

CHILD-FRIENDLY SPACES

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**A practical guide
for field practitioners**

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What is a Child-Friendly Space?



1. Definition

A child-friendly space (CFS) is a safe place where children's rights and needs come first. Especially in environments that are inherently more risk-prone for children, such as a refugee camp, a CFS is a safe haven for children to **meet**, **play**, **learn**, and **relax**.

CFS field practitioners facilitate these activities. But that is not their primary role. In challenging settings, children's protection may not come from their families – that is why the role of the CFS facilitator as a trusted adult takes on additional importance in refugee camps. CFS facilitators are there to listen, observe, and speak with the children; make them feel welcome and comfortable; cultivate bonds of trust; and, when the need arises, be the adult that children need as a protective shield.

2. CFS principles

The CFS is a miniature world where the rights of the child are the main governing principles. In the CFS all children are welcome, without discrimination.

Activities in the CFS promote inclusion, equality and social cohesion. They also help children grow as individuals and strengthen their resilience to face the challenges of their current environment, and the challenges their future may hold.

Children of different ages, gender identities, ethnic and religious backgrounds, living situations and abilities, are all treated equally, but not the same! Each child may need different adaptations to be truly included.



3. Why is the CFS important?

It is important to consider how children came to live inside a refugee camp. They may be fleeing war, natural disasters, or circumstances of extreme poverty. Children may have experienced the destruction of their communities; their home and school may no longer exist. On their way to Europe, they may have experienced abuse and maltreatment; fallen into trafficking networks; been exposed to difficult physical circumstances and sickness. They may have been separated from or have lost loved ones. Some children may have travelled or arrived in Europe without a caregiver.

Once arrived, the above dangers are less imminent. However, humanitarian settings, like refugee camps, are not considered a normal environment for children to grow up with safety and dignity. Inside a camp, they continue to face many different threats to their physical safety, as well as their mental health. There are physical risks, depending on the camp setting (e.g. close proximity to high-speed roads, presence of animals). There are also risks of physical, sexual and psychological violence, as well as neglect; risks that all children face, but that children in a camp setting are more vulnerable to. All of the above have significant consequences, both for their present wellbeing and future development.

In this setting, the CFS is important for keeping children safe and supporting their psychosocial wellbeing. No matter what the risks are in the camp, the CFS has to be as risk-free as possible. In the CFS, children can play in safety, while also learning practical skills to deal with the challenges they face outside.

Last, but certainly not least, the CFS is a place built for children in an environment dominated by adults. It is colorful, imaginative, creative, and fun! Children in a refugee camp may feel out-of-place, that they do not belong. Out of the entire camp, the CFS is the place for them.

4. What happens inside a CFS?

The CFS offers activities for children on a regular basis. Activities may be structured, but there is also room for free play. CFS facilitators may organize games, dance & movement circles, role playing, talking & sharing activities; their imagination is the limit! The only significant criterion is for activities to fulfill a purpose: to cultivate a socio-emotional skill, such as empathy, teamwork, and self-expression. Through these activities, children express their feelings, try new things, make friends, and feel they are not alone.

It is important to know both what a CFS is , and what it is not.

- ✗ A child therapy & counselling group
- ✗ A classroom
- ✗ A space for babysitting
- ✗ A free play playground

With all that in mind, we can move on to see how a CFS can be set up.

Building a Child-Friendly Space

The space

1



The physical space of the CFS is a reflection of its principles. Therefore, it has to be:

Safe

- Away from dangerous areas of the camp (e.g. high-speed roads, unstable ground)
- Regularly and easily cleaned & aired
- Well-lit, heated, and air-conditioned
- Compliant with fire and earthquake safety regulations
- With nearby access to WC or children's own homes
- Ideally, with immediate access to outside space for safe outdoor activities

Visible

CFS signs can be placed outside the CFS; they should be:

- Large and visible to everyone
- Understood by everyone (ideally using all relevant languages as well as pictures)
- Resistant to weather phenomena
- Child-friendly

Child - friendly

- Colorful, beautiful & fun
- With stimulating and interactive decorations & games
- Interesting; with frequent changes in decoration!
- With child-sized furniture and height-adjustments for objects that children need to reach
- With tools and materials adapted to different age groups (e.g. age-appropriate scissors, different sizes of building blocks)

Inclusive

- Visibly embracing children's cultures and backgrounds, e.g. with signs in multiple languages, artwork from children's countries of origin
- With potential adaptations to welcome children with mobility, sight, or other issues



4

Participatory

- With a visible CFS contract with do's and don'ts, agreed upon by all children
- Featuring children's own work as decoration
- With relative freedom for children to arrange aspects of the space to their liking

Practical tips:

- You can divide the space into different zones, so that many activities can take place at the same time; for example, there can be a reading area, a board games area, a toys area, a calming down corner, a sensory corner, an open clear space for team games.
- Choose furniture that can be easily cleaned and sterilized; avoid furniture with fabric surfaces.
- Toys and materials can be distracting if they are not part of the ongoing activity!
- Make sure there is a secure storage area to place the equipment you do not often use, as well as toys, materials, and donations that could distract children. If you don't have a cabinet that can be locked, you can use a curtain or a screen.
- The objects and materials that are frequently used (drawing materials, crafts supplies) can be placed aside in boxes or baskets; part of the activities can be a "distribution routine", and a "tidy up routine", which can be associated with a song or another fun ritual. Children can also help decorate the storage boxes.
- Donations are always welcome, but need to be managed responsibly. In cases where there are goods to be donated to children, like toys or other materials, here are some things to keep in mind:
 - Examine the items, and make sure they are safe, clean, and age-appropriate for the children they are destined to.
 - It is disrespectful to give out items that are visibly very worn and used. If there are items like that in your donation, find other ways to utilize them.
 - Never start a donation if you are not sure that the items are enough for everyone! If the number of items is lower than the total population of children in the camp, the donation cannot be addressed to all children. A good idea is to match the goods with the theme of the activities you offer. For example, you can give out toothbrushes after a session on dental hygiene, only to the children that attended. This way, it's easier to explain to the rest of the children why they can't have one of those too.
 - An ideal time for donations is the end of the activity. Set out some specific rules (line up, sit down in a circle, etc.).
 - Make sure you have a system to ensure no one has received something twice (e.g. give a child a sticker when they receive the item).



