

Ten Key Approaches for working with adolescents

The Ten Key Approaches are at the heart of all of the guidance, activities and tools in the Adolescent Kit, and are critical to successful interventions with adolescents in humanitarian situations. They explain how programme coordinators, facilitators and others can engage positively with adolescents, and outline ways to make the most out of their time together.

The **Ten Key Approaches** have been tried and tested with adolescent girls and boys around the world, and found to be the most effective approaches for working with adolescents and making positive changes in their lives. They bring together best practice and standards from:

- ▶ Life skills basic education;
- ▶ Psychosocial support and mental health;
- ▶ Child protection and peer to peer support programmes;
- ▶ Child, adolescent and youth participation;
- ▶ Conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding;
- ▶ Gender sensitivity, resilience and equity initiatives; and
- ▶ The Convention on the Rights of the Child.

There are specific actions that both programme coordinators and facilitators can take to put the Ten Key Approaches into action. Make sure that you work together and support each other as you take steps to engage adolescent girls and boys.

When working with adolescents, it is how you engage with them that matters. The way that you involve adolescent girls and boys in activities, the type of environment you create for them and the approaches that you use to connect with them can make a real difference in your work together.

The Ten Key Approaches Include:

1. Reach out to all adolescents
2. Provide structure and support
3. Listen to adolescents
4. Let adolescents take the lead
5. Include all adolescents
6. Make space for expression and creativity
7. Challenge and encourage adolescents
8. Improvise and adapt
9. Build connections
10. Build on the positive

1. Reach out to all adolescents

In times of crisis, the most vulnerable adolescents are often the hardest to reach. Take steps to identify the adolescent girls and boys who are most in need of support, and work actively to include them in interventions.

The most marginalized adolescent girls and boys in humanitarian situations are often the least visible. For example, adolescents with disabilities may be confined to their homes due to limited mobility or social stigma, and adolescent girls may not be able to move around freely due to social norms or safety concerns. This means they are often overlooked in humanitarian programmes, and face barriers to accessing support.

Work to identify adolescent girls and boys who could benefit from your intervention, including adolescents of different ages, ethnicity, clan, language, sexual orientation and religion, and those with disabilities. Go out and look for them in the places where they live, gather, learn, eat, work, pray and play, and try to motivate them to get involved. Raise awareness with their families and communities about your intervention, and enlist their support in bringing vulnerable adolescents on board.

Create safe, welcoming spaces for adolescents to come to. This doesn't have to involve setting up a formal centre for adolescents. It could simply mean finding a temporary space near where they live and play – for example, in an unused classroom, or under a tree. Make sure that participants have a safe and affordable way to get to the space, including girls and adolescents with disabilities who may have limited mobility. And if adolescents can't come to you, then go to them!

Try to schedule sessions at times when adolescents are available, and consult with them to design activities that will attract and interest them. Remember that reaching out to all adolescents is not just something that you do at the beginning of your intervention, it is something that you do every day. If enrolment is low among marginalised groups of adolescents, seek them out and ask them why. Work with them, and other adolescents, to come up with creative ideas for overcoming barriers to attendance.

Reaching the most vulnerable adolescents involves more than just opening the door. It means going to them if they can't get to the door, noticing if they stop participating, and reaching out to try to bring them back. It means making sure they feel welcome, valued and safe.

- ▶ Identify the most vulnerable adolescents in your area and encourage them to participate in activities.
- ▶ Raise awareness in the community regarding your intervention, and enlist the help of community leaders, teachers, parents and others to involve vulnerable adolescents.
- ▶ Work together as facilitators and programme coordinators to monitor adolescents' attendance, and to make sure that the most vulnerable adolescent girls and boys aren't overlooked.
- ▶ Find ways to overcome barriers to participation and adapt your intervention if vulnerable adolescents don't attend (or stop attending) activities.

2. Provide structure and support

Adolescents in crisis situations often cope better when they have structure and support in their lives. Create a welcoming space for adolescent girls and boys with clear routines and structured activities, and provide them with ongoing support as you work together.

A clear structure and routine can be comforting for adolescents who are coping with difficult experiences and adjusting to many changes around them. Schedule activities at consistent, well-announced times and make sure adolescents know when there are changes to the programme, such as a new time or place to meet.

