

Toolbox

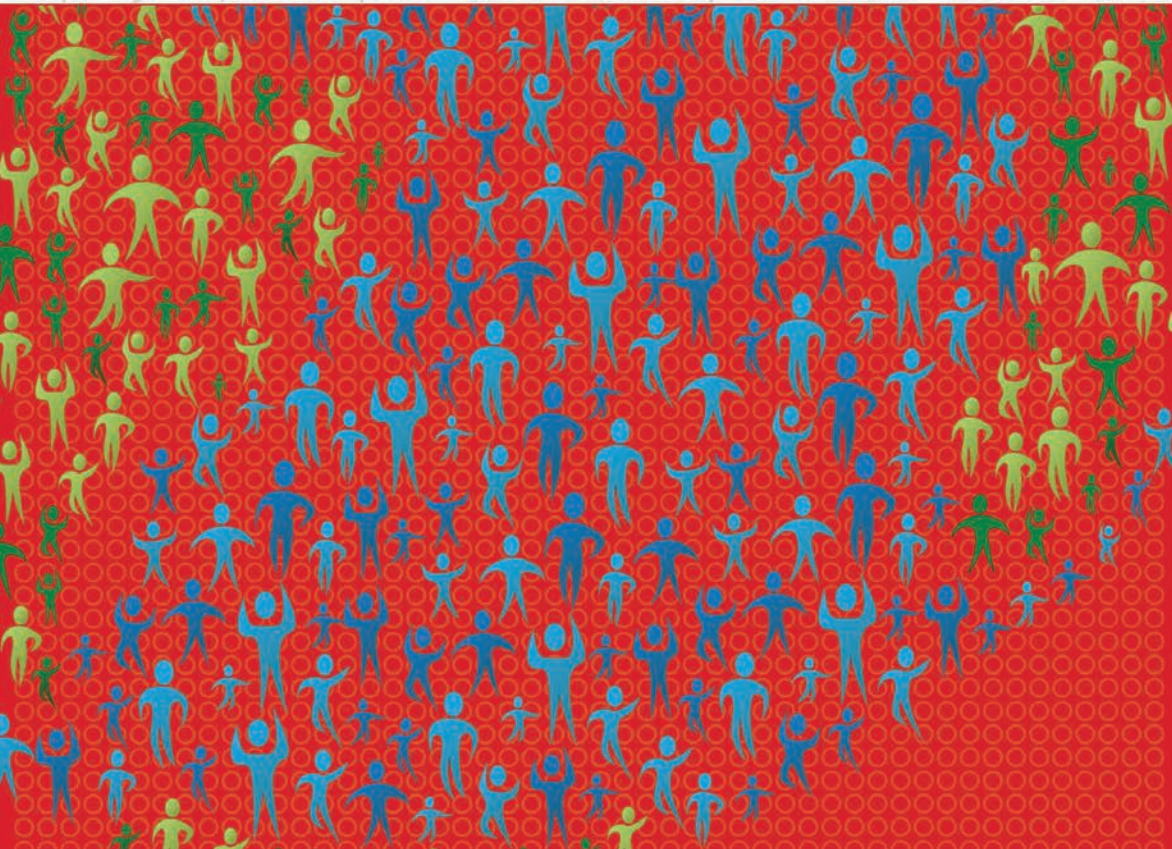
Pedagogical Basis

Protocol for the consular care of
unaccompanied migrant children and adolescents

unicef 
for every child



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MÉXICO



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INTRODUCTION

About the Toolbox

This Toolbox is a complementary support document for users of the Consular **protocol for the care of unaccompanied migrant children** developed jointly by the General Directorate for the Protection of Mexicans Abroad of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Country Office in Mexico of the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF). The Protocol has been structured based on the “inquire by informing” technique, which looks at building trust between the interviewer and the interviewed children and adolescents, so as not to depersonalize them. The Toolbox takes the same approach and is an instrument to apply the Protocol.

This Toolbox is an instrument primarily oriented towards practice, as well as strengthening the processes for specialized care taking a differentiated approach, considering the children’s and adolescents’ age and degree of development. The basic concept is to provide a quick consultation document with key information, so that the staff of Mexico’s consular network may undertake an initial evaluation of the unaccompanied migrant children and adolescents with whom it deals. The approach considers the psycho-emotional characteristics of childhood and adolescence (according to their age and including a gender approach), seeking to guarantee their rights at all times, and having the best interest of the child as the framework of action in all cases. In addition, techniques supporting the toolbox are designed to lay the foundations of an “emotional rescue” of the children concerned.

The Toolbox is made up of themes and specific topics presented in a straightforward manner to explain the key issues (psycho-pedagogical basis) and to indicate the right that each action is intended to protect (legal basis). At the end of the document, images are provided that can be used or reproduced in support of the themes, so that the interviewed children or adolescents may share their story more effectively. The themes are grouped into sections which indicate to which parts of the Protocol these are particularly relevant; in many cases, the step in question is referenced in the Protocol itself.

It is important to remember, that both the Protocol and the Toolbox are designed to help the consular authorities to fulfill, in the best possible way, the critical function of providing elements to determine the protection needs of children and adolescents within the framework of the initial interview, in order to identify special protection needs. The purpose of the comprehensive model for taking care of children and adolescents abroad, of which the Protocol and its toolbox form part, is to assure the well-being of children and adolescents involved.

STEP 1

Observe the general conditions

Stage 1. Prior to the interaction with the girl, boy or adolescent



The need for specialized care

Step 1. Observe the general conditions

• General conditions

Children and adolescents think and handle emotions differently from adults. This is determined by their stage of development and by the tools they have at each stage of their development. Their way of reasoning, of controlling emotions and of reacting when faced with authority, will generally be out of their control.

It is the task of adults interacting with them to *learn and adapt to their characteristics* and not the other way around. Only specialized care¹ can ensure actions suited to the needs of unaccompanied migrant children and adolescents. This is supported by the concrete and tangible facts of the psychological reality of childhood.²

Understanding the needs of a girl, boy or adolescent at the different stages of their growth and development is essential to provide her or him with the proper support. It is the basis of ensuring that the best interests of the child or adolescent will be identified and considered.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO KNOW THIS?

All the steps proposed in the Protocol rely on the particular characteristics of human development during childhood and adolescence.

This means that the consular staff can assure that, by following the protocol's proposals, they will match their actions to the needs and rights of the child or adolescent they will interview.

The reverse side of specialized action by the authority when it interacts with children and adolescents is re-victimization or secondary victimization. This happens when the violation of their rights in a given situation is aggravated by the effects of the start of institutional actions. If these actions are taken without adequate parameters, far from helping and protecting, they work against the children and adolescents. Instead, this may have negative effects on their emotional development and stability.

1. See: Crown Prosecution Service. *Achieving best evidence in criminal proceedings. Guidance for vulnerable or intimidated witnesses including children*. England. Government Department Vol. I, 2001. Echeburua, R. and C. Guerricaechevarria. *Sexual Abuse in Childhood: Victims and Agressors*, Spain: Ariel, 2000. Lamb, M. et al., *Protocolo del NICHD para las entrevistas en la Investigación de Víctimas de Abuso sexual en menores de edad*, NICHD, 2000.

2. See Papalia. D et al. *Human Development*. Mexico DF., McGraw-Hill Interamericana Editores. 2010.

The need for specialized care

Step 1. Observe the general conditions

- General conditions

The Inter-American Court of Human Rights, in its Advisory Opinion 17, indicated that the conditions wherein children and adolescents participate in a process are not like those applying to adults. The Court stated that if authorities held an opposite view, it would be tantamount to ignoring the particular characteristics of children and adolescents, as well as the reality that characterizes them. Such a situation could lead to the failure to take special measures for their protection, which would undoubtedly cause them serious harm. In its Advisory Opinion, the Court also indicated that it is the duty of States and their authorities, to recognize and respect the different treatment appropriate for different situations of those participating in a procedure of any kind or nature.

Inter-American Court of Human Rights. Juridical Condition and Human Rights of the Child. General Comment OC-17/02 of August 28, 2002. Series A No. 17, para. 96.

For its part, the Committee on the Rights of the Child has mentioned that “For the exercise of their rights, young children have particular requirements for physical nurturance, emotional care and sensitive guidance, as well as for time and space for social play, exploration and learning. These requirements can best be planned for within a framework of laws, policies and programmes for early childhood” care – for example, starting with the application of an independent and specific supervision plan for children and adolescents.

Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 7, Implementing child rights in early childhood, CRC/C/GC/7, September 20, 2006, paragraph 5.

Structural differences between childhood, adolescence and adulthood

Step 1. Observe the general conditions

- General conditions

Children and adolescents are not little adults who lack information or learning. They are developing persons, qualitatively different from adults. Their mode of thought is different and characterized by concrete and egocentric thought during most of adolescence.

The management and impact of emotions are characterized by the predominance of emotions over reason. They cannot fully control their emotions and this has consequences for the way they think and act. During childhood, they tend to be complaisant with adults and become distressed if they perceive they cannot “satisfy” them. During adolescence, they tend to defy authority to make themselves different.

The difference between adults, children and adolescents being structural, means that it is determined by their stage of development. The child or adolescent acts, thinks and feels in the only way she or he can, with the tools she or he has, and cannot change those mechanisms through willpower, concentration or effort.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO KNOW THIS?

These characteristics translate into realities that, from the adult point of view, may not be understandable or even be interpreted wrongly, with serious consequences for childhood and adolescence.

Although it is possible to take well-intended and “coherent” actions from the adult perspective of reality, without an adequate lens to understand children’s and adolescents’ behaviour, such actions may have negative consequences for the care of children and adolescents in a crisis situation.

Structural difference between childhood, adolescence and adulthood

Step 1. Observe the general conditions

• General conditions

According to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, children differ from adults both in their physical and psychological development and in their emotional and educational needs. In the Committee's opinion, it is precisely these and other differences that justify the need for specialized systems for the care and differentiated treatment of children and adolescents. Throughout its general comments, the Committee reiterates that States and their authorities need to adopt a positive and comprehensive approach to the rights of childhood. In particular, it emphasizes the need to abandon traditional visions and beliefs that regard childhood as a period of socialization of an immature human being, wherein she/he advances toward the condition of a mature adult.

Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 10, Children's rights in juvenile justice, CRC/C/GC/10, April 25, 2007, paragraph 10.

Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 7, Implementing child rights in early childhood, CRC/C/GC/7, September 20, 2006, paragraph 5.

Both the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the Committee on the Rights of the Child consider that the best interests of children and adolescents implies, among other things, that the analysis of each case be made on an individual basis, as it should not be overlooked that each child and adolescent has different needs. This specific analysis must be accompanied by listening to the opinion of the child or adolescent, depending on the level of development of their personality, as well as the opinion of their father, mother, guardian and/or representatives or next of kin.

Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 12. The right of the child to be heard. CRC/C/GC/12. July 20, 2009, paragraphs 29 and 59.

International Commission on Human Rights. Juvenile Justice and Human Rights in the Americas, OAS/Ser.L/V/II, July 13, 2011.

What is concrete thought?

Step 1. Observe the general conditions

- Preparation for the interview

Jean Piaget, an expert in child development, calls the thought of human beings at the start of her or his life, as “sensory-motor”. All of the baby’s knowledge derives from her or his direct experiences with objects (manipulation for example) and from information received through the senses, including perception of motion, temperature, balance and body posture, reflexes, etc. The child’s mental reality at this stage has no ideas/concepts, but images, sensations and body memory. These experiences are the “building blocks” on which thought is built, and from there it is understood why thought is concrete during childhood: it is made up of experiences, specific sensations, learned and memorized actions, etc.

Every child’s thought and reasoning is anchored in what she or he sees and manipulates directly (that is why it is called concrete). The child cannot reason through abstract ideas; she or he needs concrete, perceptible, manipulable³ references or information already learned in previous experiences.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO KNOW THIS?

We, as adults, easily make the mistake of asking a child to think abstractly, but that is outside her or his possibilities.

A very useful example is the frequency with which we ask children the question, “Why...?”

These questions are inadequate for children because they are asked to make abstractions and to understand causalities.

What the child perceives directly has more weight in the reasoning and the conclusion than objective logic. Guided by what impacts her or his perception, the child can arrive at conclusions which are “incoherent” from the adult logic.

During childhood, intuition (information closer to the senses) and emotions, normally guide thought more than logic.⁴ Children will always reason in relation to their own experiences and learning (the information they already have) and whatever they can perceive directly.

3. See Idem and Piaget, Jean. *Six psychological studies*. 1964.

4. The child's reasoning in this stage is usually understood by observing the way in which they solve the problem “what is heavier, a kilogram of lead or a kilogram of feathers?”. The child will answer that the feathers because what he/she perceives more easily is the size, when having both objects in front of her or him, is that the greater the size, the heavier the weight.

What is concrete thought?

Step 1. Observe the general conditions

- Preparation for the interview

The fact that children and adolescents have concrete thought implies that their reasoning, deduction and problem solving are necessarily subject to what is concrete – that is, to their own experiences. This means that they cannot make any abstractions or handle abstract variables mentally.

Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation, Action Protocol for Judges in cases involving children and adolescents, Mexico, pg. 28.

By recognizing the type of thought that characterizes children and adolescents, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has stated that full assurance of the right of participation of childhood demands their recognition and respect of non-verbal forms of communication, such as play, bodily and facial expression and drawing and painting. That is how very young children show their capacity to understand, choose and have preferences. Specifically, in relation to concrete thought, the Committee mentions that, given the very characteristics associated with the physical and mental development of children and adolescents, they may not necessarily have exhaustive and detailed knowledge of all aspects affecting them, but sufficient understanding to be able to adequately form their own judgment on the issue.

