

# GUIDELINES FOR THE ALTERNATIVE CARE OF CHILDREN

A TOOL FOR REVIEWING THE UNITED  
NATIONS FRAMEWORK WITH CHILDREN

## FACILITATORS' GUIDE

Based on a Plain Language Version of  
The "Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children, A United Nations Framework."





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# 1. INTRODUCTION

*'Millions of children around the world are without, or at risk of losing, parental care. They face significant challenges in their daily lives, which can affect them well into adulthood.'*

*Prof. Yanghee Lee, Chairperson of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child*

Children who cannot live with their parents should still grow up in a loving home and enjoy all their rights. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child is so concerned that this does not happen that it has drawn up a set of Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children. The Guidelines are intended to help everyone who is responsible for the care and well-being of children.

The Guidelines explain why it is necessary to make arrangements for some children to live away from their parents and which alternatives might be right for children in different situations.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child spent 5 years working on the Guidelines with governments, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), experts from different organisations and, importantly, young people who have experienced living away from their families.

It is important that children, young people, and those who work with them, understand what is supposed to happen, and how, if a child cannot live with his or her parents, for any reason. Children have a right to know what the Guidelines say and to give their opinions on them.

This booklet explains the main points in the Guidelines. It raises questions and suggests activities to help you think about the principles of alternative care and what these mean for children and families in different situations.

Each activity is designed for children to produce 'Key messages' that they would like to share with adults. You can use these in different ways – for example, to present at a conference, or to lobby government or other service providers to protect all the rights of all children, no matter where they are or who they live with.



## 2. PURPOSE OF THE GUIDELINES

The Guidelines are intended to help everyone who has a responsibility for looking after children living in difficult circumstances. They explain how children who cannot live with their parents, or risk being separated from them, should be looked after. If they are followed, they will help to make sure that all children enjoy the rights written down in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international laws.

The governments that have signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child agree that they should do everything possible so that children can be well cared for and protected by their parents or other close family members. If children are separated from their families, governments should do all they can to help bring them back together. If this is not possible, governments must help find the most suitable form of alternative care.

The Guidelines say that if children need alternative care, they should be placed in a family setting that promotes their 'full and harmonious development'.

### ACTIVITY 1

#### Let's talk: 'Buzz' in pairs

Do you think that Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children are needed?

How do you think having guidelines written down might make life better for children who cannot live with their parents?

## 3. GOVERNMENT MUST BUDGET FOR CHILDREN'S RIGHTS!

A child should only be removed from his or her family if there is no other way to protect and care for that child. When this happens, each child has his or her own needs and the type of care chosen must suit those needs. Children's needs change over time and so the type of care provided for them.

Governments have a duty to do all they can to keep families together and to help reunite them if they have to be separated for any reason.

Governments are supposed to put aside money and employ people to ensure the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children are implemented.



They may say that they want to do this but cannot afford to. For this reason, it is very important that children and young people, and those who care about them, should monitor their country's national budget. If your government claims that children are a priority but you see that money is not being spent on realising children's rights, speak out and demand changes!

Standing up for human rights is part of being a good citizen.

## KEY MESSAGE 1

### Government must budget for children's Rights

#### ACTIVITY 2: RANKING EXERCISE

The Guidelines say that governments must put aside money in their budgets and employ people to make sure that children who cannot live with their parents are properly cared for. Governments have lots of things that they must spend money on. They also have limited amounts of money. Therefore, they have to budget. That means they have to decide how to share out the money they have to pay for all the important things the people in the country need. They also have to decide how much money to spend on buying things (like hospital equipment), on finding the best people to do important jobs (such as child care workers and teachers), and paying them to do those jobs.

Governments are supposed to consult people about how they would like the national budget to be spent. They do not usually ask children what they think. This activity is designed to help you send a message to adults about what you think should be in the budget for children.

#### Steps

- 1. Brainstorm:** List all the things you think children need to live a healthy, happy life. Include material things, such as a house or shelter, food, clothes, etc. Also include services, such as health, education and transport. Include other rights, such as play, security and information. Also include care and protection.
- 2. Discuss:** On the list, write what resources are needed to provide all these things – for example, money, people (parents or others), places, training. Here is an example of how to do it but use your own ideas:



Need	Resources
House	Land, building materials, money
Safety	People who care

**3. Ranking:** Now go through your list and put a star or a cross next to each need you think government should address for children who cannot live with their parents. Then decide which are the most important needs that governments should budget for and put numbers next to them (starting with 1 for most important).

