gaps identified in these interventions (the lack of M&E tools suitable for children of up to six years of age) is addressed by the work we began in 2009.

All the material in this e-Toolkit is based on these experiences, and incorporates the international standards for Early Childhood Development, the collaboration between the two organisations (Tdh-It and PMRS) and the other major stakeholders[3] and the work of the project team – a mix of national educators, psychologists, counsellors and social workers – that has built, tested and revised this material coordinated by our psychosocial experts.

We have chosen to present our material as an eTool rather than as a set of manuals - as it constitutes a work in progress and a living document whose framework may be adapted to contexts other than the Gaza Strip.

Davide Amurri
Terre des hommes Italia
Project Manager

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1   The project is Psychosocial and nutritional support to preschool-age children and their siblings in Gaza Strip (ECHO/-ME/BUD/2009/01045) funded by the European Commission for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection. The project is the first of a two-phase intervention that ended in June 2010; the second being the Psychosocial and nutritional support to preschool-age children and their siblings in Gaza Strip (ECHO/-ME/BUD/2010/01041) that ended in June 2011.

2   See footnote 1.

3   Within the framework of the Cluster approach in Gaza and with the support of the European Commission for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection.

Empowering Caregivers: Raising Awareness in Mothers and Fathers

1. Introduction

Parents play the fundamental role in the development and growth of their children.

However, parental capacities are not innate: adults learn how to raise their children from the experiences they had as children and by observing relationships in the family and in the families of close friends. They are also influenced by the context, culture and social environment in which they live. Moreover, the parenting style is continuously challenged by the actual interaction with the child.

Providing parents with the basic notions of Early Child Development supports them in realising their child's needs and makes them more able to create – within the family – the nurturing environment crucial for the child's optimal development.

In line with this, the experience of working with preschool children in the Gaza Strip confirmed that, when caregivers fail in understanding children's developmental needs, they are not able to provide the adequate care, stimulation and appropriate learning opportunities crucial for successful development. In addition, erroneous expectations from caregivers negatively influence the relationship with the child, often generating a vicious circle of frustration that may divert the child's developmental pathway.

To encourage this understanding parents may directly refer to Booklet 1, "Monitoring Development in Preschool Children", for a thorough description of the basic changes in the five developmental domains (physical/motor, cognitive, linguistic, emotional and social) shown by children aged three to five.

Complementarily, the present booklet illustrates a variety of developmentally appropriate parenting practices for preschool children and describes a series of awareness activities on Early Child Development directed at parents. Such activities could be implemented by any professional (social workers, nurses, teachers, paediatric doctors, etc) who is in contact with parents of preschool children.

The awareness sessions have been developed within the Terre des Hommes Italy (Tdh-It) and the Palestinian Medical Relief Society (PMRS) project in Gaza, supported by the European Commission for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (ECHO).[1] Although learning activities have been tailored to target mothers and fathers in the southern Gaza Strip, the overall contents and methodologies can easily be adapted for different audiences and contexts.

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1   The projects are namely: Psychosocial and nutritional support to preschool-age children and their siblings in Gaza Strip (ECHO/-ME/BUD/2009/01045), September 2009 to June 2010; and Psychosocial and nutritional support to preschool-age children and their siblings in Gaza Strip (Phase 2) (ECHO/-ME/BUD/2010/01041), August 2010 to June 2011

2. Suggested Appropriate Developmental Practices[2]

Within the framework of the description of the basic changes in the five developmental domains (physical/motor, cognitive, linguistic, emotional and social) shown by children aged three to five,[3] this chapter suggests some key appropriate developmental practices that can be used by parents to support their children.

2.1 Helping children create mental pictures

During preschool years, the parents' job as "security providers" should expand to that of intellectual challengers for both boys and girls. Here are some helpful hints to remember:

• Remind yourself that the child's job before age six is to learn how to make sense of the world, not to memorise material that has little meaning without the necessary neural structures.
• Help your child figure out meanings and relationships in daily events. Continual "why" questions are a way of expressing a child's need to make connections.
• Introduce skills of sequencing/arranging objects according to size and of remembering words or events in order.
• Mental patterns are built on networks of sensory connections. Call the child's attention to patterns in the sensory world. For example, *"What does this taste like?"* or *"Do these two things look alike?"*
• Encourage children to find patterns in songs, rhymes, familiar stories, or in sounds around the house.
• Motor patterns need to be practiced over and over – using everyday utensils, cutting, catching and throwing a ball, playing copying games using fingers or body movements. Self-help skills and household chores are very important for the child to master. Help your child, but encourage them to do these things on their own.
• If a child needs help, guide them gently through the task several times to lay the path. Another way is to divide the task into a series of smaller activities.
• Let your child make reasonable choices whenever possible. Learning to make simple decisions and small mistakes is hard but necessary. Children's conception of reality needs to include experience with cause and effect.

