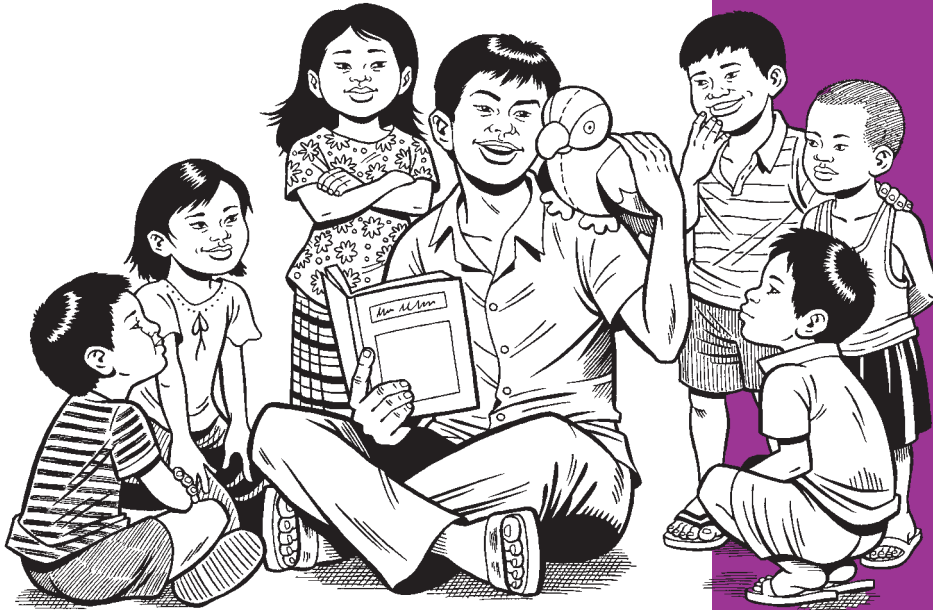


International  
HIV/AIDS

Alliance

Supporting community action on AIDS  
in developing countries



# A parrot on your shoulder

A guide for people starting to work with orphans and vulnerable children

# Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b>	2	Islands	36
<b>Introduction</b>	3	Take your turn	38
<b>Activities</b>		Find someone ...	40
<b>Learning names and getting to know each other</b>		<b>Active listening, observation and analytical skills</b>	
Bubbles	8	Pass the message	42
My name is ... and I like ...	10	Simon says or Tota kehta hai	44
The sheet game	12	Just a minute!	46
If I could be ...	14	Continuous story telling	48
Who am I?	16	Do as I say, not as I do	50
<b>Energetic icebreakers or energisers</b>		A parrot on your shoulder	52
Fruit salad	18	<b>Drama, mime and role play</b>	
The sun shines on ...	20	Acting out emotions	54
The winking game	22	Mirrors	56
Scissors, paper, rock	24	Throw the mask	58
Sit next to me	26	Puppets	60
<b>Group work, co-operation, trust building and problem solving</b>		<b>Painting and drawing</b>	
Tropical rainstorm	28	This is me	62
Human sculpture	30	Team drawing	64
Dragons	32	Murals or collages	66
Points of contact	34	<b>Selected references and resources</b>	68

# Acknowledgements

## The International HIV/AIDS Alliance

The International HIV/AIDS Alliance (the Alliance) is an international non-governmental organisation that supports communities in developing countries to make a significant contribution to HIV prevention, AIDS care and to the provision of support to children affected by the epidemic. Since its establishment in 1993, the Alliance has provided financial and technical support to non-governmental organisations and community-based organisations from more than 40 countries.

## Acknowledgements

The material in *A parrot on your shoulder* has been drawn from many sources, including Alliance colleagues, partners and consultants, as well as those sources listed in the 'Selected references and resources' at the end of the publication. The Alliance gratefully acknowledges these contributions. Our particular thanks go to Clare Hanbury for contributing activities and for her support and helpful suggestions throughout this project, as well as to Diane Swales for her comments on the text at various stages of its development. We would also like to thank Alice Welbourn, Alick Nyirenda, Andrew Hobbs, David Curtis, Eddie Mupotola, Elaine Ireland, John Williamson, Justine Cottle, Patrick Kangwa, Shikha Ghildyal, Rena Geibel and Vijay Rajkumar for their comments on the initial concept.

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This resource was made possible through the support of the UK Department for International Development. The opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of this donor.

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# Introduction

*A parrot on your shoulder* is one of a series of resources that the Alliance is developing to encourage participation in practice. It seeks to support individuals and organisations working with orphans and other vulnerable children living in a world with HIV/AIDS. Today, more than 13 million children currently under the age of 15 have lost one or both parents to AIDS. By 2010, this number is expected to have risen to more than 25 million (UNICEF, UNAIDS and USAID 2002). *A parrot on your shoulder* is also a useful companion to the Alliance's resources for communities working with orphans and vulnerable children in Africa, *Building Blocks: Africa-Wide Briefing Notes and Building Blocks in Practice* (January 2003).

