



## Raising a Child through Prison Bars

Step-by-Step Guide for Facilitating  
a Mothers' Support Group in Prison

# Discussion Groups for Mothers





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**Athens, Greece  
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Any modifications, additions and/or deletions made to its National versions (Greek, Romanian and Bulgarian) are the sole responsibility of the Organizations that have undertaken the responsibility for its translation and adaptation.



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# Introduction

This Step-by-Step Guide, which was developed in the context of the DAPHNE project “Raising a Child through Prison Bars” (JLS/2008/DAP3/AG/1260), is one out of three booklets of a series addressed to professionals who are interested in conducting Support Groups (SG) with imprisoned mothers and their children. The series also includes:

- Raising a Child through Prison Bars: A Manual for Professionals
- Step-by-Step Guide for Facilitating a Children’s Support Group

The Manual for Professionals is a review of the relevant –unfortunately, very limited- literature, which renders it not only suitable but also useful for every professional who, in the course of her/his work, comes into contact with imprisoned mothers and their children. On the contrary, the two Step-by-Step Guides have been intentionally written in such a way as to constitute a useful tool to guide and enable the conduction of Support Groups only by qualified professionals experienced in Group facilitation; the aim of this decision was participants’ safety and welfare to be safeguarded in the best possible way while, at the same time, it is ensured that children of imprisoned or released mothers will obtain the greatest possible benefit from their participation in the Support Group.

The Guide in hand was developed in order to guide an as uniform as possible implementation of all of the Support Groups with imprisoned mothers (IM) that were conducted in Greece, Romania and Bulgaria in the context of the above mentioned DAPHNE project; Its first version was revised at two crucial points in time for the implementation of the Support Groups:

- after the training of the scientific team that would either facilitate the Support Groups or train the professionals who would undertake this task and
- after the conduction of all of the Support Groups, on the basis of the facilitators’ experiences

A third revision was provisioned for each of the National versions of this Guide (Greek, Bulgarian and Romanian<sup>1</sup>) if such a need emerged after training professionals working in prison settings in each of the three countries in order to be able to conduct a support group with imprisoned mothers in the future.

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<sup>1</sup> The Romanian Guide is available in both Hungarian and Romanian languages.

## 1. NAMING THE ACTIVITY

Even though, as it is implied by its title, the current Guide aims to facilitate the conduction of a Mother's Support Group in Prison, if one names it "Imprisoned Mothers' Support Groups" this might imply that imprisoned mothers are *ad hoc* in need of support; thus, the name "mothers' support groups" might underestimate imprisoned mothers' skills and capacities, namely it might place them in an inferior position from the outset. Hence, it is suggested when addressing both imprisoned mothers and prison's personnel to name this activity, "**Discussion Groups for (Imprisoned) Mothers**".

## 2. GENERAL OBJECTIVES OF THE "DISCUSSION GROUPS FOR IMs"

### a. To enhance imprisoned mothers' parenting skills

- to reduce negative emotions of guilt or isolation in regards to their maternal role because their imprisonment interferes with their capacity to be an efficient parent
- to increase empathy with their child/ren
- to feel confidence when communicating with their child/ren
- to deal with negative emotions because of their children's non or bad responses
- to deal with negative emotions because they miss their child/ren
- to build or reinforce positive relationships with their child/ren
- to build or reinforce positive relationships with the current caregiver(s) of their child/ren

### b. To support imprisoned mothers (IM) to handle their own abusive experiences in groups where the issue of their own abuse will be raised<sup>2</sup>

## 3. METHODOLOGY

The implementation of the Discussion Groups for IMs is based on the methodology of **group-based parent training**. It is, thus, recommended to be realized in small groups of **10 to 15 mothers, coordinated by one (facilitator) or two (facilitator and co-facilitator) professionals**. In a trustworthy and emotionally safe environment, IMs have the opportunity to share their own experiences and/or viewpoints as mothers and as women, to listen to each others' experiences with their children, to listen to others' viewpoints on raising a child and, finally, to discuss them with the facilitator(s). Hence, IMs gradually acknowledge their maternal role and have an opportunity to develop their skills as mothers, given that they want to improve their relationships with their children while in prison.

## 4. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

All IMs with **children from 0 to 18 years old** are eligible to register in the "Discussion Groups for Imprisoned Mothers". Pregnant inmates as well as mothers with their infants (from birth to 1 or 3 years old, depending on the national law of each country) living with them in prison, are also eligible.

<sup>2</sup> By use of material like the Toolkit developed under the DAPHNE project ALTRA, a socio-educational programme on gender-based violence for women in prison (SURT, 2008).

