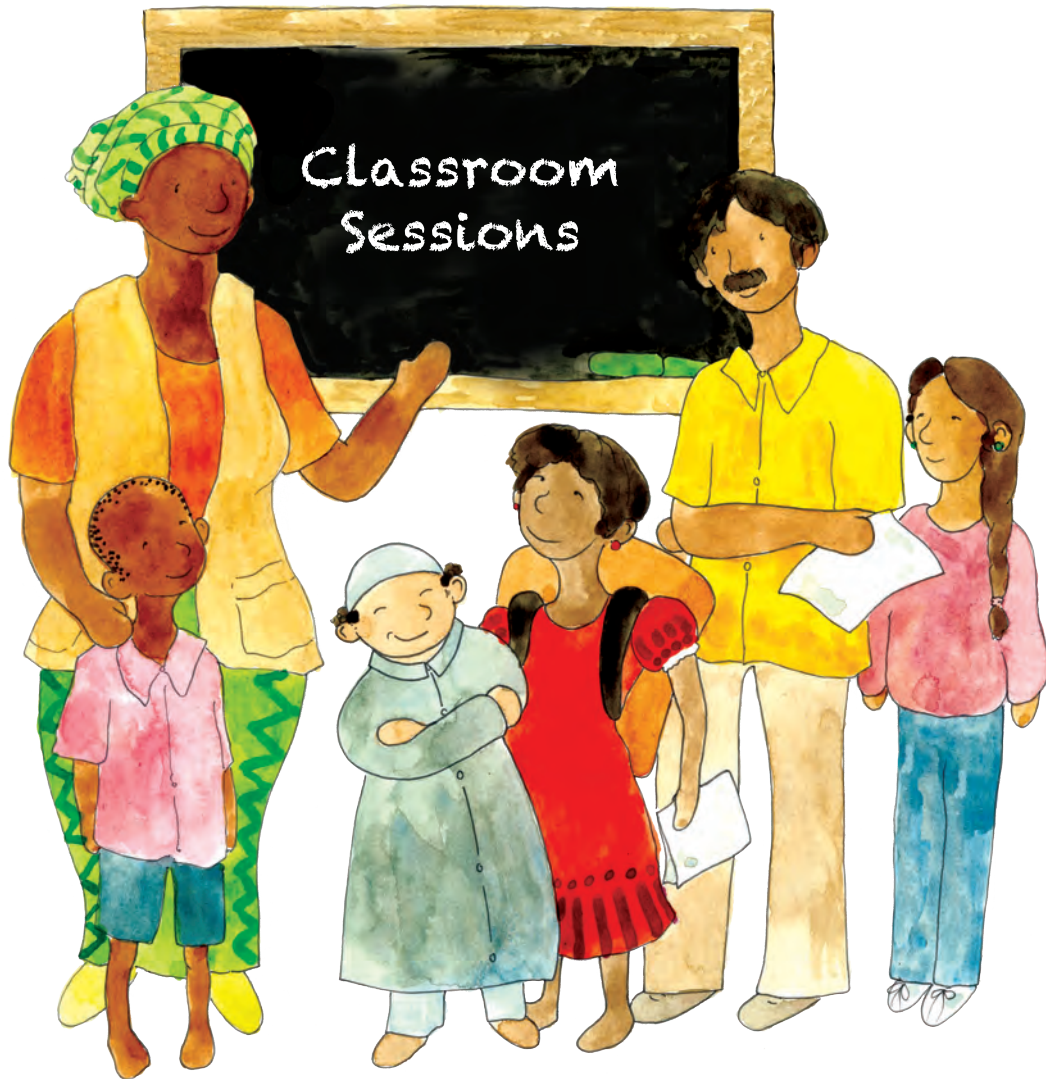


Better Learning Programme 1

Supporting Students' Recovery in Emergencies



NORWEGIAN
REFUGEE COUNCIL



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Introduction

This handbook is for teachers working with children in the demanding conditions of emergencies - war, conflict, natural disasters, and other types of crisis - and their aftermath.

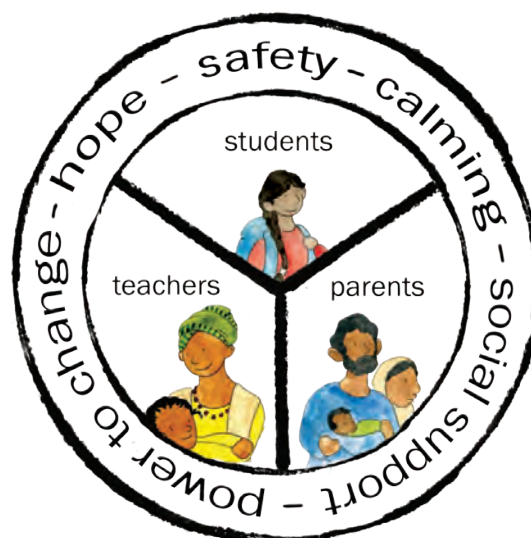
Children affected by stress from conflict and crisis situations often have difficulties learning and functioning at school. They experience a sense of chaos, loss of concentration and reduced memory, making it hard to keep up in the classroom or do their homework. Teachers, with the support of parents, have an important role in supporting children to stabilise and recover, so they can learn and thrive.

The Better Learning Programme 1 (BLP 1) provides teachers with a simple psychosocial support framework, the “Recovery Box”, which they can use on a daily basis to promote children’s recovery from traumatic experience and stress. BLP 1 also helps teachers and children understand normal reactions to fear and stress, and provides ways to manage these reactions, including easy calming exercises that can be done as part of the regular classroom practice.

BLP 1 is intended to improve conditions for learning by helping children to recognise and manage stress in emergency conditions, improving their ability to concentrate in class and engage meaningfully in the learning process. In emergencies, teachers also might have experienced life-threatening events and may be coping with stress. Many teachers find that learning BLP 1 concepts, principles and exercises helps them to recognise and manage their own stress. Parents who are introduced to BLP 1 are also able to use the programme to support recovery for themselves and their children. So, BLP 1 is intended to improve the well-being of children, as well as their teachers and families, contributing to better learning in the classroom.

BLP 1 can be used in ongoing and post-emergency contexts or other situations where children have been exposed to stressful events and experiences. The sessions have been developed for students aged 10–16, but can easily be adapted to other age-groups.

BLP 1 is based on research and international guidelines on best practice for psychosocial support for education in emergencies.



Chapter One: Understanding stress

How we respond to frightening experiences

People of all ages are terrified by war, conflict and disasters. In order to help children to recover from the experience of war and crisis, we first need to understand normal reactions to stressful events and experiences.



Stress reactions can be triggered when we experience major life stress and/or traumatic stress.

Major life stress Living in a situation with ongoing stress, and experiencing high levels of fear; for example, living with conditions of insecurity (airstrikes, shootings, fear of arrest or detention) or the experience of displacement with the loss of home and family members and the stress of living in camps or temporary settlements.

Traumatic stress Symptoms caused by experiencing traumatic events, like witnessing or experiencing situations involving severe threat, seeing others being seriously wounded or killed, or thinking you were going to die.

The human body is designed to deal with danger in a flexible and adaptive way. When the brain perceives threat, it activates automatically and prepares the body for fight or flight by creating a state of heightened stress level.



Our breathing and heart rates increase to provide more oxygen, and blood is sent to the muscles, enabling us to move quickly. Our sensory awareness is also heightened, making rapid reactions possible. This is a normal survival response. Once the danger is over, the body normally turns off the alarm response, restoring itself to a resting state. Sometimes the body simply fails to turn off the alarm and the brain continues to respond as if under threat, even though the actual danger has ended, leaving the individual in a state of chronically heightened stress level. This “false alarm” can be perceived as stress and a feeling of chaos and can severely impact our daily functioning.

Sleeping bears and feeding lions

There is a saying in Norway that one should never wake a sleeping bear. Similarly, Kenyans would never think of disturbing a feeding lion. Palestinians often say that if you have a windy room, you better close the door. But is it true that traumatic memories should be treated the same way? Should we shut out the memories? Is not talking about the terrible experiences really the best way to deal with them? Will disturbing traumatic stress symptoms disappear by themselves, if we leave them alone?

In fact, research shows that many people respond negatively to blocking out traumatic memories. When we avoid the past, it has a tendency to sneak up and take control of the present. When a person is traumatised, they suffer from memories of a traumatic event that they have been exposed to in the past. The past continues to revisit them in a disturbing manner.

Research shows that people who have effectively managed to put terrible experiences behind them have all received help from others. First of all, they have had *someone they could trust and talk to*. In addition, they have benefited from an *understanding and supportive environment* and a family or community climate that offered the opportunity of *open communication*. Family members, trusted adults and friends can enhance the recovery process. In this respect teachers are extremely important in supporting the process of recovery—as a teacher you can make a huge difference!

Children and adolescents living in or emerging from emergencies often show stress-related reactions; they are especially vulnerable, because they lack life experience and the cognitive ability to cope and recover as effectively as adults.

These are some of the common and normal reactions to an abnormal situation:



fear



anger



violence



**loneliness
and/or isolation**



nightmares



lack of concentration



**poor academic
achievement**


It is also common for children and adolescents to use a lot of energy to try to keep the scary memories away. Such reactions and coping strategies will negatively influence their ability to learn and perform in school.

Chapter Two: Supporting recovery


This handbook aims to provide teachers with simple ways of offering psychosocial support for students who are coping with stress and fear during and after emergencies.

Psychosocial support: A general term for any non-therapeutic intervention that helps a person cope with stress by improving social (friends, support at home, well-being at school) and psychological factors (stress reactions, concentration, learning). Psychosocial support can be included in daily teaching in order to support recovery and improve students' school functioning.


Experience and research have shown that students' well-being and their school performance are negatively affected by emergencies—but also that most of them eventually recover. For decades, researchers have tried to find out how young people manage to recover from emergencies—even after the most terrible experiences. What is it that stimulates recovery? Do they recover all by themselves? Research studies have identified **five** conditions or principles necessary for recovery.




5. The last principle is *re-establishing hope* for the future.




1. The first two principles for dealing with a terrifying experience are to re-establish and *build a sense of safety* and be able to *calm down*.



2.



4. The fourth principle involves connecting with others and *receiving social support*.



3. The third principle is to feel that you have *power to change your situation*, and to know that you can get help if you ask for it.

