The Child to Adult Method in Mine Risk Education

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Community organizers heard of Mitic’s situation and raised more than CN$50,000 for the custom-made chopper.

Contacted the Barrie Harley dealership before his accident about purchasing a bike, Mitic had to be walking with just a cane but still had little hope of ever riding a motorcycle. Having continued his recovery at Toronto’s St. John’s Rehabilitation Hospital, Mitic had two new prosthetic feet and was able to get around in the community.

When Canadian Master Corporal Jody Mitic lost both his feet after stepping on a landmine in Afghanistan, Mitic never thought he would be able to ride a motorcycle again. After months in the hospital, Mitic’s doctors told him that he might never be able to walk normally again.

A young Kurdish girl explains mine warning signs to her family. PHOTO COURTESY OF MUDHAFAR AZIZ HAMAD

PHOTO COURTESY OF MIKE KENDELLEN

Why is the Child Selected?

The MRE department at IKMAA selected children to deliver MRE through Child-to-Adult approach because:

• Most of the time he/she is available for training and living in the community.
• He/she has more time to meet and participate in different activities.
• He/she is able to stay focused on and easily understand the messages and retain them for a long time.
• He/she follows the adults in the daily activities such as collecting wood and herbs, cultivation, grazing animals, etc.

Which Child is Selected?

Additionally, the MRE operators should look for the following characteristics when selecting a child. The child has to be:

• Between 9 and 15 years old
• Literate
• Clever and active
• Able to relay MRE messages and instructions to his/her family members in an effective way
• Able to use posters, leaflets or any education materials
• Recommended by his/her family to be involved in this method
• Able to take on the role of leader or instructor

Canadian Mine Survivor Gets Custom Motorcycle

When Canadian Master Corporal Jody Mitic lost both his feet after stepping on a landmine in Afghanistan, Mitic never thought he would be able to ride a motorcycle again. After months in the hospital, Mitic’s doctors told him that he might never be able to walk normally again.

In April, owners of the Harley Davidson in Barrie, Ontario, Canada, presented Mitic with a custom-made chopper.

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The child-to-adult method has powerful links to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is a practical way in which children can be involved in MRE, and it is one of the best ways to ensure that children are included in MRE activities.

MRE education is a program carried out at the community level in which MRE operators exchange information, with the community to help reduce the risk of death or injury by mines or explosive remnants of war. In many communities, children may not count as the group at highest risk as young men often face the most danger from ERW. However, the risk from mines/UXO may be one that becomes more relevant to the children as they get older, and it is easier to reach them and influence their behavior while they are young.

by Mudhafar Aziz Hamad (Iraq | Kurdistan Mine Action Agency)
Many conditions must be satisfied to use the Child-to-Adult approach. The first condition involves designing a special MRE curriculum and educational materials such as posters and leaflets for distribution. Next, an area and group to work with the children (who will be chosen using the aforementioned criteria) should be selected. Seven to 10 days of training are necessary. A prepared CD containing information about mines and MRE distributed to the participating children as an educational tool will assist the children later in explaining MRE messages and instructions to their family members. It is important that there be strong coordination among the MRE operators, local authorities and the child’s family for the task to succeed.

While implementing MRE instructions, the child has to:

• Respect his/her family members and assist them.
• Perform daily chores so his family can rely on him/her.
• Try to play his/her role in the family as an MRE instructor and teach them messages in convenient times.
• Be patient and kind in relaying the MRE messages.

The Child-to-Adult Approach

For many children, mine-risk education is a vital and sensitive topic. Teaching about the risk of mines should start with finding out what children already know and feel about mines. Learning activities must be based on the children’s resourcefulness, on the knowledge they have and on their creativity and ability to understand the dangers. Children behave responsibly when adults trust them and foster in them self-respect and respect for others.

There is great potential for children to become involved in MRE programs. The child-to-adult approach can use helpful local culture and tradition to reinforce messages. It can also challenge local culture and tradition when those traditions lead to unsafe behaviour by involving children and their families in exploring the problems as they apply to the local context. This forms the basis for the design of appropriate interventions.

Advantages of the Child-to-Adult Approach

In rural communities, children are mostly forced to go out either individually or with the adults to perform daily activities such as grazing animals, collecting herbs or wood and to participate in dangerous actions such as dismantling mines or ERW to sell for scrap metal. In this case both of them will be in real danger, or security reasons, or restrictions in some communities preventing the MRE team from meeting with adults. Also, adults are not generally able to meet the MRE team for long hours or consecutive days of MRE sessions.

Examples of Emotional MRE Messages from Children to Adults

• Father, please don’t get close to mines or ERW because if you die or become disabled, who would run our family?
• Think about our lives when you try to touch mines/ERW.
• We can struggle through the difficulties of life (e.g., we may be hungry for a short time but our lives will be worse if you die or become disabled).
• If you become disabled you will not marry easily.
• If you become disabled our lives will be worse because you will not be able to work.
• We have the right to grow up under the supervision of our parents.

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Training the Child to be a Teacher

The six-steps of the Child-to-Adult approach can be used to train the child to be a teacher in his/her home as are follows:

Step 1: Understanding activities
Step 2: Finding out more
Step 3: Discussing and planning
Step 4: Taking action

Children’s self-esteem and communication skills will be greatly developed through participation in child-to-adult activities, but as the start of a project they need plenty of encouragement and careful guidance.

Attitude of adults. Children’s lack of skills in this kind of approach must not be overplayed. It is remarkable how quickly children adapt to having their ideas and opinions taken seriously. Observers are often amazed and delighted at how easily and freely children discuss problems and solutions during these sessions, which suggest that the key problem to working with children in this way is the attitude of the adults, not the abilities of the children.

Habits of some communities. In some communities, the adults do not accept their children as instructors or advisers. Their culture and habits do not allow the child to sit with the adults, especially in the nomadic and tribe families; however, some progress has been made due to the effect of media and the technology on the communities and people in general (rural communities in particular). This point has to be taken into consideration and it becomes a challenge for the operators.

Messages must not be wrong. As children are powerful communicators of messages to others, it is essential they get the messages right. If the messages are incorrect, children will effectively learn and repeat the wrong information.

Conclusion

The child is like clay; you can mold him into anything you want by preparing him with the appropriate teachings or instructions. In this case, you train the child and prepare him or her to be an instructor for his/her peers and parents at the same time.

The Child-to-Adult method is an effective approach when the child has the right to participate in decision-making in matters that have an effect on his or her life. It is also an appropriate method when MRE officers cannot meet with adults because of security reason, like in Iraq, Afghanistan and other countries. IKMAA has found that children are not only easier to meet with for MRE lessons, but they also have a powerful influence on their peers, family members and others in the community.