

Ten Key Competencies for adolescents

The Adolescent Kit for Expression and Innovation supports adolescents in humanitarian situations to develop key competencies for emotional wellbeing, healthy relationships and other skills that are relevant to their lives and circumstances. These competencies draw from child protection, psychosocial, education and youth empowerment initiatives, and are at the core of activities and approaches in the Adolescent Kit.¹

The competencies in the Adolescent Kit are organized into a framework of ten competency domains. These are broad categories of knowledge, attitudes, and skills that are essential for the wellbeing and healthy development of all adolescents, particularly those who have been affected by crisis and conflict. They include the abilities adolescents need to cope with crisis, build (and restore) healthy relationships, explore the world around them, engage with their communities and pursue their interests and goals.

Each of the activities in the Adolescent Kit is designed to help adolescents to acquire or practice their knowledge, attitudes and skills within one or more of these competency domains. Some activities introduce these competencies at a basic level, while others offer adolescents the opportunity to develop their knowledge and skills to a higher standard.

Ten competency domains

This section outlines the ten competency domains and describes how they can be addressed through activities with adolescents. They provide a starting point for deciding what you want to achieve with adolescents in your particular situation, and the best way to use the tools and approaches in the Adolescent Kit.

It is important to work with adolescents to identify which competency domains are the most relevant and important to them. The next step is to develop goals within these domains (these can be applied to adolescents individually or as a group), and to select activities that address them.

These competency domains are intended to serve as guidance only. They can be altered or expanded depending on the context and programme, and need not be limited to these ten. Adolescents should always

be given the opportunity to identify other competencies they may wish to develop.

The ten competency domains include:

- ▶ Communication and expression
- ▶ Identity and self-esteem
- ▶ Leadership and influence
- ▶ Problem solving and managing conflict
- ▶ Coping with stress and managing emotions
- ▶ Cooperation and teamwork
- ▶ Empathy and respect
- ▶ Hope for the future and goal setting
- ▶ Critical thinking and decision making
- ▶ Creativity and innovation

1. Communication and expression

Adolescents are continually learning new ways to communicate and express themselves. Communication and expression includes the wide range of skills involved in conveying ideas, feelings and opinions, and understanding the feelings and opinions of others. Communication and expression skills can be used to address conflict, promote peace, understand and manage emotions, and build and foster relationships.

Adolescents' ability to communicate with others may be affected in humanitarian crises. In situations where adolescent girls and boys have been separated from their families, isolated, or exposed to social stigma, they may have fewer opportunities to practice communication skills with others. Adolescents affected by violent conflict may have difficulty expressing their feelings and emotions, or trusting others enough to communicate openly. Cultural and social norms may also influence how comfortable adolescents feel communicating with members of the other sex, and across generations.

Finding ways to communicate effectively can help adolescents to direct their own lives and to engage positively with others. By reflecting on their communication style, and learning to recognise (and avoid) negative ways of communicating, adolescents can positively influence the lives of those around them and gain self-awareness and confidence.

¹ The framework of ten competency domains used in the Adolescent Kit is based on a framework outlined in *Peacebuilding Knowledge, Attitudes and Skills: A desk study* (UNICEF, 2013). This framework was developed to support UNICEF's education, child protection and youth programmes in conflict-affected programmes, and identifies key capacities that children require to cope with the effects of conflict and to contribute to peace. The Adolescent Kit uses these same competencies in recognition of their benefits to the healthy development of all adolescents in adverse situations, particularly adolescent girls and boys living in humanitarian crises and poverty.

Communication skills can also help adolescents to solve and negotiate problems with others, to cooperate, to work in teams, to develop positive relationships and to resolve conflicts.

Goals within this competency domain may include helping adolescents to:

- ▶ Listen to other people's perspectives, concerns and needs;
- ▶ Accurately express their ideas, perspectives or opinions;
- ▶ Communicate calmly and effectively in challenging situations; and
- ▶ Understand how verbal and non-verbal communication can contribute to conflict or build peace in the community.

2. Identity and self-esteem

Adolescents are constantly re-exploring their identities and often don't reach a fully developed sense of 'self' until adulthood. However, they can gain a stronger sense of identity and self-esteem by learning more about themselves, and how they fit into groups and society.

Adolescents should be encouraged to reflect on their individual identities, including their strengths, weaknesses, roles and responsibilities. They can also explore their group identities, and how they define themselves in relation to their family, peer groups, gender, ethnic or religious groups. This is particularly important during times of conflict and upheaval, when these identities and roles can shift and present both challenges and opportunities for adolescents. For example, gender roles may change during times of conflict, and adolescent girls may take on traditionally male tasks such as heads of household.