Follow a predictable sequence in sessions and activities, so that adolescents know what's coming and feel more comfortable participating. Guide discussions and activities in a **structured way**, even when the aim of your session is simply for adolescents to have fun, or express themselves creatively. Don't be rigid or strict, but do have a clear beginning and end to activities, give instructions and provide suggestions as adolescents work together.

Support adolescents by stepping in when they need help. Give them space to work on their own, but be ready to provide suggestions or an extra set of hands when they need support. Let them experiment and struggle with challenges, but intervene if their feelings of frustration, confusion, tiredness or anger become unmanageable. Help them to manage their expectations when they try something ambitious, and encourage them to use disappointment and failure as a chance to practice coping skills and patience.

Support adolescents by setting limits and taking preventive action when their safety is threatened.

Recognise when adolescents explore topics in their group in a way that could put them at risk, and be ready to intervene gently. For example, it may not be safe for adolescents discuss sensitive political or religious issues, and revealing very personal or painful information could leave them (or other adolescents) feeling distressed. As they experiment and explore, watch for warning signs that they may be about to do something that could result in harm to themselves or others. If so, step in and stop them. If they have been harmed, connect them with the support and services they need.

Work with adolescents so that they create structure and support for each other. Help them to create rules for sharing ideas and feedback in positive ways, and to treat each other with respect. Encourage adolescents to listen and learn from each other, and to welcome others with different backgrounds and interests. Practice and respect their rules when working with them.

- ▶ Schedule sessions at consistent times and follow a predictable sequence of activities - e.g. start and end sessions with a particular ritual such as a song or a dance.
- ▶ Guide activities and discussions in a structured way rather than leaving them too open-ended, as this can make sessions difficult to manage and pose risks to adolescents.
- ▶ Provide support for girls and boys when they need it, and help them to avoid becoming overwhelmed or too discouraged when things don't work out.
- ▶ Set boundaries for adolescents and protect them from harming themselves or others
- ▶ Help adolescents to develop rules for working together that set limits for behaviour and encourage respect and tolerance
- ▶ Recognise when you need support and ask for it.

3. Listen to adolescents

To work successfully with adolescents you need to listen to them. Make sure that you take time to learn about adolescents' lives, to explore their ideas for working together, and give them space to express themselves.

Adolescents know better than anyone else about their needs, interests and challenges. Work with them to design interventions that they find interesting and helpful, and enlist their support in reaching out to other girls and boys. Allow them to set their own goals, to propose new activities and listen to their suggestions for

improving your work together.

Encourage adolescents to express themselves in different ways, through drawing, writing, role-playing, dancing, music and humour, so that you can learn what the world looks like through their eyes. Let them to talk about issues that matter to them, (even when they raise uncomfortable topics), but also pay attention to what they say through nonverbal communication – with their faces, silences, energy and behaviour. Bear in mind that adolescents may be preoccupied with issues or concerns in their lives, and may not always be able to focus on activities.

Find different ways to communicate and connect with different groups of adolescents, such as girls, boys, or younger and older age groups. Allow them to speak openly about their lives and to describe their relationships, interests and challenges. Give them space to talk about difficult experiences and to express emotions such as sorrow and anger if they want to – however never push them to share painful experiences. Wait for adolescents to raise difficult topics themselves, and respect their decisions about what they want to share.

Respect cultural norms for how girls and boys are supposed to express feelings and emotions, or exchange personal information - for example crying, eye contact or physical contact may be encouraged or discouraged, or certain topics may be very sensitive. Don't ever force anyone to communicate in ways that make them feel uncomfortable or ashamed.

Listen to adolescents. Ask questions. Listen to their responses. Use this information to work together in ways that meet girls and boys needs and allow them to connect and grow.

- ▶ Take time to talk with adolescents about their interests, concerns, hopes and goals.
- ▶ Involve adolescents in all aspects of planning and managing your intervention, and listen to their ideas for improving your work together.
- ▶ Don't lecture, preach or dominate the talking during sessions
- ▶ Use culturally appropriate body language and eye contact
- ▶ Pay attention to the way adolescents express themselves verbally and non-verbally.
- ▶ Give girls and boys space to talk openly about positive and negative issues in their lives, but don't push them to share painful experiences or feelings if they don't want to.