Building a Child-Friendly Space



2

The schedule

Refugee and migrant children's routine have usually been unstable for a long time. The role of the CFS is to provide continuity, normality and structure. For this reason, it is important to understand the daily routines of the children of various ages (wake-up time, school hours, meals, distributions of goods to families, bedtime), and to arrange the CFS schedule around that. Don't forget that the CFS should be an open space with an open - door policy.

Hours of operation: Usually, the daily schedule starts with the younger ages, which tend to wake up earlier. It is useful for each group to have a fixed slot within the week to avoid confusion (e.g. every day 10:00-11:00).

Attendance: The schedule isn't written in stone! Monitor patterns of attendance, and make sure that the schedule is adapted to ensure maximum attendance for each group.

Age groups: Most activities cannot be organized for all children at the same time. The schedule helps organize activities tailored for different age groups. The way that you will break down the age groups depends on many factors; depending on space, time and staff available, two frequent ways of dividing age groups are:
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- 3-5, 6-9, 10-12, 13-15, and 16-17
- 3-5, 6-12, 13-15, and 16-17

Number of CFS facilitators: The two-adult rule is an important concept in child protection (to ensure that no children are left alone with a single adult). It is also a good number of facilitators to co-organize activities and dedicate attention both to the group and to individual children with specific needs, especially if there are mixed ages, multiple spoken languages, or children with disabilities in the group.



Building a Child-Friendly Space



3

Outreach

Once the space is ready to welcome children, the only thing remaining is to invite them!

Outreach to parents/guardians: In reality, you are not just inviting the children; you are also inviting the parents to embrace and support the CFS, by entrusting you with their children. For this to happen it is important to ensure that parents understand the service that the CFS provides – and what it is not. Before launching the CFS, it is a good idea to invite parents and guardians to a session (perhaps even inside the CFS) to explain its purpose.

- Underline the benefits of a child's regular attendance (improved social skills, new friends in the camp, learning and development).
- Explain how the new schedule works; if parents/guardians need to bring and pick up their children (e.g. for very young ages), make sure the information has gotten across.
- Discuss what you expect from the parents/guardians themselves; for example, to encourage their children to attend, to celebrate the work they bring home and the progress they make, to urge them to continue playing according to the rules of the CFS at home.
- Explain that you will occasionally invite parents/guardians to the CFS to enjoy what their children have prepared, or even participate in the activities (for more on this, see “The role of parents and guardians” section).
- Establish a channel of communication with parents/guardians; make sure they know where to find you to share something about their child, or an idea or concern about the group; make them feel welcome to share their opinion and feedback.



7

Outreach: Once you feel that the community is ready to welcome the CFS, the outreach effort can begin.

Prepare easy-to-read and child-friendly schedules, in all relevant languages. A poster or flyer can also help!

1. Post the schedule visibly inside and outside the CFS, making sure it's wear-resistant (e.g. plasticized).
2. Post the schedule on the camp's general announcement board.
3. Make sure all camp actors have the schedule.
4. Use the camp's messaging broadcast list, if there is one.

It doesn't stop there...

5. Door-to-door outreach is the most important step of the process! That means going to every household in the camp, handing out the schedule and all other relevant material, and having a short introductory chat to invite the household's children to attend. Ideally, the population mapping will help you navigate the camp, but you can still do outreach without it, perhaps drawing your own map in the process.
 - Usually, the children who initially attend the CFS come from more “outgoing” households. It's important to identify and encourage all children to participate in the activities, especially the most vulnerable (children from minorities, with disabilities...), who will benefit more from the protective environment of the CFS. To make sure that all households are aware of the CFS, you need to go to them.
6. **Repeat** the door-to-door outreach frequently!
 - Every time the schedule changes, it's time for door-to-door!
 - When attendance drops, go for door-to-door outreach. By chatting with the families, you might get a better idea of why attendance dropped. Usually, after an outreach, attendance is boosted again!
 - Don't forget! Door-to-door outreach also gives you a brief glimpse of the household's situation. Be observant; you may notice something that needs further attention, or something that explains a child's behavior.

The first session: Now it's finally time for the first sessions! Give your opening days some flare...

- Start with something with wide appeal, fun, and ideally non-verbal. But also make sure it's not an activity that could get out of control. For example, a party, or an outdoor game with lots of movement and noise may become difficult to manage with children you don't know yet.
- Make sure everyone knows each other! Play ice-breaking games to learn each other's names.
- Start creating things with children to put up in the CFS, so they start recognizing the space as their own. Maybe they can decorate their own name cards, or create a board with their handprints in paint...
- Especially with older children, but not exclusively, organize a discussion of what they want to do in the CFS early on. What are their interests? Their talents? Their favorite games? Things they want to know more about?

And so it begins...



