

STICKS STONES

A Training Manual for Facilitators on How to Increase
the Involvement of Children in Their Own Protection





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**Sticks & Stones, A Training Manual for Facilitators on How to Increase the Involvement of Children in Their Own Protection
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Contents

Foreword	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Glossary	v
Acronyms	vi

Introduction

Welcome	1
1. Format of the Manual	2
2. Violence Against Children	4
3. Purpose of the Manual	5
4. Why the Manual was Developed	5
5. How the Manual was Developed	7
6. How to Use the Manual	8
7. What We Mean by 'Involvement in Protection'	13
8. Risk Assessment as a Starting Point	19
9. Before We Start...	21
Some Key Questions & Considerations	22

Part 1: Thematic Guide

1.1 Why & How to Involve Children in Their Protection	27
1.2 Understanding Protection – Children's Perspectives	36
1.3 Influence of Age, Development & Individual Characteristics	49
1.4 Child Protection in the 'Real World' – at Home, at School, at Work, in Institutions and in the Community	62
1.5 Child Protection in the 'Virtual World' – Through New Technologies	76
1.6 Projects & Programmes for, with and by Children	81

Part 2: Training Context & Overview

2.1 Setting the Context	90
2.1.1 Making Participation a Reality	90
2.1.2 Important Steps in Working with Children	92
2.1.3 Making Participation Safe	95
2.1.4 Selection of Participants & Trainers	98
2.1.5 Specific Skills & Knowledge Required by Trainers	101
2.1.6 Practical Considerations	103
2.1.7 Presence of Other Adults	104
2.1.8 General Facilitation Techniques & Tools	104

2.2 Overview of the Training	108
2.2.1 Purpose & Objectives of the Training	108
2.2.2 Rationale for the Course	108
2.2.3 Training Programme Outline	109
2.2.4 Use of Course Materials	111
2.2.5 Warm Ups & Energisers	111
2.2.6 Debriefing	111
2.2.7 Evaluation & Feedback	112
2.2.8 Follow Up	112
2.2.9 Capturing Learning & Evaluation	113

2.3 Sticks & Stones Monitoring and Evaluation Framework	113
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PART 3: Training Activities

Before We Start...	117
Activity 1: People Bingo	119
Activity 2: Junior Interviewer	122
Activity 3: The Monkey Story	124
Activity 4: Our Learning Agreement	129
Activity 5: I Am Me!	132
Activity 6: Who Am I?	136
Activity 7: What Do We Mean by Protection	138
Activity 8: Right to Protection	141
Activity 9: What We Need Card Game	144
Activity 10: Good & Bad Choices	146
Activity 11: Feeling Map	149
Activity 12: Safety Drawings	152
Activity 13: My Journey	154
Activity 14: Red, Yellow, Green Game	156
Activity 15: Danger Scenarios – What Would You Do?	159
Activity 16: Good & Bad Touch	161
Activity 17: Mapping My Community	164
Activity 18: Staying Safe Online	167
Activity 19: Hands of Support	170
Activity 20: Mapping My Protective Network	173
Activity 21: Poster Design	176
Activity 22: No – Go – Tell	178
Activity 23: What We Can Do/Action Plans	180

Resources & References/Appendices

Resources & References	183
Appendix 1: Plan International Risk Assessment Matrix	185
Appendix 2: Summary of Manifestations of Types of Abuse	186
Appendix 3: Summary Sheet on Safer Internet Use	187

Foreword

Growing up with protection, and being a part of it

Growing up in a safe environment, with care and protection provided, is one of the key preconditions for overall child development. And yet, for millions of children in the developed and developing world alike, a violence-free childhood remains a remote reality. Children continue to be abused, exploited and neglected in all settings, often with long-term consequences that prevent them from reaching their full potential. If children are not well protected, all other rights they are to be entitled to are compromised and all aspects of their growth may be seriously impeded.

Traditionally, children have been mainly seen as passive recipients of care, which often implies disciplinary measures resorting to corporal punishment and other violent methods. The rights-based approach opens a whole new perspective, where children are viewed and respected as resourceful human beings, capable of contributing in line with their evolving capacities and being part of solutions for improving their own lives. Involvement of children in their own protection encourages a shift from children being mere objects of care to becoming active subjects of their own development.

This starts with learning about the different forms of violence and realising that any kind of violence is unacceptable and preventable. Being aware of abuse-related risks equips a child with a vital set of skills, helping to avoid potentially harmful situations and to report any violence observed or experienced. Eventually, children should be supported to take collective action to prevent and address violence they are exposed to through actions at different levels. However, even though children can and should contribute significantly to their own protection, it ultimately remains adults' responsibility to ensure all measures are taken to keep children safe from harm and to ensure that they are well protected.

Building on overall efforts to create opportunities for children to learn about their rights and act upon them, which is the focus of the *Bamboo Shoots* training manual, we are pleased to introduce *Sticks & Stones*, a new practical tool to increase and encourage the involvement of children in their own protection. This training manual sets the protective perspective across different settings, while offering a broad range of practical activities to help children of different ages learn about the different ways to better recognise risks and protect themselves. It also aims to increase partnering with children's groups in devising strategies for more effective prevention and protection, ensuring that children are placed at the centre of the efforts to end violence.

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Authors

Stephanie Delaney and Raša Sekulović

Glossary

We have tried to keep the text as simple as possible and to avoid jargon, however, inevitably we need to use some terms that are specific to child protection and working with children. To avoid any confusion, the main terms and acronyms we use throughout the manual are defined here. Other terms that are specific to a particular section are generally explained where they appear in the manual.

