



LOVED & SAFE



Discussion Material for Parent Groups on
the Needs and Rights of Children



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Table of Content

About the Material	3	Topic 3. Play, Rest and Leisure	29
A Children's Rights Perspective	4	Active Leisure Time	30
Discussion Topics	5	Recovery and rest	33
The Role of Discussion Facilitator	5	Active Listening	33
Training for Discussion Facilitators	6		
Meeting Structure	6	Topic 4. Conflicts and Their Resolution	35
Suggested Meeting Structure:	6	When Do Arguments Happen?	36
Confidentiality and Responsibility	7	Violence Against Children – what is it?	37
Time, Venue and Participant Circumstances	7	Why No Physical Punishment for Children?	38
Group Contract	8	Setting Boundaries?	39
Discussion Approach	8	Examples to Discuss	39
Being a Good Facilitator	9	What Can You Do? Good Examples	42
Follow-up Questions: Clarifying and Exploratory	9	Creating Security and Warmth in the Relationship	42
Preparing a Meeting	10	When Social Services Provide Support	43
Different Approaches for			
Value-Based and Discussion Exercises	11	Topic 5. Adolescence	45
Get-to-Know Exercises	14	Adolescence	46
Ending the Meeting	15	Children's Needs Change	46
After the Meeting	15	Children in the New Country	47
		Privacy and Integrity	47
Topic 1. Convention on the Rights of the Child	17	Love and Sexuality	48
The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child	18	Relationships and the Internet	51
The General Principles	20	Honour	52
Important Rights for Children	21	Marriage	52
		Female Circumcision/Genital Mutilation	53
Topic 2. Parental Responsibilities	23		
The Parental Role and the Family	24		
Me and My Family	24		
Parental Norms	25		
When I Was a Child	25		
The Relationship Account	26		
Needs and Support for You as a Parent	27		

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Text: Sofie Olovsson

Text editing: Josefin Lundmark

Production management: Henrik Nordgren

Reference group: Erik Ulnes, Eva Harnesk, Mary Douglas, Therese Lenholm, Maria Sundvall

Taavo, Åsa Eliasson, Evelina Aho Fältskog and Sanna Mjösberg.

Cover photo: MostPhotos

The people in the pictures have no connection to the content of the report.

Design: åtta.45



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About the Material

This material is aimed at those who wish to lead discussion groups for parents, legal guardians and other responsible adults. The material has been developed as a complement to Save the Children Sweden's programme *Love is Free*,¹ where children and young people at school have an opportunity to reflect on love, relationships, rights and support. In the parent material, it is adults who reflect on the rights, development and relationships of children and young people.

Parents/guardians/responsible adults are central to the realisation of children's rights, and they play an important role in children's lives and development. Therefore, it is important that adults who have children in their lives are equipped to engage with and live alongside children in the best possible way, so that children's rights are fulfilled. Discussion groups are a tool in helping to make parents and other adults more competent in meeting children's needs and development. We have therefore created this material as an important complement to the activities we carry out with children to strengthen their rights. Discussion groups with parents and other significant adults can be held in municipalities that work with *Love is Free*, but they can also take place independently of *Love is Free* activities.

We hope this material will be of use.

¹ *Kärleken är Fri/Love is Free* is a preventive programme against honour-based violence and oppression, and is aimed at students in Swedish grades 7–9, as well as high school. Government authorities and civil society actors talk together with the students about love, relationships, rights and support during a 'Love is Free Week'. More information (in Swedish) can be found at www.karlekenarfri.se

A Children's Rights Perspective

The basis of our work is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). A fundamental principle of the Convention is that all children are of equal worth, and have the right to life, survival and development. Parents and legal guardians have primary responsibility for the child's development, and the state has ultimate responsibility for ensuring that children have their rights fulfilled.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989, and today almost all countries of the world have ratified the Convention and are legally bound by it. Only the United States has abstained from ratifying the Convention. The countries which have ratified the Convention have to adapt their laws to the articles of the Convention, and have a children's rights perspective on decisions affecting children. Every state that has adopted the UNCRC must regularly report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child on how the Convention is being implemented. The state has ultimate responsibility for compliance with the Convention, but all adults have a responsibility to provide for the rights of children.

The UNCRC consists of 54 articles with no inherent ranking. They address economic, social, cultural, political and civil rights. The most basic principles are contained in four of the Convention's articles, known as the 'general principles'.

Article 2 underscores equality and inclusion for all children. Every child has the right to enjoy their rights without discrimination based on race, gender, skin colour, disability, and so on. Children must also not be discriminated against on the basis of their parent's or guardian's group affiliation or political opinions. The Convention includes all children, regardless of where in the world they are born or the circumstances they grow up in.

Article 3 states that the best interests of the child shall be considered in all decisions concerning children. In all actions involving children, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration. When adults make decisions that are contrary to the best interests of the child, it is important that the decision is clearly justified and that compensatory measures are applied.

Article 6 emphasises the inherent right of the child to life and development. The article affirms the child's right to survival and that systems should be in place for their development. Children should have access to health care, education and an acceptable standard of living.

Article 12 deals with the democratic rights of children. It emphasises the right of the child to have their voice heard and influence their own situation. The article is about participation, co-determination and being able to influence their life and the world around them, and compensating for that fact that the child does not have the right to vote.

Discussion Topics

The material is based on five topics:

- *The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* – What is meant by children’s rights?
- *Parental Responsibilities* – How do you want to be as a parent/legal guardian/significant adult, and what do you need to become that?
- *Play, Rest and Leisure* – How do you, as an adult, give a child the best opportunities for meaningful, developmental leisure time, as well as time for rest and recovery?
- *Conflicts and Their Resolution* – What causes conflict in your engagement with the child? What are the consequences of the conflicts, and how can they be resolved constructively?
- *Adolescence, Romantic Relationships, and Sexuality* – How can you engage with a child in adolescence? What does a child’s right to their relationships and sexuality entail?

It is up to the group how many meetings you decide to allocate to each topic. The topic of *Adolescence, Romantic Relationships, and Sexuality* is more extensive and should therefore be covered across several meetings.

Each topic contains exercises for discussion and reflection, and each one has its starting point in selected articles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. All your discussions will of course be founded on the UNCRC, but some articles will be of particular relevance as you talk about the various topics and issues. **It is especially important that the basic principles of the Convention are consistently included in your conversations.**

The material is a bank of exercises that you can choose from based on the needs and abilities of the group. Each topic contains more exercises than you will have time for during one meeting, so choose the exercises and questions that best suit the group.

The material includes value-based exercises such as four-corner exercises, dilemmas, hot seat, buzz groups, and other reflection exercises. The focus is not on lecturing to the group, but rather that the participants use the joint exercises to reflect on children’s rights and how they can best engage with the children in their lives. Occasionally there are fact boxes. As a group facilitator, it is good if you can convey the information in these boxes, which describe what the law says and where support is available.

The Role of Discussion Facilitator

As a discussion facilitator, you have an important part to play in the group meetings. You should help to create a safe space together with the participants, so that they feel comfortable taking part and can get the most out of the meetings. Leading groups is an exciting journey, and even as a facilitator you will learn a lot from the participants’ stories and opinions.

Training for Discussion Facilitators

It is important that you, as a discussion facilitator, are familiar with the topics covered during the meetings, and have basic knowledge about children's rights perspectives, about the kind of limiting norms, discrimination and violations affecting children, and about honour-related norms.² It is also important that you have an understanding of the norms you yourself live by, so that you are aware of the norms you are conveying to the group. In addition it is valuable if you, as a group facilitator, have some experience and knowledge about the development of children and young people. This will strengthen you in your facilitator role.

In preparation for starting a discussion group, you will need to complete Save the Children Sweden's online training courses on the UNCRC, Norms & Discrimination, as well as the online training on Honour-Related Violence & Oppression. The Facilitator Guide has more details on when you should take which course. It could also be useful to complete the course on Facilitating School Visits. It is also important that facilitators attend Save the Children Sweden's course on Child Safeguarding. The courses can be found at

<https://www.raddabarnen.se/medlem-och-volontar/grundutbildningen-det-handlar-om-karlek/>

<https://www.raddabarnen.se/medlem-och-volontar/tryggare-tillsammans/>

It is also important to read Save the Children Sweden's document *Secure Parenthood*, available in various languages at <https://www.raddabarnen.se/tryggtforaldraskap>. It contains tips and advice for parents and legal guardians, as well as basic information about normal development in children and young people. You can also hand out *Secure Parenthood* to your groups at the first meeting.

Meeting Structure

A meeting should last at least 2 hours. This will give you time to discuss the material's topics in plenty of detail. Be responsive to the needs and interests of the group, and let these guide the pace and content of the meeting. Also, try to establish some recurring procedures and touchpoints for your meetings to give participants a sense of familiarity with the proceedings. This will help them to feel safe and more comfortable. For example, start and end the meeting in a similar way every time. And don't forget refreshments for the breaks! Remember too that the casual conversation during breaks may be worth listening to and incorporating.

Suggested Meeting Structure:

- Introductions: participants take turns saying how they feel, and reveal something personal about themselves or share some other reflection.
- A group-strengthening exercise/game.
- Present the topic for the day and how the meeting will be structured, perhaps accompanied by a short story or video.
- Value-based and reflection exercises
- Break
- Value-based and reflection exercises
- Conclusion: talk about what's next, and do a round of brief closing shares. Also provide the opportunity for anonymous feedback in a 'feedback box'.