## Non-eligibility

Mothers having acute and/or chronic **mental health disorders**, such as bipolar disorders or schizophrenia, have to be excluded. This non-eligibility criterion may occasionally be modified **only** in cases that at least one of the group facilitators is a mental health professional (clinical psychologist, psychiatrist, psychiatric social worker or nurse), who could assess and decide on the participation of those IMs with chronic mental diseases. Regardless of the specialty of the facilitator(s), IMs having acute and/or chronic mental health disorders **could register in Discussion Groups only if they consistently take their medication and are under psychiatric evaluation.**

**Substance-abusing** mothers may also participate in Discussion Groups **only if they are not intoxicated (using substances) at the time before or during the Discussion Group.**

## 5. ORGANIZATION - ASSIGNMENT TO GROUPS CRITERIA

Whenever feasible, IMs enrolled should be grouped **on the basis of their children's developmental stage, namely infancy, early and/or middle childhood, early and/or late adolescence.** Taking into account the grouping criteria of a typical Parents' School, IMs' might also be classified into three major groups based on their children's age range, which are: i) *Mothers having infants or children in early childhood*, ii) *Mothers having school-aged children* and iii) *Mothers having adolescents.*

**Table 1. Examples of grouping IMs according to their children's developmental stage and age**

Grouping Categories	Mothers of ...			
	infants	children in early childhood	children in middle childhood (school age)	adolescents
Possible age range	0 - 1	1* - 6	6* - 10	10* - 18
	0 - 3	3* - 6	6* - 12	12* - 18
	0 - 6			
	Different groupings are also possible, depending on the number of enrolled mothers of each age group			

However, in prisons where there is a separate Mother and Baby Unit (MBU), where children live with their mother while she is serving her time, the first classification of the four groups is recommended (see Table 1). Particularly, according to the national (correctional) law's provision regarding the age limit children can stay with their mother in a Mother and Baby Unit (MBU) in prison (e.g. in Greece until 3 years old, in Romania and Bulgaria until 1 year old), **a special group of mothers having infants until that age (1 or 3 years old) might be assembled with mothers from MBU; IMs having infants in the same age range who do not live with them in prison can also be assigned to this group.**

However, since IM's grouping strongly depends on the total number of mothers enrolled, the age range criterion might be flexible. For instance, a group of mothers with children from 0 to 6 years old might be conducted, if only a few mothers having infants and a few mothers hav-

ing child/ren in early childhood are enrolled. However, it is strongly recommended –whenever possible- to group the enrolled mothers on the basis of the criterion of their children’s developmental stage.

Each mother can participate **only** in one group. Mothers having children at different developmental stages (namely, children belonging to different age groups), should be provided with the chance (whenever this is feasible) to choose to attend the group corresponding to the age of the child/ren that they would like to discuss more about, or that they face more difficulties in communicating with him/her/them.

### **Tips for organization**

- Women having children living with them in prison participate in the group along with their children (due to the fact that they have nowhere to leave them during the sessions); this barrier makes it impossible to assign them to a different group other than the group of “mothers of infants” (even if they wish to do so); of course, a mother can be enrolled in the group of her preference if she can arrange for her child to be taken care of by somebody else while she attends the group.
- The influence of drugs/medication
  - be informed of which time of the day they are administered and try to arrange the sessions at a time when women who take medication will not be under its immediate influence
  - if there is any woman with a psychiatric diagnosis, make it clear from the beginning that she will be accepted in the group only as long as she follows her treatment properly.

## **6. IM’S PARTICIPATION**

**Important Note:** Make sure that imprisoned women’s participation in the groups is **absolutely voluntary**; be very careful to safeguard that the way women are informed does not put any type of pressure on them to participate in the Discussion Group. Extra care should be dedicated in cases where the facilitator is a professional from the prison’s staff.

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Taking into account the special conditions and internal rules of the prison setting where the Discussion Groups are to be conducted, the way one would inform IMs and invite them to participate might differ occasionally, depending on whether the facilitator (or the person providing the information) is a professional belonging to the prison’s scientific personnel or one working for an independent organization. In both cases though it is strongly recommended –whenever possible– **to inform small groups** of prisoners (either coincidentally selected or by unit or wing, etc.) in a room or hall where women will be able to hear and also have the opportunity to ask several questions; an alternative way is to distinguish mothers from the general prison’s population -enlisted in advance by prison’s staff.

## ***Suggested Script for Informing and Inviting Imprisoned Mothers to Participate in the Discussion Groups***

### **Good morning/evening!**

My name is ....., I am a .....«**specialty**» and I work for .....«**name of Organization**». The reason we have gathered you here is to inform you about an activity we are going to start implementing here in prison, which is called "Discussion Groups for Mothers". These groups are for those of you who have children either here in prison or outside, from 0 to 18 years olds, or if you are pregnant.

### **What is a Discussion Group for Mothers?**

"Discussion Groups for Mothers" are small groups of 10 to 15 mothers having children of similar ages, who will meet together .....«**frequency of meetings, e.g. twice a week/ every week/ every two weeks**». Along with a .....«**each facilitator's specialty, e.g. psychologist, social worker etc.**» who will be the facilitator(s) of the group, you may talk about several issues that are of interest to you, namely issues on the raising of your children, as well as any other issues that may be of importance to you, either as mothers or as women. Each session will last for **##** hours and we are going to have **##** sessions. In some of our sessions we are going to discuss about:

1. the organization of a Special Day\*. For those of you who want to invite your child/ren here and your child/ren want that too, and given that an adult you trust can escort the child/ren here to the prison that Day, you can participate in some creative activities with your child/ren, like playing, drawing or anything we decide together in order to organize such a day.
2. the creation of two leaflets\*, one for imprisoned mothers and one for children whose mother and/or father is in prison. For example, those leaflets can include some thoughts or ideas you consider important for a mother who has children to know when she enters prison or what is important for children whose mother is in prison to know.

Your participation in such a group is **absolutely voluntary**; in other words, nobody from this prison facility obliges you to participate. You are also **free to stop at any time** without having to give any reason. However, taking into account how important the issues related to the mother-child relationship are to you, we hope that you will decide to participate and remain in such a group.

