

# The Child to Adult Method in Mine Risk Education

The author explains a child-to-adult approach to mine-risk education and how it uses the power of children as “little” MRE instructors in their communities. As part of this method, children use MRE lessons to teach adults and peers in their homes about the dangers of landmines and unexploded ordnance.

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**M**ine-risk 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.

## What is Child-to-Adult?

Child-to-Adult is an approach used to train children to be teachers in their homes teaching family members about MRE messages and instructions. The aim of this approach is to establish a community-based MRE program and to make use of the emotional relationship between the child and his/her parents in order to get parents and other adults to change their attitudes toward mines and ERW.

After IKMAA tested the Child-to-Adult method in a mine-affected village, it became clear that children not only looked after younger siblings but that they could also have a powerful influence on their peers, their parents and even the communities in which they live. The way in which messages are transmitted from children to others differs greatly depending on the experience and skills of the children and the group they may be asked to influence. The easiest group for children to reach is generally their peer group and the hardest is their parents. It is not normal in most cultures for children to “teach” their parents; however, children can involve their parents in activities that indirectly help to educate the parents or inspire them to seek further information. The situation may be different if parents ask their children for information, for example in communities where parents are not literate and they regard their children as important sources of information.

## Child-to-Adult: A Different Approach to Learning

The child-to-adult method is an approach to learning that involves children as full participants in learning about and promoting MRE messages to their families, friends and communities. It demands that the children:

1. Participate in developing and designing activities
2. Link what they are learning with problems they face
3. Involve their family members and others outside the immediate learning environment

Child-to-Adult method has powerful links to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.<sup>1</sup> It is a practical way in which a child's right to participate in decisions that affect him or her can be truly implemented.



A young Kurdish girl explains mine warning signs to her family.  
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## 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



Implementation of Child-to-Adult

Child-to-Adult approach is well-suited for implementation under conditions in which adults are unable to meet. For example, if there are difficulties or problems in gathering or meeting with adults due to their occupation with daily activities or because they are civil government officers, members of the military or policemen, the Child-to-Adult method is applicable. Other adults such as shepherds, farmers, smugglers and hunters are usually out of the village and thus unable to participate in traditional MRE activities. Sometimes there may be social, religious 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.



The children receive training in a tent.

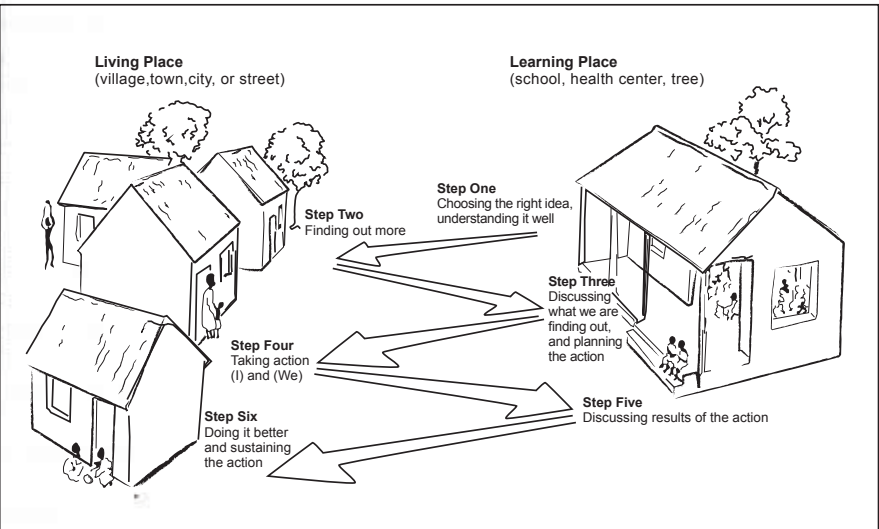


Table 1: The six-step approach to Child-to-Adult method.

Step 5: Evaluating what was done

Step 6: Doing it better

The adults are asked to satisfy and support the idea of the children as "little teachers" or "little instructors." In such cases, selected children are asked to assume the role of an adult, and they are trained to teach other children in much the same way as an adult instructor teaches.

Children's self-esteem and communication skills will be greatly developed through participation in child-to-adult activities, but at 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 adult, especially in the nomadic and tribe families; however, some progress



The trainers play games with the children to make them active and aware.

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.

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 operator, 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, but the trained child can help the adults to recognize dangerous items (mines and ERW) and warn them not to touch them because they may detonate. In addition to recognizing mined areas by becoming aware of mine warning signs, children warn the adults not to conduct the mentioned activities in mined areas. Thus the child helps the adults to stay away from the danger of mines and that reduces mine accidents.

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 are as follows:

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

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. ♦

See Endnotes, Page



Mudhafar Aziz Hamad graduated from Salahaddin University in 1989. After that, he worked with the Mines Advisory Group and then with the United Nations Office for Project Services as an MRE officer. Since 2004 he has been working as the Director of MRE at IKMAA. Mr. Aziz has had more than 50 articles published in the Iraqi press in Arabic, Kurdish and English. He is also Editor-in-Chief of Aga magazine, a periodical aimed at creating regional awareness among children in Kurdistan about mines and ERW.

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