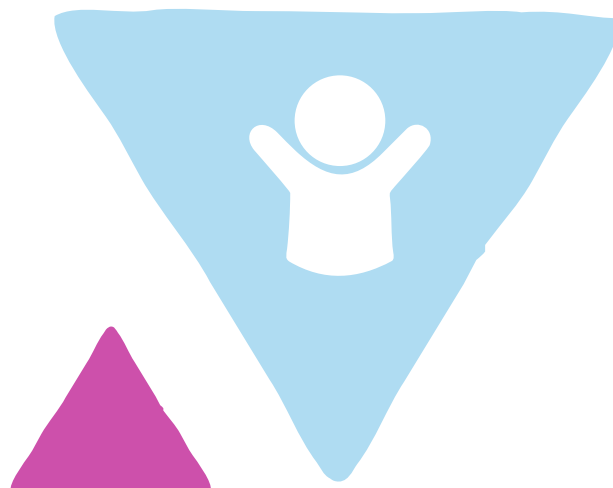
The importance of structure

1

Children, just like adults, need to feel structure, purpose and meaning in their lives. If structure and routines are created, they are more able to cope psychologically after traumatic events or in difficult circumstances; they return to a sense of normalcy despite ongoing disruption and changes around them. The CFS can enable the children to continue some of the basic learning tasks of childhood, learn additional positive coping strategies, and strengthen their resilience through socializing activities.

Routines: Routines are vital for creating structure. The aim is to create routines the children feel safe and familiar with.

- A fixed song or warm-up activity in the beginning and at the end of each session helps children focus on the moment and engage in activities.
- Routines can be very helpful when it comes to tidying up, cleaning, or calming down after a noisy activity. Turn these processes into a fun game, and children will happily follow!
- Involving children in choosing routines gives them ownership and builds a sense of belonging to the group. For example, you can come up with greeting options with the children (e.g. highfive, thumbs-up etc.), create signs for each one, and allow children to choose the sign for the greeting they want each different day!
- Be considerate of the different languages and cultural groups of the children when establishing routines. You can include songs and greetings in different languages.



Rules: Rules are needed for various reasons. They create a sense of safety, facilitate a functioning environment for structured activities to take place, and make sure everybody is included.

- Top-down rules are more difficult to respect. Ideally, rules are developed jointly and agreed upon by CFS facilitators and children through a relevant activity, making a rule poster or a group contract. Children can even sign the contract with their names or their handprints.
- A good way to welcome a newcomer to the CFS is to introduce them to the CFS rules, and have the child sign them, if they agree, it can be a little ritual to feel part of the group!
- Don't forget! If a child is old enough to come to the CFS, they can understand the concept of rules. Children usually come up with the same rules that an adult would prioritize. Some of the most standard ones are:
 - ✓ Everybody has the right to be heard!
 - ✓ Making fun of others is no fun!
 - ✓ We use our hands for playing, not for hitting!
 - ✓ When we all speak together, no one listens!
 - ✓ The CFS is for everyone– and so are its toys!
 - ✓ If someone is sad, we try to help!
 - ✓ Being on time means we have more time together!
- Some rules need to be specific to your space. For example:
 - ✓ Materials: If materials should be returned to a specific place, refer to it in your rules.
 - ✓ Bathroom, water, & food: Your CFS may have a bathroom, or a water cooler inside. Children may be allowed to eat certain foods, but not all. Consider your space and resources, and decide how to manage these processes.



The Child-Friendly Space methodology



Building trust

2

As with every relationship, the most important foundation is trust. Building trust with your groups of children comes gradually, and each child may need a different amount of time before they feel comfortable. Below you will find some tips on how to cultivate an atmosphere of trust. But don't forget: the most important element of trust is to be there for the children, and show – in your own way – that you **care**.

- Be respectful
- Be friendly
- Be available
- Show enthusiasm

- Make sure all children feel special
- Call children by their name
- Remember children's interests and talents

- Respect each child's personal boundaries
- Differentiate the way you speak to each child
- Drop down to children's height level as much as you can

- Treat children fairly
- Encourage wanted behaviors
- Leave no child behind
- Never punish – verbally or physically!

- Learn about children's cultures and countries of origin
- Remember that what is ok in one culture may not be ok in another

- Involve children in decision-making
- Give children roles suited to their abilities
- Allow children to suggest ideas and leave their mark
- Leave room for children to lead aspects of activities

- Encourage children to try – but don't push them beyond what they can do
- Acknowledge that each child has different strong points
- Be aware that children have different learning types
- Make adaptations to activities so that everyone can follow

The Child-Friendly Space methodology

Types of activities



3

Many types of activities can be organized inside a CFS. Most of them fall under the following categories:

Structured activity: In simple terms, activities that are planned, have a clear set of objectives, and a beginning, a middle, and an end, are structured activities. Objectives often have a psychosocial or educational purpose, or both; they are intended to help children face their reality with more resilience, and develop their capabilities for the future.

- ✓ Quick example: Children sit in a circle and share what makes them strong. They then draw a self-portrait as a superhero, armed with a protective shield of all the things they believe make them strong.

Energizer: Energizers are usually short activities that serve to energize the group and provide focus or a transition between activities, or to start or end the session. Energizers have a high activity level, and are usually characterized by movement and noise. They can provide an organized outlet for children's energy, and enable them to concentrate better on the focused activities that follow.

- ✓ Quick example: The CFS facilitators play a song on the speaker, initially very loudly, and frequently change the volume. The children dance and sing as intensely/loudly or as discreetly/quietly as the volume of the song on the speaker. Progressively, the song gets more quiet, and by the end the children are whispering and moving very little, ready to begin another activity.

Free play: Play is crucial to children's wellbeing. It is therefore important to balance structured activities with free play. Free play can be included as part of a session, or can constitute a whole session. Free play does not mean that CFS facilitators are not active; they should engage and interact with children, make sure everyone is playing respectfully, provide them with positive feedback, give ideas for games, and help children of different ages, backgrounds, and abilities to participate. If out of free play a more structured activity forms spontaneously, why not?

The Child-Friendly Space methodology

Themes to explore

4



CFS activities can broach many different subjects, with special emphasis on those that promote children's psychosocial wellbeing and cognitive development. Children themselves, as well as their parents and guardians, may also suggest themes to explore. Different themes may also come out of CFS activities themselves, or out of the CFS Facilitators' observations. Finally, other camp actors may suggest activities (e.g. the medical actor may highlight the need for an activity to promote better hand hygiene).

