Skills and methods during the process of direct support while working with children who are at risk or are being abused

Improving the protection and wellbeing of children in Europe: enhancing the curriculum
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Objectives of this session

• Learn the importance of using playful and creative techniques to engage with children and to access their world in a manner that is comfortable and enjoyable to their stage of development.
• Practice examples of how learned skills can enhance communication between children and social workers during the main points of engagement in child protection and welfare assessments: investigative interviews, direct work and home visits.
• Learn skills to encourage disclosure of events by children
• Learn how to engage with uncommunicative children
• Explain the concept of child participation
• Explanation of the strengths perspective
Content

- Communication and the Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Active listening
- Skills and art therapy with children
- Working with children in need
- Participation, empowerment and strength perspective
COMMUNICATION AND THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD
What do you know about international child protection documents?

What is human communication?

What are the main forms of human communication?

How do you start a conversation?

And about our case, which can be some basic elements to consider starting the conversation with the mother?

Which are some contributing factors that you will consider to have a successful communication with the mother/children/parents?
CRC

• CRC provides the most comprehensive framework for the responsibilities of States parties to all children within their borders: by ratifying the Convention, national governments have committed themselves to protecting and ensuring the rights of all children without discrimination.
  – the right to be heard and to be taken seriously; to free speech and to information; to maintain privacy; to develop cultural identity; and to be proud of one’s heritage and beliefs.

• Communication supports the need to respect children’s privacy and dignity and foster their self-esteem and confidence.
• The children have the right to be interviewed by staff, who have good skills in enabling them to articulate their claims, needs and rights.

• The CRC strongly emphasizes child participation and several articles are important in the context of communicating with children, specifically:
  – Article 3, Article 12, Article 13, Articles 9 and 10.
Communication as a process and skill

Communication is the exchange of information between two or more people. It is a process of transferring a message from the source to the receiver, a process of realization of a meaningful contact, an exchange of thoughts and concepts between people, through which an individual gains orientation on self, on own behavior, and experiences emotional satisfaction. Through communication, we achieve our goals and develop sense of connectedness and belonging.
The principles of communication

- Every communication between people, is composed of two aspects
  - The content.
  - The relationship between people having the conversation.
- The way how a communication unfolds depends on its starting point- if we start communicating with accusations and stressed out voice a different route unfolds in comparison to starting it more softly.
- Communication can be intrapersonal.
- People communicate through:
  - Verbal communication
  - Non-verbal communication
Basic skills of the social worker:

• Ability to use age, culture and development stage appropriate language, so that children can understand and relate to the context of what’s being communicated.

• Ability to engage with children in a manner that suits them - i.e. using play.

• Having the patience to develop the needed connectedness for the child to confide in you.

• Ability to understand child’s way of understanding and explaining situations.
Contributing factors to successful communication

- The Location/Environment
- Privacy
- Culture
- Attitude
- Building rapport
- Engaging the child
- Age-appropriate communication
To helping children understand their emotions better, one should:

• Be a sharp observer of children's emotions.
• Recognize that children's emotional expressions provide an opportunity to get close.
• Empathetically listen and respond to children's emotions; tell them that you understand their feelings.
• Help children to verbally label their different emotions.
• Set limits while helping children problem solve the emotional experience.
ACTIVE LISTENING
"You can stop saying 'uh-huh'! I stopped talking to you an hour ago!"
Active Listening

• Active listening is listening to another person in a way that communicates understanding, empathy, and interest.
• It is different from hearing.
• It requires energy, skills, and commitment.
• It makes the speaker feel important, acknowledged, and empowered.
Listening vs. Hearing
Principles of active listening

• Put yourself in your client’s shoes
• Carefully observe your own and your clients’ body language
• Provide regular non-verbal encouragement (i.e. nodding)
• Allow for sufficient time to listen
• Ensure the other that you understand what they are saying
• Focus on their feelings without judging them
• Avoid things that distract you
How do we know we are not listening?