- Bamboo Shoots*** Plan Asia’s training manual for facilitators working with children’s groups on child rights and child-led community action (please see the Resources and References section for the full reference)
- Child*** In line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), a child is anyone below the age of 18 years.
- Child Protection*** Actions and initiatives taken both to prevent child abuse, and to respond to situations of abuse. Note this does not mean the promotion of children’s rights generally, but specifically as they relate to protection.
- Community-Based Child Protection Mechanism*** Structures, organisations and actions at the community level that aim to involve the community in greater efforts to protect children. These can either be introduced from outside of the community (for example by NGOs) or from the community itself and can be ‘formal’ or ‘informal’. Examples include community-based child protection committees and networks.
- Referral/Reporting Mechanism*** A system or procedure for people, including children, to report their concerns regarding a child’s welfare and wellbeing to the appropriate child protection agency and/or helping organisation (depending on the focus).
- Violence Against Children*** An umbrella term to cover all forms of abuse, maltreatment, neglect and exploitation of children, including discrimination, which are a violations of children’s rights.
- National Child Protection System*** A county’s overarching coordinated framework of laws, policies, processes, procedures, structures and services that aim to ensure the protection of all children in an holistic way.



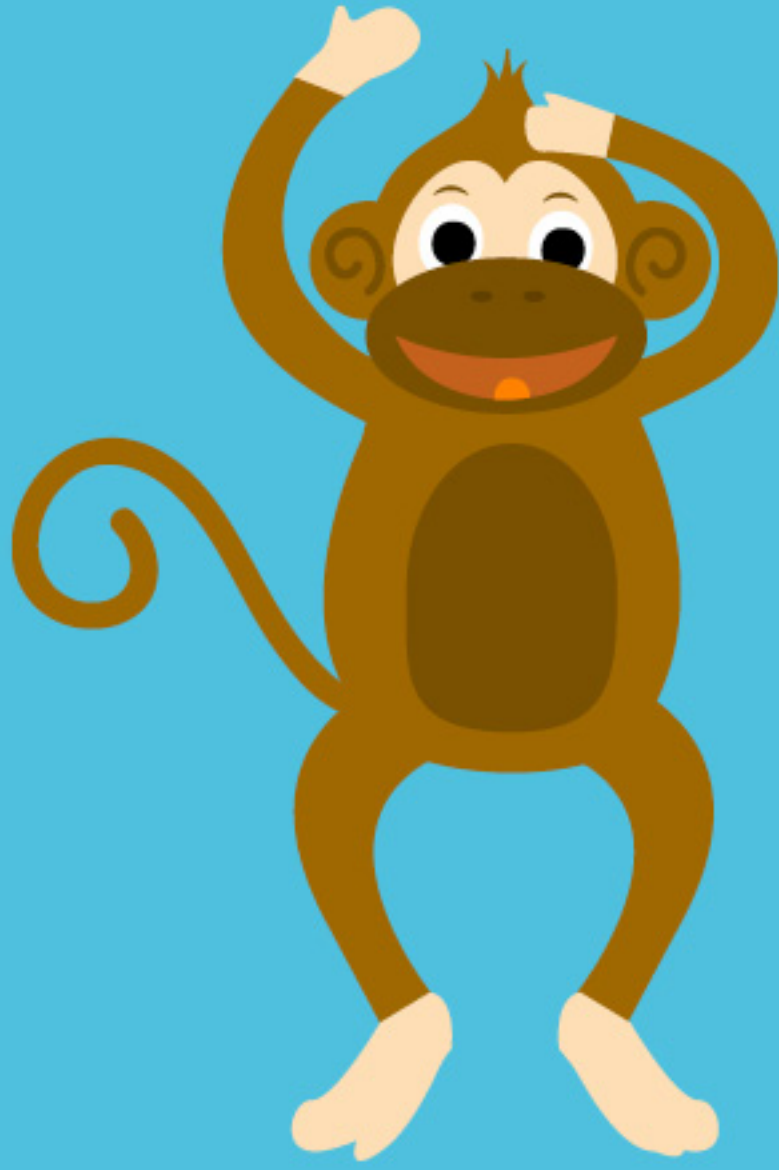
Acronyms

<i>ARO</i>	Asia Regional Office (of Plan)
<i>CBCPM</i>	Community-Based Child Protection Mechanism
<i>CCCD</i>	Child-Centred Community Development
<i>NGO</i>	Non-governmental organisation
<i>UNCRC</i>	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989
<i>UN VAC Study</i>	United Nations Study on Violence Against Children, 2006
<i>VAC</i>	Violence Against Children



INTRODUCTION





Welcome to *Sticks & Stones*, a manual for facilitators on how to increase the involvement of children in their own protection. We also hope that this manual will be of interest to other staff, including programme managers, and increase their awareness of this important work.

This manual is the sequel to *Bamboo Shoots*, Plan International’s training manual on child-centred community development/child-led community actions for facilitators working with children and youth groups.¹



What’s in a Name?

When we began talking about this manual, we needed a title.

“**Sticks and Stones**” is an English language children’s rhyme. It persuades the child victim of name-calling to ignore the taunt. In that way, it can be considered as an early example of trying to teach children a way to protect themselves from emotional harm. It is reported to have appeared as early as 1862 as:

*Sticks and stones will break my bones
But words will never harm me.*



Alternative forms include the changing of the last line to ‘But names will never hurt me’.