**Key messages:** What are your key messages for adults about how money should be spent to make sure children are well cared for.

## 4. KEEPING FAMILIES TOGETHER

The family is the basic group in any society. Family groups differ across countries and cultures. They may be large groups made up of children, parents, grandparents and other relatives. They may be made up of only children and their own parents. They may be made up of children only, with older ones caring for young siblings.

It doesn't matter whether a family is large or small, or who is in it, as long as everyone is loved and cared for. Then the family is seen as the best place for the growth, well-being and protection of children. Children who do not receive the parental care they need are at special risk of being denied their rights and their dreams for the future.

Children should never be separated from their parents simply because of poverty. Governments are supposed to ensure that families have the support they need to provide proper care for children.

Only where your own family is unable, even with appropriate support, to provide adequate care, or if your family abandons you, then the government has a duty to make sure that you receive alternative care that meets your needs. This must provide for your safety, well-being and development, and respect who you are.

Any placement must be made in the 'best interests and rights of the child concerned'. For this to happen, you must be consulted and your views, about who you should live with, and where, must be taken into account when decisions are being made. You must receive all the information you need to form those views, in your preferred language.

Governments are supposed to put in place child welfare and protection policies designed to improve their alternative care provision. These must reflect the principles in the Guidelines:



They should help prevent separation of children from their parents.

They should ensure appropriate and culturally sensitive measures to help families overcome challenges, such as disabilities, drug and alcohol abuse, discrimination against families with indigenous or minority backgrounds, as well as those living in armed conflict regions or under foreign occupation.

They should provide appropriate care and protection for vulnerable children, such as:

child victims of abuse and exploitation;

abandoned children;

children living on the street;

children whose parents are not married;

unaccompanied and separated children;

displaced and refugee children;

children of migrant workers;

children of asylum-seekers; and

children affected by HIV/AIDS and other serious illnesses.

Governments must make special efforts to stop discrimination against the child or parents, for any reason, including:

- Poverty;
- Ethnicity;
- Religion;
- Sex or gender;
- Disability;
- HIV/AIDS status;
- Any other circumstances that might cause a parent to give up or abandon a child.

## 5. CARE FOR CHILDREN DISPLACED FROM THEIR HOME COUNTRY

If a child is to be cared for outside his or her home country, whether for medical treatment, temporary hosting, respite care or any other reason, the governments concerned should ensure that specific standards are met in the selection of carers and the quality of care and follow-up, as well as the supervision and monitoring of the placement.

Unaccompanied or separated children already abroad should enjoy the same level of protection and care as nationals of the country concerned. Children should not be arrested solely for breaking immigration laws. Victims of trafficking should not be detained by the police or prosecuted for being forced to take part in unlawful activities.



As soon as an unaccompanied child is identified, a guardian or organisation should be made responsible for the child's care while his or her status is determined. When an unaccompanied or separated child is taken into care, all reasonable efforts should be made to trace his or her family and re-establish family ties, as long as this is in the best interests of the child. Authorities should obtain all available information to assess the child's risk and social and family conditions in his or her home country. Unaccompanied or separated children must not be sent home if their safety and security may be in danger or there are other reasons it is not in their best interests to go back; they should not return unless a parent, other relative, other adult caretaker, or authorised agency has agreed and is able to provide appropriate care and protection.

Those responsible for the welfare of an unaccompanied or separated child should help the child keep in touch with his or her family, unless this is against the child's wishes or not in his or her best interests.

Placement with a view to adoption, or the kafala system of care in Islamic law, should only be considered for an unaccompanied or separated child after efforts to find his or her parents, extended family or other caregivers have been exhausted.

## 6. CARE FOR CHILDREN DURING EMERGENCIES

People working with or on behalf of children without parental care in emergency situations are strongly encouraged to follow the Guidelines on alternative care.

Authorities should ensure that everyone involved in responding to unaccompanied or separated children is experienced and well-trained.

Apart from developing temporary and long-term family-based care for displaced children, they should assist in family tracing and reintegration efforts. Organisations and authorities should try to prevent the separation of children from their parents or primary caregivers in an emergency and should not encourage family separation by providing services and benefits to children alone rather than to families.