Confidentiality and Responsibility

As a discussion facilitator, you have a duty of confidentiality. Everything that's said in the group should stay in the group. You must not talk about what is said during the meetings in a way that allows others to identify who the participants are and what they have said. Having said that, it is important that you make it clear to the group that you have a responsibility to ensure that children do not come to harm. This means that you have an obligation to contact social services if you receive information that a child is being harmed. For instance, someone in the group might share that children are being abused in their family, for example being subjected to some kind of violence. If this information is revealed, you need to act and pass it on to social services, so that the children being harmed and their family can get the help they need from social services, young people's mental health services (BUP) or another care authority. **Always tell the group that you, as a group facilitator, have a duty to act if you find out about a child being harmed. It is important that participants are kept informed, so they know the ground rules for your group discussions.**

Discussion groups can be vital to the participants' development, and as a discussion facilitator you have an important role to play. Having said that, it is important that you do not offer personal, individual help. A facilitator must take care not to become a counsellor and start providing talk therapy. If a participant needs further, outside help, tell them about specialist authorities and organisations in the community that can provide support. Make sure that you know where you can refer them for further support in the municipality/region where they live.

Time, Venue and Participant Circumstances

When you're starting a group, it's important to find out what's best for the parents you want to be part of the group. If the parents work during the day, an evening meeting will be more appropriate. Other parents might be at home with their children during the day, so for them a daytime meeting will work better. Choose a time and place that is suitable for those parents who have children. If the children are coming along, you may be able to hold the meeting at a family centre where there are play opportunities at the open preschool. If play activities are going to be part of your plan, bear in mind you should have two people in charge of the children, in line with Child Safeguarding guidelines.

Also make sure there are refreshments for the participants. Eating together is not only good for cementing the group; it also creates a more familiar atmosphere and may even be necessary for certain people to attend the meeting.

The material uses the term 'parent' or 'parents'. However, not everyone in the group may be a parent; they could be a legal guardian, a related adult in the family who has a parental role, or something else. Use the most appropriate terms for the participants in your group. The discussion groups may be part of a Swedish for Immigrants (SFI) course, or another programme where perhaps not all the participants are parents or legal guardians. If so, adapt the instructions accordingly so the exercises are still useful for all group participants. For example, you might ask them to think about the exercises based on their own upbringing, or a close relationship with a child in their lives; for instance a stepchild, a grandson or a close friend's child.

Group Contract

During the first meeting, the group should make a contract together, establishing boundaries and rules of conduct: how participants should behave towards each other so that the group is a safe place (also known as a 'safe container'). It is important to let the participants create the contract together, so that the rules suit that particular group and everyone feels involved in the process. Be sure to display the contract at all meetings. That way, what is decided at the first meeting will apply to all future meetings.

Suggested points in a group contract:

- We listen to what others want to share.
- We never have to answer/share if we don't want to.
- What is said in the group stays in the group (unless it's about a child coming to harm).
- There is no absolute truth: everyone has different thoughts and experiences.
- It is not okay to make derogatory remarks about others.

Discussion Approach

The aim of the material and exercises is to prompt conversations between participants, and your role as a facilitator is to enable those conversations. In some cases your role is to convey information, which you can do using the fact boxes.

The goal is for participants to reflect on their own thoughts and experiences, and those of others. This is because reflection is an effective way of bolstering good behaviours, and also of providing tools to make any changes that need to be made. Listening to other parents and adults in a similar situation also reduces the feeling of being alone with one's issues and challenges, which in turn reduces stress. In the exercises, participants can help each other to come up with different approaches and look at things from different angles.

Value-based exercises are good because:

- They are democratic: all group members are active participants.
- Participants can express their opinion in different ways: verbally, by moving around the room, etc.
- Participants can clarify and reflect on their own values, and see how they work in interaction with others.
- The exercises allow scope for differing views and diversity, and participants are inspired to think in new ways.

The material also contains various reflection questions which the participants can discuss in small groups or as a whole group, but also reflect on individually. You can decide which approach best suits your group based on its own particular mood and dynamics. Through the reflection questions, participants start from their own life situation, unlike the value-based exercises which are often founded on more general situations or another person's life situation.

The occasional fact boxes in the material highlight important information within certain topics, such as what the law says and where support is available. Make sure that you, as a facilitator, communicate this information to the participants during the meetings.

Being a Good Facilitator

As a facilitator, you do not take part in the exercises. Your job is to act as a facilitator, or moderator, for the exercises, highlight different opinions, ask participants to develop their thoughts, and help participants listen to each other and take in different perspectives. Remember to tell the group that you are not taking part in the discussion, but are the facilitator for the exercises.

Extra important to keep in mind:

- Refer to your group contract to create a good discussion climate.
- It is of course fine to have different opinions, but personal attacks and derogatory remarks are not allowed. The right to free speech must NEVER take precedence over the right not to be humiliated.
- Never force anyone to take part in an exercise or express their opinion. If someone has a hard time establishing or expressing where they stand in an exercise, that's fine.
- Let a few participants substantiate their answers, making sure to include different perspectives on the issue being discussed. Keep in mind that the important thing is the dialogue, not convincing others of a particular opinion. Don't let a few participants dominate the discussion for too long, as the others will get tired of this.
- All opinions and thoughts should be taken seriously and treated with respect, including those that you as a facilitator disagree with or are offensive.
- Derogatory comments should never be followed by silence or stand unchallenged – but avoid moralising or suggesting 'right answers'. Ask follow-up questions to encourage different perspectives. Some examples of follow-up questions can be found below.
- Make it clear that it is okay for participants to change their mind once they have heard other group members' opinions.

Follow-up Questions: Clarifying and Exploratory

Clarifying questions are a good way for you, as a facilitator, to further the discussion and understand the reasoning behind the participants' opinions. They are particularly helpful when opinions are expressed that may be considered derogatory or offensive, such as comments of a homophobic, sexist or violence-affirming nature. It is important that such views are not met with silence but that you, as a facilitator, challenge them.

Examples of clarifying questions:

- What do you mean? Tell us more...
- I don't quite understand what you mean. Can you put it another way?
- Did I understand you right? You're saying that...
- So you mean...?
- What do you think makes you think that way?
- If it was a friend of yours in the situation you're talking about, how would you think and what would you do?

Preparing a Meeting

Be sure to plan the structure of each meeting in advance so that you and any co-facilitators feel confident about the proceedings. Planning a meeting well also makes it easier to be flexible if changes need to be made during the meeting. Ideally, plan for more exercises than you think you will have time to do; that way, you won't worry about having empty time left over. Even so, be sensitive to the pace of the group: it's okay if you don't have time to do that many exercises.

Questions to think about when planning a meeting:

- What topic will the meeting focus on? Read through the instructions and exercises that belong with your chosen topic. Decide how you want to present the topic of the meeting.
- Which exercises should you do? Since there are more exercises than you are likely to have time for, it is important to choose which ones you want to focus on during the session.
- Who should facilitate which exercise? Distribute the tasks among you if there is more than one facilitator.
- Who should keep track of time?
- Are there any needs in the group that you need to consider? Adapt the structure and exercises to the needs and circumstances of the group: physical variations, neurodiversity, the group's language level, etc.
- What should you do if someone gets angry, sad, needs more support?
- What should you do if someone says something inappropriate? Or has values that go against human rights and the UNCRC?

Different Approaches for Value-Based and Discussion Exercises

Round Robin

With round robin, participants take turns sharing their feelings, thoughts and opinions. You could use something to represent a talking stick, such as a pen. Whoever is holding the stick has the right to speak – and only them. No one is allowed to interrupt with questions or comments. Round robin works very well at the start and end of a meeting. For example, at the beginning the group might talk about their expectations for the meeting, and at the end they can sum up what they've learnt, how they've felt, what they're taking away, etc.

Suggested opening questions:

- How are you feeling today?
- If you were a superhero, what superpower would you want and why?
- What did you enjoy doing as a child?
- What toy was particularly important to you as a child?
- A place you enjoy being?
- A place you would like to visit?
- What else do you want to talk about today?
-

Suggested closing questions:

- What are you taking away from today's meeting?
- What did you mainly think about today?
- What would you like to talk more about next time?

Before the round robin, you can also ask the group to write down questions, thoughts and feedback that come up during the meeting, or ahead of the next meeting. Ask the group to put their notes in a feedback box which you, as a facilitator, read during or after the meeting.

Brainstorming

A good way to start a discussion around a particular topic is to do some brainstorming – an association exercise. Write a word on the blackboard/flipchart, then ask the group to associate freely to that word. As the facilitator, you write down what the participants say. There is no right and wrong here; participants should freely express whatever comes to mind. The focus of this exercise is not what they themselves think, but rather ‘general opinion’. You can explain this by asking them to think: “If you were to ask 1,000 people in town, what would they say when they heard the word [xxxx]?”

Beehives

To make it easier for everyone to have their say, you can talk in smaller groups. Divide participants into groups of two or three. Ask them to discuss the topic in the small group before taking it up with the group as a whole.

Whole Group Discussion

Some conversations are suitable for whole group discussion – either immediately after you as the facilitator has asked a question, or after the smaller beehive groups. With the whole group approach, there is a risk that some people might start dominating the discussion, so try to make sure that everyone who wants to speak has their say.

Hot Seat

Everyone sits in a circle on chairs. Also in the circle is a spare, empty chair. The facilitators also sit in the circle and read out statements, but they don’t take part in the actual exercise. If the participants agree with the statement the facilitators read out, they switch chairs; if not, they remain in the same seat. Once all participants have made a decision, the facilitators ask the participants to explain their thinking, whether they did or did not change seats. As the facilitator, you can ask participants to have their say, but if anyone doesn’t want to tell you what they thought, that’s fine. The focus of the exercise is to take a position on the statements, as well as the dialogue that arises from the statements.

The Line

Lay out six pieces of paper on the floor numbered 1–6 (or mark an imaginary line along the floor for the participants). Read out the statements and ask the participants to stand by the pieces of paper based on to what extent they agree with the statement. 1 = Strongly disagree, 6 = Strongly agree. Divide participants into smaller groups based on how they are standing on the scale. Then ask them to talk briefly in their small groups, before presenting their thoughts to the whole group.