The five principles work both separately and together. In the case of children, someone most often facilitates the recovery principles in order to stimulate and speed up the recovery. This could be the teacher or parents—or preferably both (Hobfoll et al., 2007).

The Recovery Box – Using the five principles for recovery

After an emergency, students are encouraged to take up normal school activity as soon as possible. Why? When the five principles are integrated into school routines and promoted by teachers on a daily basis, the school becomes an effective place to facilitate recovery. The five principles together form a simple psychosocial support framework to turn the school into a “Recovery Box”.



1. Establishing a sense of safety and stability



Feeling a lack of safety can make concentration and learning at school difficult. It is possible to reduce these feelings of fear and regain a sense of stability and safety by re-establishing routines like attending school. Going to school can provide a new focus, stimulate social interaction, and provide a welcoming, safe place to re-adjust danger perceptions (i.e. understanding that yesterday may have been dangerous, but not all days are dangerous and that school can be a safe area).

2. Calming and self-regulation

Calming can be achieved by using various coping techniques, such as breathing and relaxation exercises. When a person is exposed to danger it is natural to become tense and anxious—these are normal reactions to abnormal situations. It is important to learn how to handle overwhelming emotions, to be able to identify stress reactions and manage to calm yourself down when the situation is safe again.





3. Building power to change your situation

Students must be able to feel in control and realise how their own actions can lead to positive outcomes, for example being able to calm themselves down when stressed or anxious, or knowing where and how to ask for help.

4. Connecting with social support

Social support is perhaps the strongest single factor that helps human beings recover from crisis and extreme situations. Simply being back in school is not enough—teachers will often need to facilitate social support to help students interact actively, so they can benefit from being with their friends. Opportunities for recreation, play and group work are important ways to help children connect.



5. Re-establishing hope

Having hope is vital for the meaning and purpose of life. Hope is essential for general well-being and for good school performance. In emergencies, hope is often lost. Hope is about anticipating recovery, learning to deal with stress and planning for the future. Teachers and parents can play important roles in helping to re-establish hope, encouraging children to envision a better future.

When implemented together, these five principles help students improve their well-being and learn better at school. Teachers have a crucial role in stimulating recovery by building these principles into everyday teaching. The exercises and the classroom sessions described in this handbook help you to do this. The Recovery Box principles can also be supported by parents and family members. It is important to explain to parents how children can be affected by the stress from an emergency, and how they can support their children's well-being, working together with the teacher. Chapter 5, "Working with parents to support recovery", provides suggestions on how to engage parents in supporting their family's recovery.

Chapter Three: Calming exercises

Recovery from an emergency is about increasing mind and body awareness, being able to take gradual control over unwanted thoughts and stress reactions. Relaxation is important because stress often manifests itself as physical tension and feelings of chaos.

This chapter and the next ones introduce ways to help children reduce stress by “talking” to our brain and to our body. “Talking” to our brain is an effective way of turning off the false alarm that the brain has turned on. We can talk to our brain through:



Relaxation exercises



Breathing techniques



Self-instruction
(talking to yourself)

In this chapter, we introduce easy to do calming exercises which address Recovery Box principle 2: Calming and self-regulation, and principle 3: Building power to change your situation. The exercises help to reduce stress and increase awareness, attention and concentration. The aim is to teach students a range of exercises that help them to understand and control their reactions to stress.

You, the teacher, can introduce these exercises to students as a first step to implementing Recovery Box principles. Then, when you feel confident, you can try out the four Classroom Sessions described in the next chapter. The exercises are an important part of the Classroom Sessions, so both you and the students will feel comfortable and confident if you have practiced some of the exercises in advance.

The calming exercises can be used at the start of class or during break times, or at moments in the day when children are losing concentration and need a small break. Calming exercises should ideally be practiced every day.

We introduce two examples of calming exercises here, and the rest can be found in Appendix 1.

Tips for facilitating the exercises

Make sure you explain to children *why* you are doing the exercises and that they can use them anytime they feel anxious, frightened or stressed to calm themselves down. Encourage students to find their own personal combination of exercises and techniques to use at school when they feel stressed or cannot concentrate, and at home before going to bed, and after a nightmare.



Help participants to focus their attention on how it feels in the body while performing the exercises as well as experiencing the effects afterwards. Encourage them to put their experiences and sensations into words. Ask them how they feel after performing the exercises.

Examples of answers that show they have noticed how they feel include:

- *I can feel tension in my shoulders.*
- *My heart beats fast.*
- *It's like my body is lighter.*
- *My heart beats slower.*
- *I can hear my breath, it is calm.*

Try to include the exercises in school routines and rituals:

- Start the school day with some of the exercises, or use them at break times.
- Use the scale from 1–10 (see Classroom Session 2) before and after the exercises.
- Start the session with a song.
- Use the calming exercises frequently.

Ask students to explain which exercise they like the best and why:

- Why do you like this particular exercise?
- What is your favourite combination of exercises?

Homework:

- Give non-traditional homework, like practicing *tense-and-release* or breathing exercises before students go to bed.

Example Calming Exercises

Use the instructions to guide students through the exercises. More calming exercises can be found in Appendix 1.

Belly breathing

Breathing happens automatically. The brain regulates our breathing, according to how much oxygen our body needs at any given time. However, breathing can also be controlled and used consciously to gain physiological relaxation. When we feel nervous, scared or angry we tend to take quick, shallow breaths. Taking deep breaths from the stomach rather than breathing from the chest has a calming effect on the mind and body. And when the body is calmed, the brain is, too. Important: breathing should occur at each participant's natural pace, and never be strained or forced.

Instructions:

“ As you breathe in, let your stomach get bigger; as you breathe out, it should slowly fall inwards again. Imagine that a balloon is inside your stomach. As you breathe in, air travels down to fill the balloon, making your stomach swell. As you breathe out, the balloon is emptied, causing your stomach to sink back in. When your mind wanders, just gently bring your attention back to the belly breathing. Remember that whenever you feel scared or restless, taking deep breaths from the stomach will help calm and relax your body.

”



Tense-and-Release

This is a physical exercise that focuses on releasing muscular tension; the exercise helps students notice tension held in their bodies and facilitates relaxation. Demonstrate how to create tension in the various muscle groups, and ask your students to copy what you do. Apply high tension to the different muscle groups for approximately five seconds before you release. Use the script below to guide students through the exercise. When the group gets familiar with the exercise you can let one of the participants lead the others through it.

Instructions:

- “ I am going to lead you through some of the major muscle groups of the body, asking you to tense and release them, one by one. This technique is very effective for relaxing the body. First, we are going to focus on the hands and arms, before moving on to the face, neck, shoulders, stomach, legs and feet. As you do this relaxation exercise, concentrate on the sensations you will experience in the muscles. Focus your awareness on the difference between muscle tension and relaxation.

Get into a comfortable position, eyes open or closed. Take a few deep, gentle breaths. Breathe in through your nose and let the air fill your lungs. Then slowly breathe out through your nose or mouth. As you breathe in, imagine you are gathering up all your worries and tensions. As you breathe out, imagine that these stressful feelings are flowing out of your body.



First focus your awareness on your **hands and arms**. Clench your fists as hard as you can. Hold this for about 5 seconds. Feel how tense your fists are. Now relax. Let the tension go. Notice how it feels when the tension leaves your hands and forearms. Breathe in and out. Next, tighten your biceps by drawing your forearms up towards your shoulders as though you were lifting a heavy weight. Feel the tension in your muscles. Hold it ... and then relax. Let the tension disappear. Notice the difference between the tension and relaxation. Tighten your triceps, the muscles on the undersides of your upper arms, by holding your arms out straight in front of you and locking your elbows. Hold ... and then relax. Keep breathing steadily; with each breath out, a little more tension leaves your body...

Next, focus on your **facial muscles**, starting with the forehead. Lift your eyebrows as high as you can. Feel the tension ... and relax. Let the tension flow out. Feel the wrinkles smoothing out. Now shut your eyes tightly and wrinkle your nose. Feel the tension. Hold... and relax. Now focus on your jaw and mouth. Clench your teeth and pull back the corners of your mouth. Feel the tension in your jaw. Hold ... and relax. Release the jaw muscles. Feel the tension fading.



Now become aware of your **neck and shoulders**. First, tighten the muscles in the back of your neck by making a double chin, press your chin in to your chest. Hold ... and then relax. Notice how the tension leaves your neck. Now hunch your shoulders up as though you wanted them to touch your ears. Feel the tension in your shoulders and neck. Hold it, register the sensation ... and then relax. Let your shoulders drop and drop as the tension ebbs away. Next, focus on your shoulder blades. Push them back, feel them being gently squeezed towards each other ... and then relax. Let the muscles loosen. Next, focus on your **stomach**. Make your stomach really hard and tense by pulling it in as far as you can. Feel the tension. Hold ... and then release. Imagine a wave of relaxation spreading through your abdomen. Now focus on your **legs and feet**. Hold your legs straight out in front of you, locked at the knee, and keep your toes up in the air. Tense your legs as much as you can while tightening your buttocks. Notice what it feels like. Hold it ... and then relax. Notice the relief, how the tension has left you. And then focus on your toes. Curl your toes inwards. Feel the tension in the sole of your foot and the calf of your leg. Then ... relax. Let it go. Feel the tension leaving you.



Now it is time to tense your **entire body**. Feel the tension in your arms and hands, your face, neck, shoulders, your stomach, legs and feet. Hold it ... and then relax. Now your whole body should feel more relaxed. Keep breathing steadily. With each breath out, you feel a little more relaxed. The tension is leaving your body. You feel heavy, relaxed, calm and warm. Feel the floor underneath your feet. Move your arms and legs. Gently stretch your limbs. When you are ready, look around you, and let this exercise come to an end.

”

(Adapted from Payne 2005; Smith, Dyregrov & Yule 2002).

Short version

You can also do a short version of tense-and-release by standing with your hands out in front of you and tensing your entire body. Tighten all the muscles for about 3 seconds. Then rest for 10 seconds and repeat three or four times.

Chapter Four: Classroom Sessions: Learning to manage stress

After you have been regularly practicing the calming exercises and you and your students are familiar with them, you can begin the classroom sessions. In this chapter, we describe four classroom sessions (or lesson plans) to help students recognise and manage stress. We offer suggestions on how to explain the various aspects of stress, but it is up to you as a teacher to use these explanations or to adapt the wording, as you see fit. You can also include games or other psychosocial support activities you know to support children's recovery.

