

Child Friendly Spaces (CFS) In Crisis Situations



The term “Child Friendly Space” is a new term in development and relief settings that seeks to address psychosocial, spiritual and physical needs of children in crisis.

1. What is a CFS?

A CFS is a structured and safe place where children and youth meet other children to play, learn competencies to deal with the risks they face, be involved in some educational activities and relax in a safe place. It gives the children a sense of safety, structure and continuity that provides support amidst overwhelming experiences.

2. Where do you find a CFS?

It can be a school, a community center, a tent(s) or an open space in a camp or in a community. It **MUST** be a place where children feel safe.

3. Why do you need a CFS?

- **Play** – A fun place with sports, team and cultural activities to allow the children to switch off from their worries and concerns.
- **Formal and Informal Education** that is more holistic and less academic.

For example:

- a) Literacy and numeracy
- b) Life skills
- c) Health education in new environments
- d) Psycho-education – learning that each child is having a normal reaction to an abnormal situation.

It is a transition time and place to prepare the children before they re-engage into their formal education system.

- **A place to express and voice their feelings** to help them realize that they are not alone through role-plays, dances, talking and traditional coping activities. Connecting these with local culture is important as it gives rise to and restores positive cultural identity.
- **Learning important information** on what is happening around them helps them regain a sense of control in their lives.
- **Allow parents/caregivers to attend to their daily activities** without worrying for their children’s safety. A place for parents to meet and support one another.
- **Identifying separated children** by registering them and for parents/children to enquire about missing children/siblings.
- **Identifying other vulnerable children** who do not attend the CFS, who are orphans, who have been abused, who have family members who are missing, injured or killed or children with disabilities or have other vulnerabilities.

4. Who comes to a CFS?

It must be accessible and culturally sensitive to all children for example girls, street children, school dropouts, disabled, children under fives etc. In some cultures, boys and girls may need a separate space. Different age groups require different activities.

5. Who works in a CFS?

Generally, they are local volunteers who have been recruited using child protection practices. For example, teachers/community workers, adults who work well with children or with some basic psycho-social or childcare development training.

6. What is the role that CFS's play in helping children profoundly affected by a crisis?

It plays an important role in identifying these children. Staff are enabled to refer these children to specialized services if available.

7. Why this approach?

It is a pragmatic approach as it reaches a large number of children and allows for the integration of local social and cultural practices. It aims at building capacities for coping with grief and loss. It focuses on wellness rather than on ill health. It is important to involve community and religious leaders and local service providers being careful not to romanticize local practices and keeping a critical attitude that promotes the best interests of the child.