Four Corners

Lay out a piece of paper in each corner of the room, marked 1, 2, 3 and 4. Read out the scenario in the exercise and the four associated solution options. The fourth corner is always an open corner where participants come up with a different solution to the one presented. If a participant ends up alone in a corner, as a facilitator you should stand with that participant. You can ask the participants in each corner to talk to each other about their thought process, or you can bring the discussion to the full group directly. As a facilitator, this is your decision.

Dilemma Cases

Ask the group to talk about dilemmas (scenarios described in the material) in smaller groups or as a whole group. Some of the dilemmas are about situations from a child’s perspective, others from a parent’s perspective. For each dilemma, there are follow-up questions which the participants answer after reading about it.

Unfinished Sentences

Everyone sits in a circle. Read out a statement and ask the participants to complete the end of the sentence. The answers should be quick and impulsive: they should say the first thing that comes into their mind. If a participant cannot come up with an answer, they can pass. After the exercise, you can have a discussion about the answers. Were some statements easier/harder to complete than others?

The List

Ask the participants to rank what they think are the most important aspects based on a particular topic. This can be done individually or in a group. It may be worth letting everyone do it individually first, so that everyone has a chance to think about their own opinions on the matter.

Democratic Discussion

- Ask the participants to sit down individually and make a list based on a given topic. For example, “What do children need to have a good childhood?” “What should a good parent be like?”
- Then divide them into pairs. They now have to jointly agree on the seven most important words from each person’s list.
- Then divide all the pairs into two large groups. The new groups, in turn, should agree on the seven most important words based on the lists they have. Next, the group should appoint one or two representatives to present the list and argue why their particular words are the most important. Other participants can support the representatives with written arguments if necessary. The discussion facilitators give these to the representatives.
- The representatives of the two groups have to come up with a final list of seven words. The exercise is finished once there is an agreed final list of seven words. Make sure everyone in the group plays an active part by writing notes to their representatives.

Duo or Trio Coaching

In pairs or threes, participants can address individual dilemmas or challenges they face in their parenting/relationship with the children in their lives. Taking turns, participants tell the other(s) in their couple/trio about a situation they would like support with. The other person/people then give their feedback/advice on possible approaches. The conversations can follow the structure below (based on a trio).

- Person 1 talks about a life situation they would like advice on (3 min)
- Person 2 and 3 ask questions to get more information about the person’s situation (2 min)
- Person 1 turns their back on the people advising on the situation. Persons 2 and 3 reflect on Person 1’s situation. Encourage them to look at the situation from all different angles to find as many solutions as possible. Person 1 is not allowed to comment, but only listens to what Persons 2 and 3 say (5 min).
- Person 1 may now turn back to the others and briefly comment on what Persons 2 and 3 have said. (2 mins)

Repeat the exercise so that everyone has a chance to talk about their life situation, and a chance to reflect on the situations of the other participants.

Role Play

This exercise involves participants role playing a scenario that might take place in a family, in order to better understand how they might act in a similar situation.

Get-to-Know Exercises

Since the group will be meeting on several occasions and talking about values and ideas about parenting, it is important that there is a safe atmosphere in the group. One way to ensure this is through get-to-know exercises. It may be a good idea to include a get-to-know exercise in every meeting. It strengthens the group and helps participants to feel safe. In the exercises below, participants have a chance to talk about themselves in a fun and playful way. It is important that you as a facilitator also take part, so the group can get to know you too.

Draw Yourself

Hand out paper and pencils and ask the participants draw a portrait of themselves. Around their picture, each person should write things that are important in their life: interests, pleasures, and so on. Alternatively, they can draw the things that are important in life rather than writing them down. After that, the participants split into pairs and talk about themselves based on their drawings. Then the participants introduce each other to the whole group.

Draw Each Other Mingle

Hand out paper and pens and split the participants into pairs. Have them draw each other without looking down at the paper. Another way to do this exercise is to walk around, mingle and chat to each other. When you as a facilitator say stop, the participants stop and draw the person in front of them on a Post-it note – without looking down at the paper. Repeat the exercise several times so that each participant gets a few different portraits. Once you have finished mingling, you come together and ask everyone to introduce themselves based on the pictures the others have drawn.

A Significant Object

Ask the participants to bring an object or a photo/picture of something that is valuable to them. They then talk about themselves based on that personal object.

Find Someone Who.../Person Bingo

Prepare a sheet of paper with different assignments for the group. These could be, for example:

“Find someone who was born in a different town to where they live today.” “...who has a sister.” “...who was born in a country other than Sweden.” And so on.

The exercise can also be done in the form of bingo. Simply create a bingo card with different characteristics/experiences which participants then ask each other about. The first to complete a row shouts Bingo!

Line of People

All the participants stand in a line. You as a facilitator read out two options: ice-cream or sweets? Participants then take a step to the right or left, depending on their preferred option. Participants can interpret the words however they wish. They should respond quickly. After the exercise, you can talk about their choices and what they were thinking when they made their decision.

Suggested words

Ice-cream – Sweets

Cat – Dog

Summer – Winter

Red – Yellow

Call – Text

Town – Country

Computer – Phone

Home – Out

Tattoos – Tattoo-less

Morning – Evening

Ending the Meeting

Make sure there is enough time to finish the meeting together. Summarise what has been done during the meeting, and talk about the focus of the next meeting. Ask the participants to suggest what they would like to talk more about, and allow scope to write their thoughts down and put them in the feedback box. Perhaps there are topics you have already talked about that need more time. Or is it time to move on to a new topic?

During the closing stage, it is good if everyone has a chance to say something about their experience of the meeting. You can finish by reflecting on what they are taking away from the meeting, how they have felt, or something they have thought about. A good way to do this is with a final round robin so that everyone has a chance to share. Participants can of course pass if they prefer not to say anything.

After the Meeting

After the group has left, it's a good idea to reflect on what went well and what could have been done differently. What did you do as a facilitator that had an impact on the way the meeting turned out? Was there anything else which impacted the discussion, which you can either change or do again next time? Write down what you need to think about at your next meeting.

Topic 1. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

This topic focuses on the UNCRC as a whole, to familiarise participants with its content how it affects them and their children. Understanding the UNCRC and children's rights is absolutely fundamental. It is important to include in future discussions and in ensuring that children have their rights respected.

As a facilitator, before starting on this topic with your group, make sure you have completed Save the Children's online training course to ensure you have basic knowledge of the UNCRC. More information about the articles in the UNCRC can also be found in the introduction to this discussion material, and a list of all the articles can be found in the appendices. Print out a copy for each of the participants, and ideally hang a copy in the room you use for your meetings.

A suggested meeting structure can be found on p. 6.

Familiarise yourself with children's rights.



Hot seat/the line

To get started thinking about children's rights, it might be useful to begin with a few relevant statements:

- A child can express their opinion no matter how young they are.
- I/adults know what is best for my/their child.
- Children not only have rights, they also have responsibilities.
- Children know their rights.
- Adults know about children's rights.
- Adults have too much/too little say in children's lives.
- It was better/worse to be a child in the old days.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child



Brainstorm

A good way to highlight the rights that children have and the content of the UNCRC, is to work together to make a mind map where you brainstorm around

- What rights do children and young people have in Sweden?

Use a whiteboard or flipchart to draw a mind map incorporating the thoughts of the whole group. One option is to begin with beehives. That way, participants can make a start in smaller groups before bringing their thoughts to the full group discussion.

A mind map might look something like this:

For each right identified by the participants, ask them to give examples of what that right might actually look like for a child in Sweden. How are the Convention's articles visible in society and in children's lives?

Once you feel your mind map is complete, hand out a copy of the Convention to the group. Ask them to read it through and raise any more comments and questions that need to be highlighted.

Follow-up questions:



- Why do children have their own rights?
- What rights do children actually have in reality?
- Where could improvements be made?
- How are children's rights different today to when you were a child?
- What responsibility do you have as a parent/legal guardian/responsible adult with regard to these rights?
- What is the responsibility of social services/the state?
- Exercise: The hot air balloon



The hot air balloon

Now it's time to get more closely acquainted with the content of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and how the participants prioritise the various articles. A good exercise for this is the hot air balloon. Details about the 'boxes' (actually pieces of paper) and a picture of the hot air balloon can be found among the appendices. Print out the material as required for the exercise.

Divide the participants into smaller groups of three or four. Hand out the picture of the hot air balloon as well as an envelope containing 10 'boxes' for each group.

The 10 boxes:

- Toys
- A clean environment to live in
- Going to school
- Clothing and housing
- Music, comics, books and film
- Freedom to say what you think about things
- Play and leisure
- Food and water
- Freedom to belong to any religion
- Love and care from parents and friends

Ask the participants to imagine they are on a hot air balloon trip. In the balloon are the ten boxes. Suddenly the balloon starts losing altitude! The group has to agree on which four boxes to throw out. Which four should they choose? The group should discuss the matter and reach a consensus. All the boxes contain things that are important in children's lives in some way, so they need to discard the ones they think are least important.

When you can see that most groups have chosen their four boxes (after about 10 minutes), you reveal that unfortunately, the balloon is still losing altitude! So now, they have to throw out three more boxes. This essentially means they have to choose which three boxes to keep. Give the groups a few minutes to discuss – and ideally let them finish their discussions.

When they are ready, ask one group at a time tell to you which boxes they decided to discard and which ones they decided to keep, and what their reasoning was to arrive at their conclusion. Compare the groups' arguments to see if and how they thought differently.

Follow-up questions:

- What do you think is the purpose of this exercise?
- The Convention on the Rights of the Child has four general principles. What are they?

The General Principles

The four general principles of the UNCRC are overarching to the content of the Convention. Ask the group to talk about what they actually mean based on the questions below.