The development of *A parrot on your shoulder* started with an initial request from one of our partners, the Khmer HIV/AIDS NGO Alliance (KHANA) in Cambodia. KHANA described a great willingness and enthusiasm among their partners to work with children in a more participatory way, but had found that people were uncertain about how to get started. For example, during a field visit we noticed that children, having been lectured by a field worker about health and good behaviour, seemed very quiet and downcast. The field worker was uncertain about how to engage the children further. We decided to play some games with the children and this led to enormous fun and lots of laughter. Following the games, the children were much more relaxed and able to talk with the field worker and other adults about their problems, hopes and ideas. One grandmother was heard to comment, 'I never knew games could be educational!'

Further consultation suggested that this situation is quite common. People have enthusiasm, willingness and some skills, but need ideas to help them initiate meaningful dialogue with children, and to keep the conversations going. This can be true for people meeting children they don't know for the first time, as well as for community workers who may know the children in their projects, but who want to create an opportunity for children to be more involved in project design and development.

This resource aims to meet the needs of people who want more meaningful engagement with children by providing activities that will help them get started.

The selection of activities is based on what our partners and others have found to work well.

## Issues to consider when thinking about encouraging children's participation

### What is children's participation?

Participation is the process of involving children and young people in making decisions about projects that aim to benefit them. The list below shows different types of children's participation. One type is not 'better' than another: it depends on what works best for you, the children you are working with and the particular project you are working on. Different types of participation can be appropriate with different children and at different stages of a project.

- ✓ **Assigned but informed** – Adults decide on the project and children volunteer to be involved. The children understand the project. They know why they're involved and who decided to involve them. The children have a meaningful role and the adults respect their input.
- ✓ **Consulted and informed** – The project is designed and run by adults, but children fully understand the process and their opinions are taken seriously.
- ✓ **Adult-initiated, shared decisions with children** – Though adults have the initial idea for the project, young people are involved in planning and implementation. Their views are considered and they are involved in making the decisions.
- ✓ **Child-initiated and directed** – The children or young people have the initial idea for the project and decide how it is to be implemented. Adults are available for support but do not take over.
- ✓ **Child-initiated, shared decisions with adults** – The children or young people have the ideas and initiate the project. They then seek advice, discussion and support from adults. The adults provide their expertise for the children or young people to consider.

*'States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with age and maturity of the child ...'*

Article 12, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

### What is NOT meaningful children's participation?

There are some activities in which children are involved that we don't consider to be meaningful participation:

- ✗ **Manipulation** – Children or young people don't understand the project and its aims. An example of this would be pre-school children carrying political placards about the impact of social policies on children.
- ✗ **Decoration** – Adults ask children or young people simply to sing or dance at an event related to a particular cause wearing T-shirts proclaiming this cause, and do not explain the cause to the children or involve them in the organisation of the event.
- ✗ **Tokenism** – Children or young people are apparently given a voice, but in fact have little or no choice about the subject or the style of communicating it, and little or no opportunity to formulate their own opinions. An example is the token use of children on conference panels, where they are effectively the voice of adult messages.

Adapted from: Hart (1992), and Save the Children Fund (2002)

## Why is children's participation important?

- The United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child states that children have the right to participate.
- Children and young people are part of the communities that we work with, and projects benefiting them should be seen as benefiting the community as a whole.
- Involving children and young people in decision-making on projects aimed at benefiting them builds ownership and will build their skills and confidence.
- Evidence shows that projects that involve children and young people are more likely to be successful.
- Participation will provide children and young people with important skills and new learning.
- Children's and young people's participation can promote community responsibility for child welfare issues and increases awareness about children's abilities and rights.
- Adults learn how to listen to children and to give them more respect.

## Things to consider when planning for children's participation

- Be clear about why you want to involve children.
- Ensure that children understand the purpose of their involvement, what it is contributing towards, how much time it will take and what they can expect to gain from it.
- Consider how you will accommodate their views and ideas, especially if they may conflict with those of adults.
- Consider what type of participation is most appropriate for children at each stage of the project.
- Consider how you will enable marginalised and less confident children to participate fully in activities and not further marginalise them or reduce their confidence.

- You will need to have the support of your colleagues and the organisation before involving children and young people in your projects.
- Those working with children will need to be committed to the rights of children and young people and to recognise that the benefits will outweigh any extra resources and time needed.
- Participation needs planning – consider the time and resources you will need.
- Remember that children come from different social, economic and cultural backgrounds. They vary in age, gender, disability, caste and class, and have different values, ideas, hopes and fears.

## Things to consider to ensure safe working with children

- In accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, ensure that all work with children is in their best interests and does them no harm.
- Always let your organisation know where, when and with which group of children you are going to be working. Consider protection issues in deciding the time and location of the activity (for example, whether the children are to be going home alone in the evening, or whether the venue is isolated).
- Inform parents, adult carers or any authorities responsible for the children you are intending to work with of your plans.
- Find out if other non-governmental organisations are working with the children you intend to work with.
- Ideally, work in pairs, or if not, ensure the presence of a parent or carer, especially if working with individual children or small groups.
- Establish boundaries and good practice before working with children.