The individual or group identity that an adolescent associates with can either promote peace or contribute to conflict. Adolescents should learn to see the positive attributes of people and groups, and the benefits of sharing group identities. They should also understand how different groups of people across age, cultural, gender, caste or ethnic groups share similarities, and can work together to achieve common goals.

Self-esteem can help adolescents to engage with others and to influence them in positive ways. Adolescents can develop a more positive sense of self-esteem by reflecting on their strengths and achievements, and

ways in which they are valued and respected by others.

Goals within this competency domain may include helping adolescents to:

- ▶ Understand their personal strengths and weaknesses;
- ▶ Reflect on their individual identities in relation to their social, cultural, and historical context -- answer the question Who am I?
- ▶ Reflect on their group identities and how they feel towards their group (e.g. peer group, ethnic group, age group) -- answer the question Who are we?
- ▶ Understand the strengths and weaknesses of the group(s) they are associated with.

3. Leadership and influence

It is critical for adolescents in challenging circumstances to understand that they can influence things that happen in their lives. This can motivate them to make positive choices and to affect change.

Opportunities for constructive involvement in leadership and decision-making can be limited in humanitarian situations. However, practicing leadership skills, and learning how to positively influence their surroundings can empower adolescents to work for positive change in their family, friend and peer groups, as well as in the community.

Adolescents who understand their capacity for leadership and influence are more likely to engage in practices that are important to their social and cognitive development, such as seeking new knowledge, practicing, experimenting, and persisting when they encounter challenges or obstacles.

Developing leadership and influence can also help to resolve conflict and promote peace. Adolescents with strong leadership skills can influence others to promote peace and contribute to harmony in their communities.

Goals within this competency domain may include helping adolescents to:

- ▶ Recognize that they have influence over things that happen in their lives;
- ▶ Stay with a project until a goal is achieved and overcome setbacks;
- ▶ Take action to help themselves and others; and
- ▶ Contribute to transforming conflict/problems with family, friends and peer groups.

4. Problem solving and managing conflict

The ability to resolve conflicts and problems in a nonviolent way is critical to maintaining positive relationships with others, and building peace in the community. This can help adolescents in challenging circumstances to navigate difficult transitions and to manage disruptions within their family, friend and peer groups.

Adolescents who have lived in violent conflict settings may have developed unhealthy ways of managing conflicts, and need to learn constructive ways to solve their problems. They need to learn how to analyse the roots of their problems and conflicts, to find win-win solutions and to practice practical skills such as negotiation and mediation. This can help them to resolve conflicts and problems in non-violent and creative ways, and to contribute to building peace in their community.

Goals within this competency domain may include helping adolescents to:

- ▶ Understand the issues underlying problems or conflicts;
- ▶ Explore multiple solutions/options to resolve a conflict or problem;
- ▶ Persuade others to understand and respect their perspective;
- ▶ Use negotiation skills during an interpersonal conflict; and
- ▶ Consider and respect different perspectives and positions in a conflict, disagreement or problem.

5. Coping with stress and managing emotions

For adolescents to grow in a healthy manner, they need to learn how to manage their emotions and to develop strategies for coping with stress. They should be able to recognise and understand why they have emotions such as sorrow, anger and regret, and find ways to deal with stressful situations calmly.

Adolescents in humanitarian contexts live in particularly challenging circumstances. Developing skills to manage their stress is critical to mitigating its potentially toxic effects on their mental and physical health. By learning how to manage their emotions, and to deal with stressful situations in a calm way, they can enhance their resilience.

Adolescents who are able to manage their own stress and emotions are also better at recognising and understanding other people's emotions – and transforming them positively. For example, adolescents who understand the link between emotion and conflict can more readily de-escalate conflict in their families and communities.

Goals within this competency domain may include helping adolescents to:

- ▶ Recognise and express different emotions safely and constructively;
- ▶ Recognize and understand their emotional and behavioural response to stress;
- ▶ Use healthy strategies for reducing stress and managing their emotions;
- ▶ Recognise how emotions and stress affect the behaviours of others; and
- ▶ Respond constructively to other people's emotions and stress.

6. Cooperation and teamwork

Practicing cooperation and teamwork can help adolescents to form and maintain healthy relationships with others, and prepare them for active participation in their community as they grow into adulthood. Adolescents should learn the benefits of cooperating with others, find ways to overcome barriers to cooperation, and be encouraged to work as a team in ways that help to build peace.

Adolescents in humanitarian contexts may be restricted from practicing cooperation and teamwork, particularly if they are isolated, burdened with adult responsibilities, or if societal forces prohibit cooperation with certain groups. In some conflict situations, for example, if they have been involved in armed forces, adolescents may have even used negative or violent forms of cooperation and teamwork. In this case, it is important to recognize the strengths in these experiences and to provide adolescents with more positive ways to practice cooperation and teamwork that contribute to peace.

