GROWING STRONG TOGETHER

A PARENTING PROGRAM TO SUPPORT THE REINTEGRATION OF CHILDREN AND PREVENT THEIR RECRUITMENT

Constant Companion: Facilitators' Guide

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THE ALLIANCE FOR CHILD PROTECTION IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION

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The Parenting Program

Introduction

This Constant Companion: Facilitator's Guide - hereinafter "the Constant Companion" – is one of the tools developed for the implementation of "Growing strong together: A Parenting Program to support the reintegration of children and prevent their recruitment". It is part of a comprehensive resource pack informed by formative research findings in consultations with girls, boys and parents, and from a desk review of over 100 relevant resources.

The program aims at supporting parents to protect children and adolescents (8-21 years) from recruitment and promote their reintegration following association with armed forces or armed groups.

The Constant Companion is a guide to help facilitators in the implementation of the sessions of the Program.

The resource pack includes:

1. The Desk-Review informing the structure and the content of the entire pack.
2. The Curriculum: "Growing strong together: A Parenting Program to support the reintegration of children and prevent their recruitment – Intervention Curriculum".
3. This Facilitator's Guide: "Constant Companion".
4. The Training of the Facilitators (ToF) Guide.
5. The Family Visits Guide.
6. The Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework and Tools.
7. Intervention Curriculum

If you are a facilitator, this Intervention Curriculum is for you, to help you implement the sessions of the Parenting Program for family and community members!

1. The Parenting Program

"Growing strong together: A Parenting Program to support the reintegration of children and prevent their recruitment" – hereinafter the "Parenting Program" - has been developed for contexts where Children have been Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (CAAFAG) or are at risk of association.

1.1 Goal of the Program

Children and adolescents affected by armed conflict are protected from recruitment and children and adolescents previously associated with armed groups receive support from their parents and guardians to reintegrate into families and communities and realize their full potential.

1.2 Theory of Change

1.3 Objectives of the Program

By the end of the training, parents have strengthened their capacities to:

a. Identify the factors that can push or force their children to join armed groups, and the risks they run, and explain the consequences of their possible involvement with armed groups.

b. Recognize their children's needs and the importance of understanding, respecting and valuing their children with all their aspirations, their opinions and struggles.

c. Avoid harsh parenting practices and create positive relationships between them as parents and their children.

d. Model the above-mentioned notions in their parenting styles and expressing them through communication, interaction and relationships with their children and other family members.

e. Practice self-care strategies to reduce stress and manage emotions.

1.4 Program's fundamental values and principles

Four concepts are at the core of this Parenting Program: (i) the best interests of the child; (ii) child safeguarding; (iii) non-discrimination and inclusion; and (iv) gender equality. You, as facilitator, must embody these principles in your approach and your facilitation.

The best interests of the child

When we talk about the *"best interests of the child"*, we should be primarily concerned with children's needs and rights, supporting children to grow, develop and achieve their full potential. For every need and right, there is a corresponding responsibility. Parents, among others, are responsible for their children's wellbeing and all their actions should keep in mind the best interests of their children as primary concern.[1] The Parenting Program you are going to facilitate focuses on parents, and it ultimately aims at improving children's lives and wellbeing through parental responsibility.

In the Program we look at children as individuals, with their own capacities, capabilities and agency, even in the most restraining situations, but we also recognize children as human beings, who are growing and developing, and are entitled to particular rights and protection with their participation in matters that concern them.

Children and their families are also part of a broader community, and the best interests of the child can only be achieved when all social actors are involved in this effort. For parents, and community at large, fulfilling the best interests of their children should result in both protecting and empowering them. This balance is important at all times, but might be undermined especially for children and adolescents living in conflict zones, who are particularly at risk of violence or traumatic experiences, and who are also covering roles and activities that in other communities/conditions are carried out exclusively by adults.

Child safeguarding

This Parenting Program, as all child protection programs, has been developed and will have to be implemented ensuring that (i) no staff or others working on behalf of IRC/any organization harm children and (ii) safety risks and cases of misconduct are identified, reported, and addressed in an appropriate and timely manner. In accordance with Article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), IRC recognizes the right of all children to be protected from all forms of abuse and exploitation and has a zero-tolerance policy regarding the abuse and exploitation of children.

All the workers involved in the implementation of this Parenting Program have been recruited ensuring that they are suitable to work with children. You, as a facilitator, must conduct yourself in a way that is safe for children and are required to report allegations of abuse and exploitation. Before starting your work, make sure you have read and understood your

[1] General Comment 14 on Best Interests of the Child and its relevance for state actors and service providers

organizational Child Safeguarding Policy and if you have any doubt, feel free to ask the project team about it.[2]

Non-discrimination and inclusion

The principle of non-discrimination is embedded in the whole Program and its related facilitation style since all participants shall be treated equally, with no difference based on their *"race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status such as disability, age, marital and family status, sexual orientation and gender identity, health status, place of residence, economic and social situation"*.[3] Participants themselves are encouraged to treat their children and all the members of their family and community according to the same principle.

The Parenting program aims at *leaving no one behind,* being as inclusive as possible. Some of the participants might come from disadvantaged backgrounds or belong to an ethnic minority, or face challenges such as disability, or might have specific requirements, and the program allows for enough flexibility to be adapted to the variety of participants.

You, as facilitator, should constantly reflect on how inclusive your activities are. Each participant and each child you are responsible for is an individual. Even if they have faced similar challenges due to armed conflict, how they are affected, how they recover, how they learn, and how they support their children varies from individual to individual. You should use this individuality to strengthen the group and support their learning from each other.

Gender equality

Women and girls around the world do not fully experience equal rights and their potential often remains untapped. Starting from this consideration, the program has been developed with gender equality and inclusion as core-values, always keeping in mind that being a female or a male child, a female or a male caregiver, a female or a male facilitator, has different meaning and consequences. This approach helps us not to fall into the trap of considering that what is needed by parents of male or female CAAFAG might guide a *"universalist"* program, presuming that all children share essentially the same (male or female) characteristics and experiences and consequently should receive the same kind of assistance. The unique dynamics, risk factors, and consequences of the involvement of boys and girls in armed groups are foregrounded, to help parents address their distinctive needs.

The program also stresses the importance of recognizing and eliminating negative gender stereotypes within the family setting and it intentionally targets mothers and fathers alike. Both parents are responsible for their children and should take decisions together for the wellbeing of their children. The equality of their roles is at the backbone of this Parenting Program and you, as facilitator, should always keep it in mind during all the sessions, favoring collaboration.

Considering in the majority of socioeconomic/geographical contexts females are responsible of child rearing but it has been extensively proved that the role of male caregivers is fundamental as well, this program in particular strongly supports the participation and involvement of men/boys and recognizes their value in building a nurturing and positive family environment.

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[2] The International Rescue Committee's child safeguarding policy is found here - in English and in French

[3] Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comment No. 20, Non-discrimination in economic, social and cultural rights (2009).

For you, as facilitator, embracing the principle of gender equality and inclusion means taking into consideration gender dynamics which exist at a local level and that might compromise the effectiveness of the sessions implemented (for example, by paying attention to how certain activities might be received differently by men and women, or might be discussed with a different emphasis on the basis of gender or might reinforce gender stereotypes, discrimination or exclusion).

FURTHER RESOURCES:

The Constant Companion, which is part of this resource pack, will help you embrace gender equality and inclusivity in your work. You will also discuss these topics during the Training of Facilitators you will attend.

You will need to identify the most suitable approach towards gender equality and inclusion, based on the local context and community. The Supervisor of the Program will support you in doing that – remember to always discuss any doubts you have with him/her.

1.5 Terminology used within the Program

The following words recur throughout the Program's tools. They are used with a specific meaning that is usually more complex and vaster than what we might think at first sight. Please read their definitions carefully and reflect on how they apply to your own context.

Children

The word "children", in this Program, refers to all children, adolescents, and young people between the age of 8 and 21. This age range should not be taken in a prescriptive way. Before starting your job as facilitator, you have to reflect on what being a "child", "adolescent" or "young person" means and what being between the age of 8 and 21 years means in your context and community. Such reflections should involve the facilitators, the Supervisor of the Program, as well as the participants, who could discuss which term they find more appropriate to describe children who might fall into this age category. This will permit to acknowledge the roles and responsibilities that boys and girls have within the family, the relationships with their relatives and community, the degree of freedom, vulnerability, agency and protection they are entitled to at different ages, and how it varies from context to context.

Children associated with armed groups

This expression refers to all Children, adolescents and young people who have been associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups (CAAFAG). This definition includes those who have taken part in any kind of role in an armed force or armed group in any capacity,

including but not limited to fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, those involved as artists, such as children involved in cultural programs within the group, as well as those who have been in contact with such groups, accompanying them or engaging with them for any reason.