### **What are the benefits of participating in such a group?**

In such a group you may:

- have an opportunity to find new ways to communicate with your child/ren, according to their age
- have an opportunity to evaluate the relationship you already have with your child/ren and may find new ways in order to enhance it, if you consider this necessary
- have an opportunity to find new ways to express and communicate your feelings and your thoughts, not only to your child/ren, but also to other persons that are significant to you
- discover that you are not alone in the difficulties you are experiencing

- hear ideas from others which will enhance your ability to make decisions and solve problems
- benefit from the experience of being helpful to others

### **Any questions?**

If you are interested in participating in the Discussion Group, please wait in order to write your name, the number of your children and their ages; if you have more than one child, please also let us know about which of your child/ren you would like more to discuss about. If there are any of you who are not ready to decide now, you could think about it and express your interest in the next few days, but before Discussion Groups get started, to Ms «**name and specialty of a professional**».

In case groups have already started and you would like to register, you will have the opportunity to participate in another group that will start later, because it is important for each group to have the same members throughout the duration of the group.

*Thank you!*

\* These activities were conducted into the context of the DAPHNE project "Raising a Child through Prison Bars" (JLS/2008/DAP3/AG/1260); leaflets developed can be downloaded from: <http://www.mothers-in-prison.eu/node/14>; for a more detailed description of the Special Days conducted in the Bulgarian, Greek and Romanian prisons, please visit <http://www.mothers-in-prison.eu/node/14>.

Do not forget that IMs' personal motives and willingness to participate will determine, to a large extent, the effectiveness of the Discussion Groups.

In any case, it is strongly suggested to give IMs a reasonable amount of time to decide if they are interested in participating in such a group and then to register. For instance, to those mothers that are not sure if they want to register you might tell them to declare it (e.g. to the Social Service Office) within the next few days **before Discussions Groups get started**. In order to create and maintain a trustworthy, safe and cohesive group's atmosphere it is necessary to stress to them that **if they do not attend the first meeting of the Discussion Group they cannot attend any of the next meetings<sup>3</sup>**.

However, it seems that the implementation of Discussion Groups is highly affected by prison's rules and conditions as well as by IMs' attitudes and behaviour (e.g. distrust towards the group's facilitator(s) or unwillingness of the correctional officers, who have the responsibility to summon and/or escort inmates to parenting classes, to cooperate, IMs' transfers to other prisons or to a hospital etc.); consequently, **if some of mothers enrolled do not attend the first meeting of the group** and you are not sure of the reasons for their absence, it is strongly recommended to assess the real reasons for their absence in the first meeting, *but be very careful not to approach them in a way that forces them to come to the next meetings or to make them apologize or to feel guilty*. For example, you might arrange a personal meeting with those not attending the first session and ask them if they are still interested in participating in order to expect them and have the operational staff to call their names for the next meeting of the group. If a mother has changed her mind and does not want to participate, you should make her feel free to say it to you without giving any reasons for her decision. It is important to

<sup>3</sup> Even though, in reality, the facilitator will have to relax this criterion in case that practical or other barriers hinder the participation of some of the enrolled mothers in the 1<sup>st</sup> session.

explain to each one that the reason you are asking her is just to inform you about her decision and **not in order to apologize**. If she could not attend the group's first meeting but she wants to attend the second meeting *you should allow her to participate in the group*. Hence, one of the first two meetings should have mandatory attendance for the mothers who are enrolled. You should also explain to them beforehand that if they want to stop coming to the meetings of the Discussion Group after attending the first two meetings, they are free to do it, without being obliged to explain the reasons of their decision. Make sure that they have understood though that it is important to inform the facilitator(s) about their decision; Informing you, as a facilitator, about their decision to leave the group has not only a practical meaning in order for you to organize and rearrange the groups, but also a symbolic meaning for those mothers who have already enrolled and agreed upon the ground rules of the group during the first session.

### **Secondary motives for IM's attendance**

- **A certificate of participation:** some women might ask for a certificate of participation in Discussion Groups for Imprisoned Mothers. Firstly, check that prison regulations allow you to provide them with such a certificate. It should be made clear beforehand that *a certificate of participation will be provided only for full attendance or for women with 1-2 absences*. It is suggested that absences due to mandatory but temporary transfers, for instance to another prison or to a hospital should not exclude these mothers from receiving a certificate of participation in the group even if they miss more than 2 sessions. An alternative solution could be to provide a certificate indicating both the total duration of the group and the number of hours attended by each mother.
- **Financial motivation:** in case that a small amount of money is provisioned to be deposited to the accounts of women that successfully complete the Group, **be extremely careful not to provide this information to the women beforehand** (in order for assuring as much as possible that their motive to come and remain in the group will be only their personal growth and the relationship with their children and not to be contaminated by their financial needs); that means that the money should be deposited –whenever is applicable- after the end of **all of the support groups** that you intend to conduct in a certain prison facility.

## **7. DURATION AND STRUCTURE**

The current Guide was developed in order to lead a Discussion Group with 10 – 12 Sessions. Each session's duration could be 1,5 – 2 hours, has a specific topic and is introduced by the facilitator by naming the session's title.