Communities should be supported to play an active role in monitoring and responding to care and protection issues facing children. Care within a child's own community, including fostering, should be encouraged.



## KEY MESSAGE 2 - Keeping families together

### ACTIVITY 3: ROLE-PLAY - WHY DO CHILDREN NEED ALTERNATIVE CARE?

#### This activity is designed to identify:

- Issues that separate families;
- unique needs of each child;
- support that families need to stay together.

This activity is designed to help you examine the reasons why children are sometimes separated from their parents and other family members.

The Guidelines say that you should only live away from your parents as a 'last resort'. That means when there is no alternative. They say the government and everyone concerned about the well-being of children should try to make it possible for you to stay with your parents and siblings. If you have to be separated from your parents, it should be for the shortest possible time.

#### Steps

**1. Brainstorm:** Think for a minute about some of the reasons why children might have to be separated from their parents. Then share your thoughts with the whole group.

**2. Reflect:** Let's consider the following situations. Use your experience or your imagination to identify the problems children face and the help they need.

#### a. Emergency

Families are faced with many types of emergency, such as war or conflict, earthquake, fire or flooding, food shortages due to drought, or other shocks. Even during an emergency, everything should be done to keep families together. Imagine a situation where this is not possible and show what happens to the child.

#### b. Abuse or neglect

Many children suffer abuse or neglect at the hands of people who are supposed to provide them with a safe and loving home. Anyone who is aware of a child being sexually abused, assaulted or being denied food, education or anything else they need, has a duty to report this, to get help for the child. Think about what family members, teachers, doctors or the police could do to stop abuse in the home and show why abused children might be taken to live away from their parents.

#### c. Sickness, death or disappearance of parents

There are lots of reasons why adults might become very sick or die when their children



still need to be looked after. Many people who have HIV still do not get the treatment they need and die of AIDS-related illnesses when they are young. People also die of TB, malaria, cholera and other illnesses that can be prevented and treated. Children also lose their parents because of war or other violence, or accidents. Sometimes, children look after each other in child-headed households. What might happen if this is the situation? (Aloneness, death.....)

#### **d. Displacement**

Children are often separated from their parents when people have to leave their homes to escape war, attack or discrimination, famine or other threats. It can be very frightening and dangerous for a child to cross a border into a foreign country, especially if they have no documents or do not have a caring adult with them. What can happen to a child in this situation? What help and protection should he or she get?

**3. Create a role-play.** Get into groups and spend about 20 minutes creating a role-play. First, choose the situation you will show. Next, agree on the points you want to make, or the message you want to get across. Then, decide which characters you need. Then agree who will play each part (make sure everyone has a part) and work out how you will act out your story. Finally, practise your role-play (it should last 4 or 5 minutes)

**4. Share your role-play.** The groups take turns to present the role-plays. Observe carefully. What does each role-play tell you?

**5. Key message.** What is the key message for adults from each role-play?

## **7. SUPPORTING PARENTS TO CARE FOR CHILDREN**

Many families need support to meet their responsibilities towards their children. The Guidelines go into detail about the policies governments are expected to have to prevent child abandonment and separation.

### **Services**

These include providing birth registration, adequate housing, health, education and social welfare services, as well as fighting poverty, substance abuse, discrimination, stigma, violence, and sexual abuse.

Courts should take into account the best interests of the child when deciding whether to imprison an offender who is a sole caregiver and whether to remove children born in prison and to ensure that children remaining in custody with their parent receive adequate care and protection, and access to activities in the community.

### **Parenting skills**



Governments should promote and strengthen both mothers' and fathers' ability to care for their children. They should work with civil society, religious leaders and the media to improve social protection measures, including: services to promote positive parent- child relationships, conflict resolution skills, income-generation opportunities, social assistance, and services for parents and children with disabilities.

### **Youth policies**

Youth policies are needed to prepare future parents to make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health, as well as care services for single and adolescent parents and their children. These should help both mothers and fathers to exercise their parental responsibilities and avoid pressure to give up their children.

### **Counselling**

When a parent or legal guardian wishes to place a child in alternative care, for a short time or permanently, the government should ensure that the family receives counselling and social support to encourage and enable them to continue to care for the child. If this fails, the first step is to see whether other family members can take responsibility for the child, and whether this would be in the child's best interests. If not, efforts should be made to find a family placement within a reasonable period.