That is precisely why authorities should assess the capacity of children and adolescents to form an autonomous opinion to the largest extent possible. This means no authority can start with the assumption that a child is incapable of expressing her or his own views. On the contrary, States should presume that a child has the capacity to form her or his own views and recognize that she or he has the right to express them; it is not up to the child to first prove her or his capacity.

Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 12, The right of the child to be heard. CRC/C/ GC/12. July 20, 2009, paragraph 20.

What is egocentric thought?

Step 1. Observe the general conditions

• Preparation for the Interview

Another characteristic of childhood thought is egocentrism.⁵ This term does not allude to egoism, although these are often confused. It means that, since all information contained in the mind of a child is her or his own lived sensory experiences (what she or he saw, felt, touched, etc.), these are the elements with which the child thinks and reasons.

It is only possible for the child to draw conclusions and to think centred on her or himself. It is structurally impossible for the child to do otherwise (in an objective manner independent of her or himself, without being influenced by emotions, as would a scientist). For example, if she or he is scared about something, the child will hardly hear an instruction or respond to a question. If the child is consumed by restlessness and cannot tolerate frustration at not getting something, she or he may hardly pay attention at that moment.

Egocentrism makes it impossible for them to think from another person's point of view. The centre of reference is always her or himself; she or he will always process information (about her or himself/or about reality) by linking external events to subjective events.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO KNOW THIS?

Egocentrism results in a tendency to feel guilty or responsible for any situation where she or he is implicated.

Since she or he cannot draw conclusions in an objective manner, the explanation of what is going on is centred on something she or he did or failed to do.

The emotion she or he is feeling will guide the conclusion about what is going on. For example, if she or he is afraid, sees security guards and assumes they are the police, she or he will conclude that she or he is there because she or he will be taken to jail. Children need to receive explicit and concrete information to avoid misunderstandings.

5. See Papalia, D. et al. op. cit.

What is egocentric thought?

Step 1. Observe the general conditions

• Preparation for the Interview

Egocentric thought is a mechanism whereby children process information about themselves or about reality linking external events with subjective events. In this type of thought, the centre of reference is always the children themselves, that is, their own experiences constitute the bulk of information on which a child builds reality.

Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation, Action Protocol for Judges in Cases involving children and adolescents, Mexico, pg. 28.

In the opinion of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, egocentric thought is related to allowing children and adolescents to express their ideas and opinions freely. In particular, that children and adolescents can express themselves freely is a notion intrinsically linked to the personal perspective of each one of them. In other words, and observing egocentric thought from the point of view of rights, it translates into the right of every child to express her or his own opinions and not the opinions of others. This is precisely because the concept of children as subjects of rights is firmly rooted in the everyday life they lead from the early stages and throughout their development.

Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 12. The right of the child to be heard. CRC/C/ GC/12. July 20, 2009, paragraphs 28, 29, 30 and 31.

Suggested techniques for children younger than 10 years old

Step 1. Observe the general conditions

• Preparation for the interview

The younger the child, the less she or he will have the ability to communicate information verbally, and the less capacity to control the fear and anxiety she or he might be feeling, overcome it and converse with an adult that she or he does not know. It is essential to have concrete materials that they can manipulate to show (instead of explaining) what is happening to them. Having playdough and drawing or writing materials can be useful to allow the child to express her or himself. These can be used to mark the dots on the map, as indicated in the Protocol. Manipulating playdough allows the young child to channel her or his anxiety while the interview is underway and minimizes the appearance of defense mechanisms. Likewise, having objects that can be manipulated to carry out the steps in the Protocol is also advisable with young children. Instead of little figures to stick or mark on the map, these could be small figures (dragons or monsters, happy figures, sad figures, figures representing the family, etc.).

With small children, the steps of the Protocol can be developed referring to the story of “a character”, placed on the map instead of alluding directly to the child. Whatever the child tells about “the story of the character” will be related to what she or he has lived in reality. Talking about a third person allows her or him to minimize anxiety, but will convey her or his life experiences. If the story includes situations of pain and fear, the consular officer may assume that the child has been the victim of some type of violence. Following the same logic, with young children showing difficulty to talk, it may be useful to read or make up a story about “a child” who left home and travelled, before “building your story” directly as presented in the Protocol. The story will follow the steps set out in the Protocol: how the child in the story made the decision to travel, who did she or he do it with, what happened later, where were they going, where were the parents, did something awful happen on the way, the best part of the trip, etc.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO KNOW THIS?

While applying any of the techniques, the consular officer must record the behaviour of the child: in which moments does she or he move a lot and show anxiety, in which parts is she or he especially interested, in which did she or he try to change the subject (perhaps because it caused her or him anxiety), etc. It is possible that the child may tell her or his experiences at some point in the story. At that point, the consular officer may “connect” with the direct story of the child through a triggering question such as: “Many children I have talked to had similar experiences; did something like this ever happen to you?” After this, the consular officer will propose building a story like the one read by the child, and start the steps with the map proposed in the Protocol to build that story.

Proposed techniques for children younger than 10 years old

Step 1. Observe the general conditions

• Preparation for the interview

Authorities must see that children who have experienced neglect, exploitation, abuse, or any other forms of violence are entitled to help with recovery and reintegration. Children's experiences and knowledge, including those which are painful and damaging, can be communicated through play or artistic expression. Opportunities to exercise the rights to play and to recreational activities provide a valuable means through which they can express traumatic or difficult life experiences in order to make sense of their past and cope better with their future. It enables them to communicate, better understand their own feelings and thoughts, prevent or resolve psychosocial challenges, learn to manage relationships and conflicts through a natural, self-guided, self-healing process.

Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 17. The right of the child to rest, leisure, play, recreational activities, cultural life and the arts (art. 31), CRC/C/GC/12, April 17, 2013, paragraph 31.

Young children are extremely sensitive to their environment and very quickly understand the people, places and routines which are part of their lives, in addition to gaining awareness about their own and unique identity. They can make choices and communicate their feelings, ideas and wishes in multiple ways, long before they can communicate through the conventions of spoken or written language. For that reason, the Committee recognizes that in order to achieve the right to participation, it is essential that adults take an approach centred on the child, listen to the young children and respect their dignity and their individual points of view. Also, it is necessary for adults to display patience and creativity, adapting their expectations to the young children's interests, to their levels of understanding and preferred forms of communication.

Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 7, Implementing child rights in early childhood, CRC/C/GC/7, paragraph 14.

STEP 2

Determine the place and duration of the interview

Stage 1. Prior to the interaction with the child or adolescent



How does a child or adolescent control emotions?

Step 2. Determine the place and duration of the interview

• Definition of the appropriate space

Studies show that at two years of age, children are capable of expressing the whole range of emotions that human beings possess, but they do not know how to control them. They cannot even put a name to those emotions, or differentiate one emotion from another. Consequently, emotions completely “invade” the experience of children and adolescents, predominating over reason.⁶

Children and adolescents also have few cognitive tools. Adults are able to observe, analyse situations objectively and calm the children down, using their “judgment”. The child or adolescent, in contrast, is completely exposed to sensory impressions provoked by emotions, without the possibility of controlling them by her or himself.

A child or adolescent cannot consider and analyse the general scenario, recognize her or his emotions (anger, fear, distrust, anxiety, pleasure, etc.), assess the diverse ways of expressing them or indeed, foresee the consequences of such expressions. Much less will she or he be able to choose one emotion, while discarding the others and avoiding them affecting her or his ability to adapt to what the situation requires. Among the typical emotions of childhood, we find emotional lability (sudden mood changes), extreme inhibition or self-assurance, difficulties in self-control, low tolerance to frustration, among others.

The development of fears is a predominant aspect of the psychological and emotional reality of the child and adolescent. Fear of unfamiliar situations and unknown people is common. They will also fear abandonment, mockery, group rejection, the feeling of incompetence, etc.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO KNOW THIS?

No child or adolescent may overcome by her or himself the fear that the interview with an unknown person will cause.

Without previously calming the fear, anxiety and other emotions that surge up in the mind of the child or adolescent, the interview will not be conducted in an adequate or effective manner.

Consular staff will be able to consider and anticipate the presence of the emotions described here during the interview, in order to take specific actions to avoid them altering the interview and affecting the child or adolescent emotionally.

6. See Bowlby, John. *Attachment and Loss*. 2nd ed., New York. Erikson, 1982; and Erik H., *Infancia y Sociedad*, Buenos Aires, Ediciones Horme S.A.E., 1985.

How does a child or adolescent control emotions?

Step 2. Determine the place and duration of the interview

- Definition of the appropriate space

Levels of understanding of children and adolescents are not necessarily linked to their biological age. It has been shown that information, experience, the environment, social and cultural expectations and the level of support, all contribute to the development of their capacity to form opinions and be able to express them. The opinions of children and adolescents must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, whereby the individual and social situation of the person is considered, and always in an atmosphere where she or he feels respected and safe to express her or himself freely.

In this regard, and considering the way that children and adolescents control and express their emotions, the Committee on the Rights of the Child mentions that, in the information-compiling processes, these persons must not be interviewed more often than necessary, especially if the purpose is to obtain information regarding harmful or violent events. It asks States to understand that the process of hearing them may prove difficult and cause traumatic effects in them.

Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 12. The right of the child to be heard. CRC/C/ GC/12. July 20, 2009, paragraphs 42 and 43.

How to set up a space?

Step 2. Determine the place and duration of the interview

• Definition of the adequate space

The space where the interview is done should not have any visible objects that might be frightening for the child or adolescent. In general, it must be properly lit, somewhere that instils trust without being overstimulating. For that reason, it is not advisable to fill the space with toys that will later be used as distractors.

For the interaction with the child or adolescent, it is advisable not to put a desk between her or him and the adult. This adds formality and unleashes fears and responses to the authority that make dialogue more difficult. In order to use the map and/or suggest activities with drawings or playdough it is recommended to use a table or desk, but having the consular representative sitting beside the child or adolescent, instead of in front of them with the desk in between.

If the available space is not completely suitable to ensure that the child or adolescent does not see situations that might scare her or him, it will be necessary to put together strategies and arrange the furniture in such a way as to control the outlook during the interview. This could be, for example, placing a desk close to a wall with the child or adolescent and the consular staff member facing the wall.

Other present elements, could be used to block the view of the child or adolescent: piles of paper or folders could make an improvised cubicle that encourages paying attention to the person conducting the interview and to the map.

How to set up a space?

Step 2. Determine the place and duration of the interview

- Definition of the time required

According to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, “The context in which a child exercises her or his right to be heard has to be enabling and encouraging, so that the child can be sure that the adult who is responsible for the hearing is willing to listen and seriously consider what the child has decided to communicate. The person who will hear the views of the child can be an adult involved in the matters affecting the child (e.g. a teacher, social worker or caregiver), a decision maker in an institution (e.g. a director, administrator or judge), or a specialist (e.g. a psychologist or physician).”

Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 12. The right of the child to be heard. CRC/C/ GC/12. July 20, 2009, paragraph 42.

What are the psychological defense mechanisms?

Step 2. Determine the place and duration of the interview

• Definition of the time required

As unfiltered emotions flood the psychological reality of the child or adolescent, she or he easily interprets situations as threatening, and the perception of imminent harm is felt as real. As they do not have tools to overcome this by themselves, the impact of anxiety, whenever it approaches high levels that jeopardize their emotional stability, psychological defense mechanisms are triggered, the purpose of which is to reduce these emotions that damage psychic reality. Psychological defense mechanisms are not subject to the will of the child or adolescent. They are triggered subconsciously and he/she cannot stop them by her or himself. Defense mechanisms do the vital work of safeguarding emotional balance during childhood and adolescence. In scenarios such as those lived by unaccompanied migrant children and adolescents, it can be expected that psychological defense mechanisms will appear frequently, both in situations experienced by the child at the time, and in remembering painful experiences in the past.

As they have no resources to control emotions through reason, when a child or adolescent is in a situation that increases their anxiety, mechanisms are triggered to reduce it. These mechanisms are not voluntary (for example to channel anxiety through movement and evasion). The mechanisms that the mind normally uses more frequently are:

- *Dissociation* (the child or adolescent seems to be somewhere else; she or he disconnects from the reality being lived).
- *Avoidance* (becomes silent and nervous or becomes more active to distract her or himself from the painful images, looks away, changes the subject).
- *Denial* (denies partly or wholly, events she or he has lived or perceived because they are so painful that the mind chooses “to pretend these did not happen” as protection against the anxiety these would provoke).
- *Reactive formation* (transforms what she or he is feeling into the opposite, for example, vulnerability into omnipotence; fear into challenge, etc.). Thus, some typical defensive challenging behaviours in adolescents are: “I don’t need you” or “I can do it by myself” (omnipotence) or “you are government” (extreme disqualification so as to perceive her or his weakness and fear).

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO KNOW THIS?

The children interviewed will feel this situation as stressing and will be prone to take refuge in defense mechanisms.

The child or adolescent will not be able to concentrate on what is going on in the interview and the consular staff will be focused on calming them down.

Defense mechanisms modify the responses of a child or adolescent during an interview; therefore, it is essential that levels of anxiety are kept low.

What are the psychological defense mechanisms?