The sessions are relatively easy to carry out. We suggest that you conduct all four sessions within the course of two to four weeks. Then you can repeat aspects of the sessions to continue the dialogue with students, so they continue to develop their understanding and management of normal reactions to stress.

The four classroom sessions should help students to understand that:

- Stress reactions are normal in a dangerous situation.
- Body and mind are connected: a relaxed body cannot be attached to a frightened brain. This means that if you can get your body to relax, your mind will automatically become more relaxed as well. You can control your reactions by using various ways of “talking” to your brain.
- To experience positive effects, you need to practice the relaxation exercises regularly, for some time.
- Stress reactions become less scary when you know how to deal with them, and you can talk about them with someone you trust.
- It is important to continue discussing progress with your teacher, classmates and family members.

Important guidelines for the classroom sessions

Talking about stress and fear with students can bring up memories of traumatic experience and can be emotional. In some cases, it may be the first time that children have spoken to an adult about their fears. Use a kind tone of voice and make sure you use a song to open and close each session. Do not rush the sessions and make sure children have enough time to recover at the end of the session with calming exercises.



Keep these important guidelines in mind as you plan and facilitate the classroom sessions:

- *Encouragement—not pressure:* During the four sessions, encourage the students to take part in discussions. However, it is essential not to pressure anyone: students may find it frightening to talk about their experience of war or crisis. We want them to feel a sense of control, by having the option of *not* participating in group discussions.
- *Learning—not therapy:* The objective is to provide information and learning about natural reactions to crisis. The talk should be in general terms, avoiding descriptions of personal trauma and experience in class—so as not to frighten classmates with details, and so that children do not end up telling stories they might later regret. If children try to tell about their personal experience, gently guide them to more general observations.
- *Emotion is OK:* Do not be alarmed if some children cry a little; give them kind reassurance that it is normal to become upset when remembering difficult or sad events. Help them to calm down using the exercises you have practiced.



Checking students' well-being

Before you begin the classroom sessions, you can get an idea of your students' level of well-being and psychosocial needs by using the "Checking students' well-being" questionnaire in Appendix 2. Use the questionnaire before Session 1 and then again after Session 4 to check the state of your students' well-being, if there is any change or progress after the four sessions, and to identify students who may need additional support.

Session 1: Stressful events and reactions

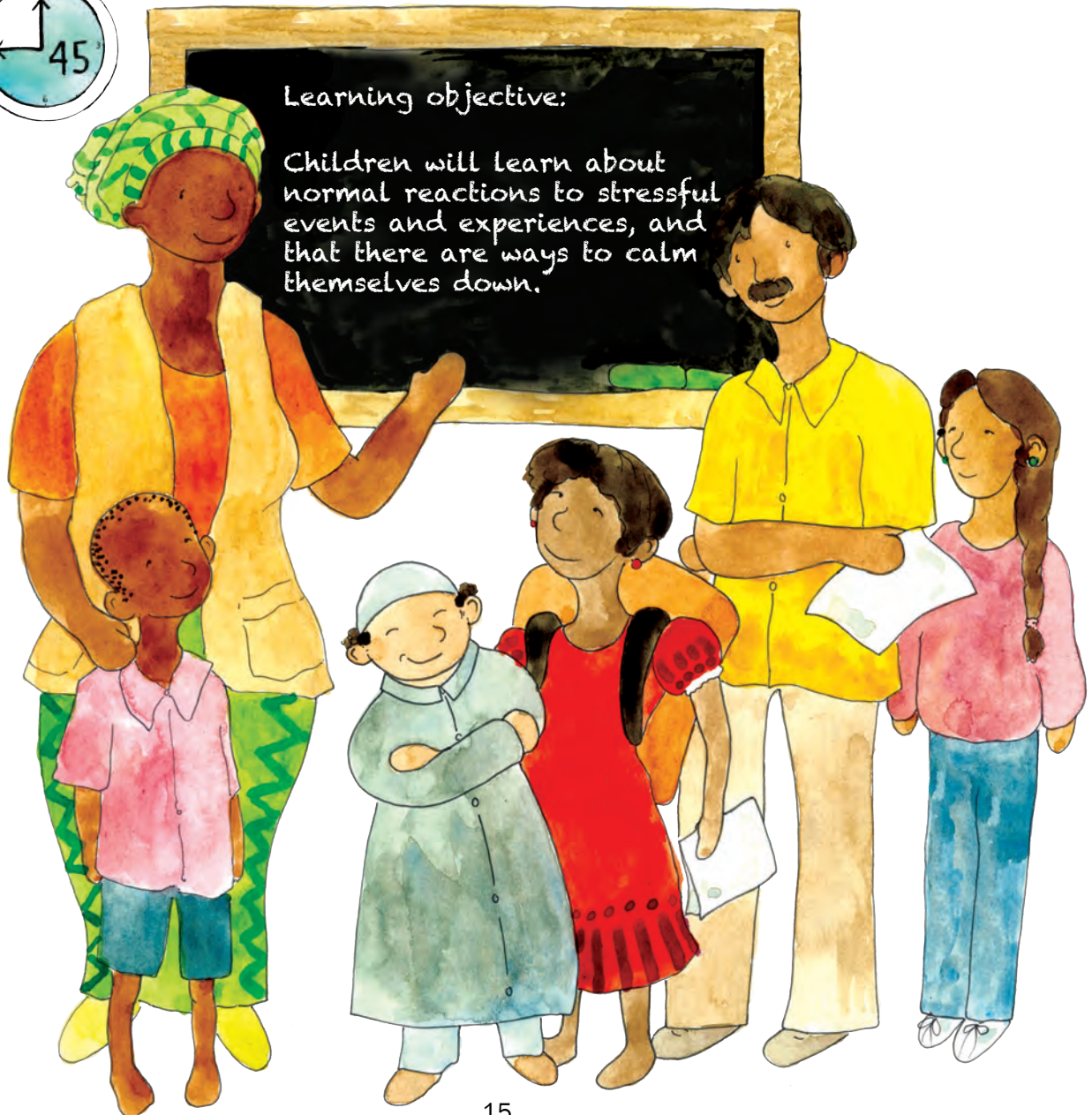
Introduction


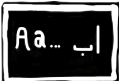


In this session you will explain to students that these four sessions are about learning to cope with stress in order to learn better at school; you will motivate the group to be engaged in all four sessions, and establish a theme song.



Tools

Blackboard, instructions for calming exercises (Chapter 3 and Appendix 1). For all the classroom sessions, every student should have a workbook, pencil and crayons to write down ideas and make drawings.

Time needed



Topic	Time	Activity instructions	Read-aloud
Introduction & motivation 	5 mins	<p>Establish a theme song for the group that you can all sing together at the beginning and end of each session.</p> <p>Use the read-aloud dialogue to generate discussion.</p>	<p><i>Today we'll talk about things that scare us—and what we can do in order to feel safer and more relaxed.</i></p> <p><i>Everyone living in/who has lived in a conflict situation is in some way affected by stress. This can affect your concentration and ability to learn. Conflict experiences can make you afraid and sometimes angry.</i></p> <p><i>We will talk about: what is a frightening and stressful event, how do we react, what helps to calm ourselves.</i></p>
Stress 	10 mins	<p>Make a list on the blackboard and ask students to copy the list in their workbook.</p> <p>Discuss the list and point out that the worst events are those that are potentially life-threatening.</p> <p>Remember to speak in general terms and gently prevent children from sharing details of personal experiences.</p>	<p><i>What is a frightening and stressful event?</i></p>
Reactions & normalisation 	10 mins	<p>Make a list of reactions on the blackboard and ask students to copy the list in their workbook. Ask the students to describe their reactions in detail.</p>	<p><i>What sorts of reactions do people have when they get frightened?</i></p> <p><i>You are not crazy when you have such reactions. It is normal to experience these kinds of reactions if you live in a conflict situation or experience displacement.</i></p>
What helps? 	10 mins	<p>Make a list on the blackboard and ask students to copy the list in their workbook.</p>	<p><i>What helps you calm down after being scared?</i></p>

<p>Talking to your brain</p> 	<p>5 mins</p>	<p>Discuss the idea of talking to your brain with students.</p> <p>Practice a few of the calming exercises: belly breathing, tense-and-release, and one or two of the exercises described in Annex 1.</p>	<p><i>When you are reminded about something terrible from the war, you automatically feel scared. But in fact, you are afraid of something that happened in the past.</i></p> <p><i>Your brain is confused and tells your body that there is danger now. This is not right. You have to tell your brain that you are safe right now and that there is no reason to be afraid.</i></p> <p><i>Your brain is controlling your body. If you want to have a calm head and a calm body, you need to get your brain to calm down.</i></p> <p><i>If you are stressed or scared your body often tenses up. You can feel it especially in your shoulders and neck, and your breathing becomes quicker. These reactions make you even more stressed. Using tense-and-release exercises and taking deep breaths will help the body to relax. Let's practice some calming exercises now.</i></p>
<p>Closure</p> 	<p>5 mins</p>	<p>Thank the students for participating and respecting each other.</p> <p>Inform the students about the homework and the two next sessions, and add that you are looking forward to the next meeting.</p> <p>Sing the theme song to close the session.</p>	<p><i>Homework: practice belly breathing and tense and release at home before you go to bed.</i></p>
<p>Your notes...</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>			

Session notes

Theme song

Stress makes us lose the feeling of being present and connected to our body. By using songs with movement, we strengthen our body awareness. They offer a break from stressful thoughts and muscle tension, and also provide fun and strengthened social interaction. Rhythms can boost feelings of relaxation by stabilising the heart rhythm. We encourage you to start and end each session with the same song sung collectively by the whole group.

Normalisation and understanding

Most reactions are automatic—they just happen without any thinking. When students have high levels of fear and stress, we can help them by:

- Identifying reactions and understanding why they appear. For example:
 - *I get scared of loud noises because they remind me of shooting.*
 - *I lose my concentration because I am reminded about the shooting.*
 - *I have problems going to sleep because I am afraid of having nightmares.*
- Explaining that these are normal reactions
- Explaining that being afraid makes it hard to concentrate and learn at school
- Pointing out that they can learn strategies to reduce fear and stress, and these strategies are always available.