In case a topic takes more time than anticipated or the group introduces a new, non-anticipated topic that was not scheduled to be discussed in that session, it is recommended for the facilitator to meet the group's needs, as long as the new topic is related to the aims of the support groups and she is able to handle it. However if the facilitator needs to be prepared in order to discuss the new topic she can postpone it by saying "I can see that this topic is of great interest to you. What would you say to discussing it next week?".

In any case, when you skip a topic, inform the group if and when you will come back to this topic (e.g. "the topic for today's session was...; but due to the fact that we ended up discussing the...., we will address this topic in our next meeting/after 2 meetings...Do you agree?"). If you

intend to endorse new topics, you have to either prolong the group's life (number of sessions) or skip one or more of the optional topics you intended to address; alternatively, you can combine the topics for two sessions into one (if feasible).

The content covered during most of the sessions should be adjusted depending on the special characteristics of the children's age range, while those covered in the first and the last session, should be common and mandatory for all of the groups. Sessions numbered 10 and 11 were mandatory only in the context of the specific DAPHNE project under which this Booklet was developed.

Some activities or experiential exercises are suggested for some sessions as delivery methods. Feel free to adjust the way of delivery to your personal style as facilitator and/or implement another activity which is related to the aims of the suggested ones.

## 8. EVALUATION PER SESSION

In order to obtain feedback from group members regarding each session's outcome, it is recommended to informally evaluate it at the end, by asking questions such as:

1. *Would you like to share a short comment about our meeting today? How did you find it?*
2. *What is it that you will remember from today's meeting? What impressed you the most?*
3. *What did you like the most today? Was there anything?*
4. *What didn't you like today? Was there anything?*

## 9. FACILITATOR(S)

Support groups could be conducted by one or two facilitators, who should be mental health professionals or other professionals belonging to the scientific personnel of the prison such as psychologists, social workers, sociologists-criminologists, health visitors and physicians.

The facilitator(s) should always be the same person(s) from the first to the last session; the roles of facilitator and co-facilitator by the same persons should be preserved during the entire duration of the group in order for it to be clear to the members of the group who is taking the responsibility of guiding their group .

Both facilitators, no matter how experienced they are or whether they belong to the prison's scientific personnel or not, should be specifically trained on how to conduct a support group for imprisoned mothers due to the fact that imprisoned mothers –and their children- often belong to high risk group(s) in terms of socio-economic-educational conditions but also in terms of their mental health, and their exposure to abusive conditions.

It is strongly recommended for the facilitator(s) to be female.

If you work in pairs, it is important for:

- the facilitator to introduce the topics and conclude each session (e.g. by an informal evaluation question)
- the facilitator and co-facilitator to cooperate and co-decide in regards to the implementation of each topic (e.g. pre-plan the questions they intend to ask, discuss in advance the potential and (un)anticipated parameters of such a discussion)
- the facilitator and co-facilitator to be prepared to refer continually to the topic of the session; for example, combining each participant's examples to a common conclusion or topic (e.g. "what you are all saying is that ....")



- the facilitator to distribute the time of each session in order to include not only discussion but also activities, tasks or exercises (e.g. drawing, story reading etc.)
- the co-facilitator to observe and keep notes (it should be easier for the co-facilitator) regarding the dynamics of the group as well as the group's process in order for both of them to handle any potential barriers more effectively
- the co-facilitator to support the facilitator's guidance
- the co-facilitator and facilitator to respect each other and give each other time to talk, without monopolizing the discussion
- the co-facilitator and facilitator to handle unanticipated events that might come up together and not to decide on their own without discussing it with each other. Spontaneous reactions in the prison setting might not be the best solution.

### 9.a. General guidelines for the facilitator(s)

Be extremely careful:

- not to be dragged into a one-on-one conversation, excluding thus the rest of the participants; there are always one or two participants who might monopolize the discussion, for example by talking about themselves. Several reasons might explain such behaviour; some persons want to hold the group's attention and get anxious if the focal point of the discussion shifts to another member. This monopolizing behaviour might also be a defensive overreaction to fear of attack or isolation in the group. In any case, such behaviour induces negative or aggressive emotions to the others, who dislike having someone monopolizing the discussion and do not have the opportunity or the floor to express themselves; thus, they might internalize their emotions or express them in a non verbal manner. If such monopolizing situations occur often, the rest of the participants might be disappointed or get bored or turn more to themselves, if facilitators do not **take charge of the situation**.
- not to end up with the whole group accusing or attacking one participant due to her (perceived by the group) "wrong" behaviour, viewpoint or reaction
- not to allow any member of the prison's staff to be present during the meeting(s). The group discussion must be conducted in a **secluded room** (wherever feasible, away from the wings). Whenever a person who does not belong to the group enters the room, the facilitator must interrupt the conversation or activity that is taking place
- to investigate in advance any limits due to the prison's regulations that could hinder your work (e.g. guards may not allow women to exit the wing in order to come to the meeting if they haven't been provided with a list of participants' names, etc.)
- **NOT to promise anything (or even to imply a promise) that you are not able to keep**

**A useful technique** in order to avoid getting carried away on topics that are not related to the aims/objectives of the sessions or getting involved in one-on-one long conversations, it is to start and end rounds of short answers to the questions you have asked, such as: «Let's take 2 minutes in order to hear from each of you what you think about ....". When each round has been completed the facilitator might group similar answers or classify different answers, comment on the general concept that emerges from the majority of the answers and avoid focusing on personal and detailed examples. Hence, every member of the group might identify a part of her story, understand that she is not the only one having such experiences and hopefully might feel less guilty about her behaviour.

