

LEARNING BRIEF

Action Learning from application of the ENGAGE Programme's

FOCUSED CARE SESSIONS TOOL



The '**Focused Care Sessions**' Tool is part of Norwegian Church Aid's (NCA) holistic programme, called **ENGAGE** – *Enhancing Girl's Agency and Gender Equality*, that aims for preventing, mitigating, and responding to child, early and forced marriage (CEFM).

The '**Focused Care Sessions**' Tool was piloted in Somalia and Iraq, with a total of 102 participants engaging in the programme. Groups were formed based on age and marital status, including younger (10 – 14 years), older (15 – 19 years), at imminent risk of CEFM, married, widowed or divorced. To learn about the effectiveness of the tool, the evaluations were conducted with both facilitators and beneficiaries after each of the 7 sessions. Additionally Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were facilitated with the staff and participants at the end of the programme.

Significant findings on how well the tool was working, include:

WHAT WORKED?



ADOLESCENT GIRLS

Adolescent girls reported that their favorite parts of the focused care programme included:

- **Session 1: Getting to Know each Other** – girls met peers from their community who faced similar challenges and were able to feel listened to, comforted and supported.
- **Session 2: Our Wellbeing.** 5 ways to Wellbeing – girls were able to understand how their mind connects to their body, and privately list positive coping mechanisms that they want to introduce in their daily lives. Girls said they “now have increased confidence and more control over their physical and emotional wellbeing”.
- **Session 4: Naming Emotions** – Happiness – girls learnt to identify what makes them happy and how to encourage more happiness in their lives. It was also useful to reflect on different positive moments they had experienced in recent years.
- Favorite warm up activity was Fruit Salad (Session 3) because it was fun and included surprises and Happy Days (Session 4) as girls liked closing their eyes and remembering a time when they were truly happy.
- All sessions were fun, provided useful knowledge and allowed girls to make new friends.
- The programme was specific to individual needs (both for girls at risk of CEFM and already married). Information and skills were easy to relate to and will be beneficial for developing positive coping mechanisms for challenging situations.

NCA staff, who facilitated the piloting of the tool, stated:

- **Session 2: Our Well-Being**, was most beneficial because girls understood that their emotional responses to challenging situations were normal. They came up with practical commitments to improving wellbeing, which was empowering.
- **Session 4: Naming Emotions;** Happiness, because participants learnt how to link happiness and gratitude. Practicing gratitude brought them joy. They also recognised their existing strengths and resources and enjoyed the variety of approaches throughout the session (brainstorm, silent role play and painting).
- The tools were suitable for the specific needs of both girls at imminent risk of CEFM, and girls already married. The sessions equipped them with skills to enhance their wellbeing and resilience.
- It was ideal that the target groups were separated (married and unmarried) as this allowed for discussion specific to those girls' groups. They understood each other's challenges easily, creating a safe and relaxed environment.



NCA STAFF

WHAT CAN BE IMPROVED?



ADOLESCENT
GIRLS

Based on the participated girls' feedback, the only session that was least enjoyable was the last, as girls knew the programme was coming to an end. They reported that they wouldn't change any aspects of the programme (Iraq).

In both Iraq and Somalia, the girls experienced some challenges with the breathing exercise in **Session 7: Understanding stress**, which was difficult to complete. This was a new technique and girls struggled to follow.

The facilitators stated that the **Session 3: Naming Emotions; Sadness**; was beneficial, however brought negative emotions. Some girls became upset and irritable, so a short break was facilitated. Also, **Session 5 (anxiety) and Session 7 (stress)** seemed similar and facilitators suggested that these two could be merged into one session.



NCA STAFF

⚠ NOTE: As the tool was finalised, participants' and facilitators' observations were considered, and further adjustments were done to various sessions, as well as to the activities used in the curriculum, to better serve the participants' needs.

IMPACT



ADOLESCENT GIRLS

- Adolescent girls reported that the sessions helped them deal with challenging situations in their life. This included:
 - ✓ Improving relationships with parents
 - ✓ Reaching peers for support, becoming more social and no longer isolating oneself
 - ✓ Learning how to face concerns of loneliness and isolation.
 - ✓ Feeling empowered to share problems and asking for help. Also standing up for oneself.
- The *Circle Round* at the end of each session encouraged reflection and made girls think about how they would apply each lesson in their life, for example, supporting friends when they are sad. Also, *Circle Round* was a final opportunity to express opinions during the session.
- Family members were encouraging for girls to attend the programme and welcomed the positive change they saw in communication, confidence and attitudes.

“We wished we had such knowledge before marriage. Our life would have been different – much better and we would be making better decisions.” – 16 year old married girl from Somalia.

-
- The sessions provided much needed support to girls who had been married young and forced to drop out of school. They gained skills and knowledge to better manage the daily challenges they face.
 - Girls were able to better discuss their feelings, recognise their strengths and ask for help. Some girls self-advocated to return to school.



NCA STAFF

“At the beginning, two girls were unable to communicate, were unable to concentrate, were stressed and had negative memories of how child marriage had damaged their future. After attending the sessions, they had developed new friendships, started to formulate their ideas for life, started to share their hopes and dreams.”– NCA Facilitator from Iraq.