Talking to your brain

When you are reminded about something terrible from the war, you automatically feel scared. But in fact, you are afraid of something that happened in the past. Your brain is confused and tells your body that there is danger now. This is not right. You have to tell your brain that you are safe right now and that there is no reason to be afraid.

Your brain is controlling your body. If you want to have a calm head and a calm body, you need to get your brain to calm down.



Session 2: Regulating stress

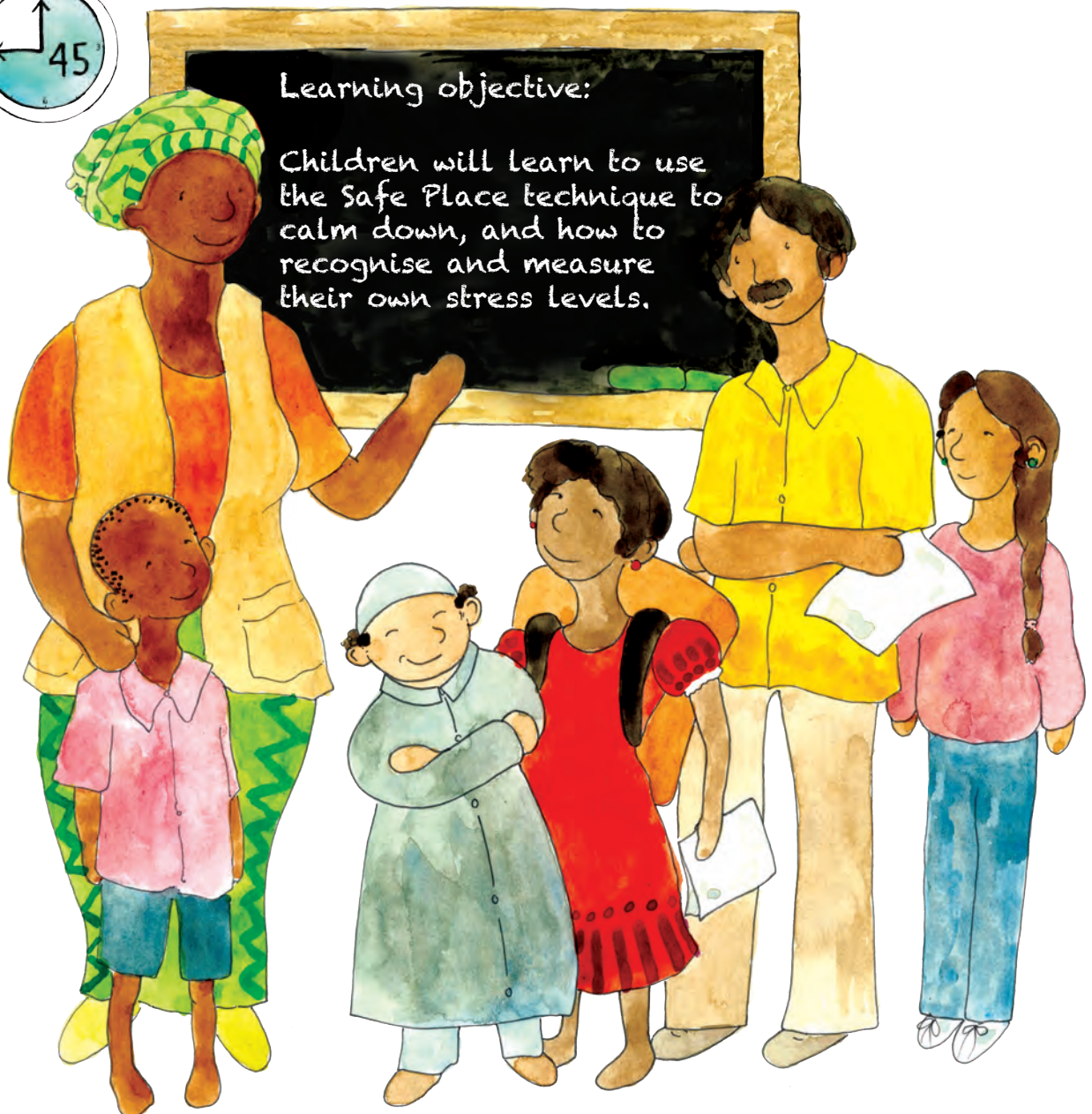
Introduction




In this session, you will teach children how to establish a *Safe Place*. This is an effective method for regulating our stress levels. Whenever we feel stressed, we can go to our own imaginary *Safe Place* and become relaxed.



Tools

Blackboard, instructions for *Safe Place* (Appendix 1) personal workbooks, pencils and crayons.

Time needed



Topic	Time	Activity instructions	Read-aloud
Introduction & motivation 	5 mins	Sing the theme song.	<p><i>In the last session we talked about stressful and frightening events and normal reactions. We practiced some exercises to calm ourselves when we feel stressed.</i></p> <p><i>Today we're going to learn something new, called Safe Place. This is an imaginary private place, a place in our fantasy where we feel safe and relaxed. This is another very effective way of calming down.</i></p> <p><i>We will talk about your homework: talking to your brain.</i></p>
Homework 	5 mins	Encourage students to tell about their experiences.	<p><i>Did you practice using tense and release and belly breathing?</i></p>
Establishing a Safe Place 	20 mins	<p>Read the instructions for Establishing a Safe Place (see Appendix 1).</p> <p>When finished, have the students draw their Safe Place in their workbook, or on a piece of paper which can be pasted into their workbook.</p> <p>Encourage them to share the description of their Safe Place in as much detail as possible.</p>	See Appendix 1.

<p>Scale: 1-10</p> 	<p>5 mins</p>	<p>Draw a scale that goes from 1 to 10 on the blackboard (see Session notes below).</p> <p>Explain that we will use this scale to measure changes in stress levels.</p> <p>Give examples of how someone who scored 1 ("not stressed") or 10 ("very stressed") might feel.</p>	<p><i>Draw the scale in your workbook and mark how you feel right now.</i></p>
<p>Closure</p> 	<p>5 mins</p>	<p>Thank the students for participating and for respecting each other.</p> <p>Inform participants about the next sessions, and add that you are looking forward to meeting with the group again.</p> <p>Sing the theme song.</p>	<p><i>Homework: practice Safe Place before going to sleep.</i></p>

Your notes...

Session notes

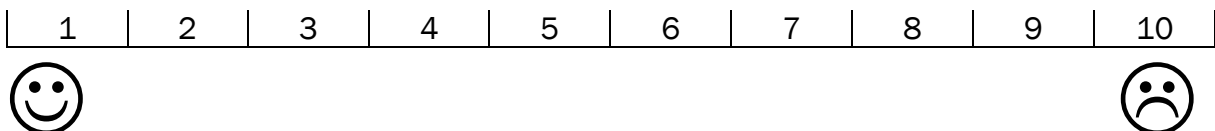
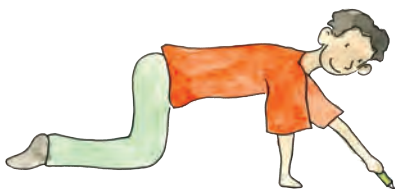
Safe Place

This is a relaxation technique where you use your imagination to create a place where you can feel safe, relaxed and happy. This visualisation technique helps to distract your mind from stressful thoughts. There is a connection between what you imagine and how you feel. You can control which images to focus on in your mind—so you yourself can make deliberate efforts to control how you feel. Whenever you feel anxious, upset, unhappy, or frightened, you can use this technique to calm down and feel secure again. You may find it hard to create images of a safe place the first time you try, but this will get easier with practice. Encourage students to use all sensory modalities: sight, taste, smell, sound, touch. Read the instructions for Safe Place in Appendix 1 aloud, in a calm voice, and pace the instructions to allow the students to use their imagination.



The scale from 1 to 10

On this scale, students should indicate how they feel right now. The more relaxed and calm you feel in body and mind, the lower your score should be. The more anxious and afraid you feel, the higher your score on the scale. The scale is useful for helping students to be aware about how they feel and how the various techniques may help them relax.