Beehives/whole group:

Article 2: Children have the right not to be discriminated against. The child or the parents' skin colour, gender, language, religion, political views, or national/ethnic/social background shall not affect how the child is treated.

- Have you noticed that your child has been treated differently based on gender/religion/ethnic/national affiliation/skin colour, etc.?
- Do you notice that you treat boys and girls differently, for example? Why? What can you do to make sure they have equal rights?

Article 3: In all decisions made about children's lives, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration for adults.

- What do you think are the best interests of the child? What is best for a young child? What is best for a teenager? In what ways does this differ?
- What do we need to know to determine what is in the best interests of the child?

Article 6: All children have the right to life, survival and development.

- Children have the right to life and development: what does a child need to develop in the best way?
- What can you do to give your child the best opportunity to develop?

Article 12: Children have the right to be heard, and to have an influence and be involved in decisions that affect their lives.

- How do you listen to your child?
- When and on what matters does your child have a chance to be involved in decisions?

Important Rights for Children



The list

Ask the participants to rank what they think are most important articles, based on the most important rights of children. This can be done individually or in a group, and they should choose a maximum of ten articles. Let the participants compare their lists and argue for their choices. If you wish, after this exercise the group can proceed to democratic discussion.



Democratic Discussion

- Then divide them into pairs. Ask the participants to talk about their list of “most important rights for children.” They now have to jointly agree on the seven most important words from each person’s list.
- Then divide all the pairs into two large groups. The new groups, in turn, should agree on the seven most important words based on the lists they have. Next, the group should appoint one or two representatives to present the list and argue why their particular words are the most important. Other participants can support the representatives with written arguments if necessary. The discussion facilitators give these to the representatives.
- The representatives of the two groups have to come up with a final list of seven words. The exercise is finished once there is an agreed final list of seven words. Make sure everyone in the group plays an active part by writing notes to their representatives.
- A variation on the exercise is to stop once the smaller groups have finished their lists. These can then be read out and discussed in the whole group, but the group don’t have to discuss their way to a single, definitive list.

Topic 2. Parental Responsibilities

Parents and other guardians are important in children's lives! Children need adults who are available, supportive and trustworthy, and who can see, listen to and understand what the child needs. But in everyday life, it can sometimes be hard to find time and build a good connection. Under this topic, participants will gain an insight into how they view themselves as parents, how they want to be, and how they can be supported in their parenting and in taking responsibility for their children's lives in a constructive way.

The topic is based on Article 5: the child's parents or other legal guardians are responsible for the child's upbringing and development. They should also support the child in exercising their rights. Article 18 on the joint responsibility of parents/legal guardians for the upbringing and development of the child, and the obligation of the State to provide support for parents, is also fundamental to this topic. Additionally, it is important that the discussions consider and touch upon the other articles in the Convention, specifically the general principles of Articles 2, 3, 6 and 12.

[A suggested meeting structure can be found on p. 6.](#)

The Parental Role and the Family

There are a number of different ways of looking at the parental role and family relationships. In order to further reflect on the role of parents and relationships in the family, it may be useful to start with some related statements.



Hot seat/the line

- Family is important.
- Parents generally know everything about their children.
- Parents should be able to talk about anything with their children.
- Parents should treat siblings equally.
- There are some things you shouldn't talk to your children about.
- Parents know what's best for their children.
- Children should help in the home.
- Children and young people should take care of themselves so that the parents don't get a bad reputation.
- Children should do as they are told by adults.
- A 14-year-old should be allowed to decide when they get home in the evening.

Be sure to ask follow-up questions after each statement you talk about.

Me and My Family

Families look different, and different people play important roles in the lives of children and adults. One way to get acquainted with the topic of family and parenting is to draw your own family, and then describe your family to each other.



Draw Your Family

- What does your family look like? What people in and around your family are important?

Participants should decide for themselves how they want to depict their family.

Beehive

Divide the participants into pairs or small groups so that they can discuss with each other.

- Describe your family to others in your group.
- How are the people in your family important to you?

Parental Norms

There are all kinds of ideas and beliefs about what parents and guardians should be like – we can call these ‘parental norms’. There are also many people who have opinions about how you should be as an adult in a child’s life. It is important that we reflect on both the explicit and the unspoken expectations of us as parents, because these expectations influence us in how we engage with our children. Sometimes, they may even lead us to do things that go against how we really want to be as parents.

Beehives/whole group

Pick some of the following questions for participants to talk about:

- What should a good parent be like?
- What expectations are there on parents in Sweden today? Do you feel you can live up to these expectations?
- If you originate from a country other than Sweden, what are the similarities and differences between being a parent in your home country and Sweden?
- If there were no outside opinions about what you are like as a parent, would you do anything differently? Why/why not?

When I Was a Child

Our own childhood has a powerful influence on how we raise and engage with our children. Sometimes we may notice that we are unconsciously doing the same thing our parents did to us, even though we may not think of it as healthy behaviour. Remembering what things were like when we were children can help us to understand the situation of children today, and break the cycle of passing on unhealthy behaviours to our children.



Own reflection/bee hive

This is a reflection exercise around what it was like for the participants themselves when they were growing up. The exercise is done first individually, and then in small groups.

As a facilitator, bear in mind that this exercise can stir up emotions in the participants, so be vigilant as to their reactions. It may be worth mentioning that support is available for adults who need help, for example through a health centre.

- What parts of my childhood did I think were good? Which ones were less good?
- Are there things from my childhood that it’s important for my children to experience too?
- What experiences do I *not* want them to have?

The Relationship Account

All relationships have what is essentially a 'relationship account'. Put simply, it means that actions towards others either count as 'deposits into' or 'withdrawals from' the relationship account. For the relationship to evolve and grow strong, it is important that we deposit into the account, i.e. do things that are positive. This increases the likelihood that both children and adults will feel well in the relationship. Sometimes we withdraw from the account, for example when we get angry with our children for some reason. At these times, it is important that we have previously made plenty of deposits into the account, so that we have a buffer of positivity in the account. It is important to know as a parent that if you focus on the negative things the child does, you will get more negative behaviour, and if you focus on the positive, you'll get more positive behaviour. A safe, well-functioning relationship is built more on love and encouragement than on restrictions. A rule of thumb from Martin Forster, PhD in Psychology and licensed psychologist, is to give your child five times more love than criticism, nagging or correction in order to develop a positive relationship².

You can read more about the relationship account in Save the Children Sweden's document *Secure Parenthood*.



Brainstorm

Ask the participants to write down positive things that adults can do (deposits into the account), as well as negative things (withdrawals from the account). Go through the groups' lists, and work together to provide examples for each item that comes up.

Examples of relationship account deposits and withdrawals

Deposit +	Withdrawal -
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Laughing together• Playing together• Doing fun things together• Positive reactions to what the child is doing• Eye contact with happy eyes• A friendly voice• Giving comfort, soothing, cradling, etc.• Showing interest in what's happening in the child's life	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Nagging• Telling off• Threatening• Punishing• Talk down to the child: "You don't understand, you can never listen, you can never sit still, you drive me crazy!"• Interrupting• Not listening• Grabbing the child in anger• Shouting at the child



Reflect individually

Ask participants to write down things that they do, and whether each thing is a positive/deposit or negative/withdrawal. This exercise should ideally be done by participants individually.

What does your relationship account look like? What positive things do you do with your child?

What negative things do you do? Write down your thoughts.

² Foster, Martin. 2009. Fem gånger mer kärlek: forskning och praktiska råd för ett fungerande familjeliv : en bok till föräldrar med barn mellan 2 och 12 år.

Needs and Support for You as a Parent

Everybody needs support in one way or another. This is especially true if you have a parental role. Being a parent is a tough job, and there are very few ready-made solutions on how to do it. Therefore, it is important to find support from others – perhaps from family and friends, or with assistance from government agencies and organisations. It is also important that you can take care of yourself and your needs, so that you have the energy to be a good adult in children’s lives.



Beehives/whole group

- What do you need to be a good parent?
- Where do you turn when you need support in your parenting?
- Are there people you particularly listen to? What is it that makes you listen to them?
- If you were to turn to social services for support, where would you go?
- Is there anything you find it hard to ask for help with? From other adults? From social services?



Unfinished sentences

- I feel good when...
- My family feels well when...
- Being a parent is...



Duo or trio coaching

In pairs or threes, participants can address individual dilemmas or challenges they face in their parenting/relationship with the children in their lives. With this topic, they can address the dilemmas/difficulties they experience in their parenting.

Taking turns, participants tell the other(s) in their couple/trio about a situation they would like support with. The other person/people then give their feedback/advice on possible approaches. The conversations can follow the structure below (based on a trio).

- Person 1 talks about a life situation they would like advice on (3 min)
- Person 2 and 3 ask questions to get more information about the person’s situation (2 min)
- Person 1 turns their back on the people advising on the situation. Persons 2 and 3 reflect on Person 1’s situation. Encourage them to look at the situation from all different angles to find as many solutions as possible. Person 1 is not allowed to comment, but only listens to what Persons 2 and 3 say (5 min).
- Person 1 may now turn back to the others and briefly comment on what Persons 2 and 3 have said. (2 mins)

Repeat the exercise so that everyone has a chance to talk about their life situation, and a chance to reflect on the situations of the other participants.

Topic 3. Play, Rest and Leisure

Play, rest and leisure are fundamental to a child's positive development. Through play, a child learns to understand the world and how life works. Play and leisure activities teach a child to develop socially, and to understand their own and other people's emotions. Being able to jump, run, climb and discover their surroundings helps a child to develop intellect and motor skills, and also to process thoughts and emotions. Playing and doing activities with children also strengthens relationships.

In Sweden, nine out of ten children and young people participate in a sporting activity at some point during their childhood. But children can do all kinds of different activities. Taking part in leisure activities contributes to joy, togetherness and companionship, and for most people it is an important and positive part of life.

