

## Friday, December 31, 2004

### **Guidelines for working with SEPARATED CHILDREN: Psychosocial Responses to the Sri Lankan Tsunami Disaster**

The following is a draft set of guidelines compiled by the Psychosocial Support Programme of the IWTTHI Trust (Tel: +94-11-4516408/+94-11-4515279; Email: pspcp@eol.lk) on 31st December 2004. The primary reference document from which this information was summarised was *Separated Children: Care and Protection of Children in Emergencies A Field Guide. Save the Children Federation 2004*. Please send comments or additions to these draft guidelines via the link at the bottom of this POST - or via email to the above address. These guidelines will be revised or updated as information comes in from other agencies active on the ground in Sri Lanka.

For children, relationships with a significant adult (a family ♣ member, teacher, aunt etc.) are very important. Being able to trust at least one adult who can take care of them can pull them through stressful times.

It is not always the event that can have a psychological and ♣ emotional impact on the child, but the lack of emotional support, separation from parents or family, taken out of familiar context and community, and grief and distress of parents and adults.

Do not remove or separate children from family members. Do not ♣ separate siblings. If family members are missing try to keep the child with someone he/she knows and trusts and support that caregiver and child.

Identify informal care systems that exist in the community ♣ (relatives or neighbours taking care of children), and find out if traditional care systems have been affected by crises/disaster.

Moving a child from such informal care arrangements provided by ♣ the community or other family members could bring additional distress. A child should be moved only if the assessment shows that the child is suffering from emotional or physical abuse, exploitative labour, neglect, poor care or abandonment from these new care givers.

Provide economic, social and emotional support to these informal ♣ arrangements so that the child can remain in familiar surroundings and within relationships that they trust.

♣ Children should be informed of care arrangements and be consulted in decision-making processes about their care.

Be honest and open about the disaster. Don't be afraid to say, "I ♣ don't know" and keep discussions about their experiences open and honest.

In cases of children being separated from family members or ♣ siblings collect as much

information as possible from the child, from the people the child was found with, and relatives/friends/school teachers. Give this information to groups documenting and working on missing people. If possible take a photograph of the child and attach to the file.

♣ It is important to document all possible information as soon as the child is found. **Please register separated children *immediately* with relevant government authorities such as child probation officers and local police stations. Measures are currently underway by Probation & Childcare and National Child Protection Authorities to support tracing and care for such children. Registering children is ESSENTIAL for successful care in the coming days and weeks. More information on these measures will be provided as soon as they are available.** Record the following information: Name and pet name(whatever the child remembers), Age, Sex, Address or Village name, Names of family members, relatives (in the area and outside the area), friends and neighbours, Name of school, occupation of parents, where the child is located currently and where he/she may be moved.

♣ Before moving the child anywhere, show the child to adults and children from the area that may recognise him/her.

♣ Establish a location where adults can also provide information about missing children and maintain detailed database on this.

If children are being moved for some unavoidable reason provide♣ children with identity tags (with the above information), provide drivers of vehicles transporting children with rosters of names and other details of children, register children in location they are being moved from and give clear information about where they are being moved to. At all times, attempt to keep children close to their homes or at least within a major town in the district.

Try to involve older children and adolescents in activities♣ carried out in the camp/displaced community – such as distributing goods, documenting information, caring for younger children etc.

♣ All notices and information provided should be in simple language so that a child of 12 years can understand and follow it.

Be sensitive to special needs or adolescent girl children, such♣ as menstruation, special clothing and undergarments, toilet facilities and safety.

♣ Try to maintain a daily routine (however basic such as regular eating and sleeping times) for the child as much as possible.

If someone comes to claim a child, make sure that the child is♣ able to identify the person. In all cases, take down information (ID number, address, contact details) of the person claiming the child prior to handing the child over. Remember that some people

may be trying to take advantage of the situation to exploit such vulnerable children.

♣ Normal stress reactions when faced with crises situations or disasters:

Anxiety, sleeplessness, grief, shock, emotional numbness or ♣ expression is part of any normal human response. Important: These are normal and expected reactions from children and should not be treated as a major psychological trauma or pathological reactions needing professional help.

♣ Respect children's responses and allow them time and opportunities to express them in a way that they are comfortable with.

♣ Attend to immediate needs of the children and be supportive.

♣ Be sensitive to children with special needs, such as children with disabilities.

Be kind, calm, and attempt to explain everything that is being ♣ done, even if you are not sure that the child/children understand you.

*posted by Psychosocial Support Programme, Sri Lanka at [5:46 PM](#) *