If you have provisioned a **break**, the time that it will be held can be either at a fixed time (e.g. after 45 minutes) or flexible (e.g. whenever the facilitator feels that it is more appropriate for the group).

### ***9.b. Preparation to be done by the facilitator(s)***

Prior to each session the facilitator(s) must prepare the meeting room. The creation of a warm environment inside the prison contributes to the formation of the group's atmosphere (i.e. having a vase with fresh flowers *etc.*).

The facilitator(s) should also make sure that the room is clean and that there are enough chairs for all anticipated participants; the chairs should be arranged in a circle, with the facilitator(s) sitting at the top of the circle (namely, two narrow openings are made between chairs, in order for the participants to enter the circle).

If there is no flipchart available, the facilitator(s) should post on the wall as many blank pieces of paper (A5 size) as needed for each session; after the 1<sup>st</sup> session, the group's rules should also be posted on the wall during every session.

## SESSION 1

### *Mandatory - Common in all groups*

#### **Title: Acquaintance - Setting the Aims - Setting the Ground Rules**

##### **Objectives**

- to create group cohesion and the feeling of belonging
- to achieve an agreement on the necessary rules to make everyone in the group feel comfortable
- to discuss in further detail the demands, needs and expectations of the group and to set the aims of the consequent group sessions in a clear and realistic way in order to correct any non-realistic expectations of the participants

##### **Material**

- flipchart paper
- colourful markers
- stickers

##### **Process**

###### **→ Acquaintance**

The facilitator (and co-facilitator, if there is one) introduces herself by saying her name/surname, specialty and the organization she works for (whenever applicable). Then she invites participants to introduce themselves, either through applying an icebreaker activity or addressing the member of the group who sits on one of the two edges of the circle, eg clockwise or counterclockwise "Let's start from the left/right side of the circle in order to make the round of the circle". For instance the facilitator might give the following instructions: "Maybe some of you have met before and already know each other but let's get to know each other in a different way, since here there are only mothers. You might say your first name, something you would like the group to know about you and, if you'd like, to share with us the first name of your child/ren and his/her/their age(s)".

If a mother does not want to introduce herself or to give any information about her child/ren, it is suggested to give her some time to become familiarized with the group.

If participants bring up a personal issue or an issue that needs an answer or time to be discussed during the acquaintance segment, the facilitator is advised not to reply personally to the member(s) of the group at this stage but rather to "postpone" the discussion for the time being by saying: "I understand that this is an important issue for you, but let's meet each other first and we will have time in the next meeting to discuss such issues further". In case an urgent issue, that seems to threaten the viability of the group, emerges (e.g. "There is a rumor that you are going to take our children away from us if you judge that we are not 'good' mothers"), the facilitator must postpone it until after the acquaintance segment, while making sure that it will be discussed and clarified before the end of the session. It is important for the facilitator to take the lead in creating an atmosphere that allows participants to share not only problems and/or complaints, but also to share positive experiences both as mothers as well as women. Otherwise the facilitator might get into a difficult position too early, that is to be the one "to solve inmates"

problems". In addition, it is important to have in mind the way facilitator addresses the participants (verbal and non verbal communication, e.g. eye contact) and introduces the norms of the group (e.g. respect to each member without making any kind of discrimination).

### → **Setting the aims of the group**

The facilitator introduces the main aim of the following meetings. The **aim** of the discussion group might be introduced as follows: *"as you might already know, the reason for our meetings is to discuss together some topics regarding the relationship a mother has with her child/ren when the mother is in prison and other topics we think that might be of interest to the group both as mothers as well as women. Some of the topics that we will discuss in the group are: "Children's Needs", "Ways to communicate with children", etc. The last two meetings will be dedicated to: i) the preparation of a leaflet we would like to develop including topics that imprisoned mothers consider important and which will be available to every mother inside the prison who has minor child/ren and ii) the organization of a special day when you could spend some hours together with your children playing together in a creative and pleasant way here in prison. Please, feel free to bring up any question, example or concern you might have regarding the topics discussed."*

Then, the facilitator informs the group about the schedule of its meetings, including the meetings' **duration** (e.g. 12 meetings for 2 hours each), **frequency** (e.g. twice a week, Monday & Thursday) as well as **starting & finishing times**.

The facilitator invites participants to share their **expectations** of this group and to suggest possible ways of fulfilling such expectations. For example, the facilitator might ask: "Once the meetings of this group have been completed, what is this that you would like to have gained?" After **each** participant has expressed her expectations, the facilitator might comment on the realistic and unrealistic expectations heard (by addressing the group and not personally), summarizing this way the expectations that are anticipated to be fulfilled because they coincide with the aims of the group and those that are not anticipated to be fulfilled because they are out of the scope of this particular group. It is recommended for the facilitator to emphasize the potential common points between mothers' expectations and the Discussion group's aims, for instance by referring to the topics that will be discussed during the following meetings. In order to more actively engage participants, the facilitator can use the activity "The tree of expectations" (described at the end of this session).