### **Informal fostering**

Informal carers should be encouraged to notify the authorities that they are responsible for a child so that they and the child may receive any available financial and other support to promote the child's welfare and protection.

### **Child-headed households**

Appropriate support and services should be available to siblings who have lost their parents or caregivers and wish to remain together, as long as the eldest sibling is willing and able to act as the household head.

### **Training**

Specific training should be provided to teachers and others working with children, in order to help them to identify situations of abuse, neglect, exploitation or risk of abandonment and to refer such cases to people who can help.



## ACTIVITY 4 – HOTLINE TO GOVERNMENT

Let's talk: Brainstorm. What support do you think parents need to care properly for their children? What prevents families getting the help described in these Guidelines? If you had a 'Hotline' to the government, what would you say about support to families?

### KEY MESSAGE 3

What are the key messages for adults for Support for Parents / Families?

## 8. WHAT IS ALTERNATIVE CARE?

'Alternative care' is any arrangement, formal or informal, temporary or permanent, for a child who is living away from his or her parents.

The Guidelines for providing alternative care all arise from 2 principles.

- 1. The principle of necessity.** This means children should only be placed in alternative care if it is really necessary. It must be in the child's 'best interest'.
- 2. The principle of appropriateness.** This means that children should only be placed in alternative care that suits their individual needs and situation.

Lack of income or resources, or conditions directly related to poverty, should never be the only justification for removing a child from parental care, or for preventing a child in alternative care from being reunited with his or her family. Such conditions are signs that the family needs support to meet its responsibilities.

If it is agreed that a child needs alternative care, there are other principles to follow. These include enabling the child to stay as close as possible to his/her usual place of residence, in order to keep in touch with his/her family, to minimise disruption to the child's life and to make it easier to reunite the family when the time comes.

Alternative care is intended to provide protection, well-being and stability while a permanent arrangement is made. It should ensure a child can exercise all their rights, including access to education, health and other services, the right to identity, freedom of religion or belief, language and protection of property and inheritance rights. The care arrangements should not separate children from their siblings unless there is a clear risk of abuse or other strong reason.



## There are many kinds of alternative care but they are grouped into two main types:

**Informal care** – where other family members or people close to the children look after them. This is common in most countries. The Guidelines say that where this happens, governments still have a role to ensure their welfare and protection, with due respect for cultural, economic, gender and religious differences and practices that do not conflict with the rights and best interests of the child. Informal care may include siblings living in a child-headed household. In this case, the government is supposed to ensure the children have the support and protection of a legal guardian.

**Formal care** – where the government or a recognised child-care agency places a child in the care of adults who are not family members. Where this is necessary, it is usually the aim to provide a family setting as close as possible to the child's normal home environment. Use of residential care (such as a refugee transit camp, emergency shelter, children's home, place of safety and orphanage) is only considered where it is appropriate, necessary and in the best interests of the individual child concerned.

### The Guidelines cover:

All children who are not in the overnight care of at least one of their parents. This is unless the children are staying voluntarily and informally with relatives or friends for reasons not connected with their parents' inability or unwillingness to provide adequate care;

Children without parental care who are outside their country of normal residence or are victims of an emergency. They may be 'Unaccompanied' (not cared for by another relative or responsible adult); or 'Separated' from their primary caregiver, even if accompanied by another relative.

### They do not cover:

Children who are in custody as a result of being accused of or found to have broken the law, (they are covered by the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice and the United Nations Rules for the Protection of Juveniles Deprived of their Liberty);

Children legally placed in the custody of adoptive parents.

However, any place responsible for the care of children (such as a boarding school, hospital, centre for children with mental and physical disabilities or other special needs, camp or workplace) is encouraged to make use of the Guidelines.



## 9. MAKING SURE CHILDREN GET THE RIGHT CARE

### **Informal care**

Many children are cared for informally by extended family members or other adults in their community. The Guidelines say that governments should support these arrangements but also take steps to protect children in informal care from abuse, neglect, child labour and all other forms of exploitation.

### **Formal alternative care**

The transfer of a child into alternative care should be done with utmost sensitivity, in a child-friendly manner, by specially trained personnel.

