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HOW DO YOU CREATE A SAFE FRAMEWORK FOR ACTIVITIES IN ASYLUM AND CRISIS CENTRES?

A tool for you as a volunteer

Safe activities for children and young people

In this brochure, you will find tips for volunteers on how you and your group can plan and create safe activities for children and young people in crisis and asylum reception centres.

Well-structured and planned activities are important in creating a sense of security for those taking part. Children and young people living in asylum reception and crisis centres are in a vulnerable and uncertain situation where they can also live in proximity to other children and adults who are also experiencing difficulties. The more chaos experienced by those participating in our activities, the more vital it is that our activities are well planned and structured.

Many of the children and young people we deal with have been in situations

where their needs for security and emotional support have not been met, some have witnessed stressful events, and some have been traumatised. What they all have in common is that they need security, to feel that they have a place where they belong, that they matter to others and to be given an opportunity to achieve. In well-structured activities with familiar routines, children and young people can play and explore relationships, and evolve. Positive experiences and new relationships from activities can amend for certain negative experiences, proving that some people are good. In this way, our activities can be a place where we can create security and help them to become curious about new people and new experiences.



Tip! In Motimate you will find the course “Children and trauma” where psychologist Heidi Wittrup Djup explains more in detail about how we can best respond to children dealing with trauma.



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Volunteer roles

As a volunteer, you can help children and young people feel safe at activities. But what does it really mean to be a safe adult with children?

Seeing the children as individuals

An important principle for Save the Children is that activities should be on the children's and young people's terms. For them, the contact with volunteers can be of great importance. The experience of being seen, feeling a sense of self-worth, being listened to and taken seriously is key. Being a safe adult in contact with children and young people means not only being well trained and familiar with the work routines and guidelines, but also being patient, present, smiling, inclusive, accommodating and calm. Child participation is central to Save the Children as an organisation, both as a goal and a working principle. This means that children and young people must have a say in influencing our activities. This can be in the planning phase if the group has



Tip! Some children and young people are outgoing, while others will be more withdrawn or shy. Try to be aware of this by making sure that everyone is included during the activities. A good tip is to share the responsibility for the children/young people between you to make sure that everyone is seen and talked to and feel included.

regular participants, during the activity or by taking children's feedback during and after the activity into account in the evaluation and further plans. Approaching children and young people in an open and accommodating manner is a good starting point for letting their initiatives play a role in guiding how the activities are set up.

Being a clear and consistent adult

Boundaries and the setting of boundaries are an important part of structuring activities, because they focus on how we should interact with one another at the activities. Some may find it challenging to set boundaries with children you know have experienced many difficulties, because you fear that the children will feel rejected, hurt, or afraid. It is important to remember that boundaries are there for a reason and that boundaries create security because they make the world predictable and create stability. Activities are not just a break for children, they are also a place where they learn through play and relationship building, and a place where past experiences are corrected.

Creating common rules for activities

The group must agree on the rules that will apply, preferably in cooperation with the children and young people participating in the activity, when possible. In any case, the boundaries should be very simple rules of conduct on how to ensure a good environment and safe time together during the activity. This means that they must be simple to understand, meaningful and possible to



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comply with. The boundaries are communicated to the children at the start of the activity, and it is important to be consistent and that there is agreement within the group as to how they will be complied with. However, there is no recipe or formula for setting boundaries, and it must be done in consultation with children and young people themselves and according to their age and maturity.

Sometimes these boundaries will be tested, and it can be demanding both to set boundaries and to deal with situations where boundaries are tested. Clear rules and limits around activities help to reduce the risk of conflict and the testing of boundaries. We have gathered some useful experiences on this below. You can also read more about boundaries and setting boundaries in the handbook for volunteers.

When parents are involved in activities, it may be advisable to share the rules that apply during the activity with the parents (and children) in advance, and to explain why you have these rules. Agreeing on the rules will give clarity to the roles of volunteers, parents and children alike and an understanding of what is being monitored. If you have many participants at large outings, it is important to make sure that parents know that they are responsible for their own children. Support the parents during the activity and remind them of the rules.