- ▶ Be aware of any barriers that might prevent adolescents from speaking comfortably or openly – for example they may not want to discuss certain issues in front of their parents, or girls may not want to speak in front of male facilitators.



4 Let adolescents take the lead

Adolescents can and do take a lead in their lives - they make decisions that shape their paths, and take active roles in their families and communities. Don't underestimate them! As you work with girls and boys, let them take the lead and encourage them to try new roles and responsibilities.

Adolescents are capable of doing things for themselves, and taking charge of their lives. During your time together, give them opportunities to try out different tasks such as facilitating activities, managing supplies, inventing tools and reaching out to other vulnerable girls and boys. Allow them to use their own initiative to come up with creative ways to work together, and let them step in and take over different roles if they feel ready.

Take into account that some girls and boys may be ready for bigger responsibilities than others. For example, older girls and boys, who already have adult roles in their families and communities, may be interested in trying out jobs that are typically carried out by adult volunteers or even programme staff - such as facilitation, planning or monitoring. Give them opportunities to run sessions and let them come up with their own ideas for supporting your work together.

If adolescents don't want to take on more difficult tasks, don't force them to. In particular, younger girls and boys, and those coping with difficult experiences may not feel ready for roles with high levels of responsibility. Instead, find simpler, smaller-scale ways for them to take the lead when they feel ready.

Giving adolescents the lead means stepping back when

they step in. Stand by, offer suggestions and provide support if needed. But be prepared for adolescents to surprise you with their ability to do things for themselves.

Give adolescents space to take the lead in different tasks and roles including taking care of supplies, planning activities, facilitating sessions, leading warm-up or energizer exercises, taking charge of younger groups, and managing activity spaces.

- ▶ Encourage adolescents to suggest ways that they could take the lead, and to decide when they are ready to move on to another Adolescent Phase
- ▶ Don't force girls and boys to take on tasks or roles that they aren't ready for or don't feel comfortable with.
- ▶ Let adolescents take the lead, however be ready to step-in with support and encouragement when they need it.



5. Include all adolescents

It is important to welcome all adolescents with support. Take steps to include girls and boys from all walks of life in your intervention, and adapt activities so that everyone has the chance to participate equally, learn from each other and feel part of the group.

Inclusion starts with reaching out to all adolescents. Strive to invite adolescents of all genders, age, ethnic groups, language, sexual orientation, religion, and those with disabilities. Include adolescents regardless of what they do outside of programme activities, or what they have experienced in the past. Never exclude or discriminate against adolescents on the basis of their identity, experience or background.

Some programmes may target specific adolescents such as younger/older girls/ boys, or marginalized groups with particular interests and needs. However, it is important not to reinforce divisions between adolescents or strengthen traditional roles that create

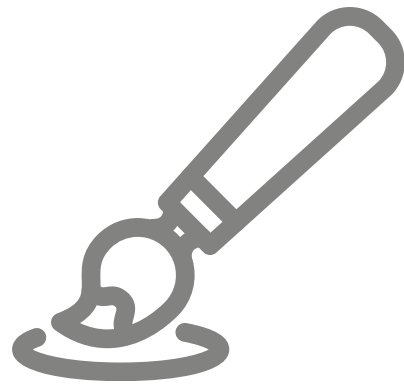
inequalities (i.e. between girls and boys). Instead, create opportunities for adolescents who are different to learn about each other and work together.

Focus on activities that allow adolescents to share and celebrate their different backgrounds, abilities and cultures, and to overcome stereotypes and prejudices. Bring together participants with and without disabilities, adolescents from host and refugee communities and girls and boys with different religions, cultural or ethnic backgrounds. However, be aware that in some cases it may be difficult or inappropriate for certain adolescents to work together, for example if they belong to rival conflict groups. Remember to always be sensitive to cultural, social and conflict dynamics in your particular community, so that you don't cause any inadvertent harm to adolescents.