While it is good to be active and have a chance to play, it is also important that children have the time and opportunity to rest. Children's lives today are full of different impressions, and many children may have several activities after school. Both school and leisure activities can be a part of a child's life which, as well as being rewarding, can create stress in children and young people. Therefore, children may also need support in getting the rest and recovery they need.

This topic focuses on the child's leisure time, and how parents and significant adults can provide children with meaningful leisure time which includes activities that children themselves want to do, as well as time for important recovery. Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child emphasises the right of every child to play, rest and leisure in accordance with the child's age, and that the child has the right to participate in cultural and artistic life. It is this article that lays the foundation for this topic. Like all the other topics, it is important to also incorporate the general principles of the Convention, Articles 2, 3, 6 and 12, and to highlight any other articles of the Convention that may influence this topic.

[A suggested meeting structure can be found on p. 6.](#)

Active Leisure Time

Children feel good and healthy when they play and have an active leisure life. Active leisure time can involve a lot of different things, both free play and organised activities. What children do and enjoy doing today may be a bit different from when we ourselves were growing up. Allow the group to have a conversation about children's leisure time using the exercises below.



Brainstorm

Ask the group work together and discuss:

- What do you think makes children feel good doing in their free time?
- What leisure activities are there to do in the municipality where you live? Which ones are free, and which ones cost money?

Write down the participants' responses on a blackboard/flipchart or Post-its to give you an overview of their answers. Follow up by asking what answers they think they would get if we talked to children of different ages.



Whole group discussion/bee-hives:

Select one or a few questions that the group can discuss together, either as a whole group or in smaller groups

- What did you like to do when you were a child?
- How do you think activities for today's children differ from when you were young?
- When do you play/do activities with your child?
- How can you spend more time with your child?



Hot seat or the line

- Children need friends.
- Children feel good when they play/do leisure activities.
- Children's leisure activities cost too much.
- It is important that children have a fun leisure life.
- Children today enjoy doing the same things as when I was growing up.
- It is important that my children help with the cooking and cleaning at home.
- Older siblings should take care of the younger ones.
- Children take too little/too much responsibility at home.



Dilemma cases

William and his sister are 14 and 15 years old. She doesn't get to do as much as he does in his spare time, like meeting friends outside the home and playing football. When there is an evening activity at their local youth centre, the sister is not allowed to go.

William thinks this is unfair, but he's worried that if he talks to his parents about it, he will have less freedom himself.

- Why do the parents do what they do?
- Is it common for guys to have more freedom than girls?
- How do you think William feels in this situation?
- What would you do if you were a parent of William and his sister?

Raise the general principles 2, 3, 6 and 12 when discussing this case. What rights are being violated for William's sister, and for William? What should the parents do in this case?

Iria's mother wants her to come home straight after school to help look after the younger children, and to cook and clean. Iria does sometimes meet friends, but her dad gives her a lift to and from their meet-ups. Her parents don't want her to be out by herself. Mum is worried about what Iria is up to, which is why she checks her phone and bag several times a week. Iria has said that she finds this difficult but her mother feels that she is responsible for Iria, so she wants to keep track of what Iria is doing.

- Why does she do what she does?
- Does Iria's mother have the right to behave like this?
- Would Iria's parents treat her differently if she were a young man? If so, in what way?
- What do you do to keep an eye on what your children are doing in their spare time?

Raise the general principles 2, 3, 6 and 12 when discussing this case. What rights are being violated for Iria?



Four corners

All children have the right to privacy, according to Article 16 of the UNCRC. What does that mean?

- That no one is allowed to read a child's diary or check their mobile phone without permission.
- That a child may dress the way they want.
- That they may do the leisure activities they want.
- Open corner – own suggestion.

Follow-up questions:

- Why do parents want to keep an eye on children's phones?
- How can you keep an eye on what your children are doing without checking their phones?
- How do you build trust so that children tell you if they are coming to harm?

Maria's child is going to the school disco. Her neighbours' children are the same age, but they're not allowed. The neighbours think Maria is doing the wrong thing letting her child go to the disco. What should Mary do?

- Tell her child that they can't go to the disco.
- Tell her neighbours not to interfere with the rules she has for her child.
- Talk to the neighbours about why they think she's doing the wrong thing.
- Own suggestion.

Follow-up questions:

- Does it matter how old the child is?
- Does it matter whether they're a boy or a girl?
- Why do you think the neighbours care what Mary does with her children?

Parental Responsibilities

Having custody of a child entails certain obligations: for instance, ensuring that the child receives the care, security and good upbringing they need, and making sure they don't come to harm. The caregiver also has the right and obligation to decide on personal matters that are important to the child, such as how long they are allowed to stay out at night. The older the child gets, the more what they themselves want should be taken into account: Article 12 of the Convention, which is also contained in the Swedish Children and Parents Code.

At the same time, children have the right to think freely and believe what they want. So there is a fine line between parents making decisions that are 'good for the child', and crossing that line by making decisions for the child that restrict their autonomy and infringe on their rights.



Four corners

Elias is 12 years old and loves to dance. His school will soon be starting a dance club. Elias tells his parents about the dance group and asks if he can join. His parents say no. They don't think it's appropriate for a boy to dance. What should Elijah do?

- Lie to his parents and join anyway.
- Do what his parents say and forget about dancing.
- Carry on trying to talk to his parents.
- Open corner

Suggested follow-up questions:

- Why do you think Elias's parents say he can't join the dance club?
- What could make them change their minds?
- According to Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, children have the right to play and leisure. What are your thoughts on that?
- Is it easy for a child to go against his parents' wishes?
- What should the parents do?

Recovery and rest

All people, children and adults alike, need time for recovery and rest. It helps us cope with stress and difficult situations.



Beehives/whole group

- What do your children do that helps them wind down?
- What do you do together as a family to relax and recover?
- Exercise and training are good for managing stress. Do you and your children have any kind of exercise/training activities you enjoy doing together? If not, what could you do?

Relaxation

Save the Children Sweden has developed the Safe Place app to help you when you get stressed. Feel free to look at the app with the group participants (if they have a smartphone) so they can try it out.

Active Listening

Children need adults who are present and who listen to them. It establishes security, a good relationship between adult and child, and helps with the child's recovery and wellbeing. Learning to listen actively as an adult is also vital if children are to have an influence and participate (Article 12).



Exercise: beehives/whole group

- How do you actively listen to your children?

Advice for active listening.

- Ask open-ended questions that can't simply be answered with a yes or no.
- Give yourself time to listen to your child's questions and answers.
- Express what you think the child is feeling and thinking in words. For example: "It sounds like you feel angry, is that right?" What has happened?
- Avoid giving advice and telling them what you would have done in their place.
- Ask follow-up questions: "What are your thoughts about this?" "What do you want us to do?"
- Talk less yourself; train yourself to listen. If you talk too much, there is a risk that the child will shut down and stop listening. Have the courage to be quiet and listen.



Role play

Divide the group into pairs, one person playing the child and the other playing the adult. Choose a scenario for the pairs to role-play. Write down the roles and hand them to the relevant players. After they have improvised a conversation as parent and child, ask them to talk to each other. Was it a good conversation where the person playing the child felt listened to? What went well, and what could they have done differently?

Scenario 1

Child: You're 14, and you've just got into an argument with your best friend who wrote something mean about you to another friend. You're angry and upset, and at first you don't want to talk to your parent when they ask you what happened.

Parent: Your 14-year-old comes home, throws his bag on the floor, rushes into his room and slams the door.

Scenario 2

Child: You're 12 years old and your parents want you to babysit your younger siblings. You're angry because you think you have to do it too often. You want to have some time with your friends, but you can't if you're going to be looking after your brothers and sisters.

Parent: You want your 12-year-old to look after the younger children because you have an afternoon job interview and there's no one else who can help. Your 12-year-old gets really angry, and you don't understand why.

Situation 3

Child: You're 10 years old, and you're really upset because a classmate has written nasty things about you to the rest of the class on Snapchat. When your parents ask you how you are, you start crying.

Parent: You come home from school/work and see your 10-year-old sitting on the sofa looking really upset. When you ask them how they are, they start crying.

Topic 4. Conflicts and Their Resolution

Despite all our good aspirations, most parents end up in conflict with their children at some point. Conflict does not have to be a bad thing if a solution can be found. However, conflicts can also become repetitive in a way that makes them harmful.

Adults always have the greatest responsibility in the relationship, and they must always have more patience and impulse control than their children. This is not always easy, but there are some strategies that can help. It is also important to ensure that conflict never escalates into any kind of violence or control. This is harmful to the child and is a violation of their rights. Repeated serious conflict and violence between adults in the family can also be harmful to the children. Therefore, it is important that the adults behave healthily towards each other in order to establish security in the family.

Article 19 of the UNCRC says that children shall be protected against all forms of violence and abuse by parents, legal guardians or any other adult in the vicinity of the child. This topic focuses on the right of the child not to be subjected to violence and abuse, and on how conflicts can be resolved in a constructive manner. The exercises in this part deal both with conflicts between an adult and a child, and conflicts between adults in the family. As with all the discussion topics in this material, you need to bear in mind the general principles of the UNCRC and the Convention's other articles.

[A suggested meeting structure can be found on p. 6.](#)

When Do Arguments Happen?



Own reflection and beehive

Ask the group first to think individually, and then talk in pairs or smaller groups about their own family situation.

- What do you often argue about in your family? What could you change to bring about less conflict?
- What do you want to do when you get angry? Is there anything you would like to change?
- It's a common expression to 'pick your battles'. What kind of things might you be able to stop nagging and arguing about? What kind of things are worth holding on to?



Exercise: Unfinished sentences

- My children get angry when...
- I get angry when...
- I can prevent arguments by...
- After we fight, we usually...