We wanted something that reflected the nature of protection – sticks and stones are basic building materials that provide protection and shelter. The name seemed especially appropriate given the children’s rhyme, as part of the purpose of the manual is helping adults understand ways in which they can assist children in developing their self-protective skills.



¹ Plan Asia (2010) *Bamboo Shoots: A training manual on child-centred community development / child-led community actions for facilitators working with children and youth groups*; Plan Asia Regional Office, Thailand, Bangkok.



1. Format of the Manual

This manual is divided into four main sections:

<i>Introduction</i>	Introduces the manual and outlines its purpose, why and how it was developed, who it is for and how to use the manual.
<i>PART 1: Technical Guidance</i>	Explores themes and settings relating to children's involvement in protection. This section includes important background information that will give facilitators and other practitioners a deeper understanding of different aspects of child protection issues.
<i>PART 2: Training Context & Overview</i>	Contains information for trainers to prepare them to work with children on increasing protection, and essential information on how to work safely and appropriately with children on protection issues. This section also has an overview of the training structure and outlines the training modules that are based on different child protection topics.
<i>PART 3: Training Activities</i>	Based on the order of the modules in the training outline, this section presents 23 activities that can be used depending on the age group and time available for the training. It also notes the importance of adapting the activities as needed for the cultural setting and abilities of the participants.

At the end of the manual, there are **References & Resources** and **Appendices** that contain additional materials referred to in the manual.



Child Friendly Resources

In order to be active participants in their own protection, children need information in formats that are appropriate for their age and development. As part of the consultation with children in Asia, Plan ARO has developed a series of publications relating to child protection in child friendly formats: *Your Personal Guide to Violence Against Children*, *Violence Against Children Action Booklet*, and a child friendly version of Plan's organisational child protection policy. These documents can be used as resources during the training and when working with children.



2. Violence Against Children

Violence against children is a global phenomenon that has devastating consequences both for the individuals concerned and for the social and economic development of countries.² The global UN Violence Against Children Study (UN VAC Study), 2006, confirmed that children can and do experience violence in all parts of the world.

What do we mean by 'Violence'?

In line with the definition of the *UN Violence Against Children Study*, 2006, 'Violence' is used as a generic term to cover all forms of abuse, exploitation (including trafficking), mistreatment and neglect.



Violence against children is universal and has detrimental effects on the lives of millions of children in both the developing and developed world. Even though it has different root causes – including poverty, harmful traditions and lack of awareness – it occurs in societies with well-established systems of social protection and care, as well as in societies with minimal capacities to respond.

At the same time as the growing recognition of the magnitude of violence that children experience, there has been a shift towards empowering children so that they can be agents of change and active participants in the realisation of their own rights, not just the passive recipients of care. This shift is in line with Plan's rights-based approach to development.

² Note that this is discussed in greater detail in subsequent sections.

Children have a right to protection. While Plan advocates that children should, and can, play an important role in their own protection, **it must be clearly understood that the ultimate responsibility for the protection of children remains with adults.** It is important that in helping to develop children's own self-protective skills, we do not shift the blame to children if they are abused or neglected.

Adults have a responsibility to prevent and respond to violence and abuse through creating a protective environment and through the provision of services. However, this does not mean that children cannot be actively involved, for example through awareness raising initiatives, being able to recognise and avoid risks, taking collective action and giving feedback on the quality of services.

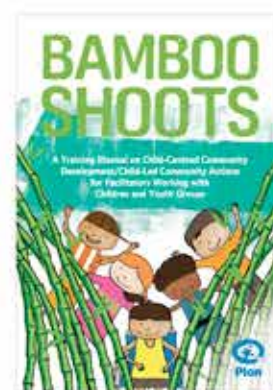
3. Purpose of the Manual

The manual was primarily developed to help fieldworkers³ working with children and facilitating children's groups to help increase children's capacities to be more involved in their own protection by being better equipped to protect themselves and their peers. However, we also hope that the technical information contained in Part 1 will be of general use to programme staff, policy makers and others who advocate for children's rights to increase their understanding of the issues surrounding the involvement of children in protection.



4. Why the Manual was Developed

The *Bamboo Shoots* manual provides a framework for helping children to increase their understanding of their rights, and to be active participants in identifying areas of concern and prioritising actions to improve the realisation of children's rights in their communities. While *Bamboo Shoots* considered the issue of children's rights generally, this manual focuses on children's right to be protected.



³ For Plan International this mainly means Community Development Facilitators (CDFs) and others specially trained to work with children.

Children have a right to be protected – This should be guaranteed. Violence against children can have a profound effect on children as individuals in terms of their development and well-being. It is becoming increasingly recognised that violence against children also has a dramatic effect on societies. Children who have experienced violence are more likely to face problems in adulthood including increased likelihood of legal offences, drug and alcohol misuse, relationship problems and family breakdown. Unfortunately while accepted within some societies, the economic costs of violence against children in many countries has yet to be properly documented and measured – although it is increasingly acknowledged.

Child protection is particularly challenging in many countries where Plan works, especially where the national child protection system is weak or in its early stages of development and/or where resources and capacities are low. Plan recognises the need to support governments and other stakeholders in the development of appropriate mechanisms and systems for protecting children through its work with communities. A foundation of this work is centred on the children’s right to participation, which opens entry points into realising their other rights, including the right to be protected from all forms of violence.

A number of Plan’s Country Offices already incorporate (to different degrees) the involvement of children in protection, and examples of these actions are included in this manual. However there is a need to provide additional advice and guidance for how to increase children’s participation in their own protection so that adults working with children can feel more competent and confident in this area and thus be more helpful for children.