Make sure that all adolescents are equally included in programme activities. Vary activities so that adolescents with different skills have a chance to experience challenges and show their talents. Adapt others so that adolescents with different abilities can be fully involved, and no one has to watch from the sidelines (unless they want to). Try to create an environment where everyone is able to join in on an equal footing.

Work with adolescents to create group agreements so that everyone has a chance to speak, try different activities and shape decisions. Most importantly, work with adolescents to respect and include each other, so that everyone feels comfortable and valued in their group.

- ▶ Encourage adolescents to share and celebrate their different background and cultures.
- ▶ Plan a mix of energetic/restful, creative/problem solving and other activities so that everyone gets to do something they enjoy or are good at.
- ▶ Let adolescents participate in their own way, even if they simply choose to sit on the sidelines. Keep welcoming and encouraging them, and remember that they may be benefiting from sessions in ways that aren't obvious.
- ▶ Find ways to adapt activities for adolescents who may be less literate, have disabilities or be shy about participating
- ▶ Support adolescents to set rules for working together that give everyone a voice in making decisions, participating in activities and to feel part of the group.



6. Make space for expression and creativity

All adolescents need opportunities to express themselves and to explore their creativity, particularly during times of crisis. Create space for girls and boys to experiment with new ways of communicating their thoughts and feelings, and to use their imagination through different arts and activities.

There are lots of ways to encourage adolescents to express themselves creatively. Show them different ways to communicate through speaking, singing, dancing, writing, drawing, drama and building. Connect them with cultural traditions from their communities and expose them to new ones. Give them opportunities to make things, and allow them to be playful and experimental as they express themselves through language, music and art projects.

Let adolescents enjoy creativity for its own sake. Don't push them to do things the right way, especially when they are working on creative projects, or always direct their ideas toward projects that are practical or helpful. Help them to set attainable goals, but let them imagine worlds beyond what seems possible, through drama, drawing, storytelling, and other forms of expression.

Girls and boys need space to wonder and to explore new ideas so that they can learn and engage positively with the world. This can be particularly helpful for adolescents who are coping with difficult experiences, and need a break from thinking about them. Give them time to feel relaxed and free, and to enjoy their imagination and creativity.

- ▶ Give adolescents time and space to practice, experience and play
- ▶ Provide adolescents with opportunities to express themselves creatively through speaking, singing, dancing, writing, drawing, drama and building
- ▶ Build in some flexibility to your sessions so that adolescents can spend time on ideas, activities or

projects that capture their imagination.

- ▶ Encourage girls and boys to connect with cultural traditions and rituals, and expose them to new ones.



7. Challenge and encourage adolescents

Adolescents can surprise you with their ability to take on demanding and complex tasks.

Challenge them throughout your work together and support them in experimenting with solutions.

Adolescents need new challenges to stretch their minds and keep them interested. Present them with different challenges throughout their activities, and support them to come up with their own ways of meeting them. Support them take on new roles and responsibilities, and to take the lead in activities when they feel ready.

Experimenting is an important part of managing challenges. Give adolescents space to brainstorm, debate solutions and try out different strategies to achieve goals. Remember that experimenting means that they won't always achieve their goal on the first attempt. When things don't go as adolescents hoped, remind them to think about what they learned, rather than to focus on feeling that they have failed.

Encourage adolescents as much as possible. Notice when they learn something new or do something well and make sure that they recognize their achievements. Acknowledge their efforts, even when they don't do something perfectly, and praise them for their courage and persistence in facing challenges.

Challenging and experimenting should always be balanced by structure and support. Don't frustrate adolescents by letting them take on challenges that are too ambitious for the time and resources they have available. Help them to experiment with the same ideas on a more manageable scale and encourage them to keep trying new ways to solve problems and

find solutions.

- ▶ Find challenging tasks that appeal to adolescents' different areas of interest and ability
- ▶ Give adolescents space to experiment with different challenges and activities
- ▶ Allow adolescents to make mistakes, and even to fail and give up (or to take a break), but encourage them to learn from their experiences and to move on.
- ▶ Avoid giving adolescents challenges that they may find too overwhelming, or which could leave them feeling very discouraged or frustrated, and step in with support if necessary.