2.2 Creating an active learning environment[4]

Young children use their evolving physical and mental capabilities to interact actively with the environment. Through this process children develop increasingly complex levels of knowledge capabilities and behavioural patterns.

Parents can greatly support this process by recognising and encouraging children's intentions, reflections, problem solving and creativity.

To do so parents should in particular:

1. *Create partnerships with children*: parents should place themselves at a physical level with the child, follow their ideas and interests and talk with them in a give-and-take manner.

2. *Seek out children's intentions*: parents should acknowledge children's choices and actions and ask them about their intentions.

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3. *Listen for and encourage children's thinking*: parents should listen to children even when they are playing alone; should talk with children about what they are doing and thinking; focus on children's actions; make comments that repeat, amplify, and build on what the child says; pause frequently to give children time to think and gather their thoughts into words; accept children's answers and explanations even when they are "wrong".

4. *Encourage children to do things for themselves*: parents should stand by patiently and wait while children take care of things independently; show understanding of children's mishaps; encourage children to ask and answer their own questions.

2.3 Creating a language-enriching environment

Children learn about how conversation works by taking turns and listening attentively. As conversationalists, questioners, listeners and respondents, parents are the most important sustainers of a child's early language development.

- Parents should try to speak more clearly and pause longer between words than in adult speech because fast, rapidly changing patterns are confusing for children. While simplifying words is good for babies, baby talk that models incorrect pronunciation is not necessary.

- Games of repetition are excellent practice. Keep it simple enough to be fun. Preschoolers and even older children benefit from word games using memory and repetition. Children demand and need lots of pattern repetition. Repetitive patterns, such as nursery rhymes, are one of the best ways to organise young brains around language.

- Children need time to think of the right words and to pronounce them. Do not spoil their chance to learn by saying the words for them. If your child mispronounces a word, gently repeat it correctly. Children learn rules from helpful adults. Parents tend to correct meaning more often than grammar, but you can tactfully reshape and expand your child's talk.

- Linking all language learning to everyday happenings helps understanding and memory. Use concrete objects to show what you mean whenever possible. Children need to hear many questions in order to learn the interrogative form. Practice asking why, what, when, where, who and how questions and show your child how to answer them. Follow your natural tendency to increase the complexity of your sentences as your child gets older. Check understanding by asking them to restate what they think you said.

2.4 The development of emotions and the need for guidance

Children's understanding of their anger, jealousy, fear, restlessness and the behaviour that causes these emotions takes a long time to develop. Parents can help them to understand and deal with their emotions, so that they become responsible and self-controlled adults.

1. *Set reasonable expectations:* Parents need to understand the normal patterns of development in order to know what to expect from children. Realistic expectations help children develop confidence in themselves and trust in adults. For example, many people think that toddlers are selfish and must be required to share with others, but selfishness is common for young children. Children become more generous as they grow older, especially if we have been generous with them. It is important to encourage children to share by showing your own generosity to others and by complimenting children when they do share.

2. *Respect children's feelings:* Children need to learn how to respect themselves and others through example. Parents can help children to express both positive and negative emotions in positive ways that are acceptable to the culture. Children will be kind, generous and considerate if that is how they are treated. Children's emotions are very important to them. If parents ignore, punish, or laugh at children, they may become shy, defiant, or demanding. When children's emotional needs are respected they will feel good about themselves. When children's emotions are not understood they may take their anger out on younger children. Some children even seem to become unresponsive to scolding or punishment. This is their way to tell the world that they cannot rely on adults to help and understand them. All young children need time with adults who care about them, activities that interest them and responsibilities they can handle.