Session 3: Body and mind are connected

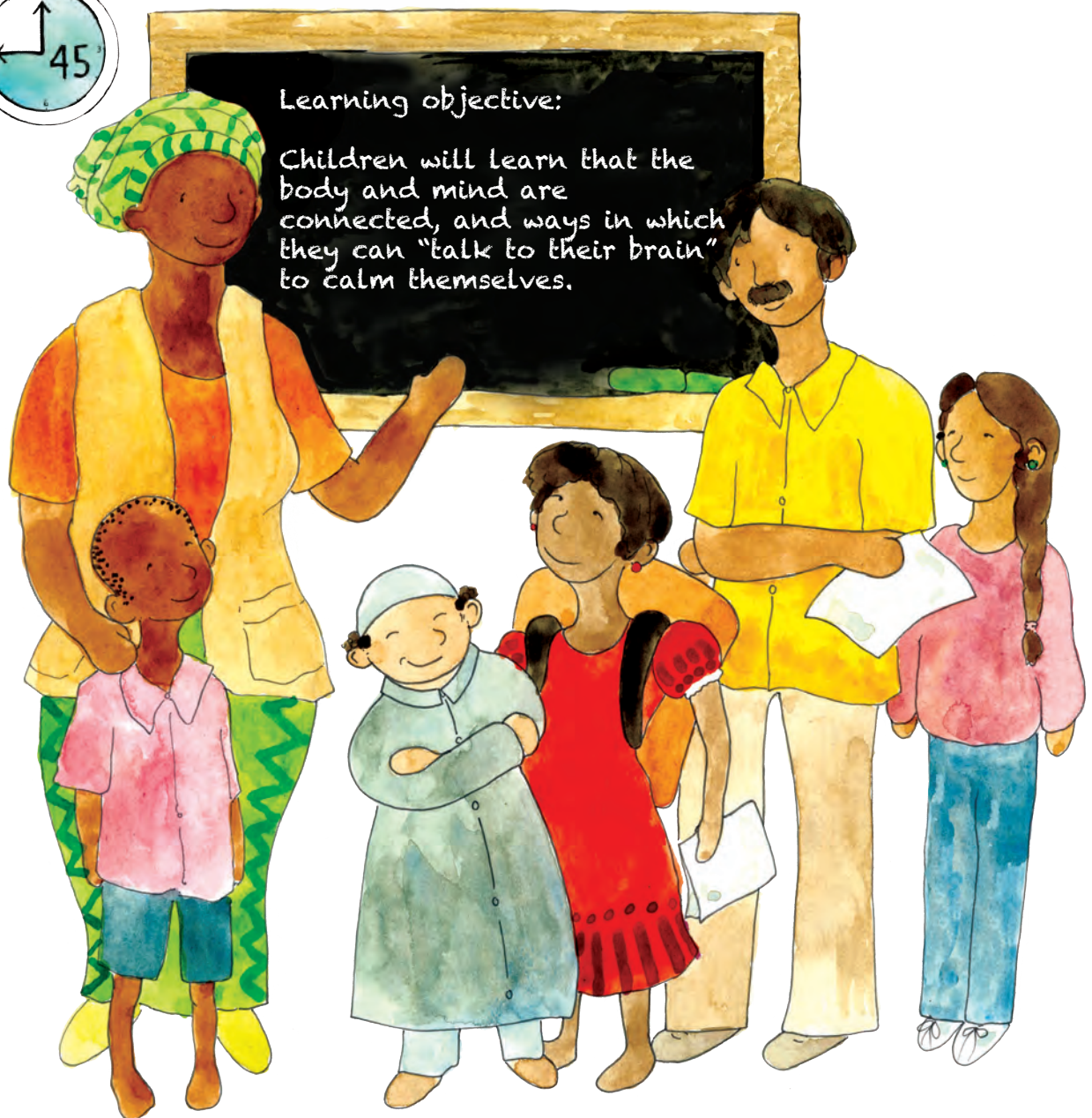
Introduction




In this session you will help students understand the mind-body connection – calming the body results in the mind feeling less stressed.





Tools




Personal workbooks, large paper for drawing, pencils and crayons.

Time needed



Topic	Time	Activity instructions	Read-aloud
Introduction & motivation 	5 mins	Start with tense-and-release, and belly breathing. Sing the group's theme song.	
Homework 	5 mins	Encourage students to tell about their experiences.	<i>How is it going with practicing Safe Place?</i>
Talking to your brain 	10 mins	Read aloud: <i>Today we are going to learn a little more about normal reactions to frightening or stressful events.</i> <i>When a frightening or dangerous situation occurs, your body switches to survival mode. This means you will be extra alert for anything and everything that seems to be a potential risk – your heart rate increases and your breathing may become fast and shallow. This is a great survival system, like an alarm, that is activated in the back of your brain, preparing you to fight or run away.</i> <i>But after the dangerous situation has passed, the brain and body need to calm down. When you are reminded about something terrible from the war, you automatically feel scared. In fact, you are feeling afraid of something that happened in the past. Your brain is confused and tells your body that there is danger now. The alarm is going off for no reason – that is a false alarm. This can be quite troublesome; you might find it hard to concentrate and hard to sleep without having nightmares. Mealtimes can be difficult because you have lost your appetite. Sometimes it is even hard to be together with friends because the alarm system in your brain has taken control. Having false alarms is scary and exhausting.</i> <i>If the alarm does not turn itself off, YOU have to help your brain to do this. You have to tell your brain that you are safe now and that there is no reason to be afraid.</i> <i>You can also “talk to your brain”. There are various ways of talking to your brain:</i> <i>You can talk to yourself, either silently or out loud: "Turn off the alarm, because I am safe now! There is no need for the alarm to be on right now."</i> <i>You can also “talk” to your brain by using exercises we have been practicing like Safe Place / tense-and-release / breathing techniques. When you do these exercises, your</i>	

		<p><i>body becomes calmer and forces your brain to turn off the alarm.</i></p> <p><i>YES, you can communicate with your own brain and tell it to turn off the alarm. The reason why you can communicate to your brain with your body is because body and mind are connected.</i></p>	
<p>Body and mind are connected</p> 	15 mins	<p>Put students into small groups and give each group a large piece of paper with an emotion written on it (e.g. anger, happiness, sadness, fear, love).</p> <p>Ask them to draw a person on the paper, and mark or draw how this emotion feels and looks.</p> <p>For example, students could write or draw things like clenching teeth and shouting for anger, heart beats and blushing for love, smiling and clapping your hands for happiness, etc.</p>	<p><i>A relaxed body cannot be connected to a frightened brain. You cannot be afraid in a relaxed body. When you manage to relax your body, the brain will also automatically become more relaxed and will turn off the alarm. When the alarm is turned off, it is easier to think pleasant thoughts, solve problems and not to worry.</i></p>
<p>Scale: 1–10</p> 	2 mins	In your workbook, draw and mark yourself on the scale 1–10.	<i>How do you feel right now?</i>
<p>Relaxation exercises</p> 	5 mins	Tense-and-release and breathing exercises.	<p><i>Can anyone tell us why we are practicing these exercises?</i></p> <p><i>Remember when we do these exercises, we are talking to our brain, telling it that we are ready to calm down.</i></p>
<p>Safe place</p> 	10 mins	<p>Read the instructions for Safe Place, and do the exercise.</p> <p>Remind students that using Safe Place visualisation is another way to tell their brain to calm down.</p>	<i>Use your Safe Place to help your brain calm down.</i>

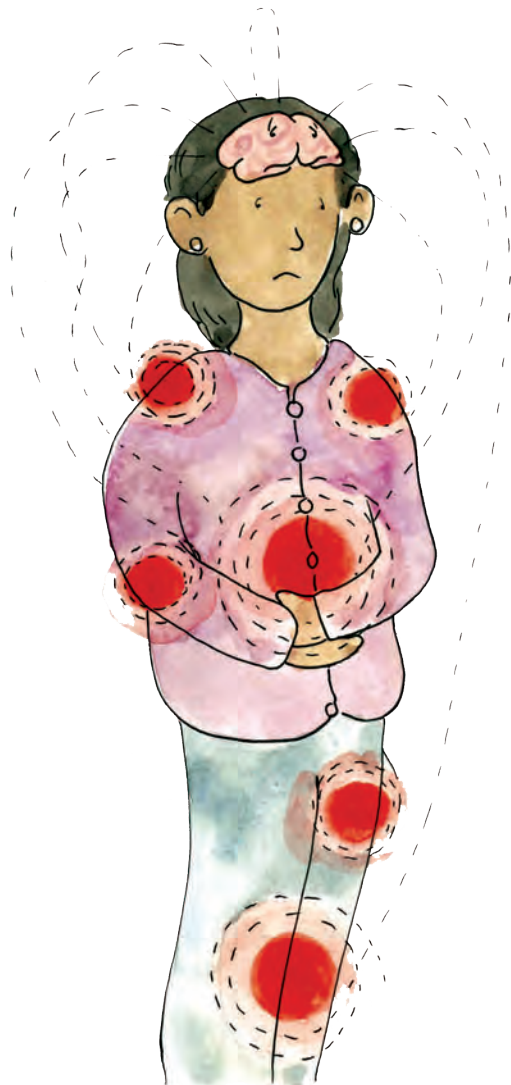
<p>Scale: 1–10</p> 	2 mins	In your workbook, draw and score yourself on the scale 1–10.	<p><i>How do you feel right now?</i></p> <p><i>Did anyone experience less stress after doing the Safe Place?</i></p> <p><i>Did you see any difference on the two scales?</i></p>
<p>Closure</p>  	3 mins	<p>Thank the students for participating, and acknowledge how they showed respect for each other.</p> <p>Sing the theme song.</p>	<p>Summary:</p> <p><i>Today we learned that our body and our mind are connected: they affect each other.</i></p> <p><i>When you manage to calm down your body, your brain will automatically become calmer as well. A relaxed body cannot be attached to a frightened brain. Then it is easier to think pleasant thoughts.</i></p> <p><i>If you are feeling afraid or anxious, you can tell yourself that you are safe now and that there is no reason to feel stressed. This can help your brain to relax—that is what we are practicing and learning in these sessions.</i></p> <p>Homework: Practice talking to your brain, breathing exercises and Safe Place before you go to sleep.</p>
<p>Your notes...</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>			

Session notes

The mind and body are connected

In this session you will teach your students what it means when we say that the body and the mind are connected—and how they can actively use this knowledge to calm themselves down. Because of the mind–body connection, stressful and overwhelming experiences can cause tensions at the mental and physical levels. Victims of trauma commonly report symptoms of re-living the incident, avoidance, emotional numbing and heightened nervousness. In addition, they often suffer from bodily symptoms like headaches, stomach cramps, and stiff neck and shoulders.

Students need to understand that a relaxed body cannot be attached to a frightened brain. This means that if you can make your body relax, your mind will automatically become more relaxed mentally and emotionally as well. You can control your reactions by using the different ways of “talking” to your brain. Ways of talking to your brain include using the practical exercises you have been learning: Safe Place / tense and release / breathing techniques and also self-instruction by talking out loud (e.g. telling yourself “it is safe now” and “I can relax”). These are all ways to calm yourself and make you able to regulate your feelings, thoughts and stress.