- Unless you are experienced in this work, avoid working with young people who have been affected by alcohol or drugs. Arrange to meet them another time.
- When using some of the more active games, be aware of physical safety issues. Check the area you'll be working in for physical hazards.
- Consider how you will respond if children disclose or raise issues of inequity, exploitation or abuse.
- Remember that just as it is a child's right to participate, it is also their right not to participate if they do not wish to.

Adapted from Rogers (2000) and Save the Children UK (2000)

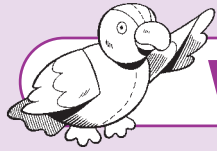
### Why use games to initiate a dialogue with children?

- Most children enjoy games – they are fun and foster a feeling of togetherness.
- They can be a non-threatening way for children and facilitators to relax and get to know each other.
- Through games, facilitators can learn a lot about the group of children they are working with.
- Games can help acquire or improve social skills, confidence, concentration, communication, co-operation, and build trust and reduce anxiety.

### When to use games and how to choose them

- Make sure you understand the instructions well before starting the game and feel confident about facilitating it.
- Have any materials needed for the game ready.
- Don't force anyone to participate in the game but encourage them to do so.
- If there are participants who are uncertain, begin with less interactive games, or ones that don't rely on disclosure of personal information.
- Think of some strategies for dealing with any potential 'saboteurs' who may try to interrupt or stop the game. Perhaps explore why they want to do so and the effect on the group.
- Be aware of cultural values. For instance, some activities may be more appropriate for single-sex groups in certain settings. Issues around personal space and physical contact also need to be considered.
- Choose games appropriate to the topic you intend to work on in the future, the time available and the type of group you're working with.
- Consider the physical abilities of the group as well as literacy levels when choosing your games.
- Adapt games according to your purpose and experience, and the cultural context in which you are working.
- Keep some notes about how the activities went, which you can review as you build up your confidence and experience.

Adapted from UNICEF (1998)



# Who am I?

This activity encourages analysis and question asking.

## What will you need?

- Sticky tape.
- Several pieces of paper with names of famous pop stars, footballers, movie stars, historical figures or people who are well known in the local community, written in marker pen.

## What do you need to look out for?

- This activity needs a group with a shared background.

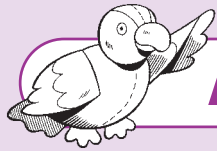
## How does it work?

- Ask for a volunteer and stick one of the names on their back, getting them to show their back to all the other participants.
- Explain to participants that the aim of the activity is for the volunteer to guess whose name is on their back by asking the rest of the group questions.
- The questions can only be answered with 'yes' or 'no' (for example, 'Is this person female?' or 'Is this person alive?').
- The volunteer can make a guess at any time. If they are correct, then the person who answered the last question will have a new name stuck on their back, and the activity continues as before. If they are wrong, they have to continue to ask more questions.
- You can agree a time limit or a maximum number of questions to be asked with the participants.

## Adaptation/variation

- Instead of assigning participants a well-known person, they themselves could each come up with a well-known person to represent without letting the others know who they have chosen. The rest of the participants would then ask the questions that can only be answered with 'yes' or 'no' (for example, 'Are you a singer?' or 'Are you from this village/town/country?').





# Acting out emotions

A good way to introduce participants to role play and drama-based activities around specific issues to be worked on later. It allows participants to act out something relevant to them in a safe environment.

## What will you need?

- A set of cards with different emotional or other situations written or drawn on them.

## What do you need to look out for?

- Be sensitive to the fact that some cards may be uncomfortable for some participants to act out or may not be culturally appropriate.

## How does it work?

- You can start this session off with a brief discussion about non-verbal communication or body language – how does it work, what does it show others?
- Introduce the activity.
- Ask for a volunteer and tell participants that while the volunteer is acting out what is on their card, the others can ask questions to try to guess what is on the card. The volunteer has to answer all the questions in character. So, for example, if the card says 'Being angry', the volunteer can reply to the question, 'How are you?' by shouting, 'What has that got to do with you?'
- Participants can make a guess at any time, and if it is right, the person who made the guess picks up another card and takes over. If the guess is wrong, continue until someone gets it right.
- The questions should be kept going at a fast speed.

## Adaptation/variation

- If you are going to work on feelings with the group, you could ask participants to think of a time when they had a strong emotion and ask them to act it out for the others to guess.
- You could also ask participants to work in pairs and act out a scenario, or to form a 'sculpture' for which the other participants have to interpret the body language.

## Examples

Being ... happy, sad, scared, angry, bored, hungry, tired, rich/poor, confused.



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Registered British Charity Number 1038860

Designed and produced by Progression, UK  
[www.progressiondesign.co.uk](http://www.progressiondesign.co.uk)

Published: July 2004

ISBN: 1-905055-02-1

POYS 07/04

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