Parents

The word "parents" indicates all the people who have a close relationship with the child and are present in the child's life and have some form of parental responsibility. This includes: (i) fathers and mothers; (ii) aunts, uncles, grandparents, or other family members or kin; (iii) caregivers who do not have blood ties with the child. This Program aims to support the reintegration of CAAFAG within their families and communities and to prevent their recruitment. Hence all the family and community members who have a close relation with the child and who have his/her best interests in mind are welcomed to participate.

Positive parenting

Positive parenting consists of a series of practices that focus on creating safe home environments and building a foundation of support and care for children, increasing parents' knowledge, and helping them recognize attitudes and behaviors that improve and support children's behavior and mental health. Different communities/cultures have different ways of providing positive and nurturing care to their children, e.g. through affection, quality time, praise and/or healthy methods of dealing with difficult behavior to encourage pro-social behavior. Systematic reviews on the effectiveness of parenting interventions in different geographical settings show that, if based on social learning theory principles, they are everywhere an effective strategy to improve parent–child relationships, and reduce violence against children and disruptive child behavior[4].

Reintegration

In this Program "reintegration" refers to the process through which children, adolescents and young people associated with armed forces and armed groups are integrated into civil society and enter into meaningful roles and identities as civilians who are accepted by their families and communities in a context of reconciliation (at local or national level). Sustainable reintegration is achieved when the political, legal, economic and social/cultural conditions needed for children to maintain life, livelihood and dignity have been secured. This process aims to ensure that children can access their rights, including formal and non-formal education, family unity, dignified livelihoods and safety from harm.

The content of the Constant Companion

The guide is divided in two parts. In the first part (see Part I) you will have some general suggestions on how to organize and conduct the sessions. In this part we will also look at the skills that a facilitator needs to possess to effectively conduct these sessions.

In the second part (see Part II), we will look into the content of the Program and will help you navigate the Curriculum. We will reflect on some of the challenges you might face, how to tackle them, and how to adapt the content to the needs of your participants. You will receive further guidance on how to deliver the sessions by attending the **Training of the Facilitators,**

[4] UNICEF Office of Research (OoR) – Innocenti. Research Brief 2017-10. "Parenting Interventions: How well do they transport from one country to another?". Available at: https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/IRB_2017_10_R.pdf

which is part of this resource pack. Also, you will discuss some of these aspects with the Supervisor of the Program.

CONTEXTUALIZATION:

Always keep in mind that this Guide serves as guidance to implement the sessions, and that the Curriculum is a very flexible tool, which needs to be adapted to serve the specific needs of your participants. Before starting the implementation, a contextualization workshop MUST be conducted jointly with your Supervisor of the Program and the team working with you to identify together the ways in which the sessions need to be contextualized. To guide you during this process, all the aspects that require contextualization in this Guide as well as in the Intervention Curriculum have been marked with the icon.

Note that the list of aspects which require contextualization is not exhaustive, and it is advisable that you and the Supervisor of the Program go through this Guide and the Intervention Curriculum to identify all the instances that might require contextualization.

Beside the contextualization, other aspects of the implementation need to be part of a discussion with the Supervisor of the Program and, when needed, with community members. More information on the pre-implementation liaison with the Supervisor of the Program are included in the Implementation Guide. At the end of this manual (see “Liaising with the Supervisor of the Program”) you will also find an overview of some of the tasks and implementation points that should be discussed with the Supervisor of the Program. In the same table you will find an indication of who is responsible for the implementation of each of the tasks.

Part 1

Tips and tricks to organize the sessions and work with adults

Part I: **Tips and tricks to organize the sessions and work with adults**

The approach of the sessions and its methodology

The Curriculum taps into parents' existing skills and knowledge, and via conversations, discussions and role plays followed by group feedback it aims at enhancing parents' abilities and empower them, in their role as nurturing caregivers.

The sessions are based on a participatory, participant-centered and active learning approach. In this approach, a central role is given to the voices of the participants and the knowledge and skills emerge through and are grounded in participants' experience and through their interaction and mutual learning. How does this approach work in practice? There are a few simple techniques that can help you achieve this goal, which are integrated into each of the activities. Here is how to deal with each of them.

A. Ask questions, and then more questions and more questions…

The central element of this approach are group discussions: Through questions, the facilitator stimulates participants' pre-existing knowledge, fostering mutual learning and reflection. Ok but… which questions should one ask? You need to help participants debate and think critically by asking **open questions and limiting the use of closed questions.**

Closed questions are those which can be answered with a yes or no. For example, "Do you feel happy today?". Not much more than a yes or no comes from this type of question. Now, try asking, "How do you feel today?", or "What makes you feel so joyful today?". These are open questions: You can get so much more information from the respondent using these kind of questions! Open questions generally start with:

How…
Why…
What…

Remember: To generate a debate and involve more people in a discussion, once you have asked a question to one of the participants, or once you received a comment/idea from one of the participants, always follow up with:

What makes you say that? AND
Who has a different idea?

Remember that in the Curriculum, you will also find **suggestions of questions to ask** to facilitate a discussion, and tips for points you should make sure are mentioned. When you ask a question STAY FOCUSED, listen to the answer carefully, do not rush into thinking about what else you can ask, or what else you need to say. Stay focused, listen carefully, if possible, take some notes!
Also, note that the Intervention Curriculum is a **scripted manual:** This means that you will find extensive guidance on how to navigate and guide the discussion.

As much as possible you should try to refrain from conducting extensive lecturing and focus on asking the right questions to tap into participants experiences and generate knowledge together.

Keep in mind that opinions are not “right” or “wrong”. Refrain from statements such as “what you are saying is wrong” but inquire what the rest of the participants think. Keep in mind your goal as a facilitator: Create a safe space where participants are free to express their opinions without judgment and help the group to understand one another’s viewpoints.

Make sure to engage everyone in the discussion, avoiding focusing on some people or excluding others. Try to engage the whole group and stimulate critical reflection by asking: “Who has a different idea? What makes you say that?”

At the end of a discussion, summarize – you see, it was useful to take notes! Ask the participants whether you have summarized in a correct way, and if there is any point that needs to be added.
Finally, THANK THE PARTICIPANTS, thank people every time they share something, it is not that easy to share your thoughts in front of a group of strangers!

You can find an example of suggested questions and Notes to the Facilitators that can help you guide the discussion in the Activity 2, Session 2, “Recognizing our role as parents” in the Intervention Curriculum.
Remember that it is crucial that you contextualize the Facilitators’ Notes before implementing the Program!

Feel free to contextualize these questions!
Example of discussion and suggested questions from the Intervention Curriculum:

2. **ASK:**
    a. What are some of the things you do to respond to your child's needs at each stage of their development?
    b. What are some of the things you do, or have done, when your child was younger, such as under 12.
    c. What are things you do to support older children, for example above 12?
    d. What barriers do you have in responding to your children's needs?
3. Take notes of the answers in your notebook. **Keep them at hand, as you will need them in the next session!** Always encourage everyone to participate. If needed, use some of the

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information in the table below – see Facilitator's Table 1: **Addressing our children's needs**. **Remember that we will investigate each of these practices in detail over the course of the next sessions!**

4. **Next ASK:**
    a. What does our community expect from us as parents? For example, how should parents behave towards their children? Towards each other? What kind of role is the mother expected to have? What about the father?
    b. Which beliefs and customs can have a positive influence on our children's wellbeing and our family's relationships?
    c. Which beliefs and customs could be dangerous or negative for boys? What about for girls?

Facilitators' Notes 1: Addressing our children's needs and rights

Table Addressing our children's needs and rights

Main aspects are relevant for all children.

What do children of all ages (male and female) need and are entitled to from their parents:

- Reassurance and support to adjust to new situations (e.g. change in family composition, school life).
- Being listened to and receiving attention when they are communicating.
- Independence to try and do things by themselves.
- Protection.
- Respect.
- Trust.
- Support, affection and understanding.
- Help to deal with new tasks.
- *Being taken seriously.*
- *Being listened to.*
- Feeling they can trust their parents.
- Being able to reach them without fearing judgment or reproach.
- Adequate shelter, healthy food and health care.

Asking questions – what to keep in mind:

- Ask questions that help the participants reflect on an issue. Questions that help people to think often start with “Why…?” or “How…?” or “What if…?” (Open questions). As much as possible, limit closed questions (yes/no answers).

- Do not be judgmental: Opinions are not “right” or “wrong”.

- During group discussion engage all participants by asking “who has a different idea? What makes you think that?”.

- Remember that your role is to guide the discussion: Before feeding your ideas to the audience, remember to always engage the audience in a discussion and try to facilitate the discussion so that the answers to questions, problems, or unclear points come from the audience.

- **Contextualization**: Use the questions suggested in each of the Intervention Curriculum activities to guide the discussions, but feel free to adapt them to your context as needed.

- Summarize at the end.

- THANK EVERYONE!