Step 2. Determine the place and duration of the interview

- **Definition of the time required**

The consequences of violence, in the short and long term, as well as of those negative experiences in children and adolescents, are well known. This may give rise to lesions, physical health problems, difficulty in learning; psychological and emotional consequences such as sensations of rejection and abandonment, affective disorders, trauma, fears, anxiety, insecurity and loss of self-esteem; mental health problems such as anxiety and depressive disorders, hallucinations, memory disorders or suicide attempts.

Given that situations of violence and neglect are intrinsically inhibitory, the authorities need to act sensibly, so that interventions for protection do not have the effect of inhibiting children and adolescents even further, but contribute positively to their recovery and reintegration through a carefully facilitated integration. In this regard, the Committee on the Rights of the Child considers that the groups of children and adolescents particularly alienated and/or discriminated -such as migrants- have more difficulty in integrating.

It is essential that the authorities keep contact with children and adolescents in complex situations, to be aware of the risk factors and indicators of all forms of violence, in order to be able to interpret these indicators and to have the knowledge, the will and the capacity necessary to take timely protection measures in an emergency. Likewise, authorities must provide children and adolescents with the largest possible number of opportunities to signal emerging problems before they reach a state of crisis, and allow adults to recognize and act on such problems even if the child does not explicitly ask for help.

Committee on the Rights of the Child. General Comment No. 13: The right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence. CRC/C/GC/13, April 18, 2011, paragraphs 48 and 63.

What are the defense mechanisms in adolescence?

Step 2. Determine the place and duration of the interview

- Definition of the time required

The most frequent defense mechanisms emerging during adolescence are omnipotence and idealism (they think that nothing will happen to them and that they know everything and can do anything, using reasoning which is not totally realistic). These mechanisms are related to the specific type of thought that specialists call “omnipotent magic thought”. The stage of cognitive reasoning, which is not fully functional in reasoning based on critical judgment and objectivity until twenty-three years of age, along with the eruption of strong emotions due to the typical hormonal development of the growth stage, mean that they are hardly able to think calmly, to plan and analyse objectively and then make their own decisions.

Another psycho-emotional reality that occurs during adolescence is that they face the challenge of restructuring their identity. They remain for some time in a complex place where they are not yet adults, but neither are they young children. This creates insecurity, fear, feelings of low worth, loneliness and impotence. Before the appearance of these emotions, which are painful for the psychic apparatus, the unconscious defense mechanisms are triggered “transforming them into the opposite”. So, instead of showing themselves as weak, insecure and in need of much support from adults, adolescents behave in an arrogant manner, thinking they know everything and constantly arguing, they accept no help and openly disqualify adults who want to help.

If they detect this type of behaviour, consular staff have the appropriate information and tools to “defuse” the defense mechanisms that cause the resistance and aggressiveness. Because these are caused by feelings of fear and insecurity, it is necessary to intervene to calm her or him down and feel safe to minimize the defense mechanisms.

What are the defense mechanisms in adolescence?

Step 2. Determine the place and duration of the interview

- Definition of the time required

Capacity to remember depends on the emotional climate in which the experience is produced. A child may register and evoke better and more easily those events she or he associates with pleasure (what she or he learns through play), which in the affective consciousness has been registered as something positive. Accordingly, it may be inferred that the child will hardly recall details of a disturbing situation where she or he was the victim of some crime, where her or his safety, and even her or his very life, was at stake. Consequently, the situation of having to give testimony about the episode that produced such high degrees of tension and sense of victimization will surely trigger the means to control stress in the child's psychological make-up.

In such circumstances, perception, memory and behaviour present particular characteristics, which a trained professional can take into account, in order to handle the interview in an optimal way: it is about psychological defense mechanisms. If the interviewer notes a significant change in the behaviour of the child when the conversation and the questions specifically approach the issue causing distress to the child, he or she should know which defense mechanisms are producing such a change in behaviour and must know how to handle the situation.

Office of the Defendant of Childhood Rights, The Child Victim of Crime before the Criminal Proceeding, Book I of the Collection "El niño víctima del delito", Mexico, 2005, pp. 105 and 106.

Technique to handle the appearance of defense mechanisms during the interview

Step 2. Determine the place and duration of the interview

- Definition of the time required

The appearance of defense mechanisms during the interview with the child or adolescent is explained because the conversation has come close to a memory or situation that generates high levels of anxiety.

Defense mechanisms emerge subconsciously to minimize fear and anxiety. In young children, there are usually attempts to change the subject, keep silent, show restless behaviour, move about and even leave the room, run and jump, etc. In adolescents, challenging, and often openly aggressive behaviours, frequently appear. It is necessary to understand that this behaviour responds to the perception of fragility and impotence they feel and which is transformed “into the opposite” in an attempt to protect themselves.⁷

In order to detect the appearance of a defense mechanism, the consular officer, will consider:

- Abrupt changing of subject and attitude in the child (when touching a particular topic, her or his behaviour changes).
- Appearance of content that might seem absurd.
- Open attempts to avoid or change the subject.
- Evident physical reactions (increased movement, twitching of hands, nervously pulling their clothes, sweating, standing on the chair, trying to leave the room, etc.)

Upon detecting the appearance of the defense mechanisms, consular staff should observe the following guidance:

- It is not advisable to insist with more questions on the issue at that time.
- If the memory of the subject generates high levels of anxiety in the child or adolescent, asking more questions would only further increase the anxiety level.
- Make a note of the topic, the time, question or memory that disturbed the child.
- Talk about a different topic or incorporate material to release tension (drawing or playdough).
- Approach the topic again from a different perspective but never with the same question.

7. See information related to the development and defense mechanisms typical of adolescence.

Technique to handle the appearance of defense mechanisms during the interview

Step 2. Determine the place and duration of the interview

- Definition of the time required

The initial evaluation must take into account not only the child's physical appearance, but also their psychological maturity. Therefore, it must be based on scientific criteria, security and impartiality, taking into account the interest of the child as well as gender considerations, and avoiding any risk of breach of her or his integrity.

Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment, Number 6, Treatment of unaccompanied and separated children outside their country of origin, adopted by the Committee in its resolution CRC/GC/2005/6 during its XXXIX period of sessions, Geneva, Switzerland.

In this sense, it must be remembered that children and adolescents have particular characteristics and needs. Therefore, whoever takes their statement needs to know what these are, and can adapt to the needs of the child or adolescent, in order to avoid re-victimizing her or him and to obtain the relevant information.

The methodology or model of intervention used with the child must comply with the following requirements:

a) It must be based on the characteristics of cognitive, emotional and moral development of the child; b) It must allow the free account by the child as the basis for all investigation with the person; c) It must contemplate the adequate formulation of the questions to clarify the account made by the child; d) It must contemplate the adequate use of support materials for the expression of the child, and e) It must contemplate strategies for the management of tension and stress in the child, as well as the detection and management of psychological defense mechanisms.

Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation, Protocol of actions for justices in cases involving children and adolescents, Mexico, 2014, pg. 63.

Guidelines about justice on issues regarding crime-victim children and witnesses, adopted by the United Nations Economic and Social Council in its resolution E/2005/INF/2/Add 1, number XI, paragraph 31, item c).

Tools for when the child or adolescent keeps silent

Step 2. Determine the place and duration of the interview

• Definition of the time required

In this scenario, it is important to control involuntary reactions that might convey to the child or adolescent that their silence is bothersome or defrauding. The best strategy is usually to retake key messages, such as:

“Every time something happens between an adult and the child it is the responsibility of the adult, and never of the child”; “I know it is difficult to talk about these topics”... “Sometimes it’s easier to write or to draw than to talk” (give them paper and markers... If you want, you may write or draw what is going on; “adults sometimes don’t know that they have to stop doing things which are not acceptable. Sometimes another adult has to show them that they have to stop doing it ; “If something is happening to you, I would like to help, and I need you to tell me if you need any help”.

It might also be useful to change the subject, go back to a conversation about pleasant topics, to return to the subject later. If her or his situation still cannot be verbalized, it is necessary to convey messages about specific situations that she or he might be living: possible threats, blackmail, trapped in the secret and feelings of loyalty towards the adult who attacks her or him (almost always present if it is a significant adult).

“Some of the children I know didn’t get to tell something that made them feel bad, or tell that somebody had done something to them that they did not like because they think that person can harm them, or they love that person very much and don’t want to cause him or her problems”.

This type of message allows the interview to ‘get in tune’ with what the child is experiencing, so that she or he feels understood. It could be helpful in minimizing the child’s anxiety and allow her or him to talk. But even if he/she fails to do so, it is a good idea to repeat messages so that the child takes in the information, as an instrument of emotional rescue. If the child or adolescent continues to be unable to talk, the signs indicating possible victimization will be recorded: silence, resistance to talking about specific issues or persons, behavioural displays of anxiety and fear, etc. A useful technique is to keep a book or folder of the drawings of children that the consular officer has interviewed. Whenever possible, the children interviewed will be asked to draw whatever they want. First tell them:

“I have worked with many other children. Some of them did drawings and I kept them here. You can see them if you wish.” “See what other children drew before you did”... “Some children drew things that scared them. Others drew things they like very much. Others did drawings of themselves. Which do you like best?”... “Look, here, at the end, there is a blank page. You can use if you like. Draw whatever you like.”

If a child cannot speak, it is possible that her or his fear can be minimized if she or he sees something with which she or he identifies. Drawings from other children may generate trust in the consular officer. Keeping the drawings of other children conveys, in addition, the “it is important” message and “what happens to you also happened to other children”, all of which help minimize the fear and frustration they feel.

Group play suggestions for the approach and presentation by consular staff

Step 2. Determine the place and duration of the interview

• Definition of the time required

The child, however, “has the right not to exercise that right. For the child, it is a choice, not an obligation. States parties have to ensure that the child receives all necessary information and advice to make decisions in favour of her or his best interests”.

Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 12. The right of the child to be heard. CRC/C/ GC/12. July 20, 2009, paragraph 16.

In this sense, it is necessary to keep in mind that children and adolescents have particular characteristics and needs. Whoever takes their statement needs to know what these are and adapt to their needs, in order to avoid re-victimizing them and to obtain the necessary information. Cognitive abilities and emotional and moral characteristics are of a structural nature. They are not subject to the will of the person (are not amendable), but are associated with their level of development. The development level of a child and the characteristics that she or he may display at a certain time depend on multiple factors (congenital, neurophysiological, biological, learning, development context, personality, access to adequate education and stimulation, etc.) which mean that a child’s level of development may not correspond to her or his chronological age. Keeping this in mind helps explain some of her or his reactions during the interview.

Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation, Action Protocol for Those Justices in Cases involving Children and adolescents, Mexico, pp. 34 and 35.

The methodology or model of intervention used with the child must comply with the following requirements: a) It must be based on the characteristics of cognitive, emotional and moral development of the child; b) It must allow the free account by the child as the basis for all investigation with/from the same person; c) It must contemplate adequate formulation of the questions to clarify the account given by the child; d) It must contemplate the adequate use of support materials for the expression of the child and e) It must contemplate strategies for the management of tension and stress in the child, as well as the detection and management of psychological defense mechanisms.

Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation, Protocol of actions for justices in cases involving children and adolescents, Mexico, 2014, pg. 63.

Guidelines about justice on issues regarding crime-victim children and witnesses, adopted by the United Nations Economic and Social Council in its resolution E/2005/INF/2/Add 1, number XI, paragraph 31, item c).

Group play suggestions for the approach and presentation of the consular staff

Step 2. Determine the place and duration of the interview

- **Definition of the time required**

Whenever possible, consular staff might conduct the first part of their interview (establish trust, introduce themselves and give basic information about what is expected of the child or adolescent and what is the function of the consular personnel) as a group. The group arrangement can save time (because several children are given the same information simultaneously) and it facilitates building an atmosphere of trust when interacting, not only with one adult, but also with other children who have been through the same situation.

In that case, the consular staff will start with some activity to relax tension and create a playful environment. This can be anything – like riddles, words and gestures, etc. After the fun start, whoever acts as the consular officer will explain his/her role (the same as in the Protocol, but he/she may add to it if considered necessary). To that end, he/she may have the Protocol functions and messages written on cards, and may divide the group into teams with the instruction: “Now I’m going to read a few cards with information about who I am and what I do”. They must try to remember what is read to them. Afterwards, each team will take turns to say one of the things that has been read. If what the child said is correct (it matches what is on the card) she or he keeps it. Every card adds points. The team with the highest number of points when all cards are gone is the winner.

Another play option for presenting information about the consular function, and what is expected of the child or adolescent, is to set up a competition with questions written on small pieces of paper and a monopoly type board or simply any chessboard on which one can advance from the starting square. In order to advance on the board, the team has to correctly answer a question picked at random from the bag with small pieces of paper. If it does not answer correctly, the opposing team has the option to answer it and keep the point. Whoever has more points when a team gets to the finish line is the winner. The consular officer will set questions which are helpful, such as, as a minimum: Does the consul work as a policeman? What is the consul’s job? What does a consul do when he/she meets a child? What is the benefit for a child to know a consul? What is the difference between a consul and a policeman? What is the difference between a consul and the border patrol? What country does the consul work for? What kind of things can a consul get? Can the consul talk on the phone with someone if the child asks him/her to?

In the case of young children, group dynamics help to get them into a trusting mood. Seeing themselves surrounded by other children helps them minimize fear and anxiety. In the case of adolescents, group dynamics, including competitions, are highly motivating and facilitate the transfer of information.