Here are some ideas to get started:



Safety, security & how to protect ourselves

- Prevention of child abuse:
 - Personal space & the underwear rule
 - Secrets that should not be kept
 - Who are my trusted adults?
- Road safety
- Personal protection in emergencies:
 - Earthquakes
 - Fire
 - Flooding
- How to be safe around animals
- First aid techniques (age-adapted)
- Emergency numbers in Greece & how to use them
- Practicing the camp's emergency evacuation plan



Health & hygiene

- Why we get sick & how we can get better
 - General health issues
 - Specific health issues faced in the camp, e.g. flu, scabies, staphylococcus
- Healthy diet
- Body image
- Dental hygiene
- Hand washing
- Sneezing & coughing done right
- Cleaning up our space
- Keeping public spaces clean



Emotional wellbeing

- Recognizing, regulating & expressing emotions
- Understanding the emotions of others
- Problem-solving
- Anger management
- Patience & perseverance



Identity & inclusion

- Gender identity
- Gender stereotypes & gender equality
- Disability & ableism
- Celebrating diversity (culture, religion, race, ethnicity...)



Coexistence & teamwork

- Valuing individuality & difference
- Stronger together
- Conflict resolution



Children's rights

- Know your rights
- Defend your rights



You can always be inspired by World Days for different themes and causes, as well as by the seasons, and local and international holidays!

Don't forget, you can always invite other camp actors (e.g. doctor/nurse), or local actors (e.g. traffic police, fire department, local animal society) to help you deliver correct information on some of the above issues.

The Child-Friendly Space methodology

Checklist for activity planning



5

The space is adequate for the activity. Consider:

- ☐ safety
- ☐ size
- ☐ noise level
- ☐ distractions
- ☐ weather (if outdoor)

The tasks involved correspond to the abilities of the children in the group, can be easily explained (breaking instructions up into smaller pieces helps). Consider:

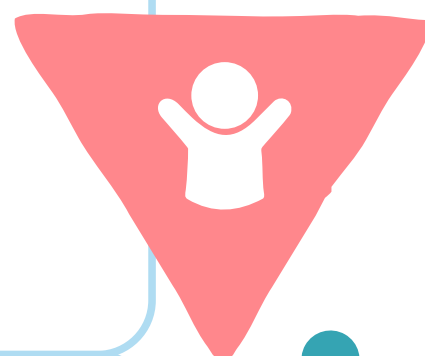
- ☐ adaptations needed for all children to be included
- ☐ presence of sufficient staff for individualized/more targeted support

The equipment is:

- ☐ safe
- ☐ child-friendly
- ☐ sufficient for all children that participate
- ☐ adapted to include any children with specific needs

The children are grouped considering:

- ☐ mixing gender/ethnicity/language/ability
- ☐ making new children feel welcome
- ☐ enabling children to help each other
- ☐ encouraging them to collaborate beyond their friend group



The Child-Friendly Space methodology

Activity structure



6

A session with children should ideally include all the below elements:

- Welcome routine (ideally agreed upon by all children and repeated)
- Structured activity or activities
- Free play (as part of an activity, or as a break during the session – especially for younger children)
- Energizers between activities
- Goodbye routine (ideally agreed upon by all children and repeated)

Time management is very important!

- Planning takes time! Make sure to include time at the start or at the end of the day to plan the next sessions.
- Try to predict how much time each activity will take, incorporating past experiences with the same group.
- Don't forget to consider time spent gathering the children, explaining the activity.

And don't forget the most important element of planning: always have a plan B ready! It's always a possibility that an activity component will take longer/shorter than expected, or that an activity will prove too complicated, or simply that something will happen to divert the group's energy. Have energizers, filler activities, and closing routines ready to be able to quickly switch gears without losing the children's attention and focus!



The Child-Friendly Space methodology

Evaluation



7

It is very important to always make time to reflect and evaluate the sessions with your colleagues and co-facilitators. Here are some questions that you can ask:

- How did the session go?
- Were the objectives achieved?
- How was the collaboration with co-facilitators?
- Did any surprising or challenging situations arise, and how did we handle them?
- Did any children need extra support during the session?
- Did we identify any children that need a referral to another actor?
- How could parents have been involved?
- What would you do differently?

Remember to show appreciation to each other when things go well, but also to support each other when things are not ideal. The circumstances under which you are working are challenging; team spirit and support are crucial to keep going.

- Do not forget to take care of yourself and your colleagues! If not, how will you be able to take care of the children?



Child protection



Children's rights violations and the corresponding risk factors may vary in each context. The threats of abuse that children face include:

- **Neglect**
Neglect is the most frequently encountered form of abuse. It can include, but is not limited to, the parents'/guardians' failure to provide sufficient food, nutrition, clothing, shelter, and supervision.
- **Sexual abuse**
- **Physical abuse**
- **Emotional & psychological abuse**
- **Child trafficking, child labor & exploitation**

Threats against children may come from inside the family environment, from camp staff, from strangers, or from other children. Statistically, however, an abuser is part of the child's close environment. No child is 100% free of the risk of abuse. In fact, abuse is more common than we think, exactly because children are more vulnerable, less likely to understand their rights are being violated, and less likely to speak up. 1 in 5 children is a victim of sexual abuse.

The CFS facilitator must always be on alert for signs that a child is undergoing abuse. Remember:

- You see the child frequently
- You see the child away from the adults of their home environment
- You are cultivating bonds of trust with the child



All of the above means that you could be the adult that notices something troublesome about the child, or that the child chooses to confide in. Your role is extremely important!



Child protection



Signs and symptoms of abuse: Signs of abuse can be physical (unexplained bruises and burns) or behavioral (fear of going home). They can be obvious, but also extremely subtle (slight behavioral changes), or counter-intuitive (very affectionate behavior).