B. Vignettes

In many sessions, you will see that the discussions are often paired with the use of simple, relatable scenarios. These scenarios are generally open-ended, and the participants are asked to imagine how the situation will evolve, how each action will impact the other actors involved and how all the characters in the scenarios will feel. This tool is very useful when you want to generate a discussion about potentially sensitive or taboo issues, and you want to protect the participants from exposing their own personal experiences, or re-living intense or traumatic experiences. By using vignettes people can place distance between themselves and what they will discuss by referring to the imaginary characters in the scenarios. This is also a great empathy building exercise: By asking participants to reflect on the feelings and reactions of each character in the scenarios, they learn to put themselves in the shoes of other people, especially their children and other family members.

These vignettes are integrated into some of the activities of the Intervention Curriculum. To make the best out of this tool, it is important to keep in mind the following points:

- **Contextualization:** Adapt the content of the Open-Ended Stories to the local context to make them more relevant.
- When adapting the vignette, remember to keep them imaginary - do not make any reference to real people or real events. However, some of the examples might be familiar to participants. Remind them that these are made-up situations even if they might feel familiar.
- At the same time, make sure to keep them relatable: The vignettes should represent instances that are likely to have been lived, experienced or witnessed by the participants, or that the participants can easily relate towards.
- When facilitating a discussion about the vignette, use the instructions highlighted in **point a: "Ask questions",** above.
- Note that every Open-Ended Story is accompanied by a list of questions to help you guide the discussion. Feel free to edit these questions to better fit the local context.
- Even if the idea is to create distance between the participants and the stories being told, this will not necessarily prevent heated feelings, or intense emotions from arising. Always be very mindful of the possible consequences of questions or activities. For more on this aspect and how to deal with this, look at the next section "Dealing with sensitive issues", in this guide. Also, refer to the Suggested agenda and sessions overview, in this guide, to identify which sessions are more likely to trigger intense emotions.
- You can find an example of Open-Ended Stories in the Activity 3, Session 4, "The experiences of children associated with armed groups" in the Intervention Curriculum.

Example of an Open-Ended Story from the Intervention Curriculum:

Activity 4. Can family relations reduce the risk of forced recruitment or abduction? (30 min)

Aims: To reflect on situations that might put children at risk of abduction; to identify the role of the family in reducing this risk.

Modality: **plenary**

1. **SAY:** (Open ended story)

Manuel is a 15 years old boy. He likes playing football, he has plenty of friends and, even though he does not like math and science, he is happy about going to school, and helps the family working in a gas station during the weekend.

One evening he was coming back home later from work, and he took a shortcut in a smaller side road. A car approached quickly, and he was forced to get in. Since than he has been forced to work as a combatant for a local armed group, without being able to communicate with his family and friends any longer.

2. **ASK:**
   a) Is this situation common in our context?
   b) Which circumstances can put children in danger of being abducted by armed groups?
   c) Do you think that there is anything that the family can do to prevent these issues?

C. Role Play

Now that you have learned from each other's stories and ideas, we need to buckle up and get in action! In most of the sessions, discussions are combined with practical, participatory activities that involve the participants directly and let them practice the new skills or behaviors acquired, such as role play (see session S9 to S20 in the Intervention Curriculum). This procedure also helps participants understand the reasons and benefits of a certain behavior or skills, as well as the impact on other people, so that they become ready to put it into practice in their everyday lives. Here are a few tips to facilitate role play:

- Clearly explain the scenario participants should represent or provide the instructions and make sure everyone understands the task.
- Form small groups (ideally 2-4 people) or invite people to form groups. Consider that the smaller the groups, the more effective the role play will be: Everyone will have a chance to play some of the characters. At the same time, having smaller groups will imply that the activity will last longer, since more groups will present their scene.
- **Contextualization:** Consider what is the best approach towards forming groups and performing a scenario in your context: Can you have mixed gender groups? Can you let the male and female caregivers work together as a "family unit"? Do participants have a disability and what changes need to be made to enable them to participate? What other power dynamics might affect the work

within the group? Will everyone have a chance to participate within the group? How can you ensure participation? (Refer to some of the suggestions provided in the next section *"Facilitation, safe space and power"*, for some extra tips).

- Within each group, assign roles or invite participants to choose their role.
- If you think that participants are using the skills incorrectly, ask the rest of the group to help the group model the new skill or behavior.
- Once the role play is completed, discuss it with the parents and exchange feedback. Use the suggestions provided under **point a: "Ask questions".** You will always have a set of questions that you can use to generate a discussion, but feel free to edit them according to the needs of the participants.
- At the end, always make a summary of the things learned.
- Thank everyone!
- You can find an example of role play in Activity 4, Session 5: "Taking care of the needs of our girls" in the Intervention Curriculum.

a. Model your behavior!

"After a few sessions into the Program, it was very clear who were Tala's favorite participants. He would mainly address Mohir and Asyaanka, two of the older male participants, and largely ignored the women in the group. After a few sessions, one by one the women stopped joining. The Supervisor of the Program tried to understand what was going on and asked a few of them what made them stop going to the sessions. Some explained that they felt ignored, that their words where not as valued as those of the other participants".

What you say is just as important as HOW you facilitate. Even if Tala spent a great deal of time discussing "respect" and "equality" in the group, he was not behaving in a respectful way towards the participants. Therefore, some of the participants grew frustrated and stopped taking Tala seriously and ended up abandoning the Program.

Make sure you embody all the values, skills and behaviors that you are exploring with the participants. Remember: The core of this Program is to help parents recognize the importance of respecting and valuing their children. It is important that you show the same approach towards the participants: Always be respectful and always show how much you value everyone's contributions and commitment to the activities.

Your body language talks for you

"It is the first session of the program. Ahyla, one of the facilitators, sits with the participants. She keeps her arms crossed on her chest, and when people are discussing she is occupied with taking notes on the whiteboard about what people are saying, she has her back towards the participants and she never really looks at the people talking".

What is happening in this example is very common: Ahyla is nervous because this is the first day of the Program, and she is preoccupied with making sure everything goes well. While feeling nervous is normal, it is important to keep an eye on our body language and make sure that we have an open, warm, energizing and welcoming behavior. Ahyla's body language - her crossed arms, her back towards the group, the lack of eye context with the participants talking - is telling participants that she is not open to receiving their comment, that she is not focused on what they are saying, although that is exactly what she is trying to achieve.

Make sure you:

- Keep your arms and hands open. Avoid crossing your arms. This creates a feeling of openness and confidence.
- Stand or sit where you can be seen by everyone.
- During group work, walk around each group and avoid hovering over the participants' shoulders – rather sit with them, or go down to their level. This creates a feeling of equality.
- Have a warm, open smile.
- Nod when someone is talking - this helps acknowledging that you are following what is being said.
- Look people in the eyes, especially when they are talking.
- Avoid having your back to the participants, especially when someone is talking. This can be tricky if you need to take notes of the conversation while the participants discuss. It can be a good idea to have one facilitator in charge of jotting down notes on the flipchart or on a piece of paper or notebook and another one moderating the discussion.

Facilitation skills and the active learning, participant-centered approach.

What makes a good facilitator?

As a facilitator, your role is that of *guiding* participants in learning from each other through their discussions. You are there to enable each member of the group to contribute and enrich everyone's knowledge, stimulate their thinking and reflection.

In terms of general attitude and behavior, a good facilitator should:

- Model the collaborative approach to problem solving (see next section, Dealing with conflicts).
- Praise the participants for their participation, for simply being there – it is not a given thing – and for sharing their knowledge, experiences and feelings.
- Thank them and, when you are mistaken, acknowledge your mistakes and say sorry.
- Be empathic, sensitive to emotions and feelings generated in the group.
- Be understanding.
- Be aware of your own bias and attitudes in order to overcome them.
- Be sensitive of possible topics which might cause conflict, or make people feel uncomfortable (see next section, Dealing with sensitive issues).
- Listen carefully and truly, stay focused when people are talking. Do not judge. Take a real interest in the people with whom you are working.
- Be enthusiastic.
- Be energetic and creative.
- Stay flexible.
- Respect participants' desires, ideas and opinions.
- Be aware and respectful of the local cultural norms.
- Be on time, organized and well prepared.
- Have fun!

Also, a large part of the sessions' success relies on your ability to establish a warm, safe and trustful environment. You will find some tips on how to create a safe and trustful environment in the next section "Organize the sessions, the space and the materials" .

NOTE: The Training of the Facilitators will help you build the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively and successfully implement the Intervention Curriculum.

Previous training experience and background knowledge

Are you well-prepared to facilitate this Curriculum?

BEFORE starting your job as facilitator, you must have:

1. Attended the Training of Facilitators included in this Parenting Program resource back
2. Received training on the Foundations of Child Protection
3. Received training on Gender-Based Violence (GBV) core concepts
4. Be committed to and received training on Child safeguarding

DURING the whole implementation of the Program (and facilitation of the sessions), you should:

5. Be familiar with and use "The Constant Companion: Facilitator's Guide"
6. Receive ongoing coaching and supervision beyond the training of facilitators
7. Receive support from the Supervisor of the program to contextualize the curriculum

Some of these aspects are covered in **the Training of the Facilitators**, which is part of this resource pack.