Children's feelings and behaviours

Children who can behave, do behave. If a child kicks back or gets angry, it is often because the expectations on them are too high; we expect more from the child than they can provide in that moment. Young children especially can get completely overwhelmed by their emotions and break down in anger, sadness and frustration. But teenagers too can show very strong emotions. It is important to remember, however, that children don't argue just to annoy their parents.

A secure relationship between an adult and a child is important to prevent conflicts from escalating and becoming destructive. Give children praise, and offer them closeness, warmth and kindness as often as you can. The best way to reduce conflict is to try to ignore negative behaviours in the child, and give praise and attention when things are going well and the child is doing positive things.

Routines in the family are important. Be sure to make it clear to the child what's expected, and what will happen. If there is always an argument during a certain part of the day, it's important to think about how you can change your routines. Children need to be involved in what goes on in the family. Talk about how they can be involved.

Feelings are contagious! If you, as an adult, get angry and shout, your child will most likely get angry and shout back. Do everything you can to stay calm, and perhaps enlist the help of another adult if you notice your anger turning into rage.

Violence Against Children — what is it?

Children have the right not to be subjected to violence, but violence can mean any number of things. We often focus on physical violence, but psychological violence, for example, can be just as harmful and lead to huge suffering in the victim.



Exercise: Brainstorm

Have the group brainstorm together about:

- What is violence against children? What different kinds of violence are there?

Be sure to talk about different examples of violence. Feel free to refer to the terms in the fact box to enhance the discussion:

Different forms of violence

- **Physical:** E.g. pushing, being restrained, pulled by the hair, punched or kicked.
- **Psychological:** Direct or indirect threats or ridicule. Nasty words used to put the person down. Violence or the threat of violence against pets also counts as psychological violence.
- **Sexual:** Rape or other forced sexual acts. Sexual acts that the victim does not dare to say no to also count as sexual violence. Sexual violence/actions/abuse can also take place online. E.g. a person is forced to do things to themselves, or watch sexual acts on video or being performed by another person.
- **Witnessing/experiencing violence:** Being present when someone else is being subjected to violence is also harmful to a child. For example, when a child sees their parent being hit, they could become very frightened and feel powerless.
- **Neglect:** This is when the child does not receive the care and love they need to live, survive and develop. It could be a lack of food and nutrition, a lack of access to education or healthcare, or the absence of love and care in the home.
- **Economic and material violence:** Destroying someone else's possessions, controlling how someone can access and use money.
- **Implicit:** Implicit violence is severe rage and aggressiveness that's held in. It manifests in posture and body language and instills fear. It is perceived as a threat of violent consequences and/or recalls past experiences of physical violence. It could also be an implied threat of violence.³
- **Honour-based violence:** Honour-based violence and oppression refers to the expectation that all family members must follow certain rules to preserve the family's reputation, its honour.⁴ A person living under honour-based restrictions may be subjected to physical, psychological, sexual and implicit violence, for example.

³ Source: <https://rikskriscentrum.se/rikskriscentrums-ideologiska-plattform/man-och-vald/>

⁴ (<https://www.umo.se/vald-och-krankningar/hedersrelaterat-vald-och-fortryck/vad-ar-hedersrelaterat-vald-och-fortryck/>) (In Swedish.)

Why No Physical Punishment for Children?

In 1979, Sweden was the first country to pass an 'anti-spanking law', which banned all physical punishment of children. Since then, corporal punishment or other abusive treatment (such as being locked in) is illegal. Several countries around the world followed suit, and since 1979 have introduced laws against physical punishment of children.



Beehives/whole group

As a whole group, or in beehives, ask the participants to talk about:

- Why is violence against children illegal?
- How does a child who is subjected to violence feel? In the short and long term.
- If you were born in a country other than Sweden, what does the law say in your country?
- Was physical punishment allowed when you were growing up? How has it affected you?
- What can happen if a parent/legal guardian uses violence against their child?

Violence harms

All forms of violence harm children. Being subjected to violence is a serious violation of the child's self-esteem and has distinctive consequences — both here and now, and in the long term. Violence against a child poses an acute risk that the child will be harmed. Additionally, constantly living with the threat of violence is a powerful stress factor that increases the risk of poorer school results, difficulty trusting others, poorer ability to develop good relationships with other children and adults, lower quality of life, worry, stress, mental illness, and self-harm behaviour. It is also common for children's anxiety and sadness to manifest physically, for example in the form of headache, stomach ache or sleeping difficulties.

Being exposed to violence during childhood also has an impact on health as an adult; for instance, an increased risk of mental illness including anxiety, depression, stress and suicidal thinking/suicide attempts, or physical illness such as cardiovascular diseases, and even shorter life expectancy. It also means an increased risk of being subjected to violence as an adult, or of using violence against others. Furthermore, being a victim of violence leads to an increased risk of falling into addiction, criminality and a worse socioeconomic situation.

Setting Boundaries?

Historically, authoritarian parenting has been common. Adults felt that they knew what was best for their children and were expected to set boundaries and control the children, and the children were expected to obey. Children who did not do as they were told were perceived as defiant. An authoritarian approach with clear boundaries on the children may instill a sense of routine and good order, but there is a serious risk of damaging the children's self-esteem; that they don't learn to take responsibility, but simply do as their parents and other adults say. An authoritarian approach can also make it harder for children to become independent.

It may be important to have routines and boundaries when bringing a child up, but it is important to reflect on what boundaries we set and why. And also, for whose benefit we are setting the boundaries. It is also important as a parent not to set boundaries that violate the child's dignity.



Beehives/whole group

- What limits do you set for your children, and why?
- Is it important to you that your children obey you? Why/why not?

Examples to Discuss

Being a parent is hard, and parents often need support in how to handle difficult situations. Have the participants consider different scenarios that are common in parenting, and then find solutions for how they might deal with each scenario.



Dilemma case: Daughter aged 6

You have a daughter who is 6 years old. You live alone with her. Almost every weekend, she stays with her dad.

Your daughter has always been strong-willed. She often tries to get you to do things for her, such as bring her a glass of milk or her clothes. When you don't do what she asks, she starts screaming. She kicks, punches and scratches you. You have bruises and scratch marks on your arms. Yesterday, she threw a heavy object at your head when you didn't bring her a glass of milk.

You usually tell her that she can fetch things herself when you're busy doing something else. You generally talk to her calmly, ask her what's wrong and cuddle her when she gets angry. She gets more angry when you ask her what's wrong.

Your daughter usually sleeps with her grandparents for five nights a month. They always do what your daughter asks them to. They say she's such a good girl.

- How do you think the parent feels?
- How do you think the child feels?
- What do you think the parent is doing?
- What could have been done differently?



Four corners

You find out that your neighbour is hitting his kids. What do you do?

- You mind your own business; it's the neighbour's job to decide over their children.
- You walk over and talk to the neighbour; it's not okay to hit children.
- You report the neighbour to social services.
- Own suggestion.

Follow-up questions

- How do you think the children feel?
- Who can you turn to in order to help the children?

Lisa and her husband fight a lot and she wants a divorce. She talks to her mother about it. Her mother thinks Lisa should stay with her husband because they have young children together. What should Lisa do?

- Get divorced.
- Stay until the kids are older.
- They're married, so they shouldn't get divorced.
- Open corner

Follow-up questions:

- How is Lisa doing?
- How are the children in this family doing?
- How does one go about getting a divorce?

Divorce in Sweden

According to Swedish law, everyone has the right to ask for a divorce. This applies even if the spouses do not agree on the divorce. The difference when the parties disagree is that the process takes longer. If the couple have joint children, or if only one of them wants the divorce, they will be given a consideration period of at least six months after the district court receives the divorce application. During the consideration period, the couple remain married to each other, but they do not have to live together. If the spouses have children together, they continue to have joint



custody unless the court, at the request of one of the parents or for any other reason, dissolves the joint custody.

Four corners

You are worried about a friend who has several bruises. You're afraid that your friend may have been beaten by their partner. What can you do?

- Wait until the friend talks about it.
- Ask your friend what happened.
- Call the police.
- Open corner – own suggestion.

Follow-up questions:

- Where can the friend get help?
- How can the person doing the beating get help to stop?

Help in case of violence

For a person who is the victim of someone else's violence, help is available. For example, they can turn to the social services in the municipality where they live for help and protection. Social services have a duty to help people who are victims of violence. The victim(s) may for example be put in sheltered accommodation, but there are also other forms of assistance, care and support. Children and adults should be protected from the perpetrator of violence. Contact information for the social services can be found on the website of each municipality.

In emergency situations with ongoing threats and violence, the police should be contacted on 112.

There are also online and phone-based support paths for victims:

Sweden's national women's helpline – Kvinnofridslinje – can be reached on 020-50 50 50 24 hours a day. Calls are free of charge and will not appear on a phone bill.

RFSL – The Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex Rights – has a victim support line for LGBTQIA+ people. Support is available by phone on 020-34 13 16 and email on stod@rfsl.se

Terrafem's nationwide hotline, 020-52 10 10, is for women of foreign descent and has responders who can give advice in 62 languages. Calls are free of charge and will not appear on a phone bill.

Help is also available for people who are violent or controlling towards others, for example via social services in the municipality where they live, or by contacting www.valjattsluta.se or 020-555 666

What Can You Do? Good Examples

So, what can be done to avoid a conflict, or to calm an already started argument? There are several ways that can help you prevent the altercation from arising or escalating.

Whole group or beehive



- How do you avoid your emotions taking over when you come into conflict with your child?
- What do you do to calm yourself down when you get angry?
- In what ways can parents influence how a conflict develops: before, during and after?