### → **Setting the ground rules**

In order to enhance the functionality and cohesion of the group, the facilitator introduces the necessity of having some co-decided rules. However, taking into account that the members of such a group "live in a space full of rules, it is important for them to achieve an environment which runs according to their own consensus." (SURT, 2008, p. 40). Thus, it is suggested for the facilitator to invite participants to set the **ground rules** for their meetings (i.e. confidentiality, punctuality, respecting the opinion of others *etc*). In case an important rule is omitted, the facilitator might bring it up like this: "Do you think ... is important? What do you think if we reach some sort of agreement about it?" (SURT, 2008 p. 40).

The rules agreed upon are written on a flipchart or on a blank page posted on the wall. Then, the facilitator should invite participants to accept to follow these rules by "signing" them (e.g. by writing their name or drawing a symbol). The facilitator might sign the rules first, in order to point out that the ground rules apply for everyone in the group.

It is important for the facilitator to have in mind that each participant has the right to disagree with these rules, but any participant who does not agree to the group's ground rules should leave the group after the first session.

The facilitator should have the ground rules' flipchart posted at every meeting.

**Rules that should be included are the following:**

- Confidentiality on behalf of the facilitator(s) and the group members
- Respect for the other's opinion
- Respect for talking in turn
- Punctuality
- Not attending when under the influence of drugs

Finally, the facilitator evaluates (informally) the first group's meeting by asking: i.e. "How did you find our first meeting today?" or "Is there anything that you heard today during our meeting that made a positive impression on you and is there anything that made a negative impression on you?" etc.

### Suggested activity

**Name:** The tree of expectations

**Objectives:** Activation, acquaintance, group's bonding

**Material:** Blank sheet (A5 size), colourful markers, stickers

**Duration:** 15 to 30 minutes

### Instructions

The facilitator distributes colourful stickers to every participant and asks them to take 5 minutes in order to draw or write what they expect to gain from this group. Some participants are anticipated to be illiterate thus it is important for the facilitator to stress drawing a symbol, a character or an icon in addition to writing with words.

The facilitator draws or asks a member of the group to draw a tree (on a flipchart) (or it might have been prepared earlier). Then, she invites every participant to read what she wrote or to describe the meaning of her drawing and post her sticker on the tree.

After all stickers are posted on the tree, the facilitator comments on the realistic and unrealistic expectations without personalizing the discussion.

## SESSION 2

### Mandatory

#### Title: Children's Development

#### Objectives

- to identify and discuss the biological and/or emotional needs children at each stage of development as well as the changes in children's development and the kinds of parental behaviour that facilitate growth at each stage
- to empathize with children
- to distinguish between children's expected functional attitudes and behaviour from dysfunctional ones, according to their developmental stage
- to understand that their own experiences as children may affect their parenting style and to distinguish between consciously choosing their own parenting practices instead of adopting the "automatic pattern"
- to raise awareness that a parent also transmits cultural and ethical values, roles, and codes of behaviour

#### Process

The facilitator introduces the topic of the session. Then, she might introduce the common characteristics of each developmental stage, e.g.: "Children from 12 years old to 18 years old have some common characteristics. Psychologists call this developmental stage *adolescence*. What do you think are some common characteristics?" The facilitator might ask every participant in the circle and after each one has replied the facilitator comments on their answers. In case there is a co-facilitator, she could write the group's answers on a flipchart or a paper posted on the wall.

The facilitator, after summarizing and clarifying the developmental characteristics introduced by mothers, might invite them to give an example of their children's behaviour. In addition, the facilitator introduces what is anticipated from a child in that developmental stage, i.e. forming and obtaining his/her own identity. When parents know what is considered to be a "normal reaction" according to the age of their children, they are able to understand children's behaviour in a more productive way and are able to better meet their needs.

For that reason, the facilitator combines the developmental tasks discussed earlier with the mother's attitude and role. It is important to stress that a mother, even from prison, could be emotionally available to her child/ren. The facilitator might ask "in which ways do you think a mother could get satisfaction and/or enjoy her child at this developmental stage?"

Finally, the facilitator evaluates the second group's meeting by asking: "was there anything new you heard today and if yes, what was that?"

## Mothers of infants

**Developmental characteristics:** Total dependency

**Developmental tasks:** Attachment and trust

What mothers should know according to this age level:

When children are born their primary needs are to be fed and cared for physically. Mothers, through caring for the physical needs of their children (breast feeding, bathing, sleeping) become closer to them and a psychological bond is developed between mothers and infants. The extent to which the baby's needs are satisfied plays a decisive role in the psychological bond that is going to be built between the infant and the mother. Children, at the beginning of their lives, are totally dependent on their mothers and so is their survival. Usually, the child's needs call for urgent attention, so it is very important for the mother to adapt to her child's needs.

The only way infants have in order to express their needs or their dissatisfaction at the beginning of their lives is through crying. Mothers gradually become more sensitive in identifying the needs of the infant/s.

When speech develops (18 months – 24 months), the infant's communication with the environment changes. At this time the infant can communicate in a clearer way his/her needs and desires, as well as his/her frustration. It is the time when children learn the word "no" and they use it very often as they try to have control of what happens to their environment and they almost demand everything to go their way. It is very usual for children at this age to resist the demands of their mothers and show aggressiveness whenever they feel their desires are not being satisfied.

## Mothers of infants living in prison with them

After the first year of life, a very productive way for mothers to communicate with their children is through playing. Playing facilitates growth and therefore health. During play time with their children, mothers should be encouraged to follow their child's lead instead of imposing their own ideas; at the same time they should be encouraged to be engaged with the child while playing.