Logistics

Logistics and COVID – 19

Contextualization:

Your location might have a higher or lower risk of Covid-19 or other communicable diseases. It is advisable that you analyze and discuss the situation together during the pre-implementation liaison with the Supervisor of the Program.

Based on the latest World Health Organization (WHO) recommendations, keep in mind some basic rules:

Before and during the sessions

- Should you feel sick, have symptoms such as muscle pain, fever or cough, you should seek a backup or cancel the sessions.
- Before the sessions, check the advice from the authorities in the community where you plan to hold the meeting or event and follow them.
- Consider the number of participants and make sure that there is enough space in the room and that a distance of 2 meters can be maintained. If possible, have the sessions in spaces that have very good air circulation e.g., open shaded spaces, windows that allow for cross ventilation etc. Open the windows as much as possible.
- Make sure that there are sufficient supplies, including tissues and handwashing facilities or hand sanitizer for use by all participants and masks available if necessary.
- Advise participants in advance that if they have any symptoms or feel unwell, they should not attend.
- If anyone develops symptoms during the session, they should go home right away.
- Before and at the beginning of the session, provide participants information or a briefing on COVID-19 and the measures taken to make this event safe for participants.
- Build trust. For example, as an icebreaker, practice ways to say hello without touching.
- Encourage regular handwashing or use of an alcohol rub by all participants.
- Encourage participants to cover their face with the bend of their elbow or a tissue if they cough or sneeze.
- Provide contact details or a health hotline number that participants can call for advice or to give information.
- Thank all participants for their cooperation.

AFTER the meeting

- If someone during the sessions was isolated as a suspected COVID-19 case, you or the Supervisor of the Program should let all participants know this. They should be advised to monitor themselves for symptoms for 14 days and take their temperature twice a day and follow the procedures indicated by the local authorities.

For more information visit: https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/getting-workplace-ready-for-covid-19.pdf?ua=1

Organize the sessions, the space and the materials

Contextualization:

It is crucial that the location is safe for the participants. Having interventions which involve caregivers of children associated with armed forces or armed groups can generate stigmatization, risk of re-recruitment and cause harm to the participants and their children. The assessment of the location and the concerns around participants' and children's safety are very context specific. Therefore, it is necessary that the safety of the location is discussed in the pre-implementation liaison with the Supervisor of the Program.

How you organize the space has an impact on the way that participants will perceive the sessions, your role as a facilitator and on how much they will feel welcomed and at ease and perceive the sessions as a safe environment, where different opinions and ideas can be shared freely. Therefore, it is essential to maintain control of the space and be perfectly organized. What you want to achieve through the space organization is:

a. Give participants the feeling that this is a meeting of equals: You are not their teacher, but their guide.
b. Build a space where participants feel safe to share their thoughts, where one perceives a welcoming and positive atmosphere.
c. Participants should feel that they are an active part of the session, and not passive recipients of knowledge. There should be as few obstacles in the room and in front of the chairs as possible.
d. The place needs to be well organized so that it is easier to work.

Here are a few tips to achieve these goals. This is not an exhaustive list: You can come up with many more ideas.

Session preparation:

- Make sure you are aware of the dimensions and composition of the group. Be aware that the ideal number is between 15 and 20 people. Consider that the time and the materials indicated in each activity in the Intervention Curriculum are for a group of this size.
- Organize your logistics: Make a list of all the things you need and have them ready at the beginning of each day, organized by session. You will find a list of materials needed at the beginning of each activity in the Intervention Curriculum. Remember to have the **Referral Plan** and its related Referral Handout developed with the Supervisor of the Program with you at all times during the implementation of the sessions.

Referral Plan and Referral Handout

The Referral Plan contains all the indications for you, as facilitator, in case some particular issues arise, and gives you suggestions on if and how to intervene. The Referral Handout is a document related to the Referral Plan but meant for the participants. It includes a list of agencies operational in your local context and it describes the kind of support each agency can provide, as well as how participants can easily contact each specific agency.

- Ideally, have the participants sit in a circle. You will also sit in the circle: You will more easily be perceived as a member of the group. Make sure you sit at their same level, to generate a feeling of equality within the group.
- Avoid standing up while facilitating as much as you can.
- Place all the materials needed neatly organized in an accessible area in the room.
- If needed (it depends on your own facilitation style as well as the literacy level of the participants), place any writing aid, such as flipcharts, in a place that is visible to everyone and easily accessible to you.
- It can be very useful to have a small notebook and a pen always at hand (possibly store it in your pocket or under your chair): You can use it to note ideas, questions, comments or other things you might want to remember that can arise during the conversations. This is a key tool to help you summarize discussions!
- Make sure there are 4/6 spaces in the corners of the room or outside of the room to work in smaller groups.
- If possible, make sure the room has space to hang flipcharts. As you will see in the Intervention Curriculum, the use of flipcharts is not necessary, but it is recommended to help you keep track of discussions and ensure that you can recall the things learned in previous sessions. If you do not have flipcharts you can use any other writing aid available, such as plain A4 paper or pages of a notebook.
- Have the materials ready before each session.
- **Contextualization:** Consider the local needs of participants. These aspects need to be discussed and agreed upon during the **pre-implementation liaison with the Supervisor of the Program**, but here are some practical tips for you to take into consideration when organizing the sessions:
    - Are you using a community space, and does it need to be pre-booked in advance? Who is responsible for preparing the space, getting it open and ready?

NOTE:

The needs of participants and how best to address them need to be discussed in the pre-implementation liaison with the Supervisor of the Program and in the community consultation, which will be attended by both facilitators and will be coordinated by the Supervisor of the Program.

  - Is the reimbursement of the participants' transportation part of your task as facilitator as agreed with the Supervisor of the Program? If so, calculate the amount needed in advance, make sure you have small change to avoid asking for change from participants, make sure you have the right amounts ready at the beginning of each day, possibly sort out this issue before starting the sessions – otherwise you will create unnecessary distractions during the sessions.
  - Do they have time to eat before or should you provide them with some refreshments during the sessions? If so, discuss with participants the best solutions which might include making the needed arrangements for food and decide with the participants whether the food will be served before or after the sessions, or if there will be a break during the sessions. Make sure the food is ready at the time when you announced it will be - otherwise you will create unnecessary distractions during the sessions. In any case and at a minimum, make sure there is always some water available for each participant.
  - Do participants have issues that could impede, delay or challenge their effective participation? For example, is there a need to provide childcare during the sessions? Reflect on these points together with the Supervisor of the Program and the participants before the implementation and make sure you tackle them also in the way you arrange the space, time and sessions.
- Print a list of participants and have it ready every day to keep track of who is there. Remember, you will be working with the same participants every session until the end of the Curriculum. Participants' contact details should be gathered during the enrolment process and the participant list developed for use in subsequent sessions.
- Limit the use of resources and limit them to locally available ones (contextualize the indications you will find in each activity in the Curriculum when needed).
- Be mindful of time: Organize the sessions in a moment of the day, which does not conflict with family activities and duties. Before the implementation, the Supervisor of the Program and the two facilitators should discuss with participants what parents' daily schedules are, when do their children go and come back from school, when do they go or come back from work, how far is their home or work space from the location of the workshop, how do they reach the location of the sessions and how long it takes them. This discussion should be part of a **community consultations** which happens before the implementation of the sessions
- Think of time management: Do not go over time! It is a way of showing that you respect participants. If possible, ask a group of 2-3 participants every day (in a rotation) to be the

"time guardians", to keep track of time and help you as well as the rest of the participants, to respect the schedule set.

- **Contextualization:** You will find a sample agenda of the training in the next section "Suggested agenda and session overview" of this guide. Use it to help you organize the sessions, but feel free to edit it and contextualize it.

Facilitation, Safe Space and Power: Gender and Other vulnerabilities

Contextualization:

To create a safe space, we need to reflect on power dynamics: This aspect depends on the local context. Here you will find some things to consider when facilitating, but it is highly recommended that you discuss the following aspects during the pre-implementation liaison with the Supervisor of the Program. Also, further suggestions on inclusive facilitation and gender equality will be made available to you during the Training of the Facilitators.

"Azulya is a parent that belongs to an indigenous group which is often discriminated against by the local community. The moment she enters the room where the Parenting Program sessions are being held, she realizes that she is the only participant belonging to that group. She starts feeling nervous and thinks "What will the other parents think of me? Is it a good idea for me to be here?". She gathers her courage and takes a seat, but soon realizes that the other parents are largely ignoring her, they do not greet her as she sits down. The session starts and soon she realizes that every time she tries to participate in the discussions the other participants are shaking their heads, and some interrupt her and do not let her finish what she tries to say. The facilitators do not seem to notice and she doesn't dare telling them. After a few sessions she stops participating".