Group play suggestions for the approach and presentation of the consular staff

Step 2. Determine the place and duration of the interview

- **Definition of the time required**

In the case of children, international human rights law imposes on the consular official the obligation to safeguard the interests of the child, in the sense of ensuring that any administrative or judicial decisions adopted by the receiving country has evaluated and taken into consideration the child's best interests.

Owing to the special vulnerability of children who are away from their country of origin and, especially, of those who are unaccompanied or separated, access to communication with consular authorities and to consular assistance becomes a right that has particular relevance and that must be guaranteed and implemented on a priority basis by all States. Especially, because of its possible implications on the process of gathering information and documentation in the country of origin, as well as to ensure that voluntary repatriation is only ordered if it is recommended as the result of proceedings, held with due guarantees to determine the best interest of the child, and once it has been verified that this can be carried out in safe conditions, so that the child will receive care and attention on her or his return.

International Court of Human Rights. Rights and Guarantees of children in the context of migration and/or in need of international protection. Advisory Opinion OC-21/14 of August 19, 2014, paragraphs 127 and 128.

States must see that children who have experienced neglect, exploitation, abuse or other forms of violence, receive the support for their recovery and reinsertion. Children's experiences, including those painful or harmful, may be communicated through play or artistic expression. In particular, the Committee acknowledges that play is the artistic expression that allows them to communicate, understand better their own feelings and thoughts, prevent or resolve the psychosocial problems and to learn how to handle relationships and conflicts through a natural, self-guided, self-healing process.

Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 17. The right of the child to rest, leisure, play, recreational activities, cultural life and the arts (art. 31), CRC/C/GC/12, April 17, 2013, paragraph 31.

STEP 3

Initiate the interview

Stage 2. Placement of the interview



Is asking questions the best way to interview children and adolescents?

Step 3. Initiate the interview

- Tension-reducing conversation

Let us first review the suitability of verbal language, in general, when interacting with children and adolescents. This is not always a suitable way to transmit and receive information, so that special care is required when communicating verbally with a child or adolescent.

Given the subjective use of language during childhood and adolescence, the adult must make sure that the child or adolescent understands the meaning conventionally given to words and, likewise, that the adult understands the same thing as the child or adolescent when using a certain word. This applies especially for technical terms or words which are hardly in everyday use in childhood or adolescence. Only after minimizing anxiety is it possible to use verbal language to provide information to the child or adolescent and have them listen. Preferably, verbal language must be accompanied by physical material through which the child or adolescent may express and channel anxiety.

Asking questions is a form of communication that creates difficulties, as it cannot be assumed that the child or adolescent is “understanding what one understands” as an adult. In general, the context in which they have learned to interact with adults asking them questions is the family, where they are compelled to answer due to power difference, and school, where the “correct” answer is required. The consular officer asking questions automatically places the child or adolescent in a position of less power, where she or he will feel compelled to “give the correct answer”. She or he may not understand the question, or if she or he does understand it, does so in a subjective manner, and different from the common meaning. In general, in a context where she or he perceives an unequal power balance, she or he will not dare to say, “I don’t understand” or “you are wrong, it really is...”.

Using questions as the only means to get information from children and adolescents is not advisable, because the answers obtained will not be reliable. Specialized techniques are required to formulate the questions, as well as prior steps to gain trust and give information to the child or adolescent.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO KNOW THIS?

If a child is interviewed while she or he feels anxiety, and the consular officer acts from a position that increases the perception of vulnerability, dependence and power difference between the child and the adult, it is very likely that she or he will merely answer what she or he thinks the authority wants to hear.

In these conditions, decisions taken concerning her or him will be ill-informed.

Is asking questions the best way to interview children and adolescents?

Step 3. Initiate the interview

- Tension-reducing conversation

According to international legislation on the rights of childhood, States have an obligation to encourage children and adolescents to form a free opinion and to offer an environment allowing the child to exercise her or his right to be heard. In particular, experience shows that it is to be recommended that the process to obtain information and listening care from persons under age should take the form of a conversation instead of a unilateral interrogation. Likewise, it is preferable that the child is not heard at a public hearing, but in conditions of confidentiality.

Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 12. The right of the child to be heard. CRC/C/ GC/12. July 20, 2009, paragraphs 42 and 43.

It is important that authorities and adults provide children and adolescents “with whatever mode of communication they need to facilitate expressing their views. Furthermore, States parties should support the training for families and professionals on promoting and respecting the evolving capacities of children to take increasing responsibilities for decision-making in their own lives.”

Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 9. The right of children with disabilities. CRC/C/ GC/9. September 29, 2006, paragraph 32.

How does a child think?

Step 3. Initiate the interview

- Presentation of the consular officer

Children do not, at birth, have the same cognitive abilities as an adult. These appear and are developed progressively as a result of the combination of:

- maturation of their nervous system, and
- the stimuli received from the environment

Consequently, it will not be possible for a child to develop and perform an ability (for example, walking) even if she or he receives adequate stimuli from the environment, if her or his nervous system is not in a condition to support that learning.⁸

These cognitive abilities evolve in stages.⁹ This means that intelligence is “building up” during childhood. “Mental equipment” will depend on the child’s stage of development in order to receive information and understand it, resolve problems, transmit her or his ideas, etc.

To say that “intelligence is building up” does not mean that the child has the same type of intelligence as an adult but in a “lesser amount” (like a deficit which is resolved as children grow up). Thought is developed from simple to complex. While the person is in the development stages where concrete, sensory perception dominates, she or he will not be able to carry out complex mental operations (mental analysis involving abstractions, for example).

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO KNOW THIS?

When we wish to transmit or receive information from a child during an interview, we must take into account that she or he has not completed all the stages of cognitive development and therefore has intellectual instruments that differ from those of adults.

Children do not understand or transmit information in the same way, so that within the interview framework, adjustments must be made and strategies used to obtain the best information.

8. See McCain, M. and J.F. Mustard. *The Early Years Study Reversing the Real Brain Drain*. Ontario. The Canadian Institute for Advanced Research To The Ontario Government; Toronto, 1999 and Terry, Henry, “The Surly Years: brain development in adolescence (and before)” in *Talking Incoherently, Dawn Patrol Child & Youth Services/ Journal*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2005

9. See Piaget, Jean, op. cit. and Papalia, D. et al. op. cit.

How does a child think?

Step 3. Initiate the interview

- Presentation of the consular officer

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has clarified that maturation and learning processes are relevant to understand the mechanisms whereby children progressively acquire knowledge, competencies and understanding, particularly about their rights and about how they can best be realized. Authorities must respect children's evolving capacities and competencies of children as this is crucial to the realization of their rights, because of the rapid transformations in their physical, cognitive, social and emotional functioning.

According to said Committee, adults have the responsibility to continually adjust the levels of support and orientation they offer to a child. These adjustments take account of a child's interests and wishes as well as the child's capacities for autonomous decision-making and comprehension of his or her best interests. Throughout their general comments, the Committee has reinforced the idea that while a young child generally requires more guidance than an older child, it is important to take account of individual variations in the capacities of children of the same age and of their ways of reacting to situations. Evolving capacities should be seen as a positive and enabling process, not an excuse for authoritarian practices that restrict children's autonomy and self-expression, which have traditionally been justified by pointing to children's relative immaturity and their need for socialization. On the contrary, adults should be encouraged to offer "direction and guidance" in a child-centred way, through dialogue and example, in ways that enhance young children's capacities to exercise their rights, including their right to participation and their right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 7, Implementing child rights in early childhood, CRC/C/GC/7, September 20, 2006, paragraph 17.

How does a child think?

Step 3. Initiate the interview

- Presentation of the consular officer

In people, the last stage of thought development is the stage of “formal operations” and theoretical reference. This is the type of thought which, when the person has experienced ideal conditions,¹⁰ is achieved during adolescence. If she or he has had adequate conditions during her or his growth and development (nutrition, stimulation, protection against trauma and violence) she or he achieves hypothetical deductive thought, whereby she or he understands logical relationships without the need for perceptive, concrete and subjective experience. She or he may then handle abstract concepts, anticipate, plan, etc. However, during adolescence, development remains unfinished. Studies affirm that...

“... The area that helps make the right decisions is not fully operational until after 21-22 years, when the neuronal grid is complete and relatively fixed... Until that age, human beings are not fully capable of controlling their impulses, direct their behaviour to goals and objectives, assess risks and benefits, prepare value judgments, hold a personal moral or ethical position, etc.”¹¹

Factors such as exposure to violence, the type of problems she or he now has to face, her or his state of awareness or of fatigue and her or his intellectual abilities in general, will be very important variables that will determine whether the adolescent applies formal logic or not.

On the other hand, and in theory, adolescents are closer to achieving abstract thought but when they use that ability, they are more susceptible to emotions taking over from reason.¹² given their stage of physical and hormonal development. They are easily confused, feel pressured, and react with mechanisms of omnipotence and impulsiveness.¹³

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO KNOW THIS?

Because it is easy to make the mistake of thinking that the adolescent has the same abilities as an adult and this is not so. On the contrary, adolescents are especially vulnerable to irruption of emotions that end up prevailing over reason. The adolescent going through difficult situations will have a lower level of thought than what her or his development would ideally allow them.

The closer the interventions asked of them are to the concrete and sensory during the interview, the lower the possibility to be off in the methodology of the procedures implemented.

10. Many children and adolescents develop in contexts where conditions are not optimal, and therefore, it is likely that they have not reached the level that theory indicates for their age in ideal conditions of development. It is also likely that, being in highly stressful situations, they may be functioning at a lower than potential level of development.

11. See Terry, Henry, op. cit., McCain, M. and J.F. Mustard. *The Early Years Study Reversing the Real Brain Drain*. op.cit; and McCain, M. and J.F. Mustard. *The Early Years Study Three Years Later*. Ontario. The Canadian Institute for Advanced Research To The Ontario Government. Toronto. 2002.

12. See Terry, Henry, op. cit.,

13 See idem and Papalia, D. et al., op.cit

How do adolescents think?

Step 3. Initiate the interview

- Presentation of the consular officer

In its General Comment 12, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, makes it clear that age in itself cannot be a critical factor in determining the importance of the opinions of children and adolescents; their degree of maturity must also be taken into account. The Committee defines the term maturity as the capacity of adolescents to understand and assess the consequences of an issue that might affect them. Undoubtedly, that should be taken into consideration in assessing an adolescent's capacity to express an opinion or give evidence.

Maturity is difficult to define; in the context of article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, it is the capacity of a child to express her or his views on issues in a reasonable and independent manner. The impact of the matter on the child must also be taken into consideration. The greater the impact of the outcome on the life of the child, the more relevant the appropriate assessment of the maturity of that child.

Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 12. The right of the child to be heard. CRC/C/ GC/12. July 20, 2009, paragraph 29 and 30.

Are migrant adolescents especially vulnerable?

Step 3. Initiate the interview

• Presentation of the consular officer

Migrant adolescents are especially vulnerable and specialized intervention during times of fear or crisis requires special care.

It is easy to see when a young child needs protection. And it is equally easy to think, as a matter of common sense, that an adolescent “is already grown up enough” to understand everything that we convey verbally to her or him, and to ask for help in the knowledge that it is the best for her or him.

The second part of the sentence is the one that could lead to serious error by the consular officer: an adolescent will hardly be clear about “what is the best for her or him” and will hardly understand what is being conveyed using adult or abstract language while she or he feels worried, stressed, fearful, persecuted or questioned (as usually happens when they migrate without the company of an adult).

Defense mechanisms and regression to concrete thought take over in these scenarios. They require the support of adults to understand complex situations, relax their emotions and think more clearly, and understand what needs to be done for their effective protection.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO KNOW THIS?

Adolescents are unlikely to ask for help, even if they need it. Quite the opposite, they will portray themselves as powerful and will say they “need nothing”. Nor will she or he easily admit to being afraid or that she or he has been victimized.

Knowing the particular challenges of the adolescent development stage, the consular officer will be able to identify vulnerability and requests for help concealed behind the rude, challenging and omnipotent conduct.

Support and protection of adolescents cannot be subject only to an explicit request by them. If only their overt conduct is considered, they might seem strong and decided, but the reality is the opposite.

Are migrant adolescents especially vulnerable?

Step 3. Initiate the interview

- Presentation of the consular officer

The Committee on the Rights of the Child has indicated that in those situations wherein the best interests of children and adolescents converge with the right to be heard and listened to, it is essential that authorities take into consideration the evolution of their abilities, because the more they know, have experienced and understand, the more should authorities reinforce their intervention mechanisms, transforming orientation and interviews into reminders and advice, to ensure an exchange of views and information on an equal level and based on the conditions of the children and adolescents. In the Committee's opinion, to the extent that children and adolescents mature, their opinions must carry ever more weight in the assessment of their best interests.

Because of this, and in order to determine the best interests of children and adolescents, authorities must keep in mind that their capacities evolve, so that obtaining information and the design of the protection and assurance measures must be reviewed and adjusted to reflect the development and characteristics of children and, especially, adolescents. Thus, no definitive and irreversible measures or decisions should be adopted. The continuity and stability of the present and future situation of adolescents must be assessed on the basis of their physical, emotional, educational and other needs.

Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 14, The right of the child to have his or her best interests taken as a primary consideration, CRC/C/GC/14. May 29, 2013, paragraphs 44 and 84.

STEPS 3 AND 4

Initiate the interview/ Informing before asking

Stage 2. Placement of the interview

Stage 3. Conducting the interview



Informing before asking. Tools to obtain information from children and adolescents

Steps 3 and 4. Initiate the interview

• Presentation of the consular officer

The central pillar of the method of approaching the child or adolescent is to create a context allowing them to come closer to us (once she or he feels in contact) and give us information about the situation she or he is living, instead of us approaching her or him directly with questions.