Preventing conflict

Tips on ways to prevent arguments and conflicts from getting worse

- Focus on your own body and your breath.
- Notice how you feel and put it into words.
- Lower your voice, speak slowly and using few words. Arguing rarely helps when you're angry with each other.
- Believe that things will go well! When we fight with each other, it's easy to feel 'here we go again'.
- Avoid raising your voice and using rough gestures.
- Count to ten, preferably backwards. This will help to calm you down.
- Take a step back and change the subject, change the direction the situation is heading in.
- Say that you need a break, and reflect. Being alone for a while usually helps.
- Apologise to each other once you have calmed down. Take responsibility for the situation.
- Talk through the situation afterwards, once you have calmed down

More can be found in Save the Children Sweden's document *Secure Parenthood*.

Creating Security and Warmth in the Relationship

We all need to feel safe and secure – especially children, and they need to know they are loved and respected as they are. As an adult you need to take extra responsibility for the relationship, and make sure you are available and able to give your child the support they need. It is also important that you talk to each other kindly, and that the children are allowed to be part of the conversation. Relationships in the family are incredibly important to a child's development. Therefore, it is vital that the relationships in the family are warm, kind and positive.



Whole group or hives

- What do you need to be able to offer your child security?
- How do you show love and joy to your child in the everyday?
- What do you like about your child? What does your child do that makes you happy? Do you tell your child this?
- How and when do you have good conversations with your child?

When Social Services Provide Support

Sometimes we are worried about our children's situation, or we feel that we need support ourselves in our parenting, and sometimes conflicts arise in the family that can't be resolved by the family members themselves. In cases like these, there are various social services that can help.



Brainstorm

- Where can parents turn if they need help with family life and children?

Beehives/whole group



- Where would you turn in the first place? Who do you get help from?
- Who would you prefer not to get help from? Why?
- If social services were to help your family for any reason, what would you want them to do? What do you need to be able to let them help you?

Where you can get help

Social Services: Every Swedish municipality has social services (called *Socialtjänsten* or 'soc'). They are responsible for providing support for children, young people, parents and other adults if children are not doing well at home or if the family needs help, if the child or adult uses drugs, if the family does not have enough money, if the child or adult is engaged in criminal activity, and so on. There are both voluntary services that a person or family can access, and forced interventions when support is needed but the people/family do not realise it themselves. Forced interventions take place only in exceptional cases, when it is not possible to support the family through voluntary measures. A voluntary service might for example be support calls, contact person/contact family, family treatment, foster home, or placement in an institution. Forced interventions could be placement in a foster home or an institution. Anonymous advice is available from social services by phone. A person can seek support from the social services themselves, but government agencies, organisations and individuals can also report a person or family that needs help. People working in areas such as education, healthcare and the police have an obligation to report if they suspect that a child is coming to harm. More information about the work of the social services can be found at kollpasoc.se/en/ or on the website of each municipality.

Child health services/BVC: As a parent of pre-school children, you can also contact your child healthcare centre (BVC) if you need support in your family. They can then help you get in touch with, say, the social services or caregivers who can help you.

Pupil health service/Elevhälsan: Parents of school-age children can ask the school's pupil health team (school nurse, counsellor, school doctor) for help. They can provide support and advice to the child/family, or make sure the family gets help from caregivers or social services.

Question Box

When it comes to help and support from social services, there are often questions about what help is available to families, and where from. If a participant has any questions, ask them to write them down and place them in an anonymous 'question box'. You can then either bring these up in your next session, or use them if you visit/have a visit from the social services, for example.

Study Visit from Social Services

It may be a good idea to invite a social worker from social services to answer any questions the group may have. This can dispel some of the myths about social services and help build trust in the agency.

Topic 5. Adolescence

All children have the right to a safe upbringing, and the opportunity to develop in the best possible way. The older a child grows, the more influence they should have on their lives, and the more we need to allow the child to have freedom under responsibility. But this is not always easy. Our patience can be tested especially when the child enters adolescence.

This topic focuses on aspects of a child's life that become prominent as they enter adolescence. These include puberty, emancipation, sexuality and sexual orientation, romantic relationships, and more: parts of a child's development that are very important, but that can sometimes be difficult for parents to engage with and talk about with their children. Several of the UNCRC articles form the basis of the exercises in this topic, including Article 6 on the right to life, survival and development, Article 16 on the right to private and family life, and Article 24 on the child's right to healthcare, including the abolition of harmful customs. The general principles 2, 3, 6 and 12 should also be included in your discussions.

This topic is somewhat more extensive than the previous ones, and should therefore be divided into two meetings so that the group can delve into the subtopics as well.

[A suggested meeting structure can be found on p. 6.](#)

Adolescence

Adolescence can be a tumultuous time, for children and adults alike. Life becomes different for many, and the roles that existed in the family when the children were young, change. One important thing to bear in mind is that a child's brain continues to develop well into their twenties. This means, among other things, that it is harder for a teenager to process impressions, fully understand the consequences of actions, regulate their emotions, and so on. Becoming more independent is an important part of adolescence and puberty, but children in adolescence still need closeness, security and love.



Beehives/whole group

This exercise is a discussion exercise around the changes a child goes through as they enter adolescence. Ask the participants to talk about:

- What happens to a child in adolescence?
- What do you remember from when you were a teenager?
- What differences can you see between your own adolescence and the lives teenagers have today?
- If you grew up in a country other than Sweden, what differences can you see between your own adolescence and the lives teenagers in Sweden have today?
- How can you as an adult provide support?
- What is it important for adults and teenagers to talk to each other about?

Children's Needs Change

Adolescence and puberty are a time of change for children. Both the body and the mind change. This is all a natural progression towards becoming an adult. Although children become more independent at this age, it is important that parents and other adults remain supportive in their lives.

As your child gets older, you may find that you have less control over their life, which can be worrying. Therefore, it's important to think about what you fear will happen to your child, and how you can be supportive of your child so they can have freedom under responsibility.



Beehives/whole group

- How do you notice ways in which a child's needs change as they become a teenager? Which needs remain, and which ones decline or disappear?
- How does the role and support of parents change from newborn, to infant, and through adolescence?
- When is a child mature enough to take responsibility in various matters? What requirements do you place on your teenager?
- How can you give your child freedom while protecting them from dangers?

Children in the New Country

When a family comes to a new country to start a new life there, it is usually the children who adapt most quickly to the new life. This can be quite tough for the adults in the family, who may feel they are losing control. It can also place great demands on the children, who might be expected to take a lot of responsibility for the family – sometimes more than a child should have to take. It also means that the children will grow up in at least two cultures, which will affect them in different ways.



Own reflection/bee hive

- Do you agree that children adapt faster in a new country? What emotions does this evoke?
- What can you do to support each other in the family?
- What is it important to you that the children keep with them from your home country?

Privacy and Integrity

According to Article 16 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, children have the right to privacy, and protection from intrusion into private and family life. But what does that mean? How should adults act to respect the privacy of the child, while also protecting the child from danger?



Beehives/whole group

- What does the right to privacy mean for a child?
- What rights and obligations do you, as an adult, have to respect the privacy of the child?
- Is it okay for you to check your child's mobile phone? Why/Why not?
- Do you ask your children before posting pictures of them on social media?



Dilemma case

Sara is 17 years old and in high school. The school has had a visit from the local youth clinic, which has handed out condoms to the students.

When Sara gets home, her father checks through her bag and finds the condoms. He gets angry because she has condoms, and wonders why she needs them.

- Is it okay for Sara's dad to search through her bag?
- Why is Sara's father angry?
- How does Sara feel after this?
- Do you think her father would have been just as angry if Sara were a boy?
- What could the father do differently?

Love and Sexuality

Adolescence is a time of awakening sexuality, and for many, this is when the first experience of being in love occurs. It is a natural part of being a teenager. As a parent, it is important to show that you are there to support your child, that you are interested in who the child is spending time with and is maybe in love with, without being controlling. There are parents who want to interfere with who their children date, and may even forbid the kids from having relationships until they come of age – this is not allowed. It violates the rights of the child. Feel free to use Save the Children Sweden's material *Respect! My body!* when talking about this topic. The material is available for download from <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/stopp-min-kropp-second-edition/>.



Beehives/whole group

- How can you talk to your child about love, sexuality and relationships?
- How old do you have to be to have sex?
- Is it okay to prohibit my child from having sex before the age of 18, or before marriage?

Sex, relationships and school teaching

Developing one's sexuality is a natural part of puberty and being a teenager. It is important that each individual is given the opportunity to develop their sexuality in a safe way, and that there are safe adults around the child who can provide support.

The sex and relationship education provided in Swedish schools is a good support in developing a safe and well-functioning sexuality. Some parents may wonder what their children are being taught about sex in school. Therefore, it is important to understand what is included in the school system's education about sex and relationships. Sex and relationship education is a compulsory subject in Swedish schools, and has been since 1955. In sex and relationship education, children and young people learn about how the body works, and what sexuality and relationships can be like for different people. Studies have shown that sex and relationship education reduces rates of sexual assault and sexually transmitted diseases, and creates a stronger understanding of human rights and gender equality.

It is important to remember that sex and relationship education is compulsory, which means that parents must not exclude their children from that education. If they do, the children will not receive the education they are entitled to, and they risk failing subjects. It may be helpful to gain an insight into the kind of materials used in school. Anyone who would like to find out more about the materials schools might use in sex and relationship education can, for example, read more at umo.se, rfsu.se and skolverket.se. They can also ask the children's teachers what they learn during sex and relationship lessons.



Hot seat/the line

- Everyone needs love
- A teenager can fall in love with whoever they like.
- I worry what others will think of my family if my kids are dating guys/girls/ are in a relationship with someone.
- Sex and love always belong together.
- It is common for teenagers to have secret relationships.
- Everyone can be with whoever they want.
- Others may think it's wrong that my daughter/son is dating someone.



Four corners

Your child is in a relationship with someone you don't like. What do you do?