What happens to Azulya is very common: In each group there can be some who are discriminated against, or stigmatized, or who have less power than others, and this will prevent some participants from feeling safe in the group and from fully participating. When preparing to facilitate the workshop, you need to be very aware of the local customs to make sure you can create a space - physical and emotional – which is perceived as safe by the participants, where they will feel encouraged to share. A safe space depends largely on the way in which power dynamics in the group are acknowledged and tackled. When one group has more power than another, or has power over another, the latter will feel more vulnerable, and will be less inclined to share. Also, in some places, participants known to be parents of children involved with armed groups or armed forces are particularly vulnerable and we need to take special care of their safety.

It is important to reflect on the following aspects:

- How are parents of children associated with armed groups or armed forces perceived in the local community? Are they at risk of stigmatization? Are the children potentially at risk of re-recruitment? Make sure that a proper risk assessment has been conducted before implementing the session, and that the risk assessment embeds the following aspects:
    - The choice of the space – make sure it is safe for the parents.
    - The choice of the participants – identify what is the best approach to the participants selection, to hinder any risk to participants.
    - The contextualization of the sessions – to make sure that the content does not cause additional harm to the participants, avoid as much as possible the chance that traumatic experiences are re-lived or that intense emotions are generated, and that at no point the participants' experience is stigmatized, shamed or placed under the spotlight.

!

NOTE:

A reflection on what is the best approach to ensure the safety of parents of children associate with armed groups or armed forces needs to be carried out by the Supervisor of the Program. As a facilitator, you should discuss the steps to take during the facilitation during the pre-implementation liaison with the Supervisor of the Program.

- Who are the vulnerable groups in your facilitation context? Are some of the participants more vulnerable than others? For example, is there any religious or ethnic minority who might struggle more to open up and participate actively in front of the majority?
- How are women's roles perceived locally? Will women participate easily and openly in front of an audience that also includes men? Will women feel free to share their thoughts in front of their husbands?
- Is there any participant who has a disability? How does each of the activities and sessions, as well as the physical space, facilitate his/her participation, or limit his/her participation?
- Are younger parents more hesitant to share their opinion in front of older parents?
- How can you address these issues as a facilitator? How can you ensure that everyone participates and feels equally welcome? Be aware of people's speaking time and attitude when speaking: Is there any person who is not participating? Is there any group or person whose ideas are never challenged or overly challenged by the other participants? If so, why? Reflect on whether non-participation is due to internal power dynamics: Does this person belong to a group who might be stigmatized or might be unwilling to share in front of people belonging to another group? (Think about religion, ethnicity, gender, but also age!)

Try to answer all of these questions and reflect on how you can support **equal participation** of all the people attending the sessions. These issues are highly dependent on the local context – in some places some groups have more or less power than others. To make sure **everyone feels safe**, and can actively and freely participate, you need to think about **who**

has more power, and who is more vulnerable in your context, and you have to find ways to **limit the power imbalance. How?** There is not a single solution to the problem, but here are some ideas:

1. If women are generally not supposed to speak up in front of men, working in a pair with another co-facilitator of the opposite sex will be helpful. Consider conducting some of the discussions in separate, parallel sessions. If possible, bring the group together only at the end of the discussion, and let the facilitator that worked with the two groups sum up and share what has been discussed.
2. Adapt any activity to the need of participants with disabilities, e.g., in Session 19, "Families are not alone", Activity 2, in the Intervention Curriculum, the facilitator reads some statements and invites participants to **stand up** if they believe that the issue needs to be addressed by a specialized agency or specialist**, or remain seated,** if they think that the issue can be addressed with the help of the family and does not need the intervention of a specialist or specialized agency. If there is someone in the group who cannot stand up, you can invite participants to lift their hand instead of standing up.
3. If there is one or more participant from a religious or ethnic minority which could struggle to participate equally, consider following the same strategy as in point 1 and 2.
4. Provide a variety of communication strategies – talking, writing, drawing, single work, group work, pair work. Be mindful of the way you structure the groups, keeping in mind how the power in each group may be imbalanced.

How "we" learn

To be an effective facilitator it is crucial to understand how human beings learn. Adults' learning is not dramatically different from children's learning (this also helps when you will facilitate the two joint sessions with the children!). Everyone, regardless of age, gender and culture learns best when they are actively engaged in the learning process, when immersed in an informal, hands-on learning environment.

Let's have a look at how "human beings" learn. To effectively learn, learners must:

- Be engaged in learning → **Engagement**
- Want and need to learn → **Need to learn**
- Be offered different learning preferences and styles (audio, visual or kinesthetic) → **Learning styles**
- Need to know when they will need to use the new content → **Immediacy**
- Relate new information to what they already know → **Prior knowledge**
- Bring their own past experience to their learning → **Past experiences**
- Learn in an informal environment → **Informality**
- Have hands-on practice → **Hands-on experience**
- Feel included and valued → **Inclusion**
- Feel that their ideas, experiences, knowledge, culture and other aspects about them are respected and valued → **Respect**
- Feel emotionally, physically and psychologically safe to share personal stories, ask difficult questions and offer challenging ideas → **Safety**
- Understand how each session is relevant and important to them and their lives. If someone cannot see the relevance, they will disengage → **Relevance**
- See and hear new content, and then do something with it. Participants need to have time to test, challenge and try it out → **See, hear, do**

- Learn at a natural pace and move from simple to complex. If the learners are lost, confused or disinterested, there may be an issue of sequence → **Sequence**[5].

[5] Adapted from *Bowman, Sharon, Training from the back of the room, 65 ways to step aside and let them learn and from Vella, Jane. www.globallearningpartners.com.*

Part 2

Dealing with the topics of the Parenting Program

Part II: **Dealing with the topics of the Parenting Program**

How to select the participants, invite them and retain their participation

Contextualization:

Who should be invited to participate, how to involve the participants and ensure their retention in the Program and whether to involve both female and male caregivers at the same time during the sessions is highly dependent on the local context. The best approach to select participants, ensure their attendance and organize their participation during the sessions, needs to be identified together with the facilitators as they understand their communities best and together with the Supervisor of the Program during the pre-implementation liaison. Below are a few elements to keep in mind. Further details can be found in the Implementation Guide.

Based on the local context it is advisable to define whether to involve in the sessions both families whose children were formerly recruited by armed forces or armed groups, whose children are at risk of involvement and those who do not fall explicitly within these two groups but are part of the same community, or to decide to keep these groups separate. Consider that having sessions which only target families whose children were involved with armed groups could risk stigmatizing these families further. Depending on your context, it might be better to have a broader audience participate in the sessions, involving families whose children are not necessarily at risk of joining armed groups.

Note: These considerations need to be addressed together with the Supervisor of the Program. As a facilitator, you will discuss these aspects with the Supervisor of the Program during the **pre-implementation liaison.**

NOTE:

How to ensure participation of the male caregivers and how to retain their attendance needs to be assessed together with the Supervisor of the Program! You will discuss this aspect during the pre-implementation liaison.

Involving male caregivers

It is strongly recommended to involve both **male and female parents**. Research shows that having both male and female parents involved in parenting programs increases the overall improvement of parent-child relationships. Having both parents involved creates a stronger support system between the two caregivers, who are more able to help each other and support their child's development together. Also, this is a great opportunity to address the potential risk factors for the child's development which are specific to the male caregiver or the female caregiver. [6]

Identifying the participants

NOTE:

How to identify the participants needs to be assessed jointly with your Supervisor! You will discuss this aspect during the pre-implementation liaison.

The families can be identified by the community – be it by teachers, women's groups, religious leaders, etc. – especially focusing on children who are directly or indirectly at risk of joining armed groups or who have joined an armed group. The analysis of which families to involve is context specific and needs to be carried out by the facilitators together with the Supervisor of the Program.

[6] See Enhancing Father Engagement in Parenting Programs: Translating Research into Practice Recommendations, Meryn E. Lechowicz,1 Yixin Jiang, Lucy A. Tully ,1 Matthew T. Burn,1 Daniel A. J., Australian Psychologist, 54 (2019) 83–89.

Working with the participants during the sessions

NOTE:

Whether or not to have a mixed gender group needs to be assessed together with the Supervisor, based on the local context. You will discuss this aspect during the pre-implementation liaison.

The ideal number of participants is between 15 to 20 people, including both male and female participants. Depending on the local context, you can decide to involve male and female parents at the same time, or you can form two separate groups each of 15-20 people based on the participants' gender – one group guided by the male facilitator, and one lead by the female one. In this second case, it can be good to stress the importance of reserving some time at the end of each day for the family members to discuss the things learned that day together, once at home. You will find some guidance on how to facilitate this discussion as a family unit in the Intervention Curriculum.

