

## Messages on Child Protection in the Pakistan Floods

### **1 THE IMPORTANCE OF KEEPING CHILDREN WITH FAMILIES**

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Where there is population displacement, there are risks of separation of family members. Even during this emergency, all children have a right to a family and families have a right to care for their children. Services should be provided to families to encourage them to stay together, rather than seek alternative care options for children whilst families struggle to meet their needs. Unaccompanied and separated children should be provided with services aimed at reuniting them with their parents or customary caregivers as quickly as possible. Interim care should be consistent with the aim of family reunification, and should ensure children's protection and well-being. Experience has shown that most separated children have parents or other family members willing and able to care for them. Long-term care arrangements, including adoption, should therefore not be made during any stage of the emergency.

#### **Messages to parents and other adults:**

- Strive to keep the family together at all times.
- Try hard not to be separated from your children for long periods of time.
- Ensure your family and children know their names and where you are living currently.
- If you find a child who seems to be lost, do not assume that he or she *is* lost. Try taking the child around the nearest group of people to see if parents or carers claim him or her. Do not move a child until you are sure that he or she has genuinely been lost or abandoned.
- Ask the child their story; try to find out when and where they last saw their family members.
- If you are aware of children without parents nearby you, you have a responsibility to notify XXXXXX (helpline) of where the children are. Report anything you feel maybe suspicious.
- If you are going to a distribution site, either keep your children close by you at all times or leave them in the care of a responsible and trusted relative or adult somewhere you can rejoin them later.
- If your children do go along with you arrange in advance somewhere you can meet if you become separated. Ensure this is somewhere the child knows and will feel comfortable.
- If you are finding it difficult to support your children after the flooding and are considering leaving them in the care of an orphanage, seek information and support from members of your community or the XXXXX helpline to explain your situation and seek advice.

#### **Messages to those providing assistance:**

- Where people are moving or being evacuated, facilitate the movement of whole families, rather than splitting families up.
- Ensure as far as possible that all households have access to basic relief supplies and other services, including education;
- Avoid the removal of children from their families for any reason unless they need urgent medical care. If critical care is needed and cannot be provided there and then, this should be as close as possible to their home and a caregiver known to the child should accompany them.
- Avoid providing benefits or services to separated children that may be perceived as better than what others are receiving – this could 'incentivise' separation.
- Limit the development of residential care options, such as orphanages, which can pull children out of families; try to promote family and community based care for children.
- If you become aware of any separated children or other children requiring an urgent response, make a note of their whereabouts and alert the child protection sub cluster coordinator. Do not remove the child from their current situation unless you have serious concern for the child's wellbeing.

- Registration and documentation must be carried out as soon as possible after a separated child is identified; forms should always be kept by or with the child.
- Registration is the compilation of key personal data: full name, date and place of birth, father's and mother's name, former address and current location.

### **Messages to children:**

- Know where your family is if you are not together.
- If you go out to school or to play tell your family where you are going and when you will be back.
- If you are forced to flee: Stay with your families, hold onto your families or friends hands or to the clothes of your parents and if you are tired ask you family to stop for a little while.
- If you lose your family look for other parents and children you know, alert them that you have lost your family. If you do not know anybody look for someone you think you can trust, ask them to alert authorities in the area. (We could put in here about the helpline for FTR?)

## **2 CHILDREN'S WELLBEING**

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Following the floods your child may show signs of distress, including:

- Difficulty sleeping, nightmares, shouting or screaming.
- Older children may behave like younger children, sometimes bedwetting, clinging to their parents, frequent crying, thumb-sucking, being afraid to be left alone.
- Some children may become unusually active or aggressive, while other children may become shy, quiet, withdrawn and sad.
- Physical symptoms in this context are likely to be due to waterborne diseases but can also be due to psychological distress, these include: complaints such as headache, stomach ache, fever, cough, lack of appetite.

*These reactions are all NORMAL during disasters. It is important to know that for most children these behaviours will disappear with time, as children return to normal life.*

### **Messages to children, parents and other adults:**

- Recognize that this is a challenging time but one that you can work to manage. You have tackled hardships at other times in your life.
- Allow yourself and your children to mourn the losses you have experienced.
- Try and keep a hopeful and positive outlook. This will help your children have hope for the future.
- Support each other and take help from friends, relatives, community and religious leaders.
- Do not promise children things you cannot provide.
- Promise that you will do anything you can to care for and protect them.
- Talk to the children. Pay attention to them, and let them explain their concerns and fears.
- Try to give children accurate information about what is happening.
- Try to maintain everyday routines, such as eating, bathing and sleeping.
- Try to continue breastfeeding if possible with mothers' groups.
- Encourage children to help. Children cope better and recover sooner when they help others.
- Encourage children to play with other children.
- Encourage children to do school work (reading, maths, writing); even if there are no schools.
- Being caring and telling your children that you love them will reassure children.
- Do not criticise your children for changes in their behaviour, such as clinging to caregivers/parents, or seeking reassurance frequently.
- Adolescents should be encouraged to talk about their experiences with peers and trusted adults.
- When children's reactions are severe and last for a long time, they need help from a counsellor.

- Children may fear further flooding, so talking about, deciding on and practicing a family preparedness plan can help increase their sense of safety.
- Engage in healthy behaviours where you can. If possible, eat well and try to rest. Avoid alcohol and drugs.
- Establish or re-establish routines, such as regular eating, bathing, and bed times.
- Try to keep yourself occupied with regular chores or with work to help rebuild your community.
- Maintain your religious activities.

**Messages to those providing assistance:**

- Schedule distributions in consultation with children, women as well as men in the community. Avoid distributions in places that are unsafe, such as concealed areas, or at times that are disruptive (e.g. during ifta, during prayers etc.).
- Consult children, women and men on location for Child Friendly Spaces, ensure they too are in safe locations that are easily accessible.
- Distributions to be run by selected and screened local volunteers who have received adequate child protection training and are aware of prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse and appropriate crowd control methods.
- Ensure that those receiving aid have full access to information about what they can expect.

### **3 OTHER PROTECTION CONSIDERATIONS FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN**

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In disasters, there is often a breakdown of law and order and an increase in criminal behaviour and human rights violations. The Haiti disaster is a high-risk environment for sexual exploitation and abuse. During a disaster people become dependent on others for survivors and thus are more vulnerable to sexual exploitation and abuse. Local populations become more dependent on others for their survival

**Messages to parents and other adults:**

- Humanitarian aid is free! No one has the right to touch you or demand any sexual actions/favours from you.
- You have the right to complain.
- You are entitled to know what you are supposed to be receiving. Those who are responsible for helping you have a responsibility to inform and ask your opinion.
- You have a special right to protection during emergencies.
- If someone tells you they have been hurt or abused let them know you believe them; it is not their fault; and that they are not alone. Help them get the services they need, especially health services.

**Messages to those providing assistance:**

- Ensure that latrines and other facilities are easily usable by children, well lit, and do not in any way endanger girls or boys.
- Ensure that all those involved in distributions are aware that humanitarian aid is free. Instigate a zero tolerance approach to anyone attempting to leverage favours of any kind in return for assistance.
- Set up a simple complaints mechanism for beneficiaries to report any exploitation or abuse by humanitarian workers from your organization.