Disclosure: If a child chooses to disclose an incident, a fear, or a discomfort to you, here is a list of what you need to do:

1. Do not ignore the child
2. Listen and be supportive
3. Do not overburden the child with questions
4. Do not investigate the incident, or ask other people in the child's environment about it
5. Do not promise to keep the disclosure a secret; explain that you will share it with professionals you trust, who will do their best to keep the child safe
8. If you are concerned about the child's safety, or about the safety of another child, seek help immediately!

Referral: Take the time to ask and learn about the child protection referral pathway in your camp.

- Know the focal point you should reach when you need to report something or need support for yourself.
- Ask what the process is for emergencies.

Prevention: In such a context, CFS activities should aim to empower children to recognize when their rights are being violated, and to know to speak up to a trusted adult. Special attention should be given to children with specific needs, as they are more vulnerable and at risk. They are especially vulnerable because, in such a context, they are often less visible.

- Challenge the stigma around such issues
- Cultivate reporting mechanisms through activities. Teach children that their health and wellbeing always come first

Don't forget your protective role; your timely referral might change a life!

More detailed resources on recognizing signs and symptoms of child abuse, as well as responding to a suspected case are included in the Annex.

Including all children



In previous sections, we mentioned ways to make the CFS inclusive for all children, along the axes of age, gender, and linguistic/ethnic/racial/religious/cultural background. These ways include making these identities visible in the space, including their elements in activities, and encouraging children to share their perspective.

Here, we will examine how to include children with disability in more detail.

- ✓ Consider the space and make alterations, when possible, to make the CFS accessible. The same goes for the CFS equipment.
- ✓ Be in touch with the disabled child's family and, if relevant, case worker. Learn as much as you can about the child's disability and how you can best support them.
- ✓ If possible, when welcoming a disabled child, prepare the rest of the children by exposing them first to other types of differences and try to de-stigmatize them. Role-playing games and relevant audiovisual material can be very helpful in these cases, and encourage empathy. All children should be encouraged to express their feelings and thoughts openly.
- ✓ Focus on the abilities of the children with disabilities, as well as their talents and the characteristics they share with the rest.
- ✓ Sometimes it is helpful to appoint a helper for the disabled child, to ensure they have a buddy within the group.
- ✓ If the child's disability needs additional support, discuss with the child's family and other actors in the camp how to accommodate it. For example, perhaps an older sibling of the child can accompany them during the first sessions.



The role of parents & guardians



“

As discussed, in the section on “Outreach”, the role of parents and guardians is of paramount importance; and not just in the beginning! Engaging with parents and guardians will help boost attendance, and will give you insight about the children's behavior and concerns. Make sure to:

- ✓ Frequently organize parents'/guardians' days to discuss CFS issues (adapting scheduling, boosting attendance, ensuring punctuality).
- ✓ Allow children to take some of their work and creations home to show their parents/guardians; this will help the adults keep track of what their child is accomplishing, and how the CFS is helping.
- ✓ Organize activities that parents can enjoy or watch; theatrical plays and art exhibitions make parents feel proud, children feel appreciated, and encourage communal cohesion in the camp as a whole!
- ✓ Set up activities that parents/guardians can also participate in. Every adult has an inner child! Invite them to share aspects of their culture (e.g. storytelling with traditional fairytales), or even play alongside their children.

Finally, the CFS can help parents and guardians understand how to talk to their children about their experiences, fears, and hopes for the future. Seeing them work in the CFS, parents/guardians may adopt some of the CFS routines and games to structure children's time at home; they might also adapt or change their parenting techniques to mirror the positivity of the CFS!



Activities



There are
countless activities that can be
done with children;
your imagination is the limit!

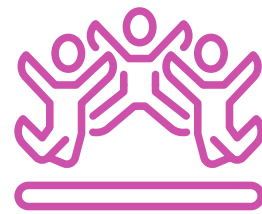
We have selected eleven, each
representing a different objective
and/or type of activity.

All activities are suitable for children 5-17,
with small adjustments, unless otherwise
indicated in the description.



Activities

Introduction – Fruit salad



Objectives: This activity is useful for group introductions, introducing new children, and generally as an opening routine. It serves to enhance appreciation for the group's individual diversity, and to encourage children to practice self-expression.

Steps:

➡ All children and CFS facilitators start by sitting in a circle, in chairs or on the floor, except for one person.

➡ That person stands in the middle of the circle, and says "Stand up, whoever... likes oranges"!

➡ Everyone who likes oranges then stands up, and must quickly sit in a different spot (chair or on the ground) than their own.

➡ Someone will be left standing. That person must then say "Stand up, whoever..." and fills in another statement.

➡ Statements can include likes/dislikes, as well as other personal characteristics, for example "...whoever has black hair", "...whoever goes to 2nd grade in school", "...whoever has a brother". Especially if the group already knows each other, statements can include feelings and moods, for example "...whoever is happy today", "...whoever is feeling hungry now", "...whoever sometimes fights with their friends".

➡ To conclude the activity, the CFS facilitators can encourage the children to summarize what similarities and differences they observed, and highlight how the group brings together different combinations of people, much like a fruit salad!



Activities

Self-esteem – Mutual self-portraits



Objectives: This activity can be used for group introductions and welcoming new children, especially with older children. Beyond practicing fine motor skills and observation, it also serves to increase self-esteem and encourage positive communication and peer support.

Steps:

Materials/equipment: Paper, drawing supplies

The CFS facilitators can begin by showing different kinds of self-portraits. Older children can also be asked to create the self-portraits in a particular style (inspired by comics, Picasso, Seurat...).