The technique of giving information to ask for information may be applied at each stage of the Protocol, directed at different issues that the consular officer needs to know concerning the situation of the child: documents available, wishes and plans, significant adults, place of settlement in the context, etc. The following are some examples:

GIVE INFORMATION	ASK FOR INFORMATION
Look here, this is my badge. It is important because it has my name and shows that I am Mexican (you let the child or adolescent hold and observe it).	Do you have any paper with your name that says where you were born?
My badge also says that I work at the Consulate. That is my job, I started to work there _____ years ago.	Have you ever worked? (The reaction is recorded: silence, fear, obfuscation, confusion)
To become a consular officer, I went to school. I had friends and teachers, some were grumpy and others I really liked.	What about you? Have you gone to school? Do you have friends there? Do you remember any teacher? What is her or his name?
I work here and am going to stay a few more years.	What is your plan? What would you like to do? What would you like to happen? Who would you like to be with right now? Who would you like to be with a year from now/ in the future/when you grow up?

Informing before asking. Tools to obtain information from children and adolescents

Steps 3 and 4. Initiate the interview

- Presentation of the consular officer

Those responsible for hearing the child have to ensure that the child is informed about her or his right to express her or his opinion in all matters affecting the child and, in particular, in any judicial and administrative decision-making processes, and about the impact that his or her expressed views will have on the outcome. The child must, furthermore, receive information about the option of either communicating directly or through a representative. She or he must be aware of the possible consequences of this choice. The decision maker must adequately prepare the child before the hearing, providing explanations as to how, when and where the hearing will take place and who the participants will be, and has to take account of the views of the child in this regard.

Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 12. The right of the child to be heard. CRC/C/ GC/12. paragraph 41.

Separation of significant figures and feeling of vulnerability

Steps 3 and 4. Informing before asking

• About family of origin

Either because she or he never had them or has lost them in the transit, the first element of vulnerability and trauma for the migrant child or adolescent, unaccompanied or separated from her or his family, is precisely the aggregate of these conditions:

- a) She or he is separated and/or
- b) Her or his significant figures are not close.

From the dawn of psychology, the importance of attachment figures for the development of human beings has been known. Since a child is born in a state of complete vulnerability with respect to adults, and would not be able to survive without them, her or his dependence is expressed both physically and emotionally. The experience of having adults that care for her or him and are there when needed, is central to the human psychological reality that remains for life.

Consular staff need this information at the time of interacting with a migrant child or adolescent, unaccompanied or separated from the family, in order to understand her or his basic emotional situation.

She or he is alone, feels vulnerability, fear and confusion. Does not have anyone close to guide her or him and, therefore, feels insecurity. Feels distrust, it is not easy for her or him to open up and trust.

Another possibility is that the child or adolescent displays unconscious psychological defense mechanisms to “seem strong” and somehow confront the sensation of vulnerability. However, even if this is what “is apparent”, the psychological reality is as mentioned above: the feeling of abandonment and of having little value.

Separation of significant figures and feeling of vulnerability

Steps 3 and 4. Informing before asking

- About family of origin

The situation of children unaccompanied or separated from their family exposes them to different risks that affect life, survival and development, for example, trafficking aimed at sexual or other kind of exploitation or participation in criminal activities. In particular, children who are unaccompanied or separated from their families, and far from their countries of origin are especially vulnerable to child trafficking, sexual and labour exploitation, as well as abuse. Because of this, an early determination of the situation of children, whether unaccompanied or separated from their families, must be made a priority. Specifically, it is pertinent to record the reasons why the child is separated from her or his family or unaccompanied, because, given her or his special vulnerability, the State must conduct a deeper investigation and take protective action.

Inter-American Court of Human Rights, Rights and guarantees of children in the context of migration and/or in need of international protection. Consultative Opinion OC-21/14, of August 19, 2014, paragraphs 89, 90 and 91.

Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment number 6, Treatment of Unaccompanied and Separated Children Outside their Country of Origin, adopted by the Committee in its resolution CRC/GC/2005/6 during its XXXIX period of sessions, Geneva, Switzerland, paragraph 23.

Presence of frustration and despair

Steps 3 and 4. Initiate the interview

• Key messages

The reality of the children or adolescents that consular staff will interview is crossed by huge frustration. Probably, they have had several months harbouring the idea of living in another country as the only opportunity in their lives. She or he has invested her or his last energy, efforts and resources in it. These expectations were diluted at the time of detention, and during the interview with the consular officer, frustration, anger and despair (latent or explicit) will be present.

Consular staff must take into account that, during the interview, these feelings appear as defiant, mocking, or evasive attitudes and, on the other hand, the interviewer must be aware that the psycho-emotional impact of frustration and despair has serious consequences for a child's development. They build themselves a reality wherein, no matter what they do, nothing is sufficient to attain their aspiration or to feel better and be protected. Sooner or later, she or he will stop trying, in the expectation that "nothing is worth it". The consular officer should offer specific messages of emotional rescue in this sense, not only during the interview, but also in the future.¹⁴

14. See *The role of consular authority in the reality of the child or adolescent. Recommended actions.*

Presence of frustration and despair

Steps 3 and 4. Initiate the interview

- Key messages

Children and adolescents in a position where they cannot possibly control or predict to any degree the situations in which they become involved, develop the expectation (based on actual experience of confusion and lack of control) that any effort they make to change their situation will lead irremediably to failure. This happens because she or he fails to overcome the harshness of the environment oppressing them, in spite of their best efforts to defend themselves and express their emotions. This is the learned helplessness or despair syndrome.

In the face of the frequent experiences of failure, the child acquires a negative lesson, accepting this condition as something that is part of her or his nature. Important changes are produced in the personality that make her or him unable to defend her or himself or to escape. She or he reacts emotionally with confusion, shame, impotence, loss of self-confidence and a deep paralysing fear.

Office of the Defense of the Rights of Childhood. *The crime victim child before the criminal process, Book I of the Collection "The crime victim child"*. Mexico, 2005, pg. 35.

Uprooting and lack of context

Steps 3 and 4. Informing before asking:

- **About the condition of unaccompanied or separated**

Most of the development of the child or adolescent depends on learning and incorporation of rules and guidelines, acquired progressively from full dependence until autonomy, which is achieved at adult maturity. The rules and guidelines to be learned come from the significant figures in their upbringing, as well as from their culture.

The child or adolescent needs these rules that indicate what can and what cannot be done. Their incorporation is part of the building of personality and the optimal development of intelligence. If this is not available, reality stops being perceived as safe and predictable; the consequence, again, is the feeling of vulnerability and anxiety, with a sensation of continuous outward wariness to prevent damage and try to understand it.

Every child or adolescent starts the trip because the family determines so, or because she or he fails to perceive another option in her or his life, but does not have either the cognitive nor the emotional tools to fully understand the consequences of this decision or its multiple implications. They go in pursuit of a dream and an expectation which is built as an idealization, out of despair or due to the need (psychological and physical) to create a different reality.

This reality, built on the fantasy of a child or adolescent, contrasts brutally with the experienced reality: they are no longer within known contexts; they do not know the rules or the language. They do not know the cultural guidelines: they are out of reach, because she/he has not learned them progressively and, therefore, she or he cannot understand them. In general, they do not have either the information or sufficient cognitive abilities to understand where they stand at each moment of the journey. It is likely that they imagine being at a point that does not match reality.

Uprooting and lack of context

Steps 3 and 4. Informing before asking:

- **About the condition of unaccompanied or separated**

States must examine and assess the difficulties and vulnerabilities which are peculiar to unaccompanied children. As a consequence of having been separated from their family, to a larger or lesser degree, they have experienced loss, trauma, disturbance and violence. In addition, many of the unaccompanied children and adolescents, especially the refugees, might have experienced generalized violence, which could have caused them deep feelings of despair and eroded their childhood trust in other persons. On the other hand, girls are particularly susceptible to marginalization, poverty and suffering during armed conflicts, and many will have suffered violence in that context for gender reasons. The deep trauma suffered demands special sensitivity and awareness in their care and rehabilitation.

Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment number 6, Treatment of Unaccompanied and Separated Children Outside their Country of Origin, adopted by the Committee in its resolution CRC/GC/2005/6 during its XXXIX period of sessions, Geneva, Switzerland.

Absence of possible alternatives

Steps 3 and 4. Informing before asking:

- About the condition of unaccompanied or separated

A study commissioned by the DIF (Mexican National Welfare System) in 2009 provides information¹⁵ about the reasons for children or adolescents to migrate. In general, they do not start the journey because they “want to”. In the majority of cases, they do it knowingly or unconsciously because they are forced to. Migration is the only alternative they perceive in their reality as a means to achieve a goal or an objective.

KEVIN (Honduras)- 14 years¹⁶

All I have ever dreamed of is being in the USA, most kids in Honduras have dreamed that since they start growing. “I’m going to the USA”. In reality, my mother is very poor. Do you understand?, and the money she makes is hardly enough to feed us, what I would like in my life is to help her to be able to buy a house. I miss her a lot, but if I start thinking about her there, I will start crying and I don’t want to cry. I want to move on with my mother.

And, what do you imagine the USA to be like?

Big towers, a great city, big cities.

How do you know it is like that?

Ah, because I see it on TV, in the movies, I want to see it, myself, live.

Were you doing really bad at home?

Well, I have a stepfather and he said I was not his son and it was true, right? But he did not love me.

Then what happened?

I came here.

Studies¹⁷ have found that motives vary significantly according to gender. In general, children migrate with the hope of finding a better job, achieving financial success or be better providers in their homes, or, in some cases, escaping the obligation of being the “head of the family” (associated with the fact of being the only man in the home in their town of origin). On the other hand, for girls, the main motive is the wish to escape domestic and sexual abuse or violence.

15. Extracted from the Appleseed Report, *Children at the Border: Evaluation, Protection and Repatriation of Unaccompanied Mexican Children and Adolescents*. Appleseed, 2011, available at: http://www.unicef.org/Mexico/Spanish/mx_Reporte_Ni-nos_en_la_Frontera_Espanol1MI.pdf

16. Extracted from the documentary *Which Way Home*, Directed by Rebecca Cammisa, 2010, available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b43dYQG4kuY>

17. According to this study, which was based on interviews with Mexican and Central American children lodged in DIF shelters.

Absence of possible alternatives

Steps 3 and 4. Informing before asking:

- **About the condition of unaccompanied or separated**

Children and adolescents move internationally for very varied reasons: in search of opportunities, for financial or education reasons; family reunion purposes, in order to re-join family members who have already migrated; sudden or progressive changes in the environment that adversely affect their life or their living conditions, harm derived from organized crime, natural disasters, family abuse or extreme poverty; massive violation of human rights or other circumstances that have seriously disturbed public order. While children and adolescents generally travel with their mother or father, members of the extended family or other adults, currently a growing and significant number migrate independently, without company. Unaccompanied or separated migrant children and adolescents are in a particularly vulnerable situation.

Report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, Mr. Jorge Bustamante, adopted by the Human Rights Council in its 11th period of sessions, resolution A/HRC/11/7, Geneva, 2009, paragraph 19

Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment number 6, Treatment of unaccompanied and separated children outside their country of origin, adopted by the Committee in its resolution CRC/GC/2005/6 during its XXXIX period of sessions, Geneva, Switzerland.

Inter-American Court of Human Rights, Rights and guarantees of children in the context of migration and/or in need of international protection. Consultative Opinion OC-21/14 of 19 August of 2014, paragraph 35.

Recommended actions for the intervention with young children

Steps 3 and 4. Initiate the interview

• Key messages

When obtaining information about possible psychological and emotional impacts, and foreseeing that this is about situations difficult to recall and tell freely, the suggestion is to continue with a strategy of offering concrete and manipulable objects that the child or adolescent may select and stick on the story she or he is building. Then questions will be asked about these figures or drawings. It is suggested to proceed as follows:

- *Look, here I have more things we can use to continue building your story. They are different things that we can stick on to make more characters and chapters. First, we have a Band-Aid/Red-Cross/nurse. Which part of the story do you want to stick this on? (Wait for the action or reply of the child or adolescent).*
- *In that part of the story. Did any part of your body hurt? What part of your body hurt? What happened later? Who helped?*
- *Here are a happy face/sunshine and a sad face/cloud and lightning. They are to mark the best part of the trip and the worst part. Where would you stick them?*
- *In the part with a happy face, what happened? What is the best part?*
- *In the part with the sad face, maybe something you don't like happened, something that hurt you and you wouldn't want it to happen again. If you tell me what happened I could try to help so it doesn't happen again (wait for an answer).*
- *Now comes the most difficult chapter of the story: the nightmare/monster/dragon. Which part of the trip would you put this figure on?*
- *What was/is the worst nightmare?*
- *Are you afraid of someone?¹⁸*
- *What does that person that makes you afraid do?¹⁹*
- *Sometimes things happen between adults and children, and children don't like. If someone has done something to hurt you and you don't want that to happen again, can you tell me in order to try and stop this happening again.*
- *Here is another figure of the trip: the rucksack. Carrying very heavy rucksacks doesn't feel nice in the journey. Sometimes rucksacks are full of things that they told us not to tell anyone. Other times they have things that have passed and which we are ashamed to account, because they made fun of us, or because they wouldn't believe us.*
- *Look, I'm going to put the dragon/nightmare at the end of the story, so that you can imagine it. Which would be the worst ending for this story? (Any mention of an ending implying death, fear, pain, or a symbol associated with that, is sufficient to consider that the child or adolescent feels at risk).*
- *And now I'm going to make the best part of the story. I'm going to take the happy face, I'm going to remove the worst ending from the story and I'm going to put it here, so that you can imagine which is the ending you want for this story. The one you would like best. What would you like to happen?*
- *Who are you with in this end of the story?*

18. One version requiring more time but offering more information is "to move" the figure of the monster or nightmare to the original family and ask; "If there was a monster here, who would it be?" Then to the road they have journeyed and continue, "If there was a monster here, who would it be?" And lastly, putting it at the end of the road and repeat the question.