When children need help assembling

Sometimes children can be overzealous during an activity, and it can be difficult to calm down and get things done as planned. This can be handled in different ways. If you get to know each other, you will know what works, but you may have to test things out a bit. It is also necessary to be flexible and change plans when required. Some suggestions on how to create calm in your activity:

- How about starting the activity with an exercise that calms everyone down and has a unifying effect, so that it gives a feeling of “now we’re in business”? See tips later in the brochure about starting activities. Also try to address children and young people calmly.
- How about starting the activity with something that provides an outlet for energy? Is it possible to divide the children or young people into smaller groups and let them choose different activities?

Agree on which volunteers are responsible for which children and tell the children who “their adult” is during the activity. This way you can work closely with each child and identify each of their needs.

PLEASE NOTE! When volunteering with children, we need to act in a way that reduces conflict and respects children and young people. See the preparedness plan for handling physical conflicts.

Your own boundaries

Sometimes it can be difficult to set personal boundaries when dealing with children you’re with at activities. Since you, as a volunteer, represent a safe adult, some of the children may want you to come to their homes for a visit or to exchange contact information. It is important to remember that we are not to discriminate, and we must keep our distance to be able to assist all the children. If we get involved and get too close, it’s easy to get overwhelmed. You can also feel bad if you reject a child, but it’s important to remember that creating a relationship of dependence is not your role. Your role is to be there for the children then and there, and both children and parents need to learn that many people just need to be a positive force for a short period of time in their lives.

It’s perfectly fine to praise the child’s initiative. For example, you could say “That’s a great suggestion, and I think it sounds very nice to come and visit you. But at Save the Children we have rules that say that we are only to be together during activities, and that everyone is to be together the same amount. So unfortunately, I can’t do that”.



Tip!

Remember that as a volunteer you have to complete the course “Safer together” in Motimate.



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How to take care of yourself as a volunteer

Many volunteers find that they get a lot of positive energy from participating in activities with children, but at the same time it can also be challenging to interact with children and young people who are in a vulnerable situation. As a volunteer, it is therefore important to be aware of your own needs so that you can be attentive to the needs of the children over time. It may be a good idea to think about what your needs are and how you can address them. What do you need from other volunteers and staff?

Everyone has different needs, but it is important to talk to other volunteers or your contact person at the regional office about what you experience when you are involved in activities. If you need to unwind after participating in activities, it may be a good idea to go for a walk, watch a good series on TV, exercise, listen to music or do something fun that you know works for you.

Tip! Save the Children has regional contracts with psychologists that both the group as a whole and you as a volunteer can use if need be. Contact the regional office to find out more.

Activities

Planning activities in advance

We are all different, but if we discuss things properly together and think about how we want the activity to be, we can help to create security and predictability. It is therefore important that as a group you stand together and support each other during the activity. If you feel confident and enjoy being together, it is easier to give more of yourselves, the activity will function better and you can be more flexible when things don't go quite as planned.

Topics for discussion at group meetings:

- What is my role as a volunteer?
- What is important for me at the activity?
What do I need from the other members of the group?
- What causes me stress? What energises me?
- What makes me think the activity is good or bad?

Allocation of responsibilities

Try to agree on who is responsible for what. It may be useful for one or two people to have the main responsibility for the activity itself, while delegating other practical tasks to other volunteers. Think through the activity from start to



Tip! If the children or young people you are going to be with do not speak Norwegian or English, it may be a good idea to show an example of what to do at the activity. For example, if you are travelling somewhere, you could show pictures of the activity. Use simple words and clear body language. You can also contact the regional office ahead of time and get help to find an interpreter who can help translate or prepare something in writing. Understanding what is going to happen is important for children and young people in a vulnerable situation.

finish, what can possibly happen and devise a good plan. Often things don't work out as planned and that's perfectly fine. Have some alternatives in mind.

In the planning phase, it is also important to think about how participants can help shape the activity and its structure. Topics for discussion can be:

- What about the structure is absolute, and what can be changed based on the children/young people involved?
- How can we organise participation with a fixed group of children/youth?
- How can we organise participation when we have different children/youth from time to time?



Tip! Spend some time getting to know each other and new volunteers so that you feel a bit more comfortable during the activity and know where each other is.

Set space for the activity

It may be advisable to establish a recognisable pace for the activity, for example

by establishing some set routines for starting and finishing, or perhaps some element along the way that you always come back to. Often there can be a lot going on during the activity and it can feel a bit hectic or get a bit busy towards the end, but a few simple steps and a little extra time can be enough to create a predictable activity.