3. *Prepare a safe environment***:** Parents should try to make their home a safe place for children to explore. All dangerous items should be out of their reach.

4. *Provide security***:** Children who are responsible need a strong sense of security. The security of a set of rules and reasonable limits encourages children to test their newly developing skills.

5. *Have confidence in your child***:** Children who are free to explore safely and securely will become competent. Children learn best when adults do not interfere. Parents must trust children to succeed.

6. *Offer choices***:** Children can make good choices if the choices match their abilities. Choices teach children how to gain more control over their lives.

7. *Provide simple rules:* Be clear about what behaviours are acceptable and what behaviours are not acceptable. Rules must be based on what can be reasonably expected from children at their stage of development. Children are easily confused if rules change from day to day or from parent to parent. Rules should, therefore, be simply stated. Children test limits so consistency is essential.

8. *Express pride and interest*: Children are competent if we expect them to be. Affection helps children grow emotionally. Children learn to trust when they can count on us. If we have reasonable expectations and if we let them know we love them, they will be confident that they can succeed. Parents can give the priceless gift of emotional good health to their children.

2.5 Monitoring social and emotional development

Parents often ask if their children's development is proceeding normally. One way of ascertaining that is to look carefully at the child's behaviour. Here are some questions that might help parents observe their child's behaviour. These relate to: play, curiosity, acceptance of authority, friendship, spontaneous affection and enjoyment.

1. *Emotional displays*: does the child exhibit a range of emotions such as joy, anger, sorrow and excitement? A child whose emotions are of low intensity or whose affect is "flat" or unchanging may be having difficulties. Within a range of emotions, the capacity for sadness means that the child also has positive emotions of attachment and care. Children's ability to show different kinds of emotions is a sign of healthy development.

2. *Variations in play:* does the child's play change over a period of weeks, and do they add to it elements or activities even when using the same play materials? Increasing complexity of play indicates the child's adequate inner security, which is necessary for exploring the environment in new and challenging ways.

3. *Curiosity:* is the child curious and excited about exploring new people and things? Children should be interested in and challenged by new territories. Curiosity is a healthy sign of the child's growing confidence and need for new challenges.

4. *Friendship:* can the child initiate, maintain and enjoy a relationship with one or more children? Playing alone some of the time is fine. However, a child's continual withdrawal from friends may create difficulties in the development of necessary social skills.

5. *Acceptance of authority:* does the child usually accept adult authority? Although excessive refusal to follow an adult's instructions is not appropriate, young children often manifest occasional resistance, the assertion of personal desires, or expressions of objection. This indicates healthy socialisation. A young child who always accepts adults' demands and restrictions without a word may suggest excessive anxiety, fear, or even decreasing self-confidence.

6. *Interest:* is the child capable of sustained involvement and interest in something outside of themself? Does the child's capacity for interest seem to be increasing to allow for longer periods of involvement in activities, games, or play? Children should show increasing involvement in activities requiring an active role and the ability to identify and complete a task or a project.

7. *Spontaneous affection:* does the child express spontaneous affection for one or more people who spend time with them? Children whose development is going well are likely to let others know that they are loved and to express the feeling that the world is a good and comforting place.

8. *Enjoyment:* is the child able to enjoy the good things in life such as playing with others, participating in family activities and exploring new places? A child may have specific fears or concerns; however if they do not prevent the child from participating in and enjoying life, then it is reasonable to assume that these will be outgrown.

2.6 Helpful disciplinary practices

By age four, children's earlier unpredictable emotional responses are more or less under control. They still, however, are not always able to manage their feelings of defiance. Thus, at this age children may openly disobey family rules and talk back. Irritating and embarrassing as this behaviour may be, it usually disappears by school age if you take a relaxed approach to it.

This does not mean letting your children control you. Believe it or not, even they do not want that! On the contrary, they expect you to restrain them when they get too far out of line, just as they assume you will protect them when they do something dangerous. So you must teach them what is acceptable and what is not. The only way they will learn to set their own limits later is by having you set reasonable limits for them now.

In deciding what limits to set, keep in mind that many of the strategies you used when the child was younger are also suitable now. It is still important to reward good behaviour more often than punishing bad and to avoid physical punishment. And it is still essential to deal with misbehaviour promptly and fairly, not waiting so long that the child forgets why they are being disciplined.