19. It's very important to remember that formulation of the questions starting with Why?) is hardly to be recommended, as it requires understanding and handling notions of causality which are not accessible at this stage of childhood or adolescent development in stressing situations. They tend to be interpreted as reprimands, demands for explanations, causing anxiety and tension. See *Toolbox. Section: Recommended Actions for Consular Intervention with Young Children/the Role of Consular Authority in the Child's or Adolescent's Reality. Recommended Actions.*

Recommended actions for the intervention with young children

Steps 3 and 4. Initiate the interview

• Key messages

The initial evaluation must consider not only the physical aspect of the individual, but also the psychological maturity. This must be based on scientific criteria, safety and impartiality, attending to the interests of the child and considerations of gender, avoiding any risk of violating her or his integrity.

Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment number 6, Treatment of unaccompanied and separated children outside their country of origin, adopted by the Committee in its resolution CRC/GC/2005/6 during its XXXIX period of sessions, Geneva, Switzerland.

It must be remembered that children and adolescents have particular characteristics and needs. The person taking their statement must know what these are and adapt to the needs of the child, in order to avoid re-victimizing her or him and to obtain adequate information. Cognitive abilities and emotional and moral characteristics are of a structural character – they are not subject to the will of the person: they are not changeable, but are found associated with her or his level of development.

The child's level of development and the capabilities she or he might display at a certain time depend on multiple factors: inherited, neurophysiological, biological, learning, development context, personality, access to medication and adequate stimulation, among others. This makes it impossible for a child's level of development to correspond to their chronological age. As an example, fear, emotional lability, innovation, extreme anger, difficulties in self-control, tolerance of frustration, the capacity to wait and anxiety, are some of the most common emotions felt by adolescents. However, as happens with children of other ages, they still do not have the cognitive strategies to face the emotions invading them and manage them. Such feelings are not subject to her or his rational control. The impossibility of controlling the emotions she or he feels affects her or his behaviour. Keeping this in mind helps explain some of their reactions during the interview.

Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation, Action Protocol for Those Justices in Cases involving Children and adolescents, Mexico, pages 34 and 35.

Step 4

Informing before asking

Stage 3. Development of the interview



Tools to identify the contexts of origin

Step 4. Informing before asking:

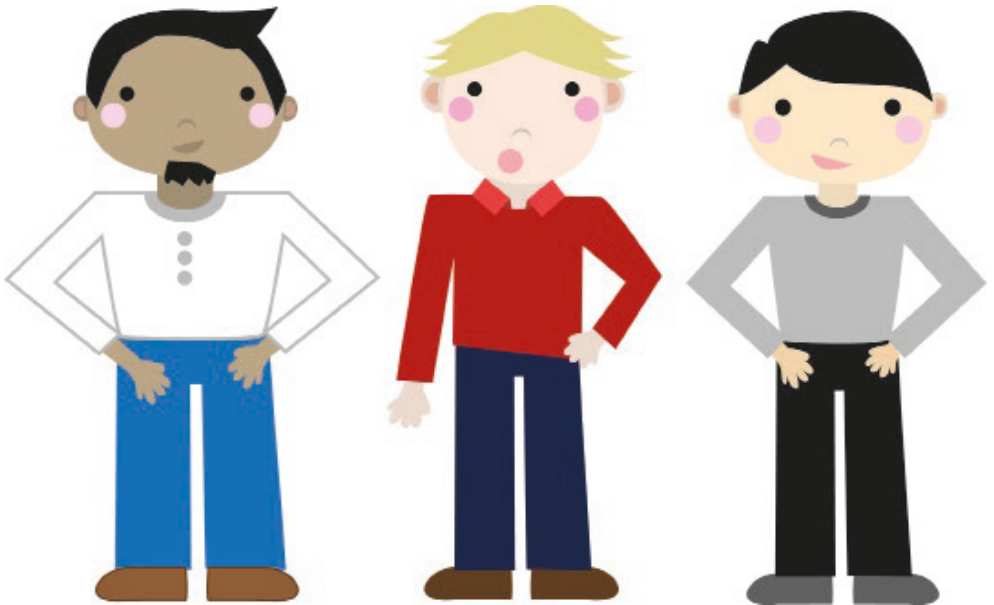
- About the family of origin



Tools to identify family contexts

Step 4. Informing before asking:

- About the condition of unaccompanied or separated from her or his family



Tools to identify family contexts

Step 4. Informing before asking:

- About the condition of unaccompanied or separated from her or his family



Tools to identify family contexts

Step 4. Informing before asking:

- About the condition of unaccompanied or separated from her or his family



Tools to identify family contexts

Step 4. Informing before asking:

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Tools to identify family contexts

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Tools to identify family contexts

Step 4. Informing before asking:

- About the condition of unaccompanied or separated from her or his family



Tools to identify family contexts

Step 4. Informing before asking:

- About the condition of unaccompanied or separated from her or his family



Tools to identify immigration routes

Step 4. Informing before asking:

- About the decision to migrate



Tools to identify immigration routes

Step 4. Informing before asking:

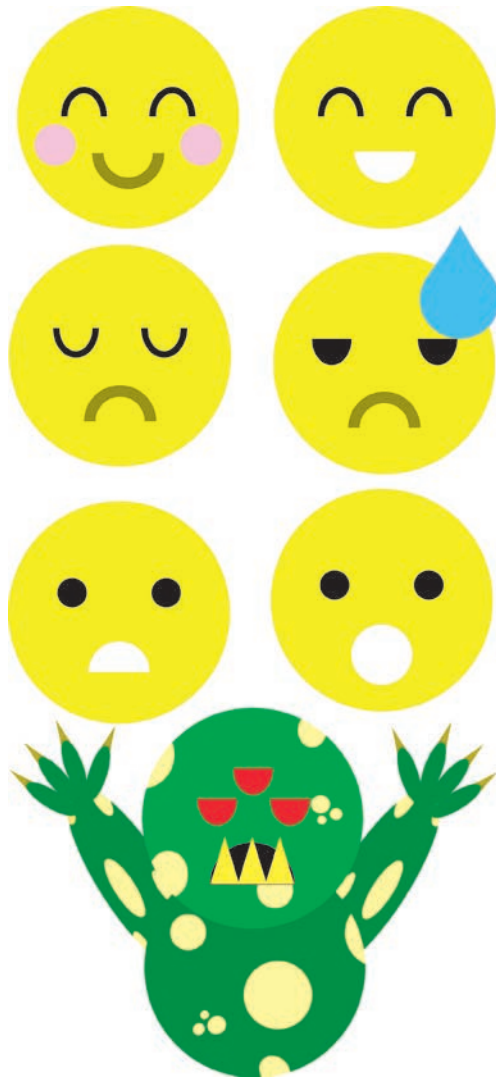
- About the decision to migrate



Tools to identify emotional conditions

Step 4. Informing before asking:

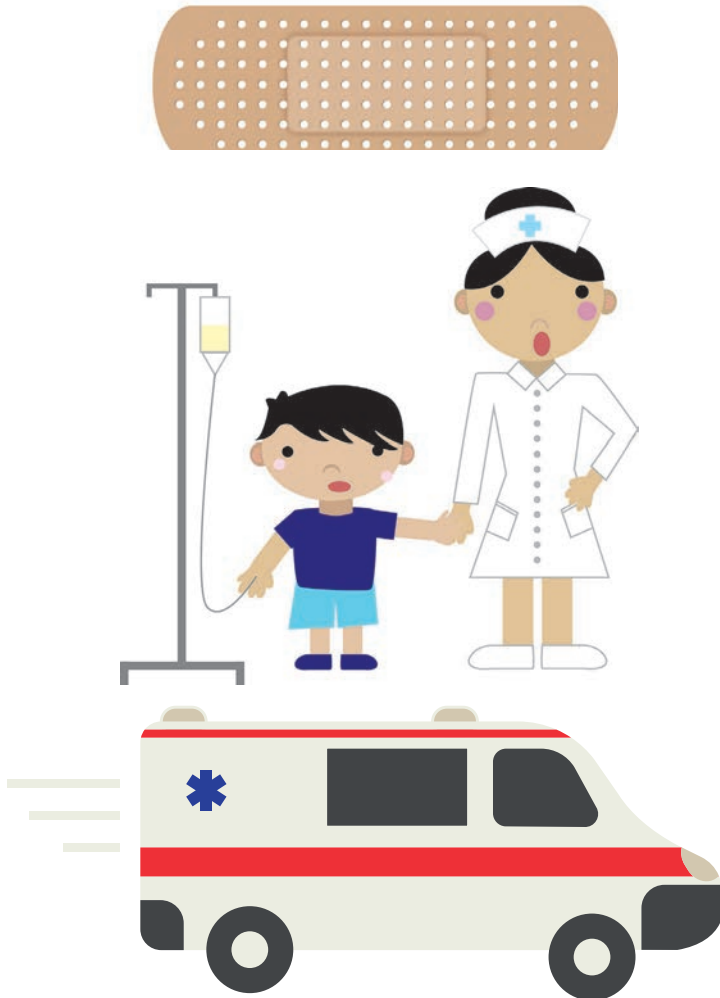
- About possible psychological or emotional affectations



Tools to identify health conditions

Step 4. Informing before asking:

- About possible psychological or emotional affectations



Premature acquisition of adult roles

Step 4. Informing before asking:

- About possible psychological or emotional affectations

The psycho-emotional situation of an unaccompanied migrant child or adolescent shows specific characteristics that have implications during the interview with the consular staff. One is the premature acquisition of roles from an adult in order to survive.

The context forces these children or adolescents to “act as adults” prematurely. The adult role is inappropriate for the abilities she or he has and places her or him in a situation of anxiety, impotence and failure. During the interview, they express concern for significant persons they have left behind, of whom they have no news, as if it were they who have to “care for the adults”. They will also be concerned about how to handle the return to their places of origin and the sense of failure that goes with it, like paying back debts and expenses associated with the trip. The return home can be received with joy because of the reunion with their loved ones, but it will be burdened with shame for not having achieved the goal, resentment at family members who pledged support and later could not deliver, etc.

In the interview, these concerns will very likely be transformed into silence, reluctance to talk about certain issues or open defiance as mechanisms to avoid admitting failure and the anxiety they feel. Every child or adolescent in these circumstances needs to hear that there are adults looking to help her or him; the Protocol includes messages aimed at this.

Premature acquisition of adult roles

Step 4. Informing before asking:

- About possible psychological or emotional affectations

In children and adolescents, breaking their natural development process makes them more vulnerable to events such as sexual abuse, domestic work and dropping out of school. In the case of unaccompanied migrant children and adolescents, particularly, the imposition of adult arises when they have to face a changing environment for which they are not prepared.

UNICEF, Latin America and Caribbean Regional Office, Undoing the Future: Migrations, A Triple Violation of Rights.

Elements to identify contexts of violence or abuse in children and adolescents

Step 4. Informing before asking:

- About possible psychological or emotional affectations

The central pillar of the approach to the child or adolescent is to create a context allowing them to come closer to us (once she or he feels in contact) and give us information about the situation she or he is living, instead of us approaching her or him directly with questions.

The technique of giving information to ask for information may be applied at each stage of the Protocol, directed at different issues that the consular officer needs to know about the situation of the child: documents available, wishes and plans, significant adults, place of settlement in the context, etc. The following are some examples:

SIGNS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE	SIGNS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE	SIGNS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE
Low self-esteem, feelings of inferiority and failure, sadness, fear or chronic anxiety, seeing the world as threatening and unsafe.	Strong feelings of terror and exposure. They live in permanent tension for the expectation of being beaten at any time. Feelings of inferiority.	Extreme confusion about reality: who cares for them and who hurts them, could be the same person. Loss of references and boundaries to trust the world and people.
They tend to isolate themselves and “freeze” their emotions or withdraw to fantasy and omnipotence (I don’t need anyone; I’ll manage on my own).	Extreme anxiety or agitation, self-destructive, provocative and angry behaviour, they might become aggressive and attack others, or become “invisible”, obedient, passive and hardly demanding in order to go unnoticed.	Children and adolescents victims of sexual violence usually display persistent aggressive or sexual games, night terrors, enuresis, ²⁰ encopresis, ²¹ excessive agitation (always alert, restless, moving around), excessive isolation, excessive submission, explosive answers with desperation and crying, regressive behaviour, fear of being left alone, fear of specific persons or places.

20. Start wetting her or his clothes or during the night when she or he had learned to control sphincters.

21. Defecate in her or his clothes or during the night when she or he had learned to control sphincters.

Elements to identify contexts of violence or abuse in children and adolescents

Step 4. Informing before asking:

- About possible psychological or emotional affectations

Unaccompanied and separated children and adolescents, especially girls, are at particular risk of gender-based violence, including domestic violence. In some situations, such children have no access to proper and appropriate identification, registration, age assessment, documentation, family tracing, guardianship systems or legal advice.