Addressing self-protection specifically places an emphasis on prevention by helping children recognise different risks and empowering them to develop skills and behaviours to keep safe. This in turn helps them to respond and adapt to the ever changing realities of children’s lives and new emerging forms of violence against children, including violence in cyber-space/online safety related issues. Prevention makes sense, and children can be key players in the timely recognition and reduction of violence.

A wide range of materials already exists, but there is no single manual that pulls together all the elements. This manual seeks to fill this gap by offering a range of information addressing different aspects relating to children’s involvement in their own protection in a systematic manner. This is particularly directed to countries where there is a developing national child protection system and a relative lack of comprehensive services.



There is a lot of information available, however, two problems with existing resources are as follows:

- Materials focus only on one or two areas of concern (in particular sexual and physical abuse) and do not give a comprehensive overview of gradual involvement and empowerment. This manual takes a more holistic view of the involvement of children in all aspects of their protection.
- Resources have often been developed for use in contexts where the child protection system is well defined, where capacities are high and resources are available. As such, they do not always reflect the realities of children's lives or the operating environment of developing countries. This manual focuses on simple, practical ways of involving children that are relatively easy to implement and that build on existing good practices.

Sticks & Stones has been developed to give practical guidance and knowledge to field-based staff and others working directly with children. Although it is based on the working methods of Plan International's Child-Centred Community Development (CCCD), we hope that the materials will also be of use to other organisations, particularly grassroots community-based groups.

5. How the Manual was Developed

The manual was conceptualised and written by Stephanie Delaney (Independent Child Protection Consultant) and Raša Sekulović (Plan Asia Child Protection Adviser), both of whom also worked on the production of the *Bamboo Shoots* manual.

The development of *Sticks & Stones* was based on the methodology already successfully trialled for *Bamboo Shoots*. This included adopting a participatory approach to learning that actively involves children in the process of identifying rights violations in their communities and developing ideas for possible collective actions. Outcomes from a workshop held with adults and children in Sri Lanka in 2012 helped inform the contents of this manual, as did a number of workshops (also in 2012) that were held with children and explored their understanding of protection.⁴ The workshops confirmed the belief that not only were children interested in their own protection rights, but they also had the capacity to be actively involved in identifying risky situations and developing plans to eliminate and reduce risk.

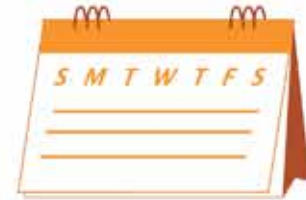
After the outline and rationale for *Sticks & Stones* was developed, it was shared with the Reference Group, comprised of members of the Plan Asia Child Rights and Protection Network representing the country and national offices working in the region.

⁴ Materials developed from these consultations have been referenced both throughout the text and in the Resources & References section.



A more detailed outline was presented to the Reference Group at a consultation workshop in Bangkok in April 2013. A draft version of the manual was distributed in August 2013 that incorporated feedback from the workshop in April. A final validation and training workshop was held in Bangkok in October 2013 with the suggestions, additions and amendments from this workshop incorporated into this version. These suggestions and additions include specific points on practice and experience that are highlighted throughout the text.

Although this version of the manual is ‘final’, it remains a practical and dynamic tool open to constant and continuous improvements. We hope that it will be revised and added to, as experience using the material increases and feedback is gained from fieldworkers and children.



6. How to Use the Manual

The manual can be used in two ways that are closely interrelated:

1. As a source of information and knowledge for field workers and child protection practitioners.
2. As a basis for training for children’s groups in protection issues and self-protection.

It is recommended that children participating in any training should have already participated in the *Bamboo Shoots* training, as that provides a broader understanding of child rights and how protection fits into a rights-based framework.



IMPORTANT!

Please note, this manual has been written especially for workers to facilitate children's increased involvement in protection. It has not been developed for use in therapeutic work with children who have been abused.

We imagine that some of the materials could be used in such settings, but this must only be done with care, by appropriately skilled and qualified workers, and where there is the necessary support and supervision.

It is also possible to conduct the training with children who have not participated in *Bamboo Shoots* training. Without previous training, however, it is useful to include a short awareness raising of children's rights (materials from *Bamboo Shoots* could be the basis for this orientation) before beginning the training. Materials from *Bamboo Shoots* can also be used to supplement other training with children. Care should be taken when doing this to ensure that important information and messages are not left out.

**What Do We Mean by 'Disclosure'**

Disclosure is the term used to describe situations when children (and adults) tell someone about their abuse. Sometimes adults and children can also disclose that other children have been abused.

Sometimes disclosures are deliberate – meaning that is the person chooses to say what is happening – but occasionally disclosures are not deliberate and happen accidentally as the topic is being discussed when the person feels safe to talk.

Since abuse almost always represents a loss of control it is **essential** that **confidentiality** be explored at the beginning of the course, since Plan staff have a duty to report concerns in line with Plan's Child Protection Policy.

If confidentiality is not explored, it may result in a lack of trust and increase a sense of being out of control if participants are not aware of the possible need to involve others in order to ensure a child is protected.

Additional guidance on managing disclosures and confidentiality is provided in the following sections.



Plan ARO has developed a range of child friendly materials and resources that can and should be used in conjunction with *Sticks & Stones* to properly support learning.⁵ These are referenced throughout the following sections, where appropriate. Other existing materials are also signposted.