The Guidelines set out detailed and strict criteria for the placement of children in formal alternative care. These cover everything from health and safety to measures to protect all a child's basic rights, including equality and dignity. The Guidelines emphasise the importance of planning and preparing for a child to be reunited with his or her family.

If you are placed in alternative care, you still have the right to stay in contact with your family members and other people you are close to, such as friends, neighbours and previous carers. You have the right to keep in touch with your parents even if they are in prison or in hospital. If this is not possible, you still have the right to be kept informed about the situation of your family members.

All carers should encourage children and young people to make informed choices about their lives, taking account of acceptable risks and the child's age. Discipline must be positive and supportive. The Guidelines prohibit disciplinary measures that are cruel, inhuman or degrading, including keeping a child in closed or solitary confinement, or using any form of physical or psychological violence. No one should ever threaten to stop you seeing your family or other special people as a punishment.

### **Foster care**

Foster care is one form of formal care. The Guidelines recommend that local foster carers should be identified who can provide children with care and protection while maintaining ties to their family, community and cultural group.

Special preparation, support and counselling services for foster carers should be made available. Carers should have the opportunity to make their voices heard and to influence policy.



### **Residential care**

Facilities providing residential care should be small and organised around the rights and needs of the child, in a setting as close as possible to a family. Their objective should generally be to provide temporary care and to contribute actively to the child's family reintegration or, if this is not possible, to secure his/her stable care in an alternative family setting.

There should be enough carers in residential settings to allow individual attention and to give the child, where appropriate, the opportunity to bond with a specific carer.

Agencies, facilities and professionals involved in care provision should be monitored regularly, through reporting, scheduled and unannounced visits, and discussion with and observation of the staff and the children.

### **Support for aftercare**

Aftercare is the period after a child leaves formal care. Throughout the period of care, facilities should equip the child with social and lifeskills to become self-reliant and to play a role in the community. The process of transition from care to aftercare should take into consideration the child's gender, age, maturity and circumstances. Children leaving care should be encouraged to take part in the planning of aftercare life. Children with special needs, such as disabilities, should have an appropriate support system. Aftercare should be prepared as early as possible, well before the child leaves.

## **10. DIFFERENT CHILDREN, SAME RIGHTS**

Every child is unique and every child has the same rights in international law. Girls have the same rights as boys. Differently abled children, and those living with or affected by HIV/AIDS, or having any other special needs, have the same rights as other children.

Carers should protect the right of every child to develop through play and leisure activities, including with children and others in the local community. The specific safety, health, nutritional, developmental and other needs of babies and young children, including those with special needs, should be met in all care settings.

Children should be allowed to follow their religious and spiritual practices, and to choose whether to participate in religious services, religious education or counselling. No child should be encouraged or persuaded to change his/ her religion or belief during a care placement.

Children's right to privacy should be respected. This includes having appropriate facilities for hygiene and sanitary needs, respecting gender differences and interaction, and a safe and accessible space to keep personal possessions.



Alternative care facilities must protect all children against discrimination, abuse, abduction, trafficking, sale and all other forms of exploitation. At the same time, their movement and activities should not be restricted more than is absolutely necessary for their protection. Children in care should be offered access to someone they can trust and confide in. They should also have a way of lodging complaints or concerns regarding their treatment or living conditions. Young people with previous care experience should be involved in this process, due weight being given to their opinions.

All staff employed by agencies and facilities to care for children should be trained to deal appropriately with challenging behaviour, including conflict resolution techniques and means to prevent acts of harm or self-harm. Carers should be prepared to respond to children with special needs, notably those living with HIV/AIDS or other chronic physical or mental illnesses, and children with physical or mental disabilities. Staff should also be sensitive to cultural, social, gender and religious differences.

## KEY MESSAGE 4

### Appropriate' alternative care

#### ACTIVITY 5: POSTER ACTIVITY - WHAT IS 'APPROPRIATE' ALTERNATIVE CARE?

**This activity is designed to help you share your views about:**

the types of alternative care that are suitable for children;

how to make sure children's diversity and uniqueness is recognised and respected.

Definition: appropriate means suitable or right, for a particular person, situation, occasion, or place.

Examples: cool clothing is appropriate for hot weather; sugary food is not appropriate for someone with diabetes.

The Guidelines say that when children have to live separately from their parents, they must be placed in appropriate alternative care. What is appropriate for one child may be quite wrong for another child. For example, it might be in the best interests of small children whose parents have died to be cared for by their older brothers and sisters in the family home.