The children are then divided into two groups with an equal number of members. The first group sits in a circle facing inwards. The second group sits in a circle inside the first group's circle, facing outwards. That way, there are two concentric circles, with children facing each other in pairs. CFS facilitators should try to create pairs that do not usually sit together.

Each child is given a piece of paper and drawing supplies. They fold their paper in two. On the first part, they have to draw their own self-portrait. On the second part, they have to draw their pair's portrait.

Ideally, children shouldn't be able to see clearly what their pair is drawing; it might be helpful to put books or another barrier between the pairs.

The CFS facilitators give equal amounts of time for both portraits. Children are encouraged to look at their pair, but not to speak with each other, to encourage concentration.

When the time allotted is up, the children stop drawing, and present the two portraits to each other. They compare their self-portrait with the portrait drawn by their partner.

The effect observed when doing this activity is that the self-portraits tend to focus more on the self-perceived "negative" physical characteristics, while the portraits made by partners are usually more neutral. Once the children observe this pattern in their pairs, they can discuss their findings with the whole group, guided by the CFS facilitators.

The overall takeaway message is that we are usually much harsher with ourselves than we are with others; and that we tend to focus on our negative aspects, while others see a more holistic picture of who we are. Hence, sometimes we need to pump the brakes on being our own strictest critic, and at the same time remember that our peers are also our champions!

Activities

Kinetic skills

Cross the emotional line



Objectives: This activity involves kinetic skills and practices mirroring, while also boosting feelings recognition and expression.

Steps:

- ➡ In a large open space, which can also be outdoors, CFS facilitators draw a line on the floor to divide the space in two (e.g. with tape).
- ➡ The group is divided in two teams, separated by the line. Each team has its own CFS facilitator (or, if there is only one CFS facilitator present, a child capable of co-leading the activity).
- ➡ With the agreed-upon signal (e.g. "1, 2, 3, go!"), each team will start slowly walking towards the other, exchanging sides across the line. While they walk, they will have to pantomime a feeling (joy, sadness, anger, enthusiasm, boredom...).
- ➡ Only the team members will know which feeling they are showing. Each team must discuss and decide their feeling quietly, so that the other team doesn't hear them.
- ➡ Once the walk finishes and the two teams have changed places, the children will have to guess which feeling the other team represented.
- ➡ For older children, the activity can be further complicated: when the groups meet as they cross the dividing line, they "adopt" each other's feeling, by mimicking the movements that the other team is doing. When they stop walking, they can confirm whether they guessed the feeling correctly.



Activities

Observation – Detect the change!



Objectives: This is a team-building activity that can help children practice their observation and collaboration skills.

Steps:

➡ The group picks a person or scene to be in the “spotlight”. This can be many things: for example, it can be one of the children, or a “tableau vivant” comprised of several children... The child or the “tableau vivant” remain still in position.

➡ All children memorize the way that the person or people look in the beginning.

➡ One child, the “detective”, steps out of the room, and waits to be called back inside.

➡ The rest of the group quickly decides on something to change. For example, if the “spotlight” child has a ponytail, the group can decide to let the child's hair down.

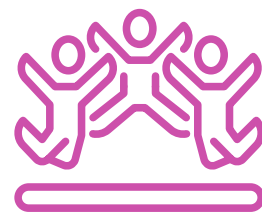
➡ The “detective” is invited back inside, and has to identify what changed. The “detective” changes with every turn.

➡ For older children, the “tableau vivant” can be a fun variant. The CFS facilitators can introduce more elements in the activity, by urging children to tell a story through their “tableau vivant”. For example, the story can be “a day in school”. Each time they change something, the story changes, and the “detective” has to fill in what happened – maybe two children are fighting in class, or maybe the bell just rang and children are rushing outside...



Activities

Fine motor skills Continue my drawing



Objectives: Beyond working on fine motor skills, this activity can improve concentration and patience, as well as build the capacity for collaboration.

Steps:

Materials/equipment: Paper, drawing supplies

Depending on group dynamics, children can be divided into pairs, or groups of 3-5. Each group is given paper and drawing supplies.

With the CFS facilitator's signal, one child per group starts silently drawing something. The drawings can follow a general theme (e.g. "nature", "family"), or be completely up to the young artists.

With the second signal, another child in the group has to continue the drawing. As they cannot speak to each other, they have to use their imagination in order to create something out of the other person's work.

The CFS facilitator counts the time and gives the signals for the artists to switch. They can use an hourglass or an egg timer to make the activity more exciting. Alternatively, they can play with the intervals, making them shorter or longer each time.

The end goal is to create a recognizable image out of the group's work. Of course, the image will probably look complicated, and maybe a little bizarre! After the drawing time is over, the groups can compare their results and have fun with their unexpected elements, sharing what they thought their partners were drawing. The CFS facilitator can help the whole group reflect on the diversity of each person's imagination, and how our individual variations help make everything more interesting!

For older children, the activity can be adapted to "Continue my story"; in other words, each child writes/says a sentence, and the next child has to continue the story, creating a story mosaic!



Activities

Emotion regulation – Our anger bottle



Objectives: This activity aims to cultivate emotional regulation; it can also serve as an introduction of the group's anger management mechanism, which will remain available in the CFS.

Materials/equipment: Clear plastic bottle, materials to place inside that can float in water (e.g. glitter, plastic beads), food coloring, paper, drawing & crafts supplies



Steps:

The activity can start with a group discussion on anger: what is anger, how does it feel, when does it come... The discussion can also stem from a relevant story or video.

The CFS facilitators give each child paper and drawing/crafts supplies. The paper can have the outline of a human figure already drawn on it, or the children can be asked to draw it.

The children are asked to fill in their "anger portrait". In other words, they have to fill in the human figure to indicate how their body feels when they are angry. They can also use coloring pencils, or other crafts supplies (glitter glue, buttons...). Each child has to think what color their anger is, which parts of the body it affects, and how concentrated it is.