Infants who live in prison should be encouraged by their mothers to engage in mutual interaction. It is very common for children at those ages to encounter difficulties in playing with each other. They usually fight because they want the same toys or because they want to gain their mothers' attention. Mothers should facilitate children in finding a way to interact productively with each other through playing. Mothers should keep in mind that children at that age range follow their mother's lead. Therefore, if their mother solves her differences with the other mothers through aggressive behaviour or fighting, this is the way their children are going to learn to handle their own differences with the other children.

When mothers spend time with their child, it is recommended to put their child's feelings into words and to comment on the child's likely mood. In this way, the child will feel understood by his/her mother and furthermore, he/she will gradually get closer to understanding his/her own feelings. This process facilitates the child's emotional maturity.

Furthermore, mothers should be encouraged to recognize and praise desirable behaviour, expressing their satisfaction concerning this kind of behaviour. Through this process, it is likely that a child will develop an inner motive for desired and accepted behaviour.

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**Note:** In case mothers bring their infants with them during the group's meeting, it is suggested that the facilitator have several toys that infants might play with available. Although the presence of children might distract a mother's attention and/or cause noise in the room, if it is not feasible for mothers to come alone without their children, the facilitator should organize the room in such a way that the presence of children will be functional (i.e. children playing in the middle of the circle) and useful for understanding children's behaviours (i.e. if a 2 year old boy cries loudly and his mother does not react, the facilitator might verbalize the child/ren's fear or anger). In addition, if two 3 year old children fight with each other and the mothers in the group shout at them or grab them violently, the facilitator should comment "what else could be done in order for a mother to stop the fight?"

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### Mothers of children in early childhood

**Developmental characteristics:** Increased perception and mobility; incomplete individuation from parent

**Developmental tasks:** Sense of autonomy, independence and initiative

During this developmental stage, play is also very important and mothers should encourage their children to play. In case children visit them during their incarceration and have brought some kind of game or a painting, mothers should use this to communicate with their children.

A central issue of this developmental age (especially for children 2-4 years old) is denial, stubbornness and egocentricity. It is a time when children need to have control of their bodies and their environment. Children get angry very easily and are usually provocative to people around them.

It is very important for mothers not to be overly resistant to their child's demands. If mothers are too restrictive, it is very possible that an atmosphere of conflict and hostility will be created. They should set limits, which should be stable, clear and explained to the children. They should listen to the demands and needs of their children as well as their anger and should recognize these feelings. Being too strict makes children even angrier and the mother-child relationship deteriorates. The group's facilitator should encourage mothers to listen to the desires and needs of their child, even if they are not able to satisfy them.

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### Mothers of children in middle childhood (or of school-aged children)

**Developmental characteristics:** Increased independence, ability to reason, importance of peers

**Developmental tasks:** Ability to work productively

This is the age when children go to elementary school. Most of the children are already familiar with the school environment, through their attendance in kindergarten, but things change at elementary school. Elementary school is very important for children as they can sublimate in learning their emotions and their energy. The setting is more organized and children should be able to attend a class and concentrate on what is taught. Their success or failure to respond to the demands of school has a serious impact on their self-esteem. It is very common for children to compare themselves to their schoolmates and feel like they are in competition with them. The



facilitator should emphasize the importance of school on a child's development, especially in groups of mothers whose children have dropped out of school: *"Do you think school is important for children and why?"* The facilitator invites participants to reflect on the benefits and/or the disadvantages of going to school. The facilitator should emphasize the role of the mother in her child's possible refusal to go to school.

Furthermore, children often have to deal with the curiosity and the questions of other children concerning their family status. In this case, mothers should be available to listen to their children's fears and anger and should encourage them to express them in words and to discuss them, but they should also be capable of distinguishing their own fears from those of their children's.

In this phase it is very important that the mothers' emotions are discussed so they can cope with the fears and the separation from their children. Emphasis should be given to the fact that when children elaborate their feelings they feel relieved and then they can deal with the reality of the absence of their mothers more effectively. Children feel supported when they know that their mother keeps them in mind and that, even though she is physically absent, she is still available to them. Thus in this phase the emotional support of the mother is very important, because only if she feels understood and supported she will be able to support in her turn the child.

## Mothers of adolescents

### Developmental characteristics

- Increasing abstract thinking, future-oriented behaviour, aggression, puberty
- Emotional crisis and confusion, adult sexual development, abstract thinking, independence

### Developmental tasks

- achieves identity
- engages in adult work and relationships
- resolves conflicts with family and society

During adolescence children have to deal with a very difficult task, which is the psychological separation from their parents, in order to connect with peer groups. It is a time of growth, when adolescents construct their personal identity; they still need their parents' support, but they try very hard to deny this need, so they can feel independent and strong. This behaviour usually confuses parents who, on the one hand, feel that their children do not need them any more and even though they try not to interfere much in their lives, this makes them sad. On the other hand, parents may feel that they have to remain in control of adolescents' lives and in turn tend to interfere. This kind of behaviour usually makes adolescents angry as they may feel that their parents do not trust them. It is very difficult for parents to maintain a balance between these two types of behaviour during adolescence.