Preparing and delivering the sessions of the Parenting Program

Before the session

- Make sure you know who will attend the sessions, their background, interests and needs and try to adapt the sessions to the participants, e.g., it might happen that you are working exclusively with parents whose children have been involved with armed groups or armed forces, and you are focusing mostly on reintegration. You also know that the children are all 12-years-old and above. If this happens, you might decide to focus more strongly on the specific needs of adolescents and limit the focus on the younger age group. You will just need to follow the instruction on the Intervention Curriculum: In most sessions you will have specific indication on how to focus on the needs and characteristics of younger children and older ones.
- Things can go very fast when people get into the heart of a discussion, try to find a strategy that is convenient for you to keep track of what happens to help you in the facilitation process, e.g., you can agree to have one facilitator focusing solely on taking notes of what is arising in the discussion, while the other one concentrates on moderating the discussion. At the end, the one who has been taking notes can use these to recap the main discussion points. Also, the person taking notes should keep an eye on the discussion guides or checklists that are available in the Curriculum in most sessions, and make sure that all relevant points included in these checklists are addressed in the discussion. Do not forget to swap tasks every other session, so that each facilitator has the chance to both be taking notes and moderating the discussions.

- Make notes of the key content of the Curriculum on a small notebook to avoid having to look through the Curriculum during the sessions. For example, write in your notebook the outline of the session, the key steps of each activity and the core questions you need to ask. Also, try to practice the sessions and rehearse them – in front of the mirror, with a friend, with a co-facilitator. You will feel much more confident and you will have things more in control. Remember! Your co-facilitator is there to help.
- Share tasks with your co-facilitator, e.g., one day one plays the main facilitator, while the other one makes sure that all the material is ready for each session; the main facilitator coordinates and moderates the discussions while the other one takes notes; the main facilitator uses the breaks to prepare for the following activities, while the other one takes care of any logistical needs, engages with the participants and takes care of any issue that might arise, and invites participants to take their places once the time for the break is over. Do not forget to swap roles!
- Ensure you are comfortable and understand the content of the sessions. Should you need to unpack a concept, discuss this with your Supervisor of the Program and with your co-facilitator before-hand.
- You should also try to practice the skills and behaviors you will be facilitating with your family members, with your own children, or friends, parents or loved ones. Once you know *how* to practice these skills, it will be much easier to teach them to the parents and to understand the inherent value of each of these behaviors.

At the beginning of each session/day

- Start the day by thanking people for coming.
- Ask some volunteers to share how their home activity practice went.
- Praise them for their efforts and for sharing their experiences.
- Start each day with a song, game or prayer, or any other routine which is appropriate to the local context or use icebreakers at the beginning of the sessions to set a friendly and welcoming atmosphere, or every time the energy level seems to go down. Ask participants to come up with their icebreakers if possible.

- Start with a short recap of the previous session – try to use a fun and engaging activity and avoid listing things. You can ask participants to help you recall what happened and what you learned during the previous session. You can hide questions under some of the chairs/mats and invite them to answer what they find under their seat (mix some actual questions referred to the previous sessions with more fun ones, such as “if you were an animal, would you be a …”).

Further resources:

For additional ideas, have a look at the “100 ways to energize groups: Games to use in sessions, meetings and the community”, developed by Alliance. It can also be downloaded here (English only): https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Energisers.pdf

During the day

- When facilitating discussions, make sure you call people by their name, rather than just pointing at them.
- Try to engage with each participant before the session and during some of the breaks.
- Make sure that you engage with all the participants without favoring anyone.
- Use some of the breaks to revise and prepare for the next sessions.
- During group work, walk around the various groups and ask whether or not all the instructions given where clearly understood. Do not interfere with the discussion but observe, listen and take notes. It can be useful for the plenary discussions.
- Observe if any participant is intentionally or unintentionally being excluded because of their age, gender, group etc.

At the end of the day

- Close with a recap of the day – possibly, again, using a fun and engaging activity.
- Distribute and discuss the home practices handouts when needed, based on the session.
- Thank everyone for their participation.
- Seek feedback from participants on what they liked and what they did not like. With your Supervisor of the Program, ensure confidential and accessible feedback mechanisms are in place.
- Indicate any relevant logistic information for the next day.[7]
- Have a recap and a personal reflection on how the session went. Include any key observations that require a change in implementation or other concerns to share with your Supervisor of the Program.

[7] This part has been adapted from the Teacher manual of the same author, UNODC "Building a sustainable, just, inclusive and peaceful world – Education for Justice".

Contextualization, contextualization, contextualization!

Contextualization:

Every context is unique: Therefore, the Intervention Curriculum has been developed as a flexible and adaptable tool, to serve the needs of diverse communities. It is crucial that the contextualization of the various sessions is discussed during the pre-implementation liaison with the Supervisor of the Program. Also, you will receive additional guidance on how to contextualize the sessions during the Training of the Facilitators. Here you will find some elements to consider when planning the sessions or when implementing them: Remember that they are only suggestions. This aspect will also be part of the Training of the Facilitator. Remember that these are non-exhaustive examples, and that they may not be appropriate or applicable in your context. Consult with the Supervisor of the Program before the implementation to identify how to best tackle these issues, when in doubt.

1. **Contextualize based on the participants. Reflect on:**

- **The literacy level of the group or different linguistic repertoires:** Perhaps reduce the use of written text, use pictures or drawings. Ask participants to express themselves orally or to use pictograms if they prefer. It is still advisable for you to note down the key discussion points on a flipchart and/or on a small notebook that you can revise to summarize the key discussion points.
- **Genuine participation**: Reflect on power dynamics and facilitate accordingly. Revise what we mentioned in the section "Facilitation, safe space and power".
- **The relationships between participants and the cause of the armed group**: It can happen that the participants are hostile against the conflict or the armed group or that they are in favor, or that the group is mixed. Reflect on these aspects and consider how it can influence the delivery of the sessions. In any case, you need to make sure that at the latest by the 4th Session, participants are all aware of the inherent risks of children joining armed forces. If by that moment there are still parents who are in favor, it is a good idea to discuss the issue with the Supervisor of the Program.
- **Possible sources of conflict in the group:** Ask yourself whether there is any potential source of conflict in the group, due to the participants' ethnicity, religion, gender or affiliation with the cause of the armed group. If so, be prepared to deal with these issues if they arise in the discussion. See "dealing with conflicts" for some suggestions. You will receive more guidance on this aspect during the **Training of the Facilitators.**

2. **Contextualization based on the local norms**

Local norms around childhood: In different contexts, what childhood means, what is expected from children, what children can do or are expected to do at different stages of their life can vary enormously, as well as what is expected of boys and of

girls within the same community. For example, whether and when it is expected that a child contributes to the family budget is not universal. It is also crucial to reflect on the impact that disability can have for children, how disability affects the parent-child relationship and more broadly how the local community understands disability and the impact it has on the child.

The reflection on what parents expect from their children, also based on their children's age, ability and gender, how they see them and how they engage with them is a central concern for the successful implementation of each of the sessions. This is in reality the most important and challenging contextualization concern of the Parenting Program, together with the locally defined understanding of gender norms. You will learn more about this aspect in the **Training of Facilitators.**

- **Local norms around gender:** Reflect on the local understanding of gender, and how gender influences family roles and relationships. This is a necessary reflection in order to contextualize each of the sessions in a way that makes sure that women are not only able to actively participate in the sessions as much as men but that the sessions do not perpetuate negative social norms. It will also be crucial to guide all the discussions around family roles, and behaviors within the family, for instance, how parents make sense of the differences between boys and girls, how they communicate differently with their children based on their gender and how they assign them different roles and expectations. These factors are a reflection of the local understanding of gender and childhood, and on the need to guide the implementation of each session of the Parenting Program. For an example of the need for contextualization which reflects the locally defined understanding of gender and gender norms, see the session "Our role as parents "..
- **Taboo topics**: Identify taboo topics and how to deal with them in a context-sensitive way. An example of a taboo topic can be for parents to talk about sexual abuse, especially when the survivors are boys. This aspect might come up when talking about the experiences of children recruited by armed groups, in Session 4 of the Intervention Curriculum.
- **Interpretation of family and parents:** Understanding who the people are who are close to the child and have at heart his/her best interests help to identify who should participate in the sessions.
- **Intersectionality:** In some contexts, being a girl, and having a certain age or being from a certain ethnic group can have a particular consequence or impact on what is expected, assumed, granted to that girl, compared to another girl of a different age and ethnicity. When thinking about how to adapt the sessions, you also need to think how certain social categories, such as gender, ethnicity, age, ability or disability, can have an impact on the person's role, relationships, inclusion or exclusion when more than one of these categories apply to a single individual.
- **Relevant locally:** Think about using local songs, poems, games or stories so that the activities fit the local context.

3. Contextualization based on the local experience of the CAAFAG and the conflict

- **Status of the conflict:** Is it over? Ongoing? No clear borders? A reflection on these aspects can help you better understand the struggles and stress that families experience. For instance, in a conflict-ridden environment, parents as well as children are constantly exposed to a high level of stress. Therefore, it can be advisable to extend the time dedicated to self-care practices such as stress reduction techniques. Have a look at the sessions S7-9-11-13-15 of the Intervention Curriculum and see

whether it is possible to dedicate more time to these sessions, dedicating the whole two hours to practicing these skills together. You will need to adjust the whole agenda accordingly. Also, if the conflict is ongoing, consider how the community perceives the various groups involved, and how you as a facilitator are influenced by the conflict, how it can affect your facilitation skills and how your own position towards the different parties involved can be perceived by the different participants.