Adolescents can replace negative patterns of problem solving and blame that contribute to conflict by learning positive ways of cooperating and working in teams. They can learn ways to identify and include people or groups who are excluded, and to promote reconciliation and peace in their communities.

Goals within this competency domain may include

helping adolescents to:

- ▶ Recognize how their skills and others' skills are valuable assets to a team;
- ▶ Listen to the ideas and opinions of others and find solutions cooperatively;
- ▶ Work in inclusive ways and compromise when working on a group or team task; and
- ▶ Form healthy, respectful and cooperative relationships with others.

7. Empathy and respect

Empathy is the ability to imagine, see and understand the situation, feelings and experiences of another person from that person's perspective. It includes the capacity to recognize other people's issues, needs and goals. Adolescents should learn to appreciate similarities and differences, and to have respect for themselves and others.

Supporting adolescents to speak with and listen to others, and to understand and imagine themselves from other people's perspectives, can help them to restore positive relationships with adults and peers, and to learn how to trust others. By giving time and energy to others, and having meaningful relationships with diverse types of people, adolescents can develop empathy and respect.

Adolescents with empathy and respect for others tend to be more tolerant, to respond more positively to others, and to be better at resolving conflicts. They can play an active part in promoting mutual understanding in family, friend and peer groups, as well as in the community.

Goals within this competency domain may include helping adolescents to:

- ▶ Listen to and understand the thoughts and feelings of others;
- ▶ Associate positive images and traits with people of different backgrounds and identities;
- ▶ Recognise and respect similarities and differences between themselves and others; and
- ▶ Build positive relationships with family, friends and peers.

8. Hope for the future and goal setting

Feeling hope for the future is important for adolescents' psychosocial wellbeing. It can decrease stress, increase

resilience and empower adolescents to make positive changes in their lives.

In humanitarian situations, adolescents' hopes and dreams may be lost due to disruptions to their family, community and education. Adolescents may lose hope that they can return to the way their lives were, or that they can make up for the time lost. They may feel discouraged, and stop preparing for their future.

Adolescents who have hope for the future are more likely to believe that their situations will improve, and to envision positive possibilities for themselves, their families and communities. Their ability to set goals can help them to pursue their hopes, and to work toward this vision.

Goals within this competency domain may include helping adolescents to:

- ▶ Imagine a positive future for themselves, their families and communities (including the possibility of peace);
- ▶ Communicate and share their hopes and goals for the future with others;
- ▶ Set goals and develop an action plan for achieving their hopes and vision; and
- ▶ Take steps and work with others toward achieving their goals.

9. Critical thinking and decision making

Critical thinking and decision making are important to adolescents' wellbeing and development. Learning to doubt, question and test information can help adolescents to critically analyze the situations, and to identify causes of conflict.

In humanitarian contexts, many adolescents don't have the opportunity to practice critical thinking or decision making due to cultural norms, restrictions or heightened tensions. Adolescents (particularly girls) are often discouraged from questioning common views, making decisions or coming up with their own ideas. At worst, they may be influenced and manipulated into actions that disrupt peace or contribute to conflict, such as perpetuating prejudices or behaving violently toward others.

Learning how to think critically and to understand the consequences of their actions can help adolescents to break down harmful stereotypes, analyse bias and prejudice, and distinguish whether their behaviours contribute to peace or conflict. This can make it easier

for adolescents to identify alternative responses, and to make decisions that lead to peace.

Goals within this competency domain may include helping adolescents to:

- ▶ Balance the risks and benefits of different courses of action;
- ▶ Gather and assess information to make informed choices;
- ▶ Support decisions with evidence and strong arguments; and
- ▶ Recognise common stereotypes (gender, cultural, race).

10. Creativity and innovation

Creativity is the ability to think of, and express, new and original ideas. It involves imagining possibilities beyond one's experience and exploring them in real life, or through artistic channels such as drama, art, story telling and poetry. Innovation, like creativity, involves experimenting with different ways to improve things or to solve problems.

In humanitarian situations, opportunities for adolescents to express themselves creatively and to innovate are often disrupted. Day-to-day survival may leave adolescents little time to play in creative and artistic ways, or to experiment with innovative ways to explore new ideas or address challenges.

Adolescents should be encouraged to think creatively, and to find innovative solutions to problems. This includes the ability to consider issues from various angles, imagine different outcomes, and to think of creative ways to transform conflict. By fostering creativity and innovation, adolescents can find ways to work with others toward shared goals and contribute to peace.

Goals within this competency domain may include helping adolescents to:

- ▶ Explore creative ideas through writing, music, drama and other arts;
- ▶ Experiment with innovative ways to solve problems;
- ▶ Brainstorm and generate creative ideas, concepts and solutions; and
- ▶ Take healthy risks and to take advantage of opportunities that arise.