We want to stress that it is important that adults working with children to facilitate the training **MUST** have completed core awareness training and acquired sufficient knowledge on child protection, as well as having experience in working with children. This is essential for children's safety, as it is important that children are given correct information and accurate messages so that they are not exposed to increased risk.

It is also critical that qualified and experienced workers lead the training, as discussing protection is a sensitive issue, and workers must be able to react appropriately to any disclosure of an alleged child protection situation or concern that might surface during a workshop. Workers need to be aware of their responsibilities (as defined in Plan International's child protection policies and procedures) for the mandatory reporting of disclosures, and to have identified in advance the existing mechanism for referrals to the relevant child protection authority for further investigation, and to know what support services may be required.

It should be noted that sometimes, in the field (during actual workshops), it can be especially difficult to make a referral and support services may be lacking. This is why it is important to know what is available in advance of the training so that workers can respond appropriately if a situation is disclosed. Plan needs to continue to advocate for and support the development of appropriate protection systems and services. Information from children in terms of their experiences can provide powerful evidence.

To ensure the effective implementation of child protection policies and procedures, we need to make sure that children are also aware of the policies and procedures, and know how to raise concerns. Together with children, Plan has developed a guide to their Child Protection Policy in a child friendly format that can be used to explain the policy to children.

Child Protection Policies and Procedures

Organisations that work with children have a duty to ensure that in working with children they do not place them at greater risk. Organisations must be safe and have appropriate child protection policies and procedures in place to both prevent situations of abuse from occurring and to respond to situations of abuse if they do occur.

For Plan, this means strictly implementing the organisational child protection policy, ***Say Yes! to Keeping Children Safe*** (2013).

⁵ For example, the Plan ARO publications (2012) *Your personal guide to violence against children* and *Violence Against Children Action Booklet* – both of which are in child friendly formats.

In addition to the policy, Plan Asia has produced a set of ***Minimum Standards for working with children's groups*** in order to ensure that such work takes place in a safe and appropriate manner.⁶



It is important to create the context for children to be empowered by working with parents (which also helps further develop parenting skills) and communities to increase their understanding of the importance of child protection, and to accept the role that children can play in their own protection. Also needed are advocacy efforts with governments and other agencies to ensure that protection systems, mechanisms, processes and policies recognise and promote the involvement of children.

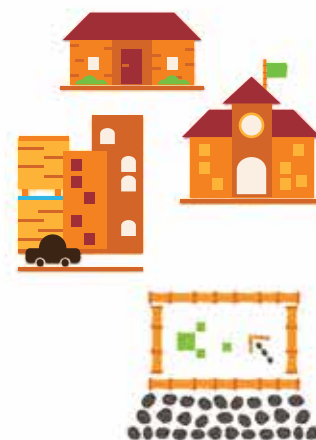
While parents/guardians want to be able to protect their child, they and other responsible caretakers will never be able to ensure that their children are completely safe 24 hours a day (except for when children are babies and under constant supervision). However, they can help children recognise risks and learn how to avoid potentially harmful situations. By doing this, the protection of children can be increased and their exposure to violence can be reduced. It has been mentioned before, but it is important to repeat here, that children can and do have the capacity to be active participants in both their own protection and the protection of their peers. Peer-to-peer support can be effective in preventing and protecting children (especially from bullying) because children typically disclose what is happening to them to other children first. Even young children are able to identify other children who are at risk. An additional benefit of peer support work is that it underscores the understanding of the concept of rights being associated with responsibilities – that is, respecting and protecting others.



⁶ Plan ARO (2013) *Towards Minimum Standards for Adult Facilitators Supporting Children's Groups*.

Building upon the work of the UN Violence Against Children Study,⁷ in *Sticks & Stones* children's involvement in their own protection is considered in relation to the five settings, in which children grow, spend considerable time and engage in different social interactions:

- in the home;
- in school and educational settings;
- in care and justice (institutional) settings;
- in work settings; and
- in the community.



Since it is an increasing area of concern, we have considered an additional space for protection concerns, the 'virtual world' – that is online, related to communication technology and social media.

Mainstreaming Protection and Capacity Building

While specific programmes and interventions may be necessary to help children develop their self-protective skills, other programmes and initiatives may be opportunities to support and reinforce these efforts.

For example, disaster risk reduction (DRR) schemes often include helping children to identify safe places/safety plans. These same skills and principles can be transferred to 'keep safe' work.

Similarly, when training children on DRR, programmes should also focus on helping children identify some of the increased or additional risks they may be exposed to in a disaster situation.

In addition to exploring child protection issues (such as abuse), we also cover broader areas of protection such as health and safety. These are included as they are useful entry points to discussing protection in a less threatening and more comprehensive way, in line with children's evolving capacities in terms of how they develop understanding about risk and danger.

Given the scope of *Sticks & Stones*, and the fact that it is for fieldworkers and practitioners, we are not able to cover every aspect in great detail, as that would take a manual for each topic! Instead our aim is to provide a good overview so that workers can feel suitably prepared and equipped to further the involvement of children. Workers will need to be mindful of the particular contexts they are working in and provide additional advice and information to children as necessary.

⁷ For a copy of the full report see www.unviolence.org

For example, if they are working in areas where there has been conflict, they may need to include warnings about avoiding areas with landmines. Similarly where child labour and/or child trafficking is endemic, they may need to help children understand the specific risks to which they may be exposed.

We have tried hard not to duplicate materials and information already included in *Bamboo Shoots*, as we see this manual as a continuation of *Bamboo Shoots*, not a substitute for it. We have also tried, as much as possible, to keep the manual easy to read and free of jargon, and the Glossary at the beginning of the manual should help with definitions of terms which we need to use in order to avoid confusion.