- **Age of the CAAFAG:** All the sessions of the Parenting Program have been developed to be suitable for parents of children and adolescents, and in some sessions you will find some tips to reflect on how some of the skills and behaviors suggested may impact younger and older children differently. Nonetheless, it is important to understand whether the children involved with armed groups belong largely or exclusively to a particular age range. For instance, if the children are mostly adolescent, it can be a good idea to work on the actual family budget when working on S18 “Making a family budget”, rather than using smaller or symbolic amounts of money.
- **Type of roles and consequences of the experience**: Are the CAAFAG mostly staying at home or are they mostly separated from their families? If they are separated from their families, how is the Curriculum being received by parents who might not fully know the situation of their children? What support is being provided to them as part of the wider child protection program? What are the local risk factors or reasons for joining? What kind of roles do the boys and girls undertake? It is crucial that as a facilitator you are very familiar with the local context, with the conflict and with the different experiences of boys and girls associated with armed forces/groups. This understanding is essential for the adaptation and contextualization of each of the sessions of the Parenting Program. This reflection should be conducted in collaboration with the Supervisor of the Program **before implementing the sessions, and it will also be the topic of one of the sessions of the Training of the Facilitators.** Together with the considerations around childhood, gender, disability and other vulnerabilities, this is another crucial aspect to a successful implementation process.

REMEMBER: This might sound intimidating, but do not worry! You will find guidance on how to navigate some of these aspects also in some of the sessions of the Intervention Curriculum, in the Training of the Facilitators and in the pre-implementation liaison with the Supervisor of the Program.

Also, the sessions are largely based on the use of **questions, to root the program in mutual learning and in the experience of the participants:** Therefore, through the discussion with the parents, you will manage to understand most of the answers to these questions and make sure that the content of the sessions reflects the needs and expectations of the parents.

Dealing with sensitive issues, providing support or referral

Contextualization: Reflect on which issues, topics or circumstances could generate discomfort in the local context.

The topics of the sessions could generate intense feelings, conflicts or distress. It is crucial that as a facilitator you always remain sensitive to participants' reactions and are careful to monitor any sign of discomfort or distress. During any activity, be vigilant about participants' mood changes if anyone becomes suddenly quiet or if participants start shaking their heads when someone is talking. Be mindful of how the local context (the ongoing conflict, the risk or reality of being separated from their children, their children's experiences with armed groups, loss of livelihoods etc.) could influence participants' stress level, their ability to cope with intense emotions or the risks associated with the reliving of traumas.

Below are some tips for dealing with intense emotions, disruptive behavior, potentially harmful opinions and conflicts. Be very mindful of the fact that severe issues might be disclosed, such as Gender-Based Violence (GBV), violence against children, etc. These issues are bigger than you and they need to be handled by appropriate actors. Refer to the instructions provided in the next section "*Recognize your limits"*, to learn how to deal with these situations. You can also seek the help of the Supervisor of the Program.

Dealing with intense emotions

In these sessions, the participants should feel safe and respected at all time. It can happen that the conversation or the topics discussed may lead participants to experience intense emotions, re-live frightening memories or traumatic experiences or generate feelings of guilt or shame.

If you note that one of the participants is experiencing intense emotions, your priority is safety first. Make sure that the participant does not feel pressured into talking.

NOTE:

This symbol helps you identify those sessions that are more likely to trigger participants' intense emotions, memories or feelings. Prepare accurately and be extra careful with these sessions! Also, be mindful of the fact that this is only a suggestion: In your context, other elements might trigger intense emotions.

Empathy is also crucial. Say something like "I can see that you are feeling sad [name the emotion], and I understand that. Remember that this is a safe space and that no one will share any of what happens here outside of this space".

If needed, you can choose to interrupt the session and introduce a song or an activity that will help the participant manage the intense emotions. If needed, you can try to use the breathing strategy together from Session 9 "Starting from ourselves: Self-care practices for stress reduction", in the Intervention Curriculum.

You can provide additional support at the end of the session by approaching the participant individually, when needed: Remember to be discreet and do not put any pressure on them, but be available to provide support if needed.

If you think that the distress is signaling other deeper problems that go beyond your ability to help, you can refer the participant in line with Referral Plan, for further help see the next section, "Recognize your limits".

Coping with disruptive behavior

"Mysya has been working with the group of adults for more than five sessions now, and there is one of the participants that is really making his work harder every time. It is impossible to facilitate group discussion because this person does not listen to anyone else and constantly interrupts whoever is trying to talk. He often starts his points with "What you are saying doesn't make any sense" and refuses to respect anyone's opinion. Mysya doesn't really know what to do and is getting more and more frustrated".

In any group setting, people have different behaviors, energy levels, personality and opinions. It can happen that someone in the group has a disruptive behavior: Someone who does not respect the opinion of others, believes that their point of view is the only/right solution, is argumentative, refuses to listen to others and interrupts constantly. In this case it is important to calmly remind participants about the group rules, avoiding pointing fingers. If needed, and especially if the behavior is escalating into verbal or physical violence against some of the other participants, invite the participant to take a break from the session and return when he/she is ready to participate. Avoid anger at all cost, but rather provide time and space for the participant to calm down.

In cases of verbal and physical violence, remember that this is not acceptable behavior! You should reach out to the participant in private after the session to discuss the issue and reinforce ground rules. Also, if the situation remains tense and the problem is not resolved, it is advisable to report the problem to the Supervisor of the Program to monitor the situation and seek a solution together.

Dealing with potentially harmful opinions

"Lyala is facilitating a session on gender equality. One of the participants says, "girls who come from recruitment should be supported to be married off". Lyala looks around and sees many heads nodding. She asks if anyone has a different opinion, but it seems that the majority of the participants agree, and no one is offering a different argument".

As much as this is a fictional story, this can happen when dealing with complex and sensitive issues. It is important that you recognize instances when a potentially harmful argument is arising. This can be especially the case when talking about violation of children's rights – for e.g., participants could agree that spanking children is an acceptable discipline strategy. Or it can happen that they share discriminatory points of view – for e.g., someone might say that children with disabilities should just stay at home and not receive education.

You need to recognize these comments and provide alternatives, for e.g., try asking the whole group: “What do you think are the consequences of that? What happens when we do not send children with disabilities to school? How do they feel? How do they grow?”

Make sure you highlight potential harm through discussion with the group, avoiding pointing fingers or spotlighting anyone in the group due to their opinions. If problematic issues arise through this conversation – for e.g., instances of child abuses or GBV, refer to the appropriate agency following the guidelines in the next section, “Recognize your limits”, and follow the instructions agreed with the Supervisor of the Program.

Dealing with conflicts

Intense emotions, miscommunication, real or perceived differences and structural conditions can lead to conflicts. Conflicts are a normal, healthy part of life – and of the facilitation process. At the same time, some conflicts can be dangerous, especially when they escalate. In the case of families whose children are at risk or have been involved with armed groups, there is a risk of shaming, stigmatization or, isolation and exclusion. Therefore, as a facilitator, you have to be very cautious when you sense that a conflict might arise or escalate.

Here are some steps you can follow to limit the escalation of conflict: Be mindful of what is most appropriate in your context and adapt these steps if you think that a different strategy could bring better results.

a. **Pause and bring people together to focus on the issue:** Start by pausing the activity. Then, identify and name the emotions and the participants or groups involved in the (potential) conflict.

   Say something like: “Let’s take a moment to reflect on what is going on. I see that J. (name of the person or people involved in the conflict) is angry/frustrated/disappointed/hurt (name the emotion that you identify). F. (name the other person or people involved in the conflict) seems to be angry/frustrated (name the emotion) as well.”

b. Recall the **group rules** and reminder participants that criticism should pertain to ideas and not to people.
c. **Facilitate an agreement**: Facilitate a conversation with the participants involved to get to the ‘heart of the problem’. Ask open questions (why, what, how), and invite participants to express how they are feeling, and what is the ground for their anger or frustration. Be mindful of your own tone and assertiveness, be inclusive and open to diverse points of view. Ask the participants to listen very carefully to each other, to avoid accusing each other, and explain to the other person or group what they mean.
d. **Provide a summary**: Rephase the discussion and answer the question: “What is the conflict essentially about?”. Ask the parties involved and the whole group if you have correctly summarized the issue.
e. **Generate alternatives:** Ask the group to list different possibilities to reach alternatives. They should only generate ideas, not criticize the ideas of others. If the situation is too tense, you can propose some possible solutions.

f. **Evaluate alternatives:** What do the different participants or groups like about the ideas? What do they not like? If one participant or group does not like an idea, how could it be improved? Do the ideas meet the needs that were expressed at stage I? Is it realistic?
g. **Choose a solution:** Together with the group and the two opponents, choose a solution. Make sure everyone has the same understanding of the solution taken in accordance with the whole group.
h. **Keep in mind some basic facilitation skills that can help you mediate a win-win solution in a conflictual situation**:
   - Use open questions and reduce your amount of talking.
   - Listen openly, do not interrupt.
   - Do not take sides but be aware of your position in the conflict (for e.g., does your ethnicity, age or religious faith have an impact on the dynamic of the conflict? If so, how can you mitigate it?).
   - Summarize points and avoid diluting arguments.
   - Identify and build on common ground.
   - Emphasize areas of agreement instead of areas of dispute.

i. Disclosing intense or traumatic personal stories

While this is not the primary focus of this Program, it can happen that the activities will lead some of the participants to disclose particularly intense or traumatic personal experiences. If this happens, clearly state the confidential nature of the sessions: Explain that none of the information that is shared during the sessions will be communicated further.