Once the children are finished, the CFS facilitator can help them make an aggregate of what anger looks like. Maybe most children have made it red, or maybe most children feel it in their heads, or their whole bodies... Most probably, the anger portraits will look quite intense and chaotic.

Now it's time for the future anger bottle to come out! The CFS facilitator presents the clear empty bottle to the group, and asks them to fill it with water and the aggregate materials of their collective anger portrait. They can use food coloring, and throw in glitter and other floating materials representing the colors used in the drawing. Everyone can contribute to designing the anger bottle!

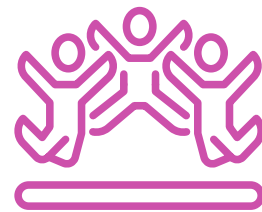
Once the anger bottle takes its final form, the group sits in a circle. One by one, the children are asked to shake the bottle really hard, to make all the materials float. Then, the children observe what happens when they stop moving the bottle. The materials slowly float down, and the bottle is clear once again.

The group reflects together. When the anger bottle is shaken, that's when it looks like the anger portrait – chaotic and intense. When the shaking stops, the bottle stops being "angry". This symbolizes that when we feel angry, we can take a break, and then our anger subsides.

The whole can then agree that, whenever someone feels angry, they can take the anger bottle and shake it. Then, during the time that it takes for the materials to float down, they can observe the bottle, and take a little break. When the bottle is clear again, they can rejoin the group; if they still feel angry, they can repeat the process, until they feel calm. There can even be an "angle bottle corner" in the CFS, and the anger bottle process can also be included in the CFS contract!

Activities

Inclusion – Multilingual portrait



Objectives: The objective of this activity is to increase children's sense and appreciation of self-identity, as well as an appreciation for diversity.

Steps:

Materials/equipment: Paper, drawing supplies

The activity can start with a discussion of the languages that children and the CFS facilitators know. Make sure to introduce all linguistic aspects in the discussion: the language that children use to speak with each other, with their families, with the CFS facilitators; the language that they dream in, that they think in, that they write notes in... Don't forget spoken languages, dialects... A relevant video or story can be used as a prompt.

The CFS facilitators write the different languages and the way that they are used on a board. They encourage children to share unique words in these languages, to write the alphabet, to teach each other greetings...

The facilitators distribute paper and drawing supplies to the children, and ask them to draw their "multilingual portrait", in other words, a full-body portrait of themselves, where they color in the different languages that make them up.

Each child can decide what the different colors and body parts mean. For example, the language that they love the most can be in their heart, drawn in their favorite color; the language that they consider their "root" can be in their legs, etc.

Children show each other their multilingual portraits, and discuss how rich they all are in terms of languages (sometimes they might be richer than the CFS facilitators themselves). As a final part of the activity, perhaps the group could also draw a CFS multilingual portrait, symbolizing the CFS as a person (or anything else!) and coloring in the different languages represented inside the CFS!



κόκκινο = Παντζαπικά

πορτοκαλί = Γερμανικά

μοβ = Αγγλικά

μπλε = Χίντι

Activities



Outdoor activity: Safety – Participatory mapping of the camp

Objectives: This activity is useful for the children to take ownership of their living environment and identify their safety strategies. It's important to note that this activity is also useful for the camp management, and can vitally contribute to assessing the camp's child-friendliness.

Materials/equipment: Paper, drawing supplies, clipboards for children to write on, map of the camp (from camp management)

Steps:

The activity can begin by showing children a map of the camp, ideally printed in big scale for all children to see. The facilitator asks children to identify points that they know in the map. They point to the labels of the map, indicating different places.

The group discusses what the children like about the camp, what they dislike, where they spend most of their time, what places they avoid...

The facilitator introduces the concept of safety; how do the children understand safety? What things can be unsafe? People? Animals? Places? Is safety different at night? Is something safe for some people, but not for others?

The facilitator explains to the children that now they will make their own map of the camp, a map that they can understand and recognize. But this map will be different: it will have labels signaling safe and unsafe points, from the children's own perspective.

Paper, drawing supplies and clipboards are distributed to the children, and the group discusses how they will use colors and symbols to indicate safe/unsafe areas (green-orange-red color codes, check marks-x marks...). They can also label places that are safe for some people, but not everyone (e.g. spaces unsuitable for babies and toddlers), or places that are unsafe only sometimes (e.g. at night or in the weekends).

Children can draw personal maps, or in pairs.

Before leaving the CFS, the facilitator makes sure to establish ground rules for children to move outside, depending on the circumstances in the camp.

The CFS facilitators moves the group around the camp, giving the children time to draw the different places they visit.

The facilitator can give guidelines on how to organize the map, but it's important for children to draw it in a way that makes sense to them.

Once the tour of the camp is complete, the group returns to the CFS, and discusses what they saw, and what they identified as safe and unsafe points. Not everyone may agree; it's important to leave space for polyphony.

If possible, the CFS facilitator can announce to the children that the results of the activity will be shared with camp management; maybe even the facilitator can organize a presentation of the results to the camp management by the children themselves!

Activities

Life skills:

Hygiene – Glitter germs!



Objectives: This activity's objectives is to enhance children's knowledge on general hygiene. Through the activity, children also enhance their teamwork and cooperation.

Materials/equipment: Glitter, paper cups (or similar), dish soap, baby oil, water basin, water

Steps:

The CFS facilitator explains that this activity's theme is the spreading of germs, and shows children that glitter is going to be used to symbolize the germs. The facilitator can also provide a short introduction on what germs are, utilizing multimedia resources.

All children begin by rubbing baby oil on their hands, and stand in a circle.

One child will play the “glitter spreader”, in other words, patient zero. The child pretends to sneeze into their palms, and the CFS facilitator pours glitter over their hands. Now the hands are glitter-infected!