7. What We Mean by ‘Involvement in Protection’

There are four distinct, but connected, aspects of children’s involvement in protection:



- 1. The development of self-protective behaviours** (sometimes also known as ‘keep safe’ skills) so that children are:
 - able to recognise situations of risk;
 - are aware of preventative actions they can take to avoid such situations; and
 - know where to seek help and support in the event that they or their peers are exposed to violence or are directly affected.






Practice from the Field: Cambodia *Identifying Risks*

Through their network of children’s clubs, Plan in Cambodia has been training children on their rights and raising their awareness.

This includes involving children in the mapping of their communities to identify risks and in prioritising actions for how to address those risks.



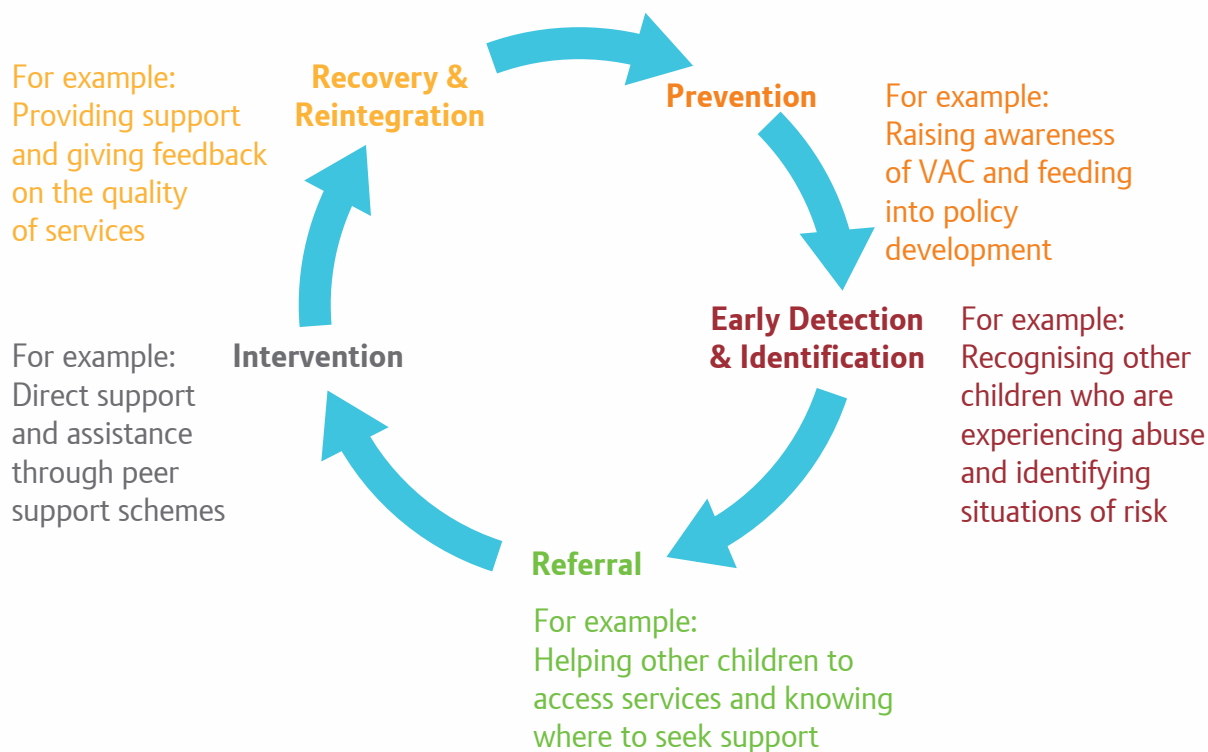
-  **2. The participation of children in programme responses**, such as in identifying risks and helping to design, run and review programmes and processes and to develop their own collective responses to violence, based upon an increased awareness of the right to protection. This includes actions by children's groups on identifying children at risk and responses to children such as peer education/support schemes and collective advocacy actions.
-  **3. Advocacy by children**, particularly around awareness raising, and necessary actions and policy development by other stakeholders, such as government and child protection agencies. This includes children's collective actions to end specific forms of violence and harmful practices (such as child marriage).
-  **4. The involvement of individual children in decisions relating to their own protection** – including the empowerment of the most vulnerable and marginalised children. For example, being involved in care-planning meetings, and having a say about where they should live if it is not safe for them to be at home. This includes providing their feedback as to the quality of services.

For practical purposes this manual primarily concentrates on the first two aspects of children's involvement in their own protection. Even though advocacy by children to tackle the different forms of violence is closely linked with their group actions, it does require separate guidance in order to ensure protective measures and prevent any potential exposure to further violence. In addition, the involvement of individual children in their own specific protection is strongly linked to the particular context and service provided. Since most of the activities are expected to be achieved through collective action and children's groups, this goes beyond the operational framework of this manual, which is more general in nature.



Cycle of Protection & Participation

Children can be involved in all stages of the protection cycle as shown in the following diagram:



As mentioned earlier, in talking about children's involvement in their own protection it is important to emphasise that while children can, and should, be actively involved, the **primary responsibility for the protection of children remains with adults**. The exact levels and scope of responsibilities will be dependent upon the legal framework in each country; however, in general, parents/guardians have the main responsibility and obligation for ensuring the safety of their children, protecting them from violence and promoting their wellbeing.