If any experience arises which needs external referral, please follow the indications of the Referral Plan as defined and discussed with the Supervisor of the Program (see next section).

Recognize your limits – identify instances in which the problem is bigger that you

When facilitating the sessions, it might happen that you notice that some of the participants need specific, targeted help, which goes beyond your capacities. The needs that can arise can be very diverse: Here is a non-exhaustive list of challenges that need to be addressed by a specialized agency.

A Referral Plan, has to be discussed and contextualized **during the pre-implementation liaison with the Supervisor of the Program.** What you will find here are only some suggestions on issues you might want to keep in mind when facilitating. For all the situations listed below, ensure you have up to date information to provide to adult parents on where they can seek support, and to children for referral.

a. Do you have any other strong concerns for the wellbeing of any of the adult participants?
b. Do you have any other strong concerns for the wellbeing of any of the children?
c. Do you suspect that any of the children is at risk of joining an armed group?

Information on child protection support to parents can be provided at the start of sessions and reinforced as the sessions continue. In this way, even if you do not notice any concerns directly, the participants have the necessary information should they need to seek support directly from

different service providers, be it health, protection, social services, support for children with disabilities, economic wellbeing or education. With the Supervisor of the Program, ensure a mapping of available services in your context is completed and updated periodically, e.g., every 3 months, and shared with participants in general/at the beginning or end of sessions.

Providing support to follow up to the parents

Providing support and follow up to the parents

Parents should not be left alone after the end of each session, and after the completion of the Program. It is important that you discuss possible strategies to provide targeted support. The Program includes the possibility for you to conduct two (or more) Family Visits: these are meetings conducted in the home, where you will discuss with the family member who have attended the sessions about their challenges and successes in their family relations. Instructions on how to set up, organize and conduct these visits can be found in the **Family Visits Guide.**

Remember: These parenting sessions need to be only one part of a larger puzzle of programs and interventions, to ensure the prevention of children's recruitment by armed groups, and their successful reintegration if they have been involved!

These interventions include, among others, activities to reduce stigmatization in the community and promote reintegration; community advocacy against the recruitment of children by armed groups and armed forces; case management for the children; financial support for the families; supporting children's access to school or vocational training; access to specialized support to deal with post-traumatic stress disorders for the families.

The responsibility for the reintegration of children who have been involved with armed groups, as well as the success of the prevention from the recruitment cannot and must not rest solely on the shoulders of the parents!

It is necessary to embed these sessions in a larger set of Programs and community action addressing both parents and children directly. Also, the recruitment of the children and their effective and efficient reintegration is largely driven by structural factors, which cannot be tackled by the parents. These issues need to be addressed separately.

The work of the parents, their role and their efforts need to be valued at all times throughout the implementation of this Program and beyond: They need to feel valued, understood, and they need to be unburdened of any sense of guilt and responsibility!

Suggested agenda and sessions' overview

Contextualization:

Note that this curriculum is flexible. The duration and structure of the agenda is the recommendation, but based on your context, adaptations should be made. The duration is dependent on the group composition: The larger the group, the more time it will take to cover each session. Also, based on the availability of the parents and on their needs, it is suggested that you revise the content of the Curriculum, together with the Supervisor of the Program, and assess whether you want to spend more or less time on some of the sessions.

The Program is composed of 20 sessions. The ideal number of participants is between 15 and 20. The number of participants will also influence the duration of the sessions.

Each session lasts between 50 minutes and 3h hours. Only Session 19 is longer than 3 h – suggested 3.5h – as this is the last session in plenary, where all the participants gather together (session 20 is conducted as a preparation session for parents to conduct action planning with their families at home). Therefore, the length suggested allows time to arrange a small closure ceremony.

Together with the participants, you can choose how to organize each week and session. Here we are showing an example of agenda in which the program is covered in 19 weeks, with one session of maximum 3 hours per week.

This agenda is only an indication, feel free to adapt the agenda and organize the sessions differently in coordination with the Supervisor of the Program and based on the participants' needs. For example, you might want to meet twice a week for two hours. This means that you might need to split some of the session of the Curriculum in two parts that can be delivered over two encounters. Remember that all activities are important so do not rush through them.

Also, time for **breaks** has not been included in the Curriculum: Before implementing the sessions, discuss with the Supervisor of the Program and the participants when and whether to have breaks, depending also on how you will decide to structure the agenda of the Program. In any case it is strongly advised to take a break of at least 5 minutes if you conduct sessions which last more than 1 hour.

Extend the activities or sessions

To extend the duration of the sessions you can extend the practicing and discussion time by forming smaller groups and providing participants more time to role-play the skills and behaviors and discuss. Discussions are crucial because participants have the chances to reflect on their own experiences and learn from each other.

Suggested agenda

This symbol means that these sessions could trigger intense emotions. Be extra careful and prepared when facilitating these sessions. This aspect is also very dependent on the local context and norms. Discuss any doubt about these or other sessions during the **pre-implementation liaison with the Supervisor of the Program.**

Note that the last session in plenary is Session 19: Families are not alone - what else is out there to support the children and the parents? After that session the two co-facilitators should arrange home visits with each family unit, which can be conducted in the following weeks.

Week 1	Week 2	Week 3
Session 1: Part 1. Welcome and introduction to the Program (45')	Session 2: Our role as parents (3h)	Session 3: Who is a child "at risk"? Why are they joining? (2h 5')
Session 1: Part 2. My child and I (1h 40`)		
Week 4	**Week 5**	**Week 6**
Session 4: The experiences of children associated with armed groups (1h10')	Session 5: Consequences of association with armed groups for the child (2h30')	Session 6: Our challenging role as parents (1h20')

Week 7	Week 8	Week 9
Session 7: In action: Gathering ideas to build a positive and supportive family environment (2h30')	Session 8: Gender specific needs, gender specific responses (3h15')	Session 9: Starting from ourselves: Self-care practices for stress reduction (1h30')
Week 10	**Week 11**	**Week 12**
Session 10: Parent-child relationship: Better communication, better listening(2h5')	Session 11: Starting from ourselves: Self-care practices to deal with our emotions (1h45')	Session 12: Parent-child relationship: Understand and manage emotions (1h35')
Week 13	**Week 14**	**Week 15**
Session 13: Starting with ourselves: Self-care practices - taking a break (1h)	Session 14: Parent-child relationship: solving problems together to support reintegration and prevent recruitment (3h)	Session 15: Self-care and caring for our children: Dealing with stigmatization (2h)
Week 16	**Week 17**	**Week 18**
Session 16: Parent-child relationship: Practicing positive discipline and avoiding violence (1h45')	Session 17: Starting from ourselves - self-care practices: Taking care of ourselves in our daily lives (1h25')	Session 18: Parent-child relationship: Making a family budget and saving money (2h50)
Week 19	**Week 20**	
Session 19: Families are not alone - what else is out there to support the children and the parents? (3h5')	Session 20. Home visit: FAMILY TOGETHER - Setting goals together to build a positive and supportive family environment (2h 35' or more, depending on how you decide to celebrate)	

Before starting: Liaising with the Supervisor of the Program

It is advisable that before starting to implement the Program, you liaise with the Supervisor of the Program and discuss some of the key aspects of the Program together. Most of them have already been highlighted throughout this guide. Here you find an overview of the tasks that you should be taking care of, with the help of the Supervisor of the Program and, when needed, in collaboration with the local community. This is only a guideline, since the roles and responsibilities might change depending on the team composition in the local context.

Activity	**Main person responsible**
Organize the space (chairs, tables etc.)	Facilitators
Arrange material during the sessions	Facilitators
Ensure that different needs are addressed during the session implementation	Facilitators
Disburse participation reimbursements (transport, food)	Facilitators
Identify the need to contextualize the Curriculum sessions	Facilitators
Implement the contextualization of the sessions	Facilitators
Learn to use a Referral Plan, and identify cases in need of referral	Facilitators

GROWING STRONG TOGETHER