At this age the child's misconduct tends to be more conscious than it once was. As a two-year-old your child acted out of curiosity, trying to find and test their limits. Now that they are older their misbehaviour tends to be less innocent. They may not understand the emotions that are driving them to break the rules, but they certainly realise that they are breaking them.

To discourage such behaviour, help your child learn to express emotions through words instead of angry actions. Sometimes a child will not be able to explain their anger, and it will be up to you to help them. This can be a real test of skill and patience, but is well worth it. Usually, however, the problem will be fairly obvious if you examine the situation from their viewpoint. This approach is most successful if you encourage your child to talk about their problems and feelings on an ongoing basis.

Setting Limits

- Make sure that the limit is appropriate to the situation.
- Fit the limits to the individual child's age, personality and skills.
- See that the limits are consistently applied by all caregivers.
- Reinforce the same rules consistently.
- Follow through. Support words with actions.
- Use simple statements, be clear and state limits positively.
- Respect the child's feelings and acknowledge them when you can.
- Act with authority. Be confident and sure of your purpose.
- Be ready to accept the consequences; have a plan ready for the next step, if needed. Maintain the limit. Do not avoid the situation or give in if the child threatens to fall apart or create a scene.
- Let children help in defining limits.

3. Awareness Programme in Gaza

This chapter illustrates in detail the awareness programme developed by Tdh-It and PMRS within the working experience in Khan Younis and Rafah governorates in the Gaza Strip, supported by the European Commission for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (ECHO).

3.1 Awareness overview

The aim of the awareness programme is to provide parents with basic notions of Early Child Development and enhance their ability to create - within the family - the nurturing environment crucial for their children's optimal development.

Based on the adult's active learning methodologies, the sessions also aspire to stimulate the discussion and sharing of experiences between parents and ultimately to create a peer support network among them. To this end, sessions all start with the "Spider Network" exercise and the number of participants should be limited to between ten and fifteen.

Six sessions have been designed within the programme:
- Session 1 - Importance of early childhood
- Session 2 - Child development
- Session 3 - Importance of communicating with the kindergarten
- Session 4 - Parental care
- Session 5 - Dealing with children
- Session 6 - Children in difficult situations

Learning activities – described in detail in the following paragraphs – last approximately one hour and can be used sequentially within a programme or as a stand-alone session on specific topics.

The description of the sessions is primarily addressed to professional (social workers, nurses, teachers, paediatric doctors, etc.) who are in contact with parents of preschool children and would like to raise awareness using active learning and facilitation techniques. To successfully implement the learning activities, professionals should be familiar with key concepts in Early Child Development, at least as described in Booklet 0, "Working with Early Childhood", Booklet 1, "Monitoring Development in Preschool Children" and in the previous chapter of this booklet.

Professionals should also have facilitation skills and experience in working with young children so as to be able to recall examples relevant to the specific culture in which (s)he delivers the awareness.

3.2 Session 1 - Importance of early childhood

Target: mothers and fathers, in homogeneous or mixed groups (the "dough metaphor" is particularly adequate for mothers in many countries)

Duration: 60 minutes

Key messages

- Early childhood – defined as the period from conception to eight years – is a fundamental stage in building the child's personality.
- Child personality is developed in the interaction between the child and the environment: family, kindergarten and community.
- Children in this period need constant care and adequate attention.

Preparation and material:

Roll of string or thread, 1500 gr of flour, three bottles of water coloured thickly with watercolours (red, blue and green), three bowls – ensure that there is water for mothers to wash their hands and towel or tissue to dry them.

Instructions for the trainer/facilitator:

10′ Introduction/spider network exercise: ask participants to stand in a circle. Keeping in one hand the beginning of the roll of string, introduce yourself, then throw the roll to another participant asking them to introduce themself, then keeping the end of the string firmly in their hand to throw the roll to another participant. The game continues until participants are all introduced.

Explain that the spider network represents the communication in the group; invite participants to share their experience and to join in.

40′ Demonstration - "the dough metaphor": divide participants into three groups. Distribute to each group one pot, some flour and a bottle of water mixed with watercolours (red, blue and green). Ask the parents to put the flour in the pot and explain that the flour represents the child, while the water represents the care they give to the child; then ask the mothers to make dough.

