The Child to Adult Method in Mine Risk Education

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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 ordinance.

by Mudnhatar Aziz Hamad (Iraq / Kurdistan Mine Action Agency)

M
ine risk education is a program carried out at the commu-
nity 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 com-muni-
ties, 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 teach-
ers in their homes teaching family members about MRE messages
and instructions. The aim of this approach is to establish a commu-
nity-based MRE program and to make use of the emotional relation-
ship 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-af-
fected 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
way for children to reach is generally their peer group and the hard-
est 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
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 immedi-
ate learning environment

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
a child’s right to participate in decisions that affect him or her can be
truly implemented.

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 and easily understand the
  messages and retain them for a long time.
• He/she follows the adults in the daily activities such as collect-
  ing wood and herbs, cultivation, grazing animals, etc.

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

• Between 9 and 15 years old
• 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
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 to other children in much the same way as an instructor teaches. 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 these 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 all 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

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.

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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.
- If you become disabled, our lives will be worse because you will not be able to work.
- I 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.
- I think about my life if you die or become disabled.
- 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, my life will be worse because you will not be able to work.
- If you become disabled, my life will be worse because you will not be able to work.
- We have the right to grow up under the supervision of our parents.

The Child-to-Adult Approach

The six-step approach to Child-to-Adult method.

Step 1: Finding out

Discussing results of the action

Step 2: Finding out more

Discussing

Step Three

Learning Place

Step Four

Finding out

Step Five

Learning Place

Step Six

Learning Place

Summary - Steps 4, 5, and 6

Step 6: Doing it better

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

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.

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.

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