8. Improvise and adapt

You will need to continuously improvise and adapt activities as you work with adolescents. Take time to understand what adolescents want and need from your time together, and be ready to do things differently.

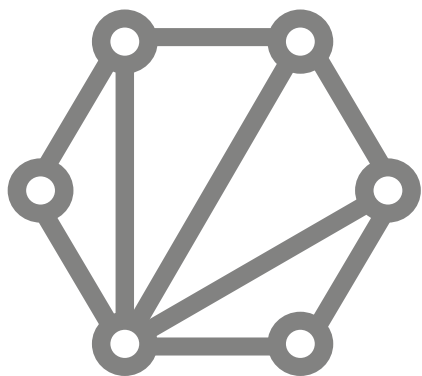
It is important to listen to and observe adolescents closely as you work together. Change or modify activities if they seem bored, confused, or frustrated, and listen to their suggestions for how things could be done differently. Adapting can also mean doing more of what is working. Pay attention when adolescents enjoy certain kinds of activities, or want more time to work on things that interest them.

Bear in mind that adolescents are not all the same (their age, abilities, gender and other factors will affect the degree to which they can participate) and adapt sessions so that everyone has a chance to get involved in activities and decisions. Group adolescents together by age, developmental level, gender, or interests, (if this makes sense in your context), and adapt activities to meet their needs. As they grow, find new ways to challenge them and build on their skills, and improvise with new approaches to stimulate their curiosity and creativity.

Improvise and be flexible! Take an activity in a different direction or try a new type of game, exercise, or arts activity. Better yet, brainstorm with the adolescents, and see what ideas they come up with. Use the Ten Key Approaches, but don't be confined by them, and let improvising be a way to create new connections and discoveries.

- ▶ Observe and consult with adolescents as you work together, and adapt activities to meet their interests and priorities.

- ▶ Tailor activities to adolescents' age, gender and abilities. For example if adolescents have low levels of literacy, focus on music, drama and other non-text activities; and modify activities for different age groups so that they are shorter, longer or more/less complex.
- ▶ Adapt activities to meet new contexts, such as welcoming new girls and boys, saying goodbye to departing participants, or responding to events such as birthdays, changes in the humanitarian situation or anything else that matters to adolescents.
- ▶ Be ready to improvise, try new activities and listen to adolescents' suggestions for working and having fun together.



9. Build connections

Feeling connected to friends, family, community and the world around them is essential for adolescents' wellbeing. Help adolescents to build these connections as you work together.

Give adolescents a chance to get to know each other. Let them become friends and feel part of a team. Allow close friendships to emerge naturally, and support everyone in feeling connected and working well together. Encourage them to include other girls and boys in their programme activities, and to welcome everyone.

Encourage adolescents to use their growing skills in communication and teamwork to build better relationships with friends, family members, and other community members. Check in with them to see how these relationships are developing.

Help adolescents to connect with the resources and opportunities around them. Encourage them to look for materials, space and information that they can use in their projects and activities, and to connect with community members who have knowledge and skills

they can share, such as expertise in the arts or cultural traditions. Help adolescents to advocate for resources from people who can lend them space or materials, and to collaborate with managers, steering committees and organizations. Connecting also means preparing adults to listen to adolescents, be open to their views, and to support their work.

Connect adolescent with services for their essential needs. Make sure they know where and when they can find support, especially food, water, essential supplies, health care, and education opportunities. Learn to recognize those with specific needs, such as adolescents who are separated from their parents, affected by violence and in need of mental health care, and take steps to connect them with the appropriate services.

- ▶ Help adolescents to get to know each other through teambuilding, group projects and fun activities, and let friendships emerge naturally.
- ▶ Reach out to community members who can share valuable skills and knowledge with adolescents, and teach them about their history, heritage and culture.
- ▶ Give adolescents opportunities to collaborate with adults through steering committees, community exhibitions, events and projects
- ▶ Provide adolescents with information about issues that matter to them, and connect them to any services that they may need.



10. Build on the positive

Even in the most difficult circumstances, adolescents have resources and strengths that they can draw on. As you work together, encourage adolescents to focus on the positive aspects of their lives, and try to create a fun and creative atmosphere for working together.