UNO, Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment number 6, Treatment of unaccompanied and separated children outside their country of origin, CRC/GC/2005/6, paragraph 3.

“This requires that all who come in contact with children are aware of risk factors and indicators of all forms of violence, have received guidance on how to interpret such indicators, and have the necessary knowledge, willingness and ability to take appropriate action (including the provision of emergency protection). Children must be provided with as many opportunities as possible to signal emerging problems before they reach a state of crisis, and for adults to recognize and act on such problems even if the child does not explicitly ask for help.”

Committee on the Rights of the Child. General Comment No. 13.: The right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence. CRC/C/GC/13, April 18, 2011, paragraph 48.

Elements to identify police contexts

Step 4. Informing before asking:

- About possible psychological or emotional affectations



Elements to identify police contexts

Step 4. Informing before asking:

- About possible psychological or emotional affectations



Indicators of possible sexual trafficking or exploitation

Step 4. Informing before asking:

• Protection needs

Detection of possible victims is not an easy task. The nature of sexual exploitation frequently makes the victims try to hide what is going on. Identifying the risk depends on our sensitivity and alertness to this subject.

There should be no fear to be wrong. When we suspect someone might be a victim and it is not possible to prove it, information can be provided that will be useful even if there is no actual situation of exploitation. There are some indicators that can help us detect a possible case of sexual exploitation.

1. Unusual personal grooming for their age and condition
 - a) Clothing notably tight on the body, short or sheer.
 - b) Clothing usually for parties or night events and inadequate for daily use.
 - c) Excessive makeup.
 - d) Costly, hardly affordable clothes given her or his economic conditions.
2. Shows excessive fear of giving personal information. Hides information about her or his activities or address.
3. Lives in a hotel, guesthouse or other unusual place for her or his age and condition.
4. Refers to activities like modelling, photography sessions, unusual for her age and condition.
5. Displays attitudes that seem very adult for her or his age.
6. Keeps no family links; is alone/or accompanied/by a grown-up person with whom she or he keeps a relationship difficult to explain.
7. Third parties (neighbours, family, friends, etc.) comment about possible child sexual commercial exploitation.
8. Bodily signs of sexual abuse or sexual activity unusual for her or his age and condition.
9. Shows marks of beating or bruises that might indicate abuse by exploiters.

Indicators of possible sexual trafficking or exploitation

Step 4. Informing before asking:

- Protection needs

Unaccompanied or separated children in a country outside their country of origin are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Girls are at particular risk of being trafficked, including for purposes of sexual exploitation. Trafficking and sexual exploitation are a threat to the fulfilment of their right to life, survival and development. Therefore, the States should adopt appropriate measures to prevent trafficking. Necessary measures include identifying unaccompanied or separated children, regularly inquiring as to their whereabouts and conducting information campaigns that are age-appropriate, gender-sensitive, and in a language and medium understandable to the child or adolescent. Adequate legislation should be passed and effective mechanisms put in place to comply with labour regulations and the laws on border crossing.

Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment number 6, Treatment of Unaccompanied and Separated Children Outside their Country of Origin, adopted by the Committee in its resolution CRC/GC/2005/6 during its XXXIX period of sessions, Geneva, Switzerland, paragraphs 50, 52.

States parties must take firm measures to protect children and adolescents from sexual and economic exploitation, from trafficking and sale of people and, according to the rights set forth in article 39, create opportunities for children and adolescents who have been the subject of such treatment, in order for them to take advantage of the support and the care services of the State and of the nongovernmental entities dedicated to these matters.

Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment number 3, HIV/ AIDS and the rights of the child, CRC/GC/2003/3, paragraph 36.

The Operating Protocol for the detection, protection and care to children or adolescents victim of commercial sexual exploitation of the International Labour Organization is a practical tool to detect possible cases of child sexual commercial exploitation. Likewise, this instrument recognizes that it is essential on first contact to detect minors who are possible victims. The insight of public servants can safeguard their future development. To that end, some indicators are established to detect possible cases of commercial sexual exploitation.

Operating Protocol for the Detection Protection and Care to Children and Adolescents Victim of Commercial Sexual Exploitation, International Labour Organization, 2004, pages 13 and 16.

Considerations to promote an adequate attitude before possible victims of sexual trafficking or exploitation

Step 4. Informing before asking: • Protection needs

Taken from the Operating Protocol for the Detection, Protection and Care to Children and Adolescents Victim of Commercial Sexual Exploitation © 2004 International Labour Organization.

The attitude of consular personnel is very important.

- Your role is to generate initial trust. Your role is not to provide psychological care. That is the task of the specialists. Do not pretend to go into detail about intimacy of the child or adolescent.
- We are all prejudiced, and the subject of commercial sexual exploitation is not easy. Put your feelings aside and avoid showing surprise, reproach or rejection about what the child or adolescent you are attending says.
- The child or adolescent before you is a victim. Regardless of what she or he has done or her or his attitude, her or his rights have been violated and she or he are in a situation of extreme vulnerability.
- Refrain from playing the role of a public prosecutor. Investigation of the details of who is exploiting, and how he/she operates, is the task of the specialized agencies. Looking for information about these issues can generate fear in the victim and cause her or him to leave.
- There might be people wishing to avoid the effort and complications implied in attending a delicate case. Remember that the protection of and care to children and adolescents at risk is not only a right but an obligation of every professional public servant. You have juridical frameworks that support your decision to act, and can help you convince others who do not share your views.
- Do not be afraid to be wrong. It is better to provide an excess of information than leaving a possible victim unattended.

Considerations to promote an adequate attitude before possible victims of sexual trafficking or exploitation

Step 4. Informing before asking:

- Protection needs

Children and adolescents are a diverse group, with each having his or her own characteristics and needs that can only be evaluated adequately by professionals who have expertise in matters related to child and adolescent development. This is why the formal assessment process should be carried out in a friendly and safe atmosphere by professionals trained in, inter alia, child psychology, child development and other relevant human and social development fields, who have experience working with children and who will consider the information received in an objective manner.

Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 14, on the right of the child to have his or her best interest taken as a primary consideration, CRC/C/GC/14, paragraph 94.

Trauma resulting from negligence and abuse has a negative repercussion in the development of children and adolescents, especially in early childhood. Therefore, the States parties should take all necessary measures to safeguard young children at risk and offer protection to victims of abuse, taking positive steps to support their recovery from trauma while avoiding stigmatization for the violations they have suffered.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 7, Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood, CRC/C/GC/7, paragraph 36.

The assistance required by a child or adolescent who has been a victim of sexual exploitation is not only a “healing” process. It is both about healing social and psychological disorders that she or he has suffered, as well as re-establishing her or his capacity to build a life dissociated from sexual exploitation. In this regard, the Protocol recognizes that assistance has more to do with the future than with the past. It includes a series of actions that provide independence to the child and adolescent, oriented, not only to assistance services, but to generate capacities so that she or he may develop with minimal institutional mediation. Institutional care provided in ways which are massive and/or divorced from community and family contact limits the possibilities of the child or adolescent to re-establish the independent capacity of building a future.

Operating Protocol for the Detection Protection and Care to Children and Adolescents Victim of Commercial Sexual Exploitation, International Labour Organization, 2004, pg. 28.

Basic messages to give the child or adolescent who is suspected of being a victim of trafficking or sexual exploitation.

Step 4. Informing before asking: • Protection needs

Taken from the Operating Protocol for the Detection Protection and Care to Children and Adolescents Victim of Commercial Sexual Exploitation © 2004 International Labour Organization.

1. Commercial sexual exploitation exists and it is a crime that anyone exploits children or adolescents.
2. Nobody can force you to provide sexual services, to prostitute yourself, take erotic pictures of yourself, etc.
3. Even when she or he is not being forced or threatened, it is a crime to benefit financially from sexual activities performed by persons under 18 years.
4. Even when she or he is not being forced, if she or he wishes to leave these activities, she/may receive protection and assistance.
5. Regardless of what they may have been forced to do, she or he deserves to receive support and protection. Children and adolescents are always victims of commercial sexual exploitation, never accomplices.
6. Indicate to her or him where and who to call if she or he decides to ask for help.
7. Inform her or him the juridical frameworks protecting the rights of children and adolescents victims of commercial sexual exploitation.
8. Assure her or him that she or he can come back to look you up anytime she or he wants.

Basic messages to give the child or adolescent who is suspected of being a victim of trafficking or sexual exploitation.

Step 4. Informing before asking:

- Protection needs

Trauma resulting from negligence and abuse has a negative repercussion in the development of children and adolescents, especially in early childhood. Therefore, the States parties should take all necessary measures to safeguard young children at risk and offer protection to victims of abuse, taking positive steps to support their recovery from trauma while avoiding stigmatization for the violations they have suffered.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 7, Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood, CRC/C/GC/7, September 20, 2006, paragraph. 36.

The most important message to relay to the child or adolescent is that she or he has a right to receive protection and care. Only if we are successful in giving her or him security about the protection she or he may receive, will she or he trust us and may confirm if there is any exploitation situation.

Operating Protocol for the Detection Protection and Care to Children and Adolescents Victim of Commercial Sexual Exploitation, International Labour Organization, 2004, pg. 17.

Indicators of possible physical or sexual violence against children or adolescents

Step 4. Informing before asking:

• Protection needs

Taken from the Protocol for Comprehensive Protection to Children and Adolescents Victims of Violence in the State of Veracruz © 2013.

During the interview with children and adolescents, it is possible to detect situations of violence through observation, before starting to ask questions.²² In general, a child or adolescent who is living with violence will not be willing to talk about what is happening to her or him. The effects of the situation in which she or he is living foster distrust, fear and shame. The most frequent signs of victimization in childhood and adolescence appear in their behaviour²³ (which is a reflection of what they feel). Before the appearance of any indication or suspicion, it will be necessary to consider the possibility that she or he is suffering or has suffered violence.

Some indicators are:

- Change in the behaviour of the child or adolescent when she or he feels threatened or when the subject of the interview gets close to a painful memory.
- Excessive agitation and fear, permanent nervousness, alert status, shocks.
- Excessive isolation or paralysation, submission, as if trying to “be invisible.”
- Regressive behaviour, speaks or acts as a toddler, or “locks up in her or himself”.
- Risky or self-destructive behaviour; mentions instances where she or he was hurt (falls, repeated beating). During the interview, she or he might hit her or his head with the hand, pinch her or himself, etc.
- Defiant behaviour; shows her or himself provocative, aggressive, excessively angry. Attacks and provokes others (passively or actively). Shows her or himself omnipotent (“I don’t need anybody”).
- Explosive behaviour with despair and crying.
- Sexualized behaviour; knowledge with sexual contents inappropriate for her or his age. Touches her or his genitals persistently; include genitals in a drawing.
- Secrecy and entrapment, when violence has been provoked by a significant adult. She or he shows distrusting behaviour, shame, blame, inability to express anger, anxiety, fear, doubt and confusion. Cover-up of and loyalty to the family, due to threats or fear of destroying it.

²² It will be the task of the consular staff to detect a possible risk. It is not recommended to look for detail or formulate questions to the child or adolescent about what happened to her or him. Suffice it to know she or he is afraid, that something happened to her or him that she or he does not want to repeat and, only if the child or adolescent spontaneously verbalizes what happened to her or him and who did it.

²³ Cirillo, S. and P. Di Blasio, *Niños maltratados. Diagnóstico y terapia familiar*, México, Paidós, 1991.; Sullivan, E. D. y L. Everstine, *El sexo que se calla. Dinámica y tratamiento del abuso y traumas sexuales en niños y adolescentes*, Mexico, Pax Mexico, 1997.

Indicators of possible physical or sexual violence against children or adolescents

Step 4. Informing before asking:

- Protection needs

States parties should adopt effective measures to protect adolescents against every form of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation, devoting special care to specific forms of abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation that affect this age group. They must specifically adopt special measures to protect the physical, sexual and mental integrity of handicapped adolescents, who are especially vulnerable to abuse and neglect. To that end, it is necessary to dedicate financial and human resources to promote studies on the adoption of laws, policies and effective programmes at local and national level.

UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment number 4, Adolescent Health and Development in the Context of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, CRC/GC/2003/4, paragraph 12.

Unaccompanied and separated children and adolescents, especially girls, are at particular risk of gender-based violence, including domestic violence. In some situations, such children have no access to proper and appropriate identification, registration, age assessment, documentation, family tracing, guardianship systems or legal advice.

UNO, Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment number 6, Treatment of unaccompanied and separated children outside their country of origin, CRC/GC/2005/6, paragraph 3.

All persons having contact with children and adolescents should be aware of the risk factors and indicators of all forms of violence; they should receive guidance on how to interpret these indicators and have the knowledge, the will and the capacity necessary to take timely measures (such as protection in case of emergency). Children and adolescents should be provided with the largest possible number of opportunities to pinpoint problems as soon as they appear and before a crisis situation arises, so that adults recognize these problems and act in consequence even if the child does not explicitly asks for help.

Committee on the Rights of the Child. General Comment No. 13, The right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence. CRC/C/GC/13, paragraph 4.

Guidelines for approaching possible victims of trafficking or sexual exploitation

Step 4. Informing before asking: • Protection needs

Taken from the Operating Protocol for the Detection Protection and Care to Children and Adolescents Victim of Commercial Sexual Exploitation © 2004 International Labour Organization.