It might be best for other boys and girls to go and stay with relatives in another home. If a child has committed a serious criminal offence, or has a problem of drug or alcohol abuse, it might be appropriate for him or her to be placed somewhere that can provide professional help and guidance. Whoever the child and whatever their circumstances, they have the right to have all their needs met. They must also receive the care and support to help them develop to their full potential.



## Steps

**1. Discuss.** In your groups, discuss the following questions. One person should take brief notes.

### a. Types of care

What are the different types of alternative care you know about?

List them and put them in the order you think they should first be considered (for example, if you think the most appropriate alternative for any child is child-headed household, put that as Number 1; if you think the least appropriate is staying in an orphanage, give that the last number).

### b. Recognising diversity

What needs to be done to make sure alternative care is appropriate for children in different situations? Consider factors such as:

Gender

Language

Culture

Religion

HIV status

Disability

Safety (eg risk of abuse, trafficking, exploitation, child labour)

Environment (eg pollution, distance from loved ones)

Any other issues you think are important.

## 2. Design a simple poster to share your ideas

You might want to make a poster around needs. Consider carefully what are the most critical aspects of care, support and services for children who cannot stay with their parents? Are their needs different in any way from children who do live with their parents?

Or, you might choose to focus on a particular type of care (such as foster care, emergency care or informal care)

Or, you might highlight a certain issue (such as gender, or safety), or situation (for example, the needs of a refugee child or a girl child living with HIV).

## 3. Create your poster

You can use pictures, symbols and words. If you like, you can write a message or slogan that will make people take notice of your concerns.



## KEY MESSAGES 4

What is the key message for adults from your posters about 'Appropriate' alternative care?

## KEY MESSAGE 5

What is the key message for adults from your posters about appropriate care: different types of care?

## KEY MESSAGE 6

What is the key message for adults from your posters about recognizing diversity?

## KEY MESSAGE 7 Recognize Me

### ACTIVITY 6: THE STORY OF ME

This activity is designed to share and celebrate your life story. It focuses on how you see yourself and how others see you, your special qualities and the things that are important to you. No matter where you live, no matter how far you are from the family and place of your birth, you have a unique and special identity. This activity is designed to share and celebrate your life story.

#### 1. Portraits of a special person

**a) Self-portrait.** Draw a picture of yourself. It can be just your head and shoulders or your whole body. Above the picture, write your name, around the picture, draw or paste images, or write words, showing things you like.

**b) Partner portrait.** Now find a partner and draw a picture of each other. Above the picture, write your partner's name, around the picture, draw or paste images, or write words, showing things you observe about your partner (eg 'friendly', 'shy', 'strong', 'sad', things they like). Give each other the picture you have drawn. Look at it for a moment and discuss the image it reflects of you. What is the difference between the way your partner sees you and the way you see yourself?

#### 2. Treasure what makes you YOU!

a) Think of an object (not an animal or person) that you can compare yourself with. Take turns to share with the group why you are like this object. For example: 'I am like a path because I get past obstacles and reach my destination'.



b) Draw or paste a picture of the object onto a piece of paper. Around it, write words, qualities, skills, beliefs, values, dreams that make you who you are.

### 3. Tell your story

Start making writing in your journal. You can use what you have made today as the first 'chapter'. Then you can add any information, pictures, personal objects or souvenirs that you have collected, or will collect in future, to record each step of your life.

You can keep these things in a box, bag or case, somewhere safe but also somewhere you can look at them when you want to.

If you don't have photos or belongings from your childhood, there are other ways to record important things in your life. For example, you can write a poem, or quote from a song or book that means something to you. You can include newspaper articles about things that have happened, a wrapper from your favourite sweet or snack, a coin or a ticket from a place you visited. Use your journal to do this activity

It's your story, you decide how to tell it!

## KEY MESSAGE 6

What are the key messages for adults about recognizing me!

## 11. REUNITING FAMILIES

Local and international agencies providing emergency relief have to have clear policies on providing holistic support to families and communities, and care and protection of children.

In any emergency, it must be a priority to identify, register and document unaccompanied or separated children as quickly as possible, to increase the chances of reuniting them with family members.