Although governments are the primary duty bearers, their role is often limited in relation to protection to ensuring that the conditions are provided so that parents can fulfil their responsibilities (for example social protection schemes and education) together with implementing programmes to ensure that support is provided to children at risk, including removing children from abusive situations and where necessary arranging for alternative care. By signing the UNCRC, governments have accepted the responsibility for the protection of all children in their jurisdiction. This includes advocating for an end to violence against children and promoting the participation of children.

In terms of children’s participation in protection, of key importance is that the capacities of children change with development and experience. It is critical to include children’s own perspectives on what is safe or unsafe to ensure that interventions aimed at protecting children are effective and meet their needs.

Professionals who come into contact with children, such as doctors and teachers, may also have ethical and professional guidelines that place additional responsibility on them for participating in efforts to protect children. Similarly, agencies, such as NGOs, also have a critical role to play in protecting children through activities such as advocacy, raising awareness and the provision of services.

While the extent to which communities are legally responsible for the protection of children varies (for example, in some cases mandatory reporting of concerns and the inclusion of community protection mechanisms within the national child protection system), it is important to remember that communities can still play an important role. Safer children live in safe communities.



When children are involved in their own protection, a space is opened up in which they can develop a set of self-protective skills. In this manner, children become subjects of their own rights, including the right to be protected from all forms of violence, and grow to accept more responsibility and become more confident. When traditional protective cycles surrounding children are more flexible, without losing their protective strength, children are encouraged to take a proactive stance towards their own safety and wellbeing. It is then that they are more likely to develop awareness and resilience, which will help them avoid and prevent situations of abuse, as well as address and report any that occurs.

Globally, emphasis is being placed on the development of national child protection systems.⁸ Such systems aim to prevent and respond to violence against children by providing holistic and coordinated services within a cohesive framework of laws and policies, linking with other complimentary sectors such as health and education that link to the development and wellbeing of children. Child protection systems take into account that while there are formal services that need to be provided by government and civil society organisations, including NGOs, communities also have an integral role to play in protecting children.



Plan's own actions in relation to the development of national child protection systems are undertaken through their work with communities and in strengthening community responses to child protection concerns.⁹

⁸ A lot of work is being undertaken by many agencies, including Plan and UNICEF, in terms of how to conceptualise and describe a national child protection system. It should be noted that there are some variances between the different ideas being proposed. However, common features of all models include addressing both prevention and responses to abuse, providing services that address the situation holistically for all children (not just those from particular groups) and the need for a capable workforce.

⁹ For further information see Plan ARO (2012) *Lessons for Protection – A comparative analysis of community based child protection mechanisms*.





Protection is important, but there is more to it...

In addition to running special training courses on increasing protection, we believe that all activities and interactions with children can be learning experiences and create opportunities to discuss and explore protection issues. Child development is not linear, nor does the nature of childhood remain the same. As children grow, the nature of the risks that they are exposed to change. A child's developing cognitive and reasoning skills need practice and it is not sufficient to tell a child something once. By incorporating protection issues into everyday life, we help children both learn about, and integrate, protection into their behaviours and actions in a natural and continuous way, enhancing their level of protection. This links with the idea that children's capacities to protect themselves increase with and support their development.



However, while we need to give real and honest messages about protection, it is important not to create an atmosphere of fear, which may be created as awareness of protection issues increases. We may run the risk of making children overly fearful or anxious about life, rather than helping them feel better equipped to deal with potentially harmful situations. It is a matter of finding the right balance between the positive messages of empowerment and important facts about the risks that children may encounter.



Safety and Protection

In this context, 'safety' is more associated with the qualities of the environment or potential threats, such as busy roads and fire hazards, whereas protection refers more to measures taken to prevent and address violence against children such as physical abuse.

8. Risk Assessment as a Starting Point

It is critical before undertaking any work with children to increase their active involvement in protection that a careful assessment of safety and protection considerations is undertaken.

Unfortunately, it is a reality in some contexts that empowering children can place them at greater risk. For example, involving children in advocacy in high-risk situations (such as red light/brothel areas) may place them at risk of violence from people who do not approve of their involvement, perhaps because an abuser feels they will no longer have an advantage (for example, those profiting from the commercial sexual abuse of children are unlikely to welcome actions taken to stop it). If children’s identities are revealed, they can become a target for potential abusers or reprisals from angry community members who are not happy about what they are saying.

It is important to make sure that while we are seeking to increase children’s protection, involvement in that we do not place them in greater danger. Plan has developed its own risk assessment matrix, which can be found in the USB flash drive in the inside back cover pocket. See example of matrix below:

Plan International Risk Assessment Matrix

For Identifying and assessing risks for:

- planning events involving children
- individuals/group/agencies impacted by child protection issues

Date of Risk Assessment

		Impact		
		L	M	H
Likelihood	H-3	M	H	H
	M-2	L	M	H
	L-1	L	L	M

Description of Event or Child Protection Incident

Risk Assessment					Risk Management				
Step 1: What is the event stage or activity?	Step 2: Who is at risk? (Think about the factors which put them at risk)	Step 3: What are the risks?	Step 4: What are the control measures currently in place?	Step 5: Risk Calculation			Step 6: What are the agreed additional controls/actions to be put in place to mitigate the risk?		
				Impact	Likelihood	Risk Level		By Whom	Be When

Prepared By: _____ Print Name _____ Signature _____ Date _____
 Management Sign Off: _____ Print Name _____ Signature _____ Date _____

The completion of the risk assessment before every activity involving children is a requirement of Plan’s Child Protection Policy⁹ and is mandatory. This matrix involves six steps:

Step 1: What is the event stage or activity?
Identifying the specific nature of activity

Step 2: Who is at risk?
Identifying who may be at risk, and the factors that place them at risk

¹⁰ ‘Say Yes to Keeping Children Safe’ revised 2013.