Suggested structure for the start of the activity:

- Welcome each child and young person: smile, use a welcoming body language and say hello, show that you are happy to meet them. Even if you may not speak the same language, this is something everyone will understand.
- Gather everyone in a circle to welcome them to signal that you are starting, say who you are, what you will be doing together and what the activity is going to be like. Go through the rules you have agreed on.

During the activity

How about starting with a regular song, a clapping game or something that grabs everyone's attention, or maybe something that gathers and calms everyone down if you're going into a quiet activity? A good structure for the activities is to have a meal or a meal break together during the activity. When the activities have a certain length, this is necessary, but also for shorter activities that only last two hours, it's a good idea to take time for a bite to eat. Many volunteers mention nice conversations around the table, the campfire or creating team spirit in the group.



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Finishing up

If possible, gather the group to finish the event together, or make sure you thank everyone for the day and say goodbye. It can be good for volunteers to say a few words about the day and what they have done together, and for children and young people to have a chance to say something if they want to.

Afterwards

After the activity has finished and you have said goodbye to the children, it is a good idea for you, as volunteers, to set aside 10 minutes for debriefing. How do

you think the activity went? Was there anything that worked particularly well or anything that could have been done differently? What feedback and impressions did you get during the activity about how the participants liked the activity? Is there anything you should do more of? Were there any unusual situations? Agree on who will write the report to the contact person at the regional office.

If there was an incident during the activity, such as a child being injured or the guidelines being broken, you should complete a deviation form and send it to the regional office.

Safe activities

It is important that children and young people who participate in activities feel safe and well cared for when they are with us. They need to feel comfortable and have a say in decisions when appropriate and know that they can tell us if something seems uncomfortable to them. Since part of the activity often takes place outside the regular meeting

place, it is important to properly plan and take some precautions so that the outing is a positive experience for the children and volunteers alike. In advance of each activity, it is important to:

- Assess the potential risks of the activity and how many volunteers are needed to ensure it is safe (Use the checklist in the document called "Safe and positive activities for children". You can get it from the regional office or at reddbarna.no)
- Familiarise yourself with the little preparedness plan and take it with you to activities
- Make sure the first aid kit is filled and clarify who is responsible for taking it with you



Tip! Children say it is important to have volunteers who take the time to join in play, talk to and get to know them. It is important to have enough volunteers to actually spend quality time with the children.

Financial framework for the activities

At the beginning of each semester, it is useful to set up an activity plan based on the wishes of children and young people and what you think might be good activities. Schedule the activities at regular times so that it is predictable for the participants.

Think about what is needed to carry out the activities in an optimal way:

- Transport - do you need to hire a bus or a taxi?
- Premises - do you have a suitable place for the activity, or should you rent one?
- Equipment - what is missing from the equipment bag? What do you need for each activity?
- Entrance ticket - is there a cost for participating in the activity?
- Meal break - what food and drink is suitable?

Set up as realistic a budget as possible for each activity and send the application to Save the Children. Ask your contact person at the regional office for the application form.

Not all activities need to cost a lot. More often than not, the most important thing is to be together and do simple activities. But it can be nice to spend money on some activities that children might not otherwise have access to, since many of the children and families who participate in our activities don't have a lot of money. For children and families living in asylum reception centres, this means that they

cannot always afford to eat healthy food, or enough food. It is therefore a good idea to include a meal break during the activity. It often creates a nice atmosphere if you prepare simple meals together, but you can also order food, if for example you are on an outing in the city.

Remember that although there is not always time for a long meal break, it is important to replenish your energy during this time. Prepare a small lunch bag or bring fruit and drink if you expect to be busy.



Tip! Save the Children has created its own brochure for children and young people taking part in our activities.

The short text is translated into many languages and explains who Save the Children is, how the activities with us will be like and how those who partake in the activities can let us know if something seems wrong or if they would like to report anything.

When meeting children and young people for the first time, please read through the brochure individually or as a group. It can also be good to discuss amongst yourselves what you have read. What do children think about this? Are any of the points difficult to understand?

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**THANKS A MILLION
FOR VOLUNTEERING!**