Adolescents may have more skills and strengths than they realise. Help them to recognise the ways that they

contribute to their families and communities, and care for themselves and others around them. Support them to reflect on their abilities and strengths, and to explore ways that they can use their creativity and energy to solve problems, contribute new ideas, and build peaceful communities.

Encourage adolescents to focus on what they do have, rather than what they don't. They have people around them who can support them, resources they can use and opportunities for learning. Set a good example for adolescents by showing them what you can do even when supplies and equipment are limited, and conditions are challenging.

Try to create a positive atmosphere for your work together. Focus on having fun, being creative and taking a break from concerns and stress. Show adolescents that it is possible to have positive experiences even in difficult situations, and that you can still have fun and laugh together. Try out new activities, discuss different ideas, take risks – and most of all enjoy your time together!

Building on the positive does not mean pretending that difficulties don't exist. Adolescents, especially in times of crisis, face very real losses and deprivations that can be

difficult to put aside. If girls and boys want to talk about negative experiences and feelings, let them. Always respect their emotions or moods; don't force them to smile, laugh, or pretend to feel happy when they don't. Instead, let adolescents know that you are there for them, and that you support them.

As much as possible, try to create a welcoming and cheerful space for adolescents to work together, and encourage them to build on the positive aspects of their lives.

- ▶ Help adolescents to recognise, and build on, their strengths and abilities
- ▶ Encourage adolescent to identify the resources they have around them, including people who can help them, materials they can use, and information they can learn from.
- ▶ Create a fun, positive atmosphere for your work together, and try to put your own frustrations and concerns aside
- ▶ Encourage adolescents to play, laugh and to have fun, but respect their emotions and don't force them to act happy when they aren't.
- ▶ Be positive and encouraging, and let adolescents know you are there to support them

Do No Harm

The most important thing to remember as you work with adolescents is to Do No Harm. That means making sure that girls and boys aren't unintentionally harmed by your work together. For example:

- ▶ Pushing adolescents to talk about distressing life experiences, to participate in activities they are uncomfortable with, or to take on roles they don't feel ready for, may upset or embarrass them, and even risk driving them away.
- ▶ Putting adolescents in charge of valuable supplies could put them at risk of theft or anger from their peers if they lose or damage items
- ▶ Organizing mixed gender activities in cultures where adolescent girls and boys are strictly segregated may stigmatize participants and result in punishment by their families or communities
- ▶ Setting up activity spaces in places which are difficult for adolescents to reach could expose them to danger en route (e.g. robbery, mines, assault)
- ▶ Encouraging adolescents to speak up publically about controversial issues in places where there is limited tolerance for free expression could endanger them.

No matter what you do with adolescents, first consider the potential risks involved and make sure you don't expose them to harm.

Don't give up!

Working with adolescents can be challenging. Sometimes it may feel like you aren't making any progress, and that adolescents aren't really benefiting from (or enjoying) your work together. But don't give up! It can take time for adolescents to feel comfortable and to trust you, especially in difficult circumstances.

Be patient. Keep reaching out to adolescent girls and boys, encouraging them to participate in activities, and letting them know you are there for them. Remember that even the most withdrawn, or the most troublesome adolescent may be benefiting from your work in ways that you can't see. Keep showing up, and keep showing them that you care.

Make sure that you recognise when you need support, and ask for it. Work together as facilitators and programme coordinators to help each other, share information about what is or isn't working, and to resolve any problems. Recognise that the work you are doing is challenging, and that asking for support doesn't mean that you have failed. Try to learn from your experiences, and don't be too hard on yourself.

Most of all - try to enjoy your time with adolescents! Put aside your own concerns and difficulties, and keep a sense of humour when things don't go as planned. Take time to connect with adolescent girls and boys, to laugh, have fun and be creative. And - don't forget how much you can learn from adolescents as you work together.

Using the Ten Key Approaches

You will see reminders to use one or more of the Ten Key Approaches as you read through the guidance and tools in the Foundation Guidance, Programme Coordinator's Guidance and the Facilitator's Guidance. This will help you as you manage your intervention with the Adolescent Kit and work with adolescents in their Adolescent Circles.