When each of the groups has made their dough, explain that when attention and care are not enough the dough is dry. When it is too much the dough is sticky. When care and attention are well-balanced the dough is homogeneous.

Then explain that the group with the red dough represents the family, the group with the blue dough is the kindergarten and the group with the green dough is the community.

Ask one of the mothers to make a mixture of the three coloured doughs and explain that the child's personality in early childhood is built through the interaction of the three components. Care and attention received from each component "shape" the child in a unique way and it is not possible to separate the three, in the same way that it is not possible to separate the three colours in the dough after the mixing.

10′ closure: summarise the key messages and allow questions for clarification.

3.3 Session 2 – Child development

Target: mothers and fathers, in homogeneous or mixed groups

Duration: 60 minutes

Key messages

- Child development is the process through which children acquire life skills and abilities.
- Children develop along five interrelated domains (physical/motor, cognitive, linguistic, emotional and social).
- Children learn primarily through experience so they need to be given the opportunity to explore the world using the senses: touching, smelling, listening, tasting, manipulating.
- There are normal variations (individual differences) in the children's development process.

Preparation and material:

Roll of string or thread.
For the demonstration on physical development: pieces of string (30-40 cm each), paper with lines, pens or pencils.

For the demonstration on language development: cards with words in different languages; flipchart stand and paper, blue-tack or adhesive tape.

Instructions for the trainer/facilitator:

10′ Introduction: spider network exercise as described above or a different warm-up exercise if participants are the same ones who attended the previous session.

20′ Demonstration on physical development: divide participants into pairs. Distribute pieces of string and ask one of the participants in each pair to tie the fingers of the partner's right hand (or left if the partner is left-handed). Demonstrate how to tie the fingers.

Distribute paper and pencils and ask each participant to write on the paper the names and ages of their children. Ask participants to show their work and note that those with tied fingers could not write exactly within the lines or be precise in drawing the letters.

Explain that young children's small muscles are not formed yet; so they are like the mothers with tied fingers. There is no point in forcing them to write and exercise the fingers' fine movements: their bodies are not mature enough. The child's ability to copy and draw improves with age and it is no use trying to rush the process. No amount of practice will make a three-year-old child copy as accurately as a five-year-old, because the system cannot be pushed into premature muscle development.

Alternative demonstration on language development

20′ Demonstration on language development: prepare big cards or write on a flipchart the following words in different languages (languages are English, Russian, Italian, Chinese, Arabic, and Turkish)

English	TEACHER	LOVE	CHILD	FRIEND
Russian	УЧИТЕЛЬ	ЛЮБОВЬ	ДЕТЯМ	ДРУГ
Italian	MAESTRA	AMORE	BAMBINO	AMICO
Chinese	師範	愛	兒童	朋友
Arabic	مربية	حب	الطفل	الصديق
Turkish	ÖĞRETMEN	AŞK	ÇOCUK	ARKADAŞ

Ask participants in turn to read one word aloud and discuss the meaning. Most of the participants will understand Arabic only; some may understand English; exceptionally some may understand Turkish or Russian; no-one would understand Chinese.

Explain that children's language abilities depend on the environment in which they live and on the linguistic stimulation they receive. Children living in an environment that encourages language development opportunities have a richer vocabulary and are better able to understand and express themselves.

20′ Presentation/lecture on the five developmental domains (in delivering this presentation remember to adjust the terminology to the level of understanding of the audience. You may decide to group cognitive and linguistic, and emotional and social into one domain, thus presenting three domains rather than five).

Explain that the principle demonstrated in the exercise performed applies as well to most of the

abilities of young children. Child development is the process through which children acquire life skills and abilities.

Even if the concept of the whole child is based on the accepted principle that all areas of human growth and development are interrelated, five major developmental areas have been identified to help in describing the changes occurring with growth. These areas are: physical/motor, cognitive (mental/thinking), linguistic, emotional and social.

Development in each of these areas is dependent on appropriate stimulation and opportunities to learn. As children from three to five learn primarily through experience, they need to be given the opportunity to experience the world using the senses: touching, smelling, listening, tasting, manipulating.

Children's individual achievements may vary across areas, as each child is unique.