Session 4: Getting rid of unwanted thoughts

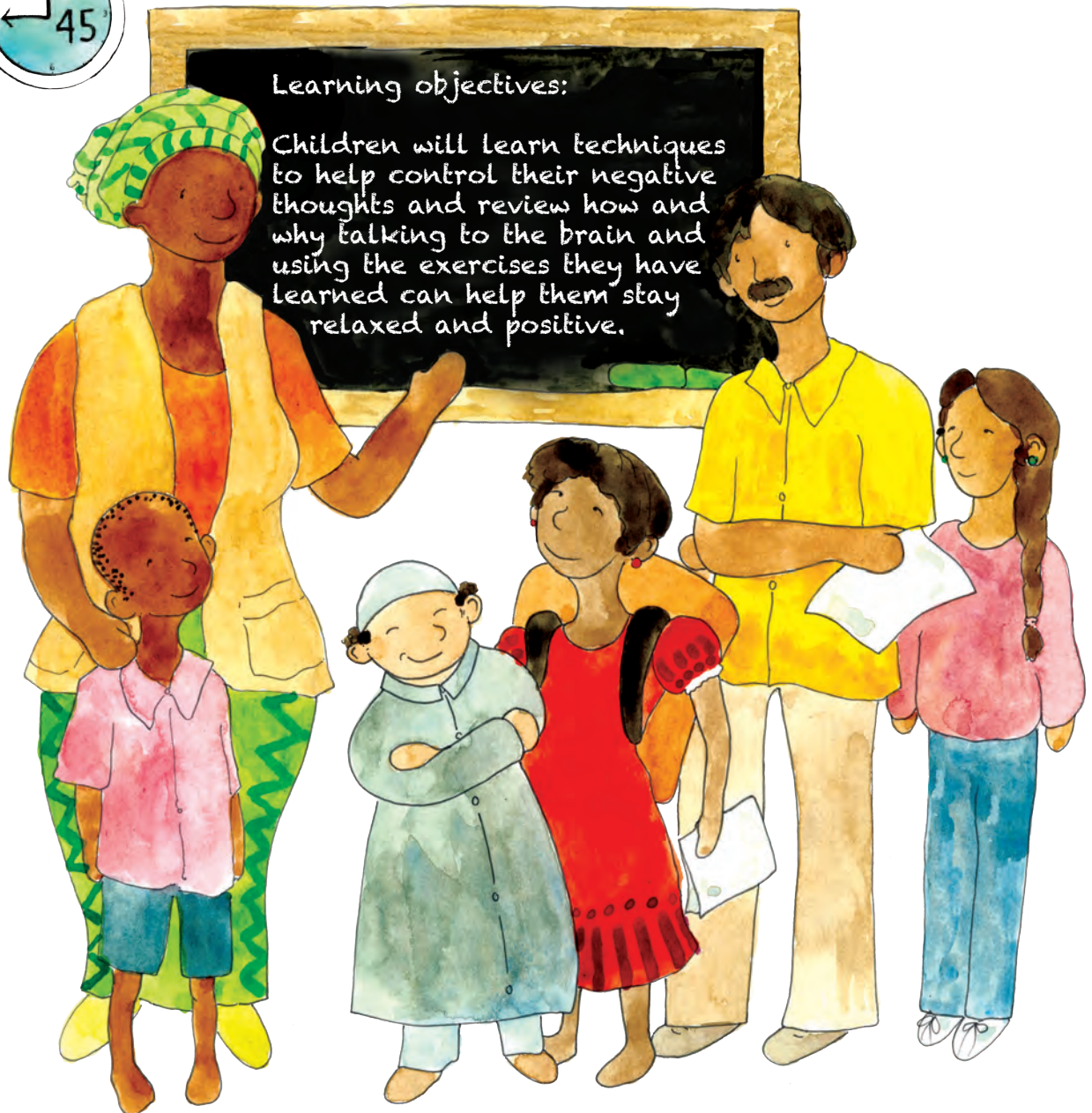
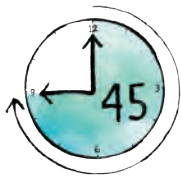
Introduction



In this session you will help students become aware of negative thinking patterns, and the effects they have. You will teach students techniques to help control their negative thoughts.




Tools

Blackboard, pencil, crayons and personal workbooks.

Time needed



Topic	Time	Activity instructions	Read-aloud
<p data-bbox="204 309 384 365">Introduction & motivation</p> 	5 mins	<p data-bbox="608 309 919 432">In your workbook, draw and mark yourself on the scale 1–10: <i>How do you feel right now?</i></p> <p data-bbox="608 472 879 562">Begin with tense-and-release and breathing exercises.</p> <p data-bbox="608 602 871 636">Sing the theme song.</p>	<p data-bbox="959 315 1382 539"><i>Today we're going to talk about unwanted thoughts, unpleasant thoughts that keep coming back to us. They are like an inner voice telling us bad things. We can work to change these negative thoughts.</i></p> <p data-bbox="959 580 1350 674"><i>To do that, we first need to recognise the kinds of thoughts we have.</i></p> <p data-bbox="959 714 1382 916"><i>During the war or time of danger, you needed to have your alarm on. You do not need that now. You can turn off the alarm and relax. You can start thinking about what you want to be when you grow up.</i></p>
<p data-bbox="204 992 448 1081">Unwanted thoughts & how to get rid of them</p> 	15 mins	<p data-bbox="608 992 1342 1048">Write down some examples on the blackboard (please see Session Notes).</p> <p data-bbox="608 1088 767 1111">Read aloud:</p>	<p data-bbox="959 1151 1374 1509"><i>We spend a lot of time listening to our thoughts. They are a sort of inner voice, telling us how we feel. Most of these thoughts are positive and productive, but some send us negative and unwanted messages about our future and ourselves. If you feel bad, you will probably act badly. That in turn will further influence your thoughts, and you end up in a negative circle. We accept many of these unwanted thoughts as the truth, without even questioning them. It is easy to get caught up in a negative spiral of unwanted and negative thoughts—but, as we will see, it also is possible for you to control your thoughts, and not the other way around.</i></p> <p data-bbox="959 1550 1302 1606"><i>The “spiral of unwanted thoughts” means that one bad thought leads to others. This is never very helpful.</i></p> <p data-bbox="959 1646 1382 1736"><i>Make a list in your workbook: What kinds of negative thoughts do you sometimes have? Write down some examples on the blackboard (please see Session Notes).</i></p> <p data-bbox="959 1776 1366 1933"><i>When you are caught in such a negative cycle, this is what happens in your brain: The negative thoughts get louder and louder. They crowd out any other kinds of thoughts. When you listen to these bad thoughts, more and more unpleasant feelings turn up.</i></p> <p data-bbox="959 1973 1334 2040"><i>These unwanted thoughts often come when you are alone, when you are doing nothing in particular, or when you are</i></p>

		<p><i>trying to sleep. Sometimes they can keep you from falling asleep. However, these unwanted thoughts can be stopped or changed. Imagine the flow of your unwanted thoughts as a river. Sometimes a river can be big and powerful like the [name a local river], or it can be small, like a stream. But just like the flow of a river can be controlled and changed by humans, it is also possible to change the flow of unwanted thoughts, for example through distraction techniques. Distracting your brain from unwanted thoughts or intrusive memories is a very helpful way of dealing with the problem. YOU yourself can stop the spiral of unwanted thoughts.</i></p> <p><i>Make a list in your workbook: What could be your strategies to distract your brain from these unwanted thoughts?</i></p>	
<p>Tense & release</p> 	5 mins	<p>Have some of the students lead the calming exercises.</p> <p>Encourage participants to tell about their experiences: how do the various exercises affect them? How does it feel in their body when they do these exercises?</p>	<p><i>Which of the techniques is your favourite?</i></p>
<p>Safe Place</p> 	10 mins	<p>Use the Safe Place instructions to practice the exercise.</p>	<p>See Appendix 1.</p>
<p>Scale: 1-10</p> 	5 mins	<p>Mark yourself on the scale 1-10: <i>How do you feel right now?</i></p> <p>Do students feel different than they did at the start of the session?</p> <p>Ask them to compare their individual scores at the beginning of the session.</p> <p>Did the calming exercises work?</p> <p>Emphasise that these exercises can help relax both the body and brain, but they need to be practiced regularly for full effect.</p>	<p><i>How do you feel right now?</i></p> <p><i>Do you feel different than you did at the start of the session?</i></p> <p><i>Did the calming exercises work?</i></p>

Session notes

Thoughts – Feelings – Actions

What we believe and think drives our emotions and shapes our behaviour and actions. This means: what we think shapes our feelings, and how we feel shapes our actions. If you have negative thoughts, you will probably say negative things and act negatively. That in turn will further influence your thoughts, and you end up in a negative circle. Such “vicious circles” occur frequently—but more frequently among young people who are experiencing trauma and crisis. In this session, the focus is on helping students to become aware of their thinking patterns, so they can examine their thinking and sort out thoughts that belong to the past.



The spiral of negative thoughts

An explanation for the students: A negative spiral drags you into the dark clouds. Uneasy currents in your body make you feel threatened. A little stress can readily develop into more stress. It is easy to recognise the negative feelings: anger, agitation, frustration, loneliness, chaos. When you feel unsafe, the negative thoughts multiply: “I can’t manage”, “I will never finish school”, “I won’t live to reach old age,” and so on. In order to stop the negative spiral, you have to step back and try to recognise the little lies that your body keeps on telling your brain. The brain is fooled and passes on the lies to your thoughts. Your brain and your thoughts believe the lies, producing strong negative feelings. But you can stop this spiral of negative thoughts—by breathing deeply and calmly, thinking positive thoughts and remembering positive experiences. One way to regulate your negative feelings is by being together with others. Inner chaos is stopped when you experience structure and order—for instance after a good class at school, you have positive feelings. Feelings of being unsafe are stopped by recognising that you are now in a safe environment.

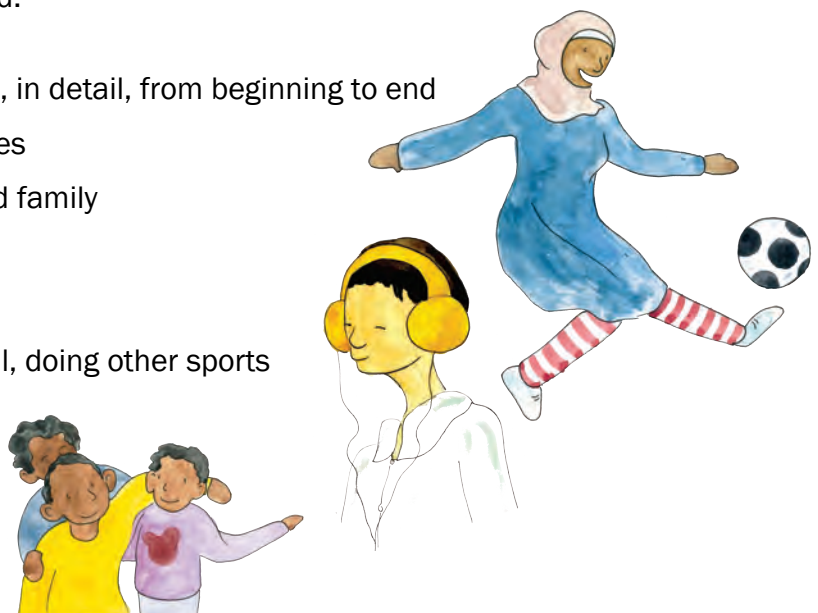
Asking children to make lists of examples

Before you ask children to write lists, write or draw ideas up on the blackboard. They find it easier to draw examples. For example, here are some examples of unwanted thoughts:



Here are some examples of ways in which children can distract themselves. Write down some examples on the blackboard:

- thinking about something else, in detail, from beginning to end
- taking part in favourite activities
- spending time with friends and family
- listening to or playing music
- reading books
- going for a run, playing football, doing other sports
- playing games
- being with friends
- talking with family or friends



Using the Recovery Box principles to support well-being

When students have become more experienced in identifying fear/stress reactions and detecting their own negative spirals, teachers can focus on how students can support each other. Encourage students to talk to one another or trusted adults, and give them opportunities to play games and work together. This is a way of strengthening their *feeling of connectedness*. Having fun together is one way of boosting a person's *sense of safety* and *feeling of self-belief*. Isolation will intensify the bad symptoms; connectedness brings calm and enhances the feeling of being in charge and in control - feeling the *power to change your own situation*.