The child then proceeds to greet the other children in the circle. They greet some children with a firm handshake, and other children with an elbow bump.

Once every child has been greeted by the “glitter spreader”, the CFS facilitator asks the whole group to examine their hands: who has the most glitter? Is it the hand-shakers, or the elbow-bumpers?

Now, the CFS facilitator distributes a common-use item, like paper cups. Children are asked to hold them, and pretend that they are using them, or actually use them (e.g. to drink water).

The children are then asked to observe their objects. Did the hand-shakers, or the elbow-bumpers leave more glitter on them?

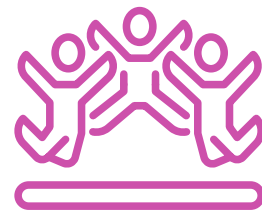
The time to get rid of the glitter-germs has arrived! The CFS facilitator gathers the children around a basin filled with water, and pours glitter inside it. They then drop a droplet of dish soap; the whole group observes as the dish soap repels the glitter, forming a ring of clear water around it. The CFS facilitator explains that this is how soap repels germs in real life.

The children then take turns to wash their hands, getting rid of all the glitter.

Finally, the CFS facilitator reviews the observations from the activity, underlining that simple gestures, like covering our mouth with our elbow when we sneeze, greeting each other with elbow-bumps, and frequently washing our hands, is very important to keep germs and disease away!

Activities

Education: Human rights – Our island



Objectives: This activity aims to help children conceptualize the idea of rights, as well as learn to think in the collective interest.

Steps:

Materials/equipment: Paper, drawing supplies

➡ The CFS facilitator invites the children to think of the following scenario: they are all together explorers, traveling the world to find their own island. They find a beautiful unpopulated island, with all the resources they need to survive. They decide to settle there, and live all together.

➡ The CFS facilitator asks the group to think of what the explorers need to agree upon, in order to live harmoniously together. These will be grouped under the group's "charter", or "convention".

➡ Children then share ideas, in groups or all together, about what they think should be in the charter. The CFS facilitator can jump-start the conversation with simple propositions: the island's water is for everyone; if someone gets sick, the explorers will take care of them, etc.

➡ For older children, the CFS facilitator can also assign characteristics to individual children or groups. Those can include: children & older people, women & men, people with disabilities... Children then need to think in terms of their assigned characteristics, and come up with what they feel they should safeguard with the rest of the group.

➡ Gradually, children will come up with ideas that echo most human rights, and possibly incorporate some rights pertaining to more specific vulnerable groups. The CFS facilitator can then draw the parallels with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child; relevant audiovisual material on these topics can be used at this point.

➡ The group can then write down and decorate their charter, and even have a signing ceremony!

➡ The island can always be revisited by the little explorers, and become a regular jumping off point for activities on human rights, and living together with people and nature!



Activities

Parental engagement: Parents' Olympics



Objectives: This activity aims to implicate children and their parents, strengthening their mutual bond, but also actively involving parents in the CFS and showing them new ways to play with their children.

Steps:

Materials/equipment: Cones, balls, rope, hula hoops, bowling pins, potato sacks...

This activity is in reality a series of activities that can be transformed every time. The general idea behind Parents' Olympics is to invite parents and guardians to participate in group games with their children. Women and men can be invited on separate occasions, or together, per camp dynamics. Father's and Mother's Day are ideal days for this activity.

In a large space, ideally outdoors, the parents and children gather in family teams.

The CFS facilitators organize the space before each game, give instructions, keep time and score for each round, and make sure everyone is having fun!

The Olympics can feature well-known games, adapted per the age of the children, but also ensuring that both adults and children can play them with enough of a challenge. Games can include:

- Egg-and-spoon race
- Potato sack race (an additional challenge is to have the child/parent pair race sharing one sack)
- Bowling
- Obstacle course (featuring obstacles constructed out of the CFS furniture and equipment, but also quick riddles/puzzles)
- Anything else the CFS facilitators, as well as the children and parents can think of!

At the end of the games, the CFS facilitators announce which family pairs scored higher. There can even be an awards ceremony, with medals the children have made previously!



Resources

1. Social Emotional Learning, Safe Healing and Learning Spaces Toolkit, International Rescue Committee: <https://shls.rescue.org/shls-toolkit/social-emotional-learning/>
2. Child Friendly Spaces in Emergencies: A Handbook for Save the Children Staff, Save the Children: <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/2923.pdf/>
3. Compasito, Manual on Human Rights Education for Children, Council of Europe: <http://www.eycb.coe.int/compasito/>
4. StreetSmart Play, Mobile School NPO: <https://play.street-smart.be/en>
5. Social and Emotional Learning, Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies: <https://inee.org/eie-glossary/social-and-emotional-learning>
6. Operational Guidance for Child Friendly Spaces in Humanitarian Settings, International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies & World Vision: <https://pscentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Operational-Guidance-for-Child-friendly-spaces-low-res.pdf>
7. Child-friendly sexual abuse prevention material, One in Five, Council of Europe: <https://enastapente.gr/el/deite-akoma>
8. Examples of types of abuse, Terre des Hommes Hellas: https://tdh.gr/sites/default/files/2022-10/%CE%A6%CF%85%CE%BB%CE%BB%CE%AC%CE%B4%CE%B9%CE%BF%203_%CE%9C%CE%BF%CF%81%CF%86%CE%AD%CF%82%20%CE%BA%CE%B1%CE%BA%CE%BF%CF%80%CE%BF%CE%AF%CE%B7%CF%83%CE%B7%CF%82.pdf
9. Online training material on protecting children from abuse, Terre des Hommes Hellas: <https://tdh.gr/el/programma-reinforce-educators-empower-children-reec>

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CHILD-FRIENDLY SPACES

A practical guide
for field practitioners



unicef 
for every child

SOLIDARITY
NOW
This is our common ground