Introduce the developmental domains as described in the Booklet 0: Chapter 2, "Basic Concepts in Working with Early Childhood", paragraph 2.2.1 Developmental domains.

10' closure: summarise the key messages, allow questions and clarifications

3.4 Session 3 – Importance of communicating with the kindergarten

Target: mothers and fathers, in homogeneous or mixed groups

Duration: 80 minutes

Key messages

- Communication between family and kindergarten is crucial for a complete overview of the developmental status of the child.
- The Child Follow-Up File is a tool that could support this communication, providing monthly information on the child's developmental progress, by assessing the gradual acquisition of their skills and abilities.

Preparation and material:

Roll of string or thread, two large puzzles (exchange four or five pieces from each puzzle), reproduction of the Child Follow-Up File on a flipchart.

Instructions for the trainer/facilitator:

10' Introduction: spider network exercise as described above or a different warm-up exercise if participants are the same ones who attended the previous session

20' Demonstration: Divide participants into two groups and tell them that one represents the family and the other represents the kindergarten. Give each group one puzzle and ask them to complete it. After some time the groups will realise that they have enough pieces, but not all the pieces belong to their particular puzzle.
Only now suggest that the two teams

might cooperate and exchange pieces. Participants will then discover that the missing pieces of their puzzle are with the other team and they eventually exchange these pieces.

Once the two puzzles are completed explain that the puzzles represent the child: neither the family nor the kindergarten – teachers especially – can have a complete picture of the child, their abilities, strengths, weaknesses or problems, unless they exchange information amongst themselves.

Communicating with kindergarten teachers is therefore extremely important for a full picture of the child's development to emerge.

20' Open discussion: ask parents to share their experiences of how they communicate with the kindergarten teachers and how relevant and complete the information they receive is.

20' Child Follow-Up File[5]: introduce the Child Follow-Up File (only Section 2 – Child's Progress Follow Up) explaining that it provides monthly information on the child's developmental progress through an assessment of the child's progressive acquisition of skills and abilities. Explain that this tool should also be used by the family and the teacher to discuss the child's strengths and weaknesses, and agree on specific pedagogical attention in the kindergarten and at home to support optimal development.

10' closure: wrap up the key elements of the discussion, summarise the key messages, allow clarification.

3.5 Session 4 – Parental care

Target: mothers and fathers, in homogeneous or mixed groups

Duration: 60 minutes

Key messages

- Child care is an integrated process between the parents, where mothers and fathers should take complementary roles.
- The child reflects the parents' behaviour by imitating them.

Preparation and material:

Roll of string or thread; ten dolls.

Instructions for the trainer/facilitator:

10' Introduction: spider network exercise as described above or a different warm-up exercise if

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5   The format of the Child Follow-Up File is available in Booklet 1, "Monitoring Development in Preschool Children": Chapter 3, "Child Follow-up File: Tool for Monitoring and Supporting Child Development"

participants are the same ones who attended the previous session.

25' Demonstration: divide the participants into two groups, one will play the "mothers" and the other will play the "fathers". Ask them to line up in two lines. Make sure that there are at least three meters between the two lines. Pair one "mother" and one "father" (one in front of the other) and give each pair a doll. Ask "fathers" to turn so that "mothers" face their backs.

Explain the exercise: when you say "go", each mother should throw the doll to the father and turn 180 degrees, while simultaneously the father has to turn the other way around and catch the doll. Let the group play for five minutes. On the first attempt the dolls will fall to the floor many times.

Stop the game and explain that they will have another round and that the aim of the game now is to prevent the doll touching the ground. Let the group play for an additional five minutes.

Comment on the exercise explaining that the doll is the child: on the first attempt each "parent" played for themselves and the doll fell to the ground many times. But when the two parents had "the wellbeing of the child" as a common goal, they worked together to "protect the child".

20' Discussion: ask participants to discuss the role of the fathers and mothers in taking care of the children. In the discussion highlight that the years from three to five are crucial in learning socialisation and gender roles and that children at this age learn through imitating their parents. The mother's and father's roles should be complementary and both of them should be contributing to the development of their children through the appropriate learning opportunities.

10' closure: wrap up the key elements of the discussion and summarise the key messages.