Information about children should only be shared among agencies for the purpose of tracing, family reintegration and care. Nothing should be done that may hinder eventual family reintegration, such as adoption, change of name, or movement to places far from the family's likely location, until all tracing efforts have been exhausted.

People and agencies engaged in tracing family members or caregivers should work together, using the same systems, wherever possible. They should ensure that the child and others concerned will not be endangered by their actions. They must be certain that the child and family members wish to be reunited.

If a child cannot be reunited with his or her family, long-term options should be considered, such as adoption, foster care, residential care, including group homes, or other supervised living arrangements.



## Promoting family reintegration

After a child has been placed in alternative care, the team responsible for the placement should consult regularly with the child, the family and the alternative caregiver to decide whether it is possible and in the best interests of the child, for the child to go back to live with his or her family. If it is agreed that this can happen, it should be 'a gradual and supervised process, accompanied by follow-up and support measures that take account of the child's age, needs and evolving capacities, as well as the cause of the separation'.

The Guidelines say that children and their families must be actively involved in decision-making and planning for reunification.

## KEY MESSAGE 8

### Reunify with families

#### ACTIVITY 7 – COLLAGE

##### **Let's talk:** how to reunify families

There are many different reasons that children may be separated from their families. For example, there are children whose parents are in prison, missing, forced to work away from home, seeking asylum in another country, abusing drugs, or suffering from a terminal illness.

What kind of planning and support do you think is needed to make sure that a child can be reunited with his or her family? What are the things that need to be in place to help children's reunify with their families? You could share your ideas in a collage or a group poster showing the steps to reunification and the support needed at each step.

##### **Key messages**

What is the key message for adults?



## 12. GOVERNMENT'S DUTY TO CHILDREN –WHO IS RESPONSIBLE

Governments have to do all they can to enable children to stay with their parents. They also have to make laws, policies and plans for emergency, short-term and long-term (permanent) alternative care. They must set aside money to put those plans into practice. They must make sure that the people and organisations looking after children in alternative care are fit to do so. That means those people must have the right knowledge, skills and attitudes towards children.

All agencies and facilities offering alternative care services must be registered by their country's social welfare services. Every professional involved in childcare placements should sign a code of conduct that defines their role. There must be clear procedures for reporting allegations of misconduct.

Facilities must keep complete, up-to-date, confidential and secure records for children in care. These should include all details of the care placement of each child, together with any identity documents and other personal information. Information on the child's family should be included in the file, which should follow the child throughout the alternative care period. The records could be made available to the child, as well as to the parents or guardians, within the limits of the child's right to privacy and confidentiality.

The best place of care for a child is generally in a home with his or her own parents, siblings and other significant family members. If a child has to be separated from the family, the aim should always be to change the circumstances so that it possible and desirable for the child to live with his or her family again. Government must monitor all placements to review the quality of care and the need for it to continue.

### **Who decides that a child needs alternative care?**

Lots of different people may be involved in ensuring that decisions about alternative care are made in the best interests of the child. These may include social workers, officers of the court, family members and lawyers.

At every stage, you must be consulted, according to your capacity to understand what is happening, along with your parents or legal guardians. You must have the opportunity and support to state in court what you think about the placement decision.

### **What is best for each child?**

Every child's situation and needs have to be properly and carefully assessed before a placement is made. Assessment must consider the child's immediate safety and well-being, as well as his or her longer term care and development, and should cover the



child's personal characteristics, ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious background, family and social environment, medical history and any special needs.

The assessment will take account of the child's attachment to his/her parents and siblings, the family's capacity to safeguard the child's well-being and development and the desirability of the child remaining within his or her community and country.

Any temporary placement must be reviewed - preferably at least every three months, taking into account notably the child's personal development and any changing needs, developments in his/her family environment, and the adequacy and necessity of the current placement. The child should be prepared in advance for all changes of care settings.

## KEY MESSAGE 9

### Who is responsible

#### ACTIVITY 8 - WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY?

This activity is designed to identify all the people who have a role or responsibility to provide care and support for children. You can use it to review who is really 'there' for you and who is missing. You can investigate this further in your own community and use what you find out to lobby for more appropriate support and services.

The Guidelines say that governments must make sure there are resources to keep families together and to provide appropriate alternative care for children who cannot live with their parents. Resources means money but it also means services, training and people with the right skills to help children realise all their rights.