Chapter Five: Working with parents to support recovery

Parents are vital in stimulating recovery. The reason for involving parents is that they can help teachers achieve the goals of recovery. Experience and research clearly show that the best support a young person can get in a crisis or its aftermath is the support from parents and family—and from teachers. This support becomes particularly effective when parents and teachers work together.

Parents often search for better knowledge and practical ways to help their children, and here teachers can provide important assistance. We recommend that the head teacher or manager invites all parents to a meeting to present and explain the aims of the Better Learning Programme. Parents should get a general understanding of the following:

- Reactions to stress are normal in a dangerous or stressful situation and can include:
 - Fear, anger, violence, loneliness, isolation, nightmares
 - Reduced well-being
 - Reduced learning capacity.



- Stress-related reactions are normal and frequently observed among children and young people who have experienced or are living in the midst of emergency situations.
- Stress reactions can last for a long time (even years) after the original stressful event.
- Children and young people can learn strategies to calm down and control their stress levels.
- Stress reactions become less frightening when you know how to deal with them and can talk about them to a trusted person.
- The five Recovery Box principles, and BLP exercises and strategies to practice with their children at home. For positive effects, exercises have to be repeated and practiced over time.
- There are two effective ways to improve learning capacity in such situations:



It is important to continue discussing the use of study skills with the teacher and with family members.

- The support for children’s recovery becomes especially effective when parents and teachers work together.

Both teachers and parents are encouraged to look for improvements in well-being and stress management —and report this back to the young person. Receiving positive feedback is always highly motivating, and can help in achieving recovery.

Chapter Six: When students need extra help

People differ in their reactions to crisis. Stressful reactions will vary according to a whole range of factors—like the level of exposure, previous experience of crisis, and the level of support from family and others. Most children will get the support they need for self-healing by being socially involved at home and at school and with regular practice of BLP 1 exercises and strategies.

However, some students will need extra support and attention, at school and at home, because they cannot manage to calm themselves down, or their stress reactions persist, weeks and months after their classmates have progressed further. Some may need to be referred to a local mental health service for help from a professional.

In the following section, we focus on what teachers can do for those in the group who may need extra support because they continue to appear to be frightened, socially withdrawn, aggressive or lack concentration. Look out for stress reactions that interfere with everyday life and hinder a student in carrying out daily tasks, likely resulting in significant drops in school performance. You can refer back to Page 4 in Chapter 1 for signs of stress. Reduced learning capacity after experiencing emergencies may last for months and even years. An effective way to shorten this period and restore learning capacity is to provide extra support and close follow-up.

As an extra follow-up after they have received BLP 1 in class, invite students who need additional attention to individual talks where you can explore the problems with school functioning together. Talk it over—invite him or her to tell about their situation at school. If they lack concentration and are stressed mainly because they are afraid or worried, teachers should try to find out when they feel afraid and how this affects the learning situation. You can start this discussion using the eight questions in the Measuring Students' Well-Being Questionnaire (Appendix 2).



Tips for talking with students individually

- Encourage the student to tell about his or her fears and stress with you. Be very clear that they are experiencing normal reactions to an abnormal situation - and that recovery is expected.
- Explore together what the teacher and student can do at school so that the student can be less afraid and stressed, such as using BLP calming exercises.
- What special measures are possible? Make a plan together: it may be helpful to follow up on homework, set priorities, and focus on only a few school subjects. Try them for a reasonable length of time, and then evaluate to see any positive effects - and adjust the measures as necessary.
- Involve the parents: discuss the challenges at school and learn more about how the parents view the situation. Find ways for them to contribute positive support, such as practicing BLP exercises at home with their child.

If no positive effects occur, or you feel that the child's issues are serious, speak to your school counsellor, head teacher or manager about referring the child to a local mental health service.



Chapter Seven: Continuing the recovery process

Now that you have been practicing calming exercises and talking with students about how to manage stress in the classroom sessions, you may notice some changes in your role as a teacher and your relationship with students. Hopefully you have a better understanding of the stress and fears students are bringing to your classroom, and more open and regular dialogue with them and their families on how to manage these normal reactions to abnormal experiences and events in their lives. Perhaps you are using the knowledge and skills you have gained to recognise your own reactions and manage your own stress levels.

We encourage you to continue practicing the exercises and return to the topics of the classroom sessions periodically. However, there is a lot more you can do to promote the five Recovery Box principles in your classroom. Take time to brainstorm and plan with other teachers to come up with activities you can do to promote each of the five principles in school every day, even in small ways, to help students recover, learn, play and thrive.



Appendix 1: Additional Calming Exercises

Relaxation exercises



Alternate-nostril breathing

Instructions

Sit in a comfortable position with your back straight. In this exercise, you breathe through your nostril – one at a time. Use your right-hand thumb or index finger to close the right nostril. Gently inhale and exhale through the left nostril, then switch, closing your left nostril and gently inhaling and exhaling through the right nostril. Breathing should be slow, effortless, rhythmic and deep. Continue breathing for 2 to 3 minutes.



Feeling sounds through your back

Instructions

Divide the group into pairs, and instruct partners to sit back to back, either on the floor or on chairs. Ask them how their backs feel when they sit like this. Encourage them to pay attention to what happens to their backs when they breathe in and out. Ask one partner to sing, talk or experiment with various sounds. Encourage the other partner to identify where in the back s/he can feel the sound, and what it feels like. Then switch roles.

Concentration and balance exercises

The three exercises described here aim at increasing concentration and balance. They also help to bring participants into the present moment, here and now. Body and mind are connected. Practicing these exercises helps to restore some inner balance. Remember, it takes a lot of practice to be in balance. Remember to breathe through your stomach while standing in these positions. When participants have mastered the balance, they can close their eyes, making the exercise even harder.



Tension-relieving exercises

Stress can manifest as physical tension and pain. These exercises aim to release tension in the neck, shoulders, stomach, back and the whole body. When participants have learned an exercise, they should be encouraged to coordinate movements with their breathing. Ideally, they should breathe in and out through the nose. If some find nasal breathing hard, they could breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth.



Shoulder shrugs

Instructions:

Sit upright on a chair, or stand comfortably, with your arms hanging down by your sides. As you breathe in, lift your shoulders up towards your ears. Let your shoulders drop down as you breathe out. Find a speed that is comfortable for you so that you can breathe in and out at an even pace. Continue for 1–2 minutes. This exercise can also be done standing next to your desk.



Elbow circles

Instructions:

Sit comfortably on a chair with your back straight. Bend your elbows and touch your shoulders with your fingers. Stretch your arms out to the side at shoulder level. Start moving your elbows around in small circles. Breathe in as you rotate your elbows forward and up. Breathe out as you continue to roll your shoulders to the back and down. Gradually, make the circles bigger and bigger until the tips of your elbows touch in front. After a while, reverse the direction. Now, inhale as you roll your shoulders up and back, and exhale as you roll them down and to the front. Again, begin with small circles that gradually become bigger and bigger. Remember to coordinate your breathing with the movements throughout the exercise. When finished, shake loose.



Spinal flex

Instructions:

This exercise relieves tension in the back and the stomach. Sit on the edge of your chair, feet flat on the floor, back straight, shoulders down and relaxed, and your head centred between your shoulders. Place your hands on your thighs, palms down. Inhale as you press the lower spine forward, pulling your chest forward. Exhale as you arch your spine back again, pushing back with the navel centre. Feel the stretch in your back. Try to keep your head straight throughout this exercise. Continue rhythmically for 1–3 minutes. Remember to coordinate your breathing with the movements. You can also do this exercise on the floor, like a cat stretching its back.



Standing spine twist

Instructions:

Stand with your feet firmly on the ground. Breathe in through your nose as you stretch your arms out to the sides at shoulder level. Breathing out, twist your body to the right, turn your head and look over your left shoulder. While breathing in, return to centre with your arms stretched out to the sides. Breathing out, twist to the right. Inhale and return to centre, with arms stretched out to the sides at shoulder level. Find a tempo that feels comfortable, and repeat five to ten times. Be sure to coordinate your movements with your breathing.



Standing side stretch

Instructions:

Get into a standing position. Take a moment to feel the ground below your feet. Breathe in while raising your arms above your head. Take a firm grip around your left wrist. Breathing out, gently pull your left arm over your head, bending towards the right side. Continue breathing steadily while standing in this position for a few moments. Feel the stretch on your left side. Breathing in, return to centre with both arms high in the air. Now take a grip around your right wrist and gently pull your right arm over your head to the left side. Feel the stretch on your right side as you continue to breathe deeply in and out. When ready, return to centre and release your arms to your sides. Stand for a few moments and feel the effects of this exercise. You can also do this exercise while seated in a chair.

Visualisation exercise

Safe Place

To help children cope with fear or stress, it is useful for them to practice creating a Safe Place in their imagination. This self-control technique helps to distract them from stressful thoughts, inducing relaxation, and enhancing a sense of safety and control. Encourage the participants to use all their senses: taste, smell, touch, listening and seeing. Read the instructions below slowly with a calm voice, to allow the students to use their imagination. Afterwards you can ask them what they imagined. The first time you introduce this exercise, give the participants the opportunity to draw their Safe Place.



This exercise will show you how to use your imagination to find a scene or place that makes you feel safe, comfortable and happy. This could be a real place where you know you will feel good and in control, or it could be a place from your imagination or a picture that you have seen. [Suggest some examples: at a beach, at your grandmother's home.]