Step 3: What are the risks?
Identifying all risks

Step 4: What are the control measures currently in place?
Establishing what already exists to reduce/remove the risks

Step 5: Risk calculation
Identifying the risk level based on the likelihood of the risk being realised and its impact

Stage 6: What are the agreed additional controls/actions to be put in place to mitigate the risk?
Identifying what further actions are needed in order to reduce risk or to bring the risk level to an acceptable level



Only when all six stages have been considered and addressed can the activity proceed. Since risk assessment is not a one-off task, as the nature of risks can change overtime, it is important to remember that even if an activity only lasts for a relatively short period of time, it may be necessary to revisit and update the risk assessment as the situation changes.

Children Developing their Own Risk Assessment

An example of children developing their own risk assessment matrix was undertaken by the Youth Partnership Project (YPP) in South Asia, working in Nepal, India and Bangladesh. Under this project, children from different organisations worked together on a variety of initiatives from awareness raising, to advocacy and peer support. Since a lot of the work involved outreach, meaning that children went into risky environments, it was acknowledged that protection was a key concern.

Training and consultation was undertaken with the children to help them recognise and identify potentially risky situations and to develop solutions appropriate to specific situations. For example, children were often challenged about their presence in these areas by police, so one idea was to have an identity card that could be shown if they were questioned by authorities about their activities.

With the support of the staff, children also developed their own risk assessment matrix to help identify when activities were unsafe or additional support was needed.

For further information see Youth Partnership Programme in South Asia (2009) *Child Protection Framework*; ECPAT International (available from www.ecpat.net).

9. Before We Start...

Although guidelines for working with children around protection are included in Part 2, Training Context and Overview, it is worth outlining here the overall principles that should frame our work and be adhered to when exploring protection with children and empowering them to be active agents of their own protection.

The following six principles should guide our work:

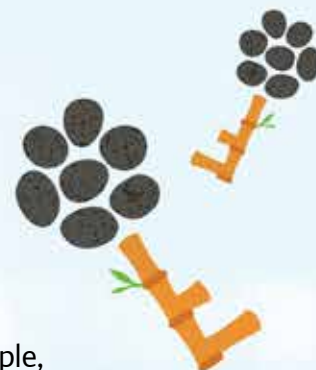
1. **Non-discrimination and inclusiveness** – treating all people equally and including everybody.
2. **Democracy and equality of opportunity** – giving everyone the same chances, and allowing all people to have their say.
3. **Physical, emotional and psychological safety of participants** – making sure that everyone is looked after, that nobody is harmed ('Do No Harm') and that the best interests of the child are prioritised.
4. **Adult responsibility** – although children's voices are important and children have skills, it is an adult role to ensure that children are safe.
5. **Voluntarism, informed consent and transparency** – children should be asked if they want to take part, understand what they are agreeing to do and know what will happen as a result.
6. **Participation should be an enjoyable and stimulating experience** – even if it is a serious topic or issue, it does not have to be boring!

These principles have been translated into a **Code of Ethics** (contained in Part 2.1) for staff working directly with children to support the full participation of children.



Some Key Questions & Considerations

Before moving forward, it is useful to pause and reflect on some of the key questions and considerations that Country Offices/programmes need to examine in order to decide if it is appropriate to work with children on increasing their participation in protection, and, if it is, to what extent this should be done, and how to do it safely. Key points, in no particular order of importance, include:



- What risks and protection issues have we, as adults, identified through child rights situation analysis and otherwise (for example, information from available statistics and other assessment reports including consultations with children)?
- What risks are recognised by children and/or how can we encourage children to recognise risks from their own perspective? This includes to what extent we engage children in on-going consultations regarding violence and concerns to capture changes and developments.
- Are there specific or unique risks in this community/setting?
- What, if any, resources and/or services exist to support children who are at risk or are in need of protection (including child protection mechanisms and the national child protection system)? This includes proposed alternatives and resources identified through community mapping and consultations.
- What are the context-specific laws and policies that relate to child protection? Remembering that not all laws relating to the protecting of children are only contained in child protection legislation.
- What is the age, stage of development and common experiences of children we are working with? And how might this affect our work?
- What are the children's previous experiences of participation?
- What other activities are we implementing or what other initiatives exist to help mainstream children's involvement in their own protection?
- To what extent are parents, community leaders and members of the community aware of issues related to violence against children? How open are they to the acceptance of the empowerment of children?

- Are internal procedures and policies in place to ensure we are operating in a child-safe way?
- Are facilitators suitably capable, equipped and supported to be able to explore protection with children?
- What resources and sources of support are available in the event that a child makes a disclosure and/or becomes upset while we are working with them? This includes arrangements for mandatory reporting of disclosures.
- What opportunities exist and how can children be involved in advocacy to end violence against children and abuse?
- How can we ensure inclusion of the most marginalised children?
- What are the differences between how violence against children affects girls and boys within the community?
- How can we identify and capture good practices, so that lessons can be learned and they can be promoted elsewhere?
- How can taboos and harmful practices be challenged? Including how can resistance to and the denial of child protection concerns be countered?
- How can we prevent children's greater exposure to risks because of the actual activity (particularly advocacy)?
- How can we support children's own initiatives to prevent and address violence against children, while ensuring their protection throughout the activity/programme cycle?