Families, communities and governments are made up of lots of different people with different responsibilities.

#### Steps

- 1. Reflection:** Think about all the things that parents are meant to do in a home. Think about food, clothes, schoolbooks, getting to school, housework, caring for small children or sick people, keeping the family safe, for example.
- 2. Discussion:** In your group, talk about who should be there to help with all the things you need if your parents cannot look after you.
- 3. Drawing circles of support:** Copy the 'circles of support' diagram onto a big sheet of paper and use it to show all the people or organisations who you think should be there for the children (for example, older siblings, grandparents or other family members, neighbours, social workers, community leaders, people in government, the UN or others).



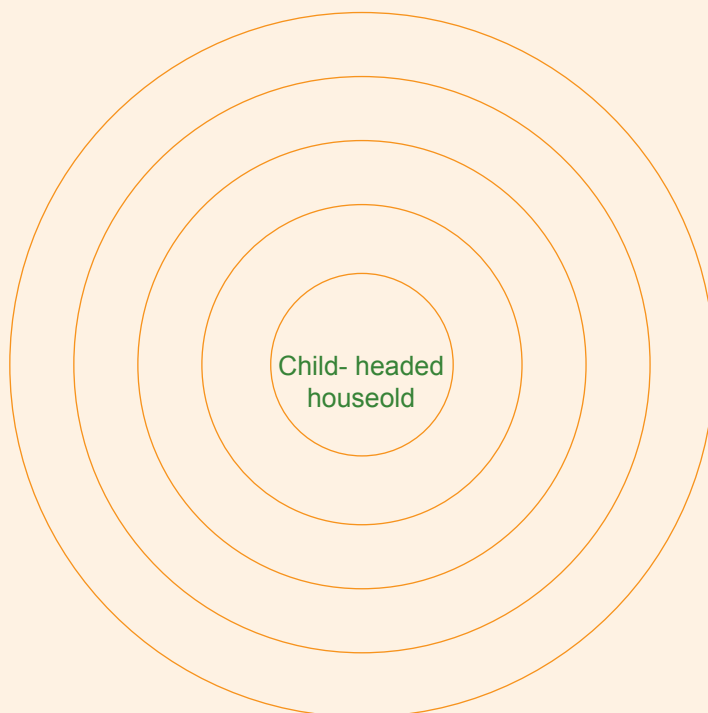
Write the names of those who you think should be closest to the children in the inside circles and others in the outer circles.

Consider your own situation or that of other children you know. Are there any circles of support that are simply missing?

What do you think could be done to fill the gaps?

What do you think is the weakest circle?

How could it be made stronger?



### **Key messages**

What are the key messages for adults about who is responsible for ensuring children get the care they need?



## 13. HOW TO GET MORE INFORMATION

Here are the addresses of some websites where you can get more information about children's rights and organisations that protect and promote the rights of children.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC):

- Full text of the Convention: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm>
- Child friendly English version: [http://www.unicef.org/voy/media/rights\\_leaflet.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/voy/media/rights_leaflet.pdf)
- Other language versions: [http://www.unicef.org/voy/explore/rights/explore\\_2781.html](http://www.unicef.org/voy/explore/rights/explore_2781.html)

African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child

<http://www.africa-union.org/child/home.htm>

Council of Europe Recommendation Rec (2005)5 on the rights of children living in residential institutions: <http://www.coe.int/familypolicy> (select 'children in residential institutions'; available in English, Russian, Greek, Polish, Estonian and Serbian)

Quality4Children Standards (Q4C) - <http://www.quality4children.info>

Council of Europe & SOS Children's Villages International: "Children and young people in care – Discover your rights": [http://www.coe.int/t/transversalprojects/children/News/enfants%20institution/text%20flyer\\_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/transversalprojects/children/News/enfants%20institution/text%20flyer_en.asp)

SOS Children's Villages International: <http://www.sos-childrensvillages.org>

International Social Service: <http://www.iss-ssi.org/>

NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child: <http://www.childrightsnet.org/>

Child Rights Information Network (CRIN): <http://www.crin.org>

Better Care Network: <http://crin.org/bcn/>

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF): <http://www.unicef.org>

Better Care Network & UNICEF Manual for the Measurement of Indicators for Children in Formal Care: <http://www.crin.org/BCN/details.asp?id=19618&themeID=1001&topicID=1011>