- Try to get to know the person and be welcoming, because your child has chosen to be with that person.
- Demand that your child break up with the person.
- Contact the person your child is with and tell them to break up because they're not welcome in the family.
- Open corner

Follow-up questions

- Why would you not like someone your child is with?
- What is it within your rights to do?

Fatima is in love with a girl, and she knows the girl is in love with her too. Fatima is afraid to tell her family because she worries that they wouldn't accept it. What should she do?

- Talk to her family.
- Forget about her family and date the girl.
- Ignore her feelings.
- Open corner – own suggestion.

Follow-up questions:

- How does Fatima feel?
- Why is she afraid that her family won't accept the relationship?



Case questions

Gabriel is in a secret relationship and is very much in love. He wants to tell his family, but is worried about how they will react.

- Why do you think Gabriel hasn't told his family about his relationship?
- Do you think it's common for young people to have 'secret' relationships? Why?
- Is it important for children to tell their families about who they are with?
- What can you do to make your child feel safe to talk about who they are with?

Anna is 16 and has had sex with another person for the first time. She feels happy, but is worried about having lost her 'hymen'. She thinks maybe the fact that she has had sex is visible in some way. Her family has told her there's a hymen that breaks when a girl has sex the first time. But at school, she has learnt that there is no hymen, that it's impossible to see if someone has had sex.

- Why is Anna worried?
- What are the actual facts regarding the 'hymen'?
- Why is there a myth that there's a hymen which breaks the first time a girl has sexual intercourse?

The vaginal corona and the hymen myth

There is no membrane that completely covers the vagina. Rather there is a fold of mucous tissue called the vaginal corona (or sometimes the vaginal crown). Riding a bicycle, climbing trees and so on do not affect a girl's genitalia. Some girls bleed on having sex, usually due to tension or lack of lubrication. So it is a myth that there is something that 'breaks' in the vagina.

More information about the vaginal corona and other matters regarding the body and sexuality can be found (in Swedish) at umo.se – the website of UMO, Sweden's Youth Guidance Centre. RFSU, the Swedish Association for Sexuality Education, has produced videos about the vaginal corona, such as *RFSU informerar om slidkransen på engelska*, which is in English with Swedish subtitles. You can watch this together, or suggest that the participants watch it at home between meetings. Information in Swedish is also available on the UMO website at umo.se



Dilemma case

Ali is 17 years old and a believer. Ali is attracted to other guys and has had sex with guys. He feels very bad afterwards and asks God for forgiveness. He knows that his parents would never accept that he's gay. He does not want to disappoint his parents and therefore intends to marry a woman and have children.

- Why does Ali feel bad?
- What can Ali and his parents do?
- How will he feel if he marries a woman?
- Do you think he will carry on having sex with guys even after marrying?
- How will he feel if he can live as an openly gay man?



Exercise: Dilemma case

Mira and Daniel are in love with each other and have just become a couple. They meet up at a party at a friend's house and start kissing, but after a while Mira wants to stop. She signals this to Daniel with her body language, but finds it hard to voice the fact that she no longer wants to kiss. It all ends up with Daniel having sex with Mira, even though she has shown him that she doesn't want to.

- Why did Daniel carry on even though Mira didn't want to?
- How do you think Mira feels after what has happened?
- What would you say and do if Mira was your daughter and told you this?
- What does the law say in this situation?

The Swedish Consent Act

The fundamental principle of this law is that sex should be voluntary, and if it's not voluntary then it's illegal. This means there does not have to be any violence, threats, other coercion or exploitation of the situation (such as being intoxicated) involved. If the person has not explicitly said yes to sex, or in some other way actively shown that they want sex, it is considered sexual exploitation or rape.

Under the law, 'sexual offences' is an umbrella term for the crimes of rape, aggravated rape, rape of a child, sexual coercion, sexual exploitation, sexual molestation, purchase of sexual services, procuring (or 'pimping'), and other offences. A sex crime occurs when a person is subjected to a sexual act against their will. If the person is under 15 years of age, a sexual act may be assessed in a specific manner. The sexual act might be sexual intercourse, but other sexual acts which, due to coercion or other circumstances, represent a serious violation can also lead to a conviction of rape.

Relationships and the Internet

Children growing up in today's society live a large part of their lives online. It's a natural part of their everyday lives, and something which adults need to relate to. Adults often don't have a good idea of what their children are doing online, and who they're talking to. To some extent, this could be because adults don't ask their children enough about who they're meeting online. The web and social media present great opportunities to establish connections and relationships with other people, and to develop any interests that children may have. However, the web and social media also present risks. Not everyone online wants what's best for children, and some children are subjected to abuse by adults or peers. Therefore, it is important that children and parents have conversations about relationships, actions and behaviours online. At the same time, parents must not prevent children from having access to the internet and social media. Children have the right to their own relationships, and to access information and media. Feel free to refer to Save the Children Sweden's material *Nätsmart* (in Swedish, about online safety) when you talk about this topic. *Respect! My Body!* may also be useful. They can be downloaded from our website.



Exercise: beehives/whole group

- How do you talk to your child about what they do online?
- *Nätsmart* talks about **good and bad secrets**. How can you talk with your child about good and bad secrets?
- Some parents use apps to monitor their child's whereabouts. What do you think about that?

Honour

Honour is a broad, complex concept that can mean many different things. For many people, personal honour might be the most important thing in life. It can entail a sense of respect and dignity, but it can also have a negative side which involves people exerting control and being violent towards each other in an effort to maintain their honour.



Beehives/whole group

- What does honour mean to you? Is it important to have honour?
- Can you lose your honour? What happens then?

Marriage

Some parents and families have strong opinions about who their children should marry, and think it is very important that their children marry in adulthood. Some parents want their children to marry even before the age of 18, which is illegal. There are also parents who want to prevent their children from having a romantic relationship before they get married, as they may feel it damages the family's honour. This too is not permitted. Everyone has the right to choose who they marry, as long as the people involved are at least 18 years of age. This applies to both heterosexual and same-sex relationships.



Hot seat/the line

- It is important to me that my child gets married.
- It is important to me that my child chooses a good husband/wife.
- I want to be involved in deciding who my child marries.
- I know that my child will choose a future partner/husband/wife that I think is good.
- Other people have the opinion that my child should get married.



Four corners

Your daughter's 16-year-old friend tells you she's getting married in the summer. You know that getting married at 16 is against the law. What do you do?

- Talk to the friend and ask what she wants to do.
- Report the family to the police – a crime is about to be committed.
- Nothing, it's not your family so it's none of your business.
- Open corner

Follow-up questions

- Where can your daughter's friend get help?
- What can you do to provide support?

Fact box: Children and forced marriage

To get married in Sweden, you have to be at least 18 years old. Special dispensation for children to marry was abolished in 2014. Since January 2019, further stricter legislation has been in force which bans the recognition of foreign child marriages. The ban applies regardless of any connection to Sweden the people had at the time of the marriage, or how old they are when the matter is examined by an authority. If at least one of the people is still a child at the time of the examination, it will never be possible to make an exception to the prohibition.

It is a punishable offence to force someone to marry, or to pressure someone to marry against their will. Even if the marriage is not officially registered but equates to a marriage in the eyes of others, it is illegal. In addition, attempts and preparations for forced marriage have been criminal offences under Swedish law since 1 July 2014. Deceiving someone to travel abroad with the aim of marrying them off through coercion or exploitation is also illegal.

Female Circumcision/Genital Mutilation

In some parts of the world, genital mutilation is customary. This involves cutting or otherwise damaging parts of a person's genitalia. It is a very harmful tradition that can lead to lifelong physical and mental suffering. In Sweden, genital mutilation of any person with a vagina is illegal under Swedish law to mutilate people with a vagina. Anyone who has been subjected to genital mutilation can get help from the Swedish healthcare system in various ways.



Exercise: Dilemma cases

When Nicole was 11 years old, her parents returned with her to their homeland and took her to a doctor. The doctor cut into her vagina and removed part of her clitoris. Nicole didn't know exactly what they were doing, but she was in pain for a long time and still has pains sometimes. Nicole now knows that what her parents subjected her to is called genital mutilation, or female circumcision. Today, Nicole is 20 years old and has a little sister who is 11. Nicole is worried that her sister will have to go through the same thing.

- Where can Nicole get help with her pain due to the circumcision/genital mutilation?
- How can Nicole help her little sister so she won't have to go through circumcision/genital mutilation?
- What does the law say?

Amir lives with his wife and their 8-year-old daughter. They are going to visit his family in his homeland for their summer holidays. In Amir's family, it is common for the girls to be genitally mutilated, but this is not something he wants his daughter to go through. However, he knows it will be hard to stand up to his family in the home country, who strongly believe that his daughter should be genitally mutilated.

- What can he do?
- What can he say to his family?
- Where can he get help?

Female genital mutilation/circumcision

Female genital mutilation/circumcision is illegal in Sweden, and anyone who does it can be sentenced to prison. Nor are you allowed to go to another country to have a girl genitally mutilated/circumcised, even if it is allowed in that country.

Östergötland County Administrative Board has produced a **Genital Mutilation Passport** (a document entitled *Information About Genital Mutilation*), which parents and other adults can take with them when travelling abroad. The document contains information about Swedish legislation regarding the crime, types of genital mutilation, and consequences of genital mutilation. It can be ordered for a small fee, or downloaded free of charge on the Östergötland County Administrative Board website.

Visit from UMO

If possible, it may be useful to invite someone from UMO (Sweden's Youth Guidance Centre) or a family centre who can talk to the group about sexuality, the body, relationships, contraception, and so on. It might be easier if the group can ask questions directly to a person who works with issues relating to children's and young people's right to sexual health.

**Every day we make the
world a little better for
children.**

Save the Children Sweden (Rädda Barnen)
SE-107 88 Stockholm

Tel.: +46 (0)8-698 90 00
kundservice@rb.se

www.raeddabarnen.se