3.6 Session 5 – Dealing with children

Target: mothers and fathers, in homogeneous or mixed groups

Duration: 60 minutes

Key messages

- Child development should be supported through positive stimulation
- There are a lot of developmentally appropriate practices that could be used by parents to encourage and motivate their children
- Punishment and aggressive behaviour have negative consequences on child development

Preparation and material:

Roll of string or thread, pictures showing different ways of dealing with children (at least ten positive and ten negative).

Instructions for the trainer/facilitator:

10' Introduction: spider network exercise as described above, or a different warm-up exercise if participants are the same ones who attended the previous session.

45' Picture show and discussion: show the mix of pictures and stimulate the discussion on each picture through examples and the experiences of the participants. Guide the discussion on the following points:

- Punishment and aggressive behaviour towards children produce negative consequences for their development.
- Discipline differs from punishment. Discipline refers to the methods parents use to regulate the interaction with and among children within the social rules. Discipline means guiding and directing children toward acceptable behaviour (refer to this booklet, paragraph 2.6 Helpful disciplinary practices, and Booklet 1: Chapter 2, "Describing Developmental Changes in Preschool Children", paragraph 2.6.3 Discipline).
- Parents can do many things to support their children in positive ways (refer to this booklet: Chapter 2, "Suggested appropriate developmental practices").

10' closure: wrap up the key elements of the discussion and highlight the key messages.

3.7 Session 6 - Children in difficult situations

Target: mothers and fathers, in homogeneous or mixed groups

Duration: 60 minutes

Key messages

- The large majority of difficult behaviour is normal behaviour perceived as difficult by the parents, or normal regressive behaviour, or reaction to inappropriate stimulation by the environment.
- The main criteria to define difficult behaviour is persistency (more than one month).
- Parents should identify the causes of the unhappiness generating the difficult behaviour and work on them.
- Collaborating with the kindergarten teacher is important in order fully to support the child.

Preparation and material:

Roll of string or thread, flipchart stand and paper, markers.

Instructions for the trainer/facilitator:

10' Introduction: spider network exercise as described above or a different warm-up exercise if participants are the same ones who attended the previous session.

15' Brainstorming: explore with the mothers what kind of difficult behaviour they face from their children; the difficult situations faced by children. Capture behaviour and situations on the flipchart and organise them.

10′ Definition of difficult behaviour: explain that there are different types of difficult behaviour :

Normal behaviour can be perceived as difficult because the caregiver is not familiar with what type of behaviour can be expected from the child at a certain age.
Regressive behaviour can be normal behaviour.[6]
Difficult behaviour can be a reaction to inappropriate stimulation from the environment, but the child can recover easily with appropriate care and special attention. Behaviour is seen as difficult (thus needing specialised support) when persisting for a long time with no improvement (more than two months), being particularly intense or erratic, despite all attempts by the caregiver to understand and address the underlying causes.
It can be a symptom of mental health or psychological problems (however, in the Tdh-It–PMRS experience only about 0.5% of preschool children show serious difficulties).

When a child manifests difficult behaviour, it is important to understand the cause and support the child by working on the behaviour. In the large majority of cases the behaviour disappears as soon as the causes are addressed. However, if the behaviour persists for more than one month, it is worth seeking specialised support.

25′ Discussion: ask parents to share experiences of difficult behaviour and how they manage (or not) to solve it. In the discussion highlight the importance of understanding the causes of the difficult behaviour and the need to develop supporting strategies in collaboration with the kindergarten teacher.

10′ Closure: wrap up the key elements of the discussion and highlight the key messages.

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6   Regression describes the evidence that "progress along the developmental continuum is rarely smooth. Rather, development is often uneven and irregular and occurs in a series of starts and stops. Spurts of rapid development are often followed by periods of disorganisation or regression. Then, the child seems to reorganise and there follow periods of calm and consolidation. In difficult situations or periods of stress or change, children often regress to earlier forms of behaviour. This is a normal characteristic of early development", Booklet 1, "Monitoring Development in Preschool Children":Chapter 2, "Describing Developmental Changes in Preschool Children (aged from three to five)"

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WORKING WITH PRESCHOOL CHILDREN
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Empowering Caregivers:
Raising Awareness in Mothers and Fathers

Terre des hommes Italy assists 100,000 children and 400,000 people with 70 projects in 22 countries.
We carry out humanitarian relief and international development projects in child protection.