• When we compare self with others, or clients between themselves
• When we have a negative attitude towards the person
• When we give advice
• When we constantly agree with the client
• When we think how we will respond
• When we look for the hidden message
EXERCISE

Participant Handout: Paraphrasing
• **Paraphrasing** is to restate what has been said, with the goal of conveying that one has heard and understood.

• **Paraphrasing Guidelines**
  – Listen to the speaker’s basic message.
  – Give the speaker a simple summary of what you believe is the message. Do not add any new ideas.
  – Observe a cue or ask for a response that confirms or denies the accuracy of the paraphrase.
  – Do not restate negative statements that people may have made about themselves in a way that confirms this perception.
  – Use paraphrasing sparingly.
Summarizing is similar to paraphrasing, but conveys an understanding of what the other person is conveying overall.
SKILLS AND ART THERAPY WITH CHILDREN
List the qualities and the activities of persons who were perceived as being helpful.

**ACTIVITY #1**
Role-play

the child,

the interviewer,

the rest act as observers.

ACTIVITY # 2
Play skills in social work

• Introduction to play media
• Non-directive play (Axline, 1969)
• Therapeutic stories (Davis, 1990)
• Six-piece story (Lahad, 1992)
  – (1) Hero/ heroine and where they live; (2) What is their task or mission; (3) Who or what could help them (if at all); (4) Who or what obstacles prevent them from completing their task; (5) How will the main character cope with obstacle; and (6) Then what happens
• Sand play (McNally, 2001)
• Drawing techniques (Oaklander, 1978)
• Worksheets (Jennings, 2005)
• Birds nest drawing (Kaiser and Deaver, 2009)
WORKING WITH CHILDREN IN NEED
The needs of the children

EXERCISE 1
EXERCISE 2.

Identify the emotions
What we do?
Identifying children in distress/need

- The event is remembered in all details, “hooked” in memory, the child can tell about it in details.
- Sudden flashes of emotional experiences of the stressful event, raised by coincidental image, sound or smell. It forces to experience again the traumatic event.
- Posttraumatic stress reactions:
  - Nightmares
  - Fears
  - Intense, sharp reactions of being scared by the stimuli, which should not cause this kind of reaction
  - Excessive caution, suspiciousness and alertness, especially in the places, linked with trauma
  - Avoidance
  - Sleep disorders, mood swings, anxiety, hyperactivity
• Denial, mortification

• These children avoid talking about themselves; try to be “normal”.

• They are furious, and their anger is often underestimated.
We should observe changes in child’s behavior:

- Lowered self-esteem
- Cautiousness in relation to adults or excessive clinging to familiar people
- Getting scared, when other children cry
- Shivering at any sudden movement of another person
- Difficulties to concentrate and keep attention
- Aggressive behavior
- Apathy, passivity, indifference to any kind of activities, lack of interest and energy
- Avoiding friends, keeping aside
- Fear of parents, fear to go home
- Strange appearance, clothing not adequate to climate or situation
- Self-destructive behavior
- Worsened performance at school
- Loss of appetite;
- Sleep disturbances;
- Headaches or other somatic complaints;
- Poor concentration, restlessness, sudden changes in mood etc.;
- Sexual behavior inappropriate to age; aggressiveness or destructiveness;
- Preoccupation with violence, suffering or separation in their play.
Factors which determine ways of coping with trauma include:

- Age and gender of the child
- Psychological and physical maturity
- Relations with the parent
- Relations with brothers and sisters
- His personal experience in dealing with crisis
- Existence of significant adults (relatives, teachers, friends), who are able to help to overcome trauma
- Changes in social environment due to crisis
Several feelings that may prevent the child from disclosing the traumatic event

• Fear of abuser
• Fear, that nobody will listen to him
• Shame
• He thinks, that nobody can help him
• Blames himself for the violence experienced
• Is afraid, that nobody will love him
• Is afraid, that if he tells someone, the same will happen to his brothers and sisters

• Thinks, that he is very bad, therefore it happened to him
• If an abuser is a close person, he is afraid to tell anybody, because something bad will happen to that person
• Might not have proper words to tell about violence
• Doesn’t know, to whom he can tell
• Simply might not know, that this is an abusive behavior, and nobody is allowed to treat him like that
• Smaller children often do not remember consciously, that they experienced abuse, and who are the abusers.
When we suspect, that the child has actually experienced violence:

- Listen to them, and show them, that you understand
- Do not deny it.
- Don’t lose control over emotions it raised
- Do not blame them or make the feel ashamed for what happened
- Give them psychological support, ensure that they are safe, that nothing will happen to them because they told you.
- Try to know more about the event
- Provide them medical aid, bring to doctor or call emergency
- If necessary, call police
- Address Child Protection Unit
Where a child communicates a need or desire to talk

- Help the child feel comfortable
- Allow the children to set the pace
- Give adequate time to the child
- Reassure the child that it is not his/her fault
- Don’t react with shock, anger, disgust
- Don’t force a child to show injuries
- Use terms and language that the child can understand
- Don’t ‘interview’ the child
- Ask appropriate questions
- Don’t ask ‘why’ questions
- Don’t teach the child new terms or words.

- Find out what the child wants from you
- Be honest with the child
- Confirm the child’s feelings and accept them
- Be supportive
- Talking about difficult situations may enable children to work out their own solutions
- Sometimes it is necessary to allow regression

Remember…
Responding to the uncommunicative child

• Be patient and allow time to build up trust. Give lots of positive messages of warmth and acceptance.

• Use games, activities, drawing, writing, outings etc. to help develop trust and open lines of communication.

• Avoid pressurizing the child to talk: continue to communicate but also continue to allow silences.

• Find out more about the child from others
Child Friendly Space

• Play
• Formal and informal education
• A place to express and voice their feelings
• Learning important information
• Allow parents/caregivers to attend also to their daily activities
Things to say

• ‘I believe you’
• ‘I am going to try to help you’
• ‘I will help you’
• ‘I am glad that you told me’
• ‘You are not to blame’

Things not to say

• ‘You should have told someone before’
• ‘I can’t believe it! I’m shocked!’
• ‘Oh that explains a lot’
• ‘No not...he’s a friend of mine’
• I won’t tell anyone else’
• What do you understand by the term “empowerment”? 
ACTIVITIES – WORKSHEET A
WORKSHEET B
Strength-Based Practice

• An absolute belief that every person has potential and it is their unique strengths and capabilities that will determine their evolving story as well as define who they are.

• What we focus on becomes one’s reality.

• The language we use creates our reality

• Belief that change is inevitable

• Positive change occurs in the context of authentic relationships.

• Person’s perspective of reality is primary.

• People have more confidence and comfort to journey to the future (the unknown) when they are invited to start with what they already know.

• Capacity building is a process and a goal

• It is important to value differences and the essential need to collaborate
The empowerment of the children

- Letting go of their issues without abandoning them
- Agreement not rules:
- Love and encourage
- Ask for help
- Respectful communication
- Information vs. orders
- Encourage learning from mistakes:

- Show faith
- Respect privacy
- Express you’re limits
- Listen without fixing, discounting, or judging”
- Control your own behavior
- Decide what you will do with dignity and respect.
- Follow through with kindness and firmness.
Preparing children for everyday life

- Respect for individuality.
- Self-assertiveness and expressing needs and feelings.
- Problem-solving and decision-making skills.
- Respect and empathy for others.
“BE THE CAUSE!”

B – Best Interest of the Child
E – Ethical Approach
T – Transparency and Informed Consent
H – Honoring
E – Equal opportunity and democracy
C – Care, safety and protection
A – Appreciation, recognition and mutual respect
U – Uphold non-discrimination and inclusiveness
S – Staff effectiveness
E – Evaluation and follow-up
Genuine and effective child participation requires:

• An ongoing process of expression and active involvement in decision making at different levels in matters that concern them;
• Information sharing and dialogue between children and adult based on mutual respect.
• Power for children to shape both the process and outcome;
• Acknowledgment that children’s evolving capacity experience and interest play a key role in determining the nature of their participation.
• Capacity building among children by strengthening their skills base as well as building an enabling social environment.
REFLECTION...
Thank you