

## Handout 5

# Communicating with children

## Do's and Don'ts

### Do

- Find a quiet place where the child can talk freely, and make sure it is safe for you and the child (in relation to child protection, personal safety etc)
- Be kind and interested, smiling when appropriate
- Be respectful when talking about parents, communities and culture
- Nod or use facial expressions and gestures to encourage the person to say more or to let them know you understand
- Make eye contact (as appropriate)
- Let the child finish his or her sentences
- Validate the child's perspective - the situation may be seen differently by adults
- Notice the child's body posture and facial expression
- Listen carefully and try to remember what the child says
- Re-state what has been said to show you understand
- Ask questions to clarify
- Give appropriate feedback – reassurance, suggestions, encouraging responses
- Sum up periodically
- Be sensitive to any feelings of guilt or conflict of loyalty in the child
- Explore the child's experience - be curious
- Respect the child's emotional boundaries. This means not probing with difficult or very personal questions, but letting the child share as much as he or she feels comfortable with.
- Respect the child's physical boundaries. This means not attempting to hug or hold the child, unless the child reaches out and indicates a need for this.
- Acknowledge when he or she speaks about something difficult
- Use child-friendly language
- Give undivided attention to the child
- Be patient and give time to the child to speak
- Be empathic and approachable

## Handout 5

- Be tolerant and accept the person without judgement
- Have courage to tolerate reactions or behaviour that is off-putting. There is a reason someone behaves that way.
- Be aware that any grief or aggression is not personally directed at you as a person
- Learn how to protect yourself from being emotionally overwhelmed. This means recognizing your own emotional limits, and accepting that working with children who are distressed can be a difficult experience.

### Don't

- Interrupt or allow interruptions
- Punish the child
- Laugh at a child or allow them to be mocked
- Create a situation where the child feels she/he has to please you by saying something specific
- Apply pressure for answers
- Pass personal judgement
- Be vague
- Be too focused on facts – it is the experienced feelings of the child that is important
- Promise more than you can provide
- Pressure the child to talk about personal issues that they are not comfortable with sharing
- Give direct advice
- Talk too much about yourself or your own experience
- Be ironic or sarcastic
- Undermine or minimize what the child says
- Blame
- Discipline or use intimidating voice
- Interpret what the child says without clarifying it
- Lie or tell half-truths.