The nature of commercial sexual exploitation often makes the victim feel guilt, shame or fear to speak openly on the subject. A child or adolescent in this situation may even be under threat of reprisals if she or he talks about the issue. The most important message to get through to the young person is that she or he has the right to receive protection and care and that we will do everything possible to provide this to her or him immediately. Only if we manage to give her or him security about the protection she or he can receive, will she or he be able to trust us and confirm if there is any exploitation situation.

The main goal of this step is to obtain some confirmation of the existence of a commercial sexual exploitation situation and thus be able to provide the child or adolescent with the necessary protection. It is not necessary to investigate how this exploitation takes place or who is responsible – that will be the task of the investigating prosecution. Our task is to provide security and trust to the victim so she or he, receives care.

1. Make sure to find a private space wherein the child or adolescent feels comfortable and with the confidence that nobody can hear or see her or him.
2. If she or he is accompanied by someone who might inhibit her or him when speaking, gently seek to generate a situation in which you can communicate alone with her or him.
3. Inform her or him that cases of commercial sexual exploitation happen, and that victims have the right to receive protection for themselves and for their families.
4. Offer your personal support to accompany her or him in this process until verifying she or he has received adequate protection.
5. Make sure she or he is aware that, regardless of what she or he might have done, she or he is the victim of a situation. She or he should not feel shame or fear criminal consequences.
6. Remind her or him that she or he is not obliged to give information she or he does not want to, and that this does not take away her or his right to receive protection.
7. It is important that she or he knows that the authorities have an obligation to help her or him find a safe place to live, if necessary.
8. Do not expect a broad explanation of her or his situation. Any sign from the child indicating she or he needs help is sufficient for you to provide it to her or him.

Guidelines for approaching possible victims of trafficking or sexual exploitation

Step 4. Informing before asking: • Protection needs

The Committee on the Rights of the Child has urged States not to penalize children and adolescents victims of trafficking, and instead provide them with the due assistance as victims of serious violation of their human rights.

Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment Number 6, Treatment of unaccompanied and separated children outside their country of origin, adopted by the Committee in its resolution CRC/GC/2005/6 during its XXXIX period of sessions, Geneva, Switzerland.

Trauma resulting from negligence and abuse has a negative repercussion in the development of children and adolescents, especially in early childhood. Therefore, the States parties should take all necessary measures to safeguard young children at risk and offer protection to victims of abuse, taking positive steps to support their recovery from trauma while avoiding stigmatization for the violations they have suffered.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 7, Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood, CRC/C/GC/7 paragraph 36.

The Protocol acknowledges that the most important message to relay to the child or adolescent is that she or he has a right to receive protection and care. Only if we are successful in giving her or him security about the protection she or he can receive, will she or he trust us and confirm if there is any exploitation situation.

Operating Protocol for the Detection Protection and Care to Children and Adolescents Victim of Commercial Sexual Exploitation, International Labour Organization, 2004, page 17.

Guidelines for approaching possible victims of trafficking or sexual exploitation

Step 4. Informing before asking: • Protection needs

Taken from the Protocol for Comprehensive Protection to Children and adolescents of the Special Childhood Protection System in the State of Oaxaca and the State of Chiapas, UNICEF-ODI, 2011.

When consular staff have more time to interact with the child or adolescent, they will have more chances to obtain information and understand better the violent situations she or he has lived. The following is suggested:

- More extensive tension-relaxing conversation to generate more trust and reduce fear.
- Speak in the first person and from experience to “show” the child or adolescent that the idea is to talk, without falling into an interrogation.
- Introducing activities while talking; drawing or handling playdough. Whenever possible, it is useful to participate in the work of the child or adolescent (do a part of the drawing, write or colour so long as she or he agrees to that).
- Asking her or him to draw her or his family is a useful tool to know who is more significant in her or his environment and talking more about the subject.
- Introducing some game and objects to handle while the interview develops, which allow her or him more body movement to channel anxiety and tension. For example, playdough, balls that can be squeezed, simple puzzles, etc.
- Repeat key messages, without expecting answers, while another activity is conducted or as a chat, when there is suspicion she or he was the victim of violence. For example:
 - “I have met other children that experienced things they did not like.”
 - “I know that talking helped these children”.
 - “I know that sometimes adults, even if they love you very much, are wrong and do things they must stop doing.”
 - “I will always believe what you tell me and will do everything possible so that, if something happened that you do not like, it will not be repeated.”
- Create key message phrases with the idea to stop the situation she or he doesn't like, instead of talking about punishing the adult who failed to take care of her or him.
- Do not dig into detail. If an investigation is necessary that will be the job of specialized personnel, the account and its processing will be given in a specialized therapeutic process.²⁴
- Indications in the behaviour or our suspicion, are sufficient to determine we are possibly before a case of violence.

²⁴ Young children who say what happens to them usually do not understand why they have to say it again, if they already did. This can hinder participation of the child in a preliminary inquest. In other situations, once they relate a situation of victimization, fears and anxiety are triggered upon seeing that this brings reactions to adults around her or him, which usually makes children and adolescents afraid and remain silent.

Guidelines on approaching possible victims of physical or sexual violence

Step 4. Informing before asking:

- Protection needs

The Committee on the Rights of the Child stresses that States have the duty to adopt adequate measures to guarantee all children and adolescents the right to protection against all forms of violence. In a similar sense, the International Court of Human Rights recognizes that the conditions in which children and adolescents participate within the framework of a process are not similar to those corresponding to adults. For that reason, it is the duty of States and their authorities to recognize and respect the differences in treatment corresponding to differences in the situation of those participating in a procedure of any kind.

Committee on the Rights of the Child. General Comment No. 13, The right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence. CRC/C/GC/13, April 18, 2011, paragraph 60.

Inter-American Court of Human Rights. Juridical Condition and Human Rights of the Child. Advisory Opinion OC-17/02 of August 28, 2002. Series A No. 17, paragraph 96.

Step 5

**Knowing the informed opinion
of the child or adolescent**

Stage 3. Development of the interview



Does the difference in power between children or adolescents and adults affect their answers during the interview?

Step 5. Knowing the informed opinion of the child or adolescent:

- Opinion of the child or adolescent

From the child's and adolescent's perception and reality, every adult has, by the simple fact of so being, more information, more experience, and therefore, more power than her or him, even when the reactions of the child or adolescent vary from submission and the intent to please to adolescent challenges.

In this situation, it is not surprising that, before any adult, and especially before those who in fact portray themselves as an authority, the child prioritizes, above all else, the need to please the adult and avoid punishment.²⁵ So the child will adjust her or his behaviour²⁶ according to what she or he thinks will allow her or him to avoid punishment and survive, given that she or he always depends to a larger or lesser degree, on adults.

In the case of a child, the expected reaction is to please the adult. In the case of an adolescent, the likely reaction is to challenge the adult for fear of failing to give the correct answer or get in trouble if she or he reveals information. In this sense, if she or he feels threatened or at risk of receiving a punishment, she or he will try to give the "correct" answer (that is, the one she or he considers the adult wants) above memories and actual experiences in relation to an event.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO KNOW THIS?

Behaviour typical of childhood development unleashed to please or challenge the adult when being questioned by someone she or he perceives as authority, might be interpreted as lies or a voluntary attempt to hide information.

This conclusion will not be correct, because the reaction to authority and the need to "accommodate" her or his behaviour and answers to what they suppose the authority wants to hear, is the only possible reaction, given the cognitive and emotional tools that she or he has.

It is the task of the adult interacting with children and adolescents to generate the conditions to minimize anxiety, fear and the perception of the power difference, so that the interview will develop in the best possible manner.

25. Piaget, Jean, op. cit.; Kohlberg Lawrence, New York, Harvard University: Longman, 1987.

26. The moral development of the child is determinant in the way she or he reacts before the authority and interprets what she or he must do before it. These characteristics may affect the way a child answers complying with the "must do" which she or he self-imposes according to the moral development stage she or he is in.

Does the difference in power between children or adolescents and adults affect their answers during the interview?

Step 5. Knowing the informed opinion of the child or adolescent:

- Opinion of the child or adolescent

For the Committee on the Rights of the Child of the UNO, one of the goals pursued by the Convention on the Rights of the Child is to demand respect and consideration for children and adolescents as persons, subject of rights, that must be considered as active and valuable members of the family, the community and of society, in general, without leaving aside their own concerns, interests and points of view. Likewise, it has clarified the obligation of the authorities to take into consideration the individual differences in the capabilities of children of the same age and how they react in different situations, as the evolution of their abilities should be considered as a positive and enabling process and not an excuse to exercise authoritarian practices that restrict their autonomy and expression, and which traditionally have been justified alleging the relative immaturity of children and adolescents and their need for socialization.

Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 7, Implementing child rights in early childhood, CRC/C/GC/7, September 20, 2006, paragraphs 5 and 17.

For its part, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights has reminded States that children and adolescents must be heard for the purpose of being able to resolve matters according to their best interests, as even the views of her or his father, mother or guardian cannot replace that of the child or adolescent.

International Court of Human Rights. Rights, Advisory Opinion OC-21/14 Rights and Guarantees of Children in the Context of Migration and/or in Need of International Protection. Series A num. 21, August 19, 2014, paragraph 122.

Step 6

Completion of the interview

Stage 4. Conclude the interview



The role of consular authority in the reality of the child or adolescent. Recommended actions

Step 6. Conclude the interview:

- Gratitude and emotional rescue

The child or adolescent will be especially vulnerable to feeling a failure, lacking ambition and worthless. If she or he is in a border patrol station or other security building, under the care of armed officers in uniform, she or he will inevitably be fearful about the future of her or himself and her or his family members, having conceived the idea that they are in trouble and will be taken to jail.²⁷

Consular staff can play an essential role in this reality: they may offer messages that help minimize the harmful effect on the development of the child or adolescent. Or conversely, through ignorance, they might undertake actions and relay harmful messages that will only increase desperation and the perception of little value.

The actions that consular personnel can offer verbally, which represent a real emotional rescue for the child or adolescent and which are therefore recommended for use whenever pertinent during the interview are, for example:

- Offer a perception of her or himself that counteracts the feeling of failure and little value: “you are very brave”, “you managed to get all the way up to here”.
- Reinforce her or his identity and story through their appropriate interaction.
- Offer information to offset confusion and embarrassment: explain where she or he is, what is going on, what is expected of her or him.
- Offer information to offset the perception of failure and crumbling of the future project: explain what is going to happen, possible options.
- Help visualize the resources she or he has: “now I see all you did”.
- Confirm the emotions that the child or adolescent is probably feeling so she or he feels heard and understood.

27. See: *What is concrete thought? What is egocentric thought? How does a child think? How do adolescents think?*

The role of consular authority in the reality of the child or adolescent. Recommended actions

Step 6. Conclude the interview:

- Gratitude and emotional rescue

The Vienna Convention on Consular Relations recognizes, as an essential function of the consular officer, “granting assistance to the national of the sending State in the defense of her or his rights before the authorities of the receiving State”, in a way that accordingly, the national of the sending State has the right to access the consular officer in order to procure said assistance.

In the case of children and adolescents, international human rights law imposes the obligation on the consular personnel to oversee the interests of the child, in the sense that administrative or judicial decisions taken in the receiving country have assessed and taken into consideration the child’s best interests. Due to the special vulnerability of children outside their country of origin, especially those unaccompanied or separated, access to consular communication and assistance becomes a right that takes on special relevance, and which must be guaranteed and treated as a priority by all States. This is especially true, given the implications of their participation in the process of collecting information and documents in the country of origin. In addition, whoever acts as consular officer plays an essential role in ensuring that voluntary repatriation is ordered only if so recommended as the result of a procedure to determine the best interests of the child, subject to proper guarantees. And this is after verifying that the repatriation may be conducted under safe conditions, so that the child receives attention and care upon her or his return.

International Court of Human Rights. Rights and Guarantees of children in the context of migration and/or in need of international protection. Advisory Opinion OC-21/14 of August 19, 2014, paragraphs 126, 127 and 128.

Risk of depersonalization

Step 6. Conclude the interview: • Anticipation of the following steps

Along with the feeling of failure, the psycho-emotional situation of the unaccompanied migrant child or adolescent can induce reactions which in psychology are known as depersonalization.

Depersonalization is a phenomenon whereby children and adolescents cannot perceive themselves or value themselves as persons; they lose contact with who they are, their identity and their own value. Despair and depersonalization are closely linked to depression, which may develop to severe levels, aggravated by the fact that, in general, the case is about children and adolescents from contexts of high or very high levels of poverty; in such contexts, it is usually difficult to find resources to survive and, moreover, to develop in an optimal manner.

There are actions that the consular staff may undertake during the interview to minimize the risk of depersonalization.²⁸ For example, consular staff may:

- Reconstruct with the child or adolescent, where she or he comes from and who her or his significant persons are.
- Propose key messages wherein her or his bravery is conveyed.
- Contribute ideas about who she or he is and what she or he would like in the future, etc.

28. See *The role of the consular authority in the reality of the child or adolescent. Recommended actions.*

Risk of depersonalization

Step 6. Conclude the interview:

- Anticipation of the following steps

Depersonalization is to feel detached from oneself or from one's own body. The problems of impulse control give rise to behaviours that the survivor considers very atypical compared with their pre-traumatic personality. A person who was cautious before, may lunge into a high-risk behaviour.

Office of the High Commissioner of the United Nations for Human Rights.. Manual on the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment ("Istanbul Protocol"), 2004, pg. 90.

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