“ Make yourself comfortable. Close your eyes or look at the tip of your shoes. Take a few deep, steady breaths. Bring up a picture of a place where you feel secure, calm and happy. Imagine that you are standing or sitting there. Can you see yourself there? In your imagination, take a look around. What do you see? What can you see close to you? Look at the details. Notice the different colours. Imagine reaching out and touching. How does it feel? Now take a look further away. What can you see around you? What's in the distance? Try to see the different colours and shapes and shadows. This is your special place and you can imagine whatever you want to be there. When you're there, you feel calm and peaceful. Imagine your bare feet on the ground. What does the ground feel like? Walk around slowly, trying to notice the things there. Try to see what they look like and how they feel. And what can you hear? Maybe the gentle sounds of the wind, or birds, or the sea. Can you feel the warm sun on your face? What can you smell? Maybe it's the sea air, or flowers, or your favourite food cooking? In this special place, you can see the things you want, and imagine touching and smelling them, and hearing pleasant sounds. As your mind becomes more peaceful, your body will begin to relax. You feel calm and happy.

Now imagine that someone special is with you in your place. This is someone who is a good friend, someone strong and kind. He or she is there to help you and look after you. Imagine walking around and exploring your special place slowly with this person. You feel happy to be together. This person is your helper and is good at sorting out problems. Just look around in your imagination once more. Take a good look. Remember that this is your own special place. It will always be there. You can always imagine being there whenever you want to feel calm and secure and happy. Your helpers will always be there when you want them. OK? Now take a deep breath, and get ready to open your eyes and leave your special place for now. You can come back whenever you want to. Slowly, slowly, become aware of your surroundings here and now. Notice the chair underneath you and feel your feet touching the ground. Gently move and stretch your limbs. When you feel ready, open your eyes. As you do so, notice how you feel calm, relaxed and happy.

”

To finish this exercise, ask the participants what they imagined. Ask how it made them feel. Point out the connection between imagination and feelings. *Underline that they can have control over what they see in their mind's eye and therefore over how they feel.* Remind them that this is a positive thing to do, that they can imagine being there whenever they feel unhappy or frightened, and that it will make them feel better. Also, explain that imagining this special place will get easier each time. This is a technique that needs practice, and it is important for participants to understand that it gets easier the more they practice. (Adapted and cited from Smith, Dyregrov and Yule, 2002).

Appendix 2: Checking students' well-being

Planning: The questionnaire below can be used for the whole class before you start BLP 1. It will give you a good overview of the level of students' well-being and school functioning in your class, which may be useful as you begin BLP 1 classroom sessions.

Measuring change: When you have completed BLP 1 in your class (all four sessions and daily use of calming exercises), you can apply the questionnaire for the second time to measure change in well-being and school functioning. When you calculate the class average before and after BLP 1, you can see if the class average has improved.

Calculating well-being and school functioning: The questionnaire provides an indication of students self-perceived well-being and school functioning. Scores should always be checked against the teacher's observation and knowledge about the student.

Question 1 – 7 can be graded to determine the class average and to identify students who need extra help. The questions are graded with the following scores – the higher score, the better:

Always	Usually	Rarely	Never:
○	○	○	○
=4	=3	=2	=1

The maximum score a student can receive is 28 points, indicating a high level of well-being and school functioning. The lowest score possible is 7 points, indicating poor well-being and school functioning that needs immediate action. See Figure 1 showing an example of the average score of 40 students from one class.

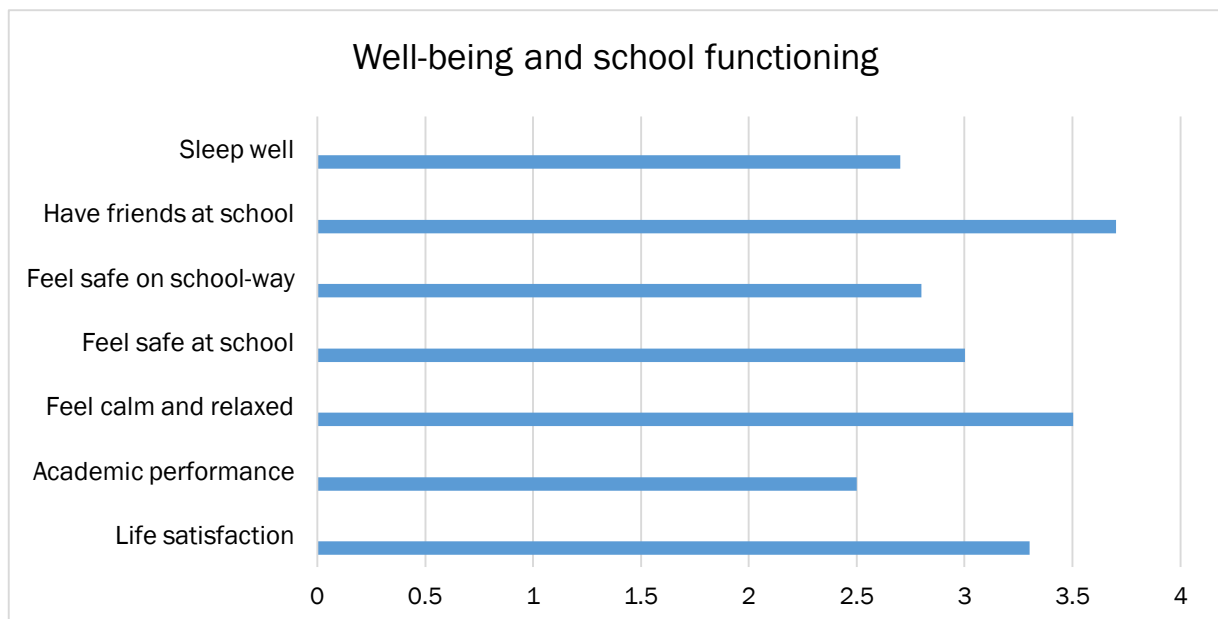


Figure 1: Measuring well-being and school functioning

At a score of 15 points or lower, you have a rough indication that the student needs more adapted education and psychosocial support. To provide follow-up you need to invite the student to an individual conversation and discuss the school situation with the parents. The aim is to explore the reason for the low scores and apply measures to improve school functioning.

Individual score	School functioning	Action
28 – 20 points	High	Regular teaching
<u>19 – 16 points</u>	Medium	Regular teaching
15 – 12 points	Low	Individual follow-up
11 – 7 points	Critical	Individual follow-up

Individual follow-up: Students who receive low scores are at risk of having reduced school functioning – including low well-being, low academic performance and high levels of stress. They need extra attention from the teacher. As an extra follow-up after they have received BLP 1 in class, they should be invited to individual talks where you together discuss various strategies for calming down and ways for improving learning. During this conversation, you can use the Measuring Well-Being at School Questionnaire as an interview guide and explore each of the seven questions. See Chapter 6: When students need extra help.



How to use the questionnaire: The questionnaire is given to all pupils. You read the questions aloud in class and the pupils fill in the answers. Provide time for all students to answer. Or you can fill in the answers together with pupils individually or in smaller groups. The questionnaire is kept in the student's file.

Measuring Well-being at School Questionnaire

Name of student: _____

Name of teacher: _____

Male

Female

Age: _____

I'd like to ask you how you feel your situation is right now. You can mark your answer in one of four possibilities: always – usually – rarely – never.

1: I am satisfied with my life

Always

Usually

Rarely

Never

2: I am able to do my best at school

Always

Usually

Rarely

Never

3: I feel calm and relaxed

Always

Usually

Rarely

Never

4: I feel safe at school

Always

Usually

Rarely

Never

5: I feel safe on the way to school and on the way home

Always

Usually

Rarely

Never

6: I have friends to play with/be with at school

Always

Usually

Rarely

Never

7: I sleep well

Always

Usually

Rarely

Never:

8: Are there any specific problems you would like to get help in solving?

Thank you for answering these questions!

Appendix 3: Theoretical framework for BLP 1



The Better Learning Programme 1 (BLP 1) is a school-based intervention that provides support for students during or after an emergency, such as war, armed conflict, prolonged conflict, natural disasters and other types of crisis. Being school-based means that teachers provide the intervention, and the methods used are suitable for the field of education and regular teacher practice. The aim is to address high levels of stress and fear, to establish a sense of stability and safety, calming and self-regulation—all with the goal of improving school functioning: school well-being and academic achievement. BLP 1 is based upon five principles for recovery (Hobfoll et al., 2007):

1. Establishing a sense of safety and stability
2. Calming and self-regulation
3. Building power to change your situation
4. Connecting with social support
5. Re-establishing hope

The five principles, taken together, form a psychosocial support framework teachers can use on a daily basis to turn the school into a “Recovery Box”, supporting students' recovery by lowering stress and promoting conditions for better learning.

References

The Better Learning Programme is informed by research and international guidelines on the provision of basic psychosocial support for students affected by emergency. The following literature and documents have provided guidance:

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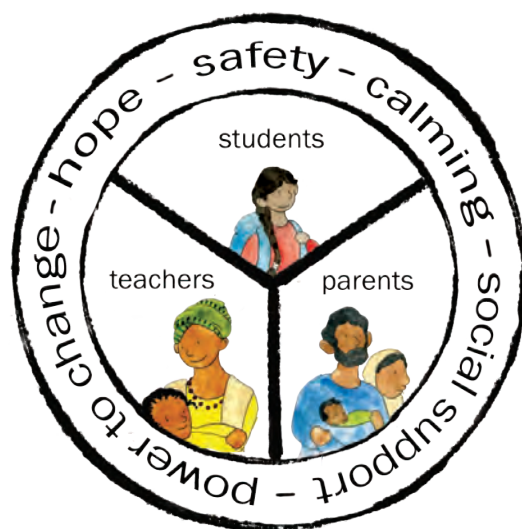
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Better Learning Programme 1

Supporting Students' Recovery in Emergencies: Classroom Sessions



This handbook is written for teachers working under the demanding conditions of an ongoing crisis or its aftermath. Children and young people affected by stress from war, crisis and displacement often have difficulties learning and functioning at school. They experience a sense of chaos, loss of concentration, reduced memory—making it hard to keep up in the classroom or do their homework.

BLP 1 is intended to improve conditions for learning. The programme helps teachers and children understand normal reactions to fear and stress, and provides ways to manage these reactions, including easy calming exercises that can be done as part of the regular classroom practice.

BLP 1 is based on research and international guidelines on best practice for psychosocial support for education in emergencies.



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