It is very important though for mothers to understand how much their child needs to know that she is available in case s/he needs her. The development of a trusting relationship between mothers and children is crucial for their well-being. Children should know that they can trust their mother and it is possible for them to reach her, even by a telephone or, if it is possible of course, by writing a letter, or even visiting her whenever it is allowed according to the rules of the prison.

During adolescence conflicts between parents and children occur very often. Children need to fight for independence and parents need to show them that they still have control. But they should understand that during this time of growth, children have a really hard time. They try very hard to take responsibility for their actions and their choices and at the same time they feel alone, unprotected and insecure. Therefore, feeling that they can rely on their parents whenever they need to, is very important for their self-esteem and the path to adulthood.

The facilitator should encourage mothers to recall their own adolescent years and the disagreements they probably had with their parents. In this way they will probably be more psychologically attuned to their children and be able to identify with them.

## SESSION 3 & 4 (MIGHT BE COMBINED IN ONE SESSION)

### *Mandatory - Common in all groups*

#### **Title: Being a Mother from Prison: Ways to Communicate with Children**

##### **Objectives**

- to introduce the phenomenon of the “conspiracy of silence” (should children know about their mother’s imprisonment?) and to discuss the importance of structuring and maintaining honest and realistic contact with children
- to emphasize the importance of consistent and frequent communication with children
- to improve the quality of their communication with their child/ren when there is such communication or to start establishing communication when it does not exist by exploring different ways to communicate
- to introduce alternative positive ways to communicate with children

##### **Process**

#### **→ First part: Revealing the imprisonment to children**

Children need honest, factual information and they need to have their experience validated; thus, “providing children with reliable and dependable information” (about their mothers’ absence) “allows them to begin to make sense of their situation” and to cope with their new life after having the opportunity “to grieve the ‘loss’ of their parent” (Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2002, p.5).

In this context, the facilitator might introduce the topic of communicating the fact of imprisonment to children by asking the group *how each mother has justified her absence to her children*. It is anticipated that the group will be divided into two subgroups, including those who believe that the child should know that his/her mother is in prison and those who have not revealed their imprisonment to their children. The facilitator invites each participant to share her beliefs and viewpoints. This way the facilitator is able to smoothly introduce and discuss with the group the phenomenon of the “conspiracy of silence” (Jose-Kampfner, 1995) or “forced silence” (Johnston, 1995), namely the failure of many caregivers, including parents and family, to disclose the mother’s incarceration to the children (Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2002). The facilitator should have in mind that the quality of the existing relationship a mother has with her child at the time of her arrest, the relationship she maintains with her children from prison and the duration of her imprisonment are some factors which determine a mother’s decision to talk to her child/ren about her imprisonment or not. Possible reasons that make it difficult for mothers to disclose their imprisonment can also be discussed by inviting participants to share their own thoughts or concerns about this. The facilitator may then summarize the contrasting viewpoints and discuss with the group which one seems to be more preferable in terms of the children’s best interest. It is important to make them reflect on alternatives that are for the children’s benefit. The underlying general concept is that it is better for a child to know the truth about her/his mother’s absence but the provision of such information should be made only under very specific conditions.

The facilitator has to be very careful in order to avoid taking a judgmental position against the mothers that have not revealed their imprisonment to their children in order not to make them feel guiltier than they may already feel.

However the facilitator might explain that it seems more helpful for a child to deal with his/her mother's absence when s/he is aware that she is in prison. The facilitator should be cautious to clarify that although children usually ask for further details about the reason of their mother's incarceration (i.e. the nature of the crime committed) mothers do have the right not to disclose all of the details of their conviction, which may be more preferable in some cases.

Children who are aware of their mother's incarceration usually ask their mother about the living conditions inside the prison. Mothers have described in such groups that when talking to their children on the phone, children tend to ask them about the noises they hear or where their mother is sleeping, if there are people who do not allow her to sleep, if she is having problems and fighting with other inmates etc. When a mother replies to such questions by describing a realistic situation it prevents her child/ren from having scary fantasies about prison.

The facilitator might invite participants to discuss the way a mother could talk to her child/ren and under which conditions. She might suggest to mothers who have decided to inform their children (wherever feasible) to discuss it beforehand with the children's current caregiver in order for the mother and the people who are responsible for the child (e.g. a grandmother) to answer the child's questions in the same way. Whenever possible, it seems to be more preferable for the mother to inform her children herself and to avoid doing that over the phone because she would not have the opportunity to handle the spontaneous reactions of her child/ren. In any case, however, it is important to stress that the mother should be well prepared in order to face and handle any possible negative or aggressive feelings and reactions that her child may have towards her.

### → **Second part: Communicating with children from prison**

The importance of communicating from prison in a consistent and frequent manner should be emphasized. The facilitator might introduce the topic by asking: "in what ways do you communicate with your children". After each participant has replied, the facilitator might identify the most common means of communication and assess how often they have contact with their children. In addition, the facilitator might invite each participant to share with the group some topics mothers usually discuss with their children from prison or might ask them to describe a typical conversation on the phone or a mother-child contact during a visitation in prison *etc.*

Based on their answers, the facilitator may invite them to describe an example of positive and negative communication with their children; in other words, the facilitator might ask participants to describe a time when a mother felt bad after communicating with her child/ren (i.e. depressed, sad) and to describe a time when she felt satisfied or happy after her communication. When a positive experience is recalled it is suggested to ask them for the reasons. As for the negative experience of communication, it would be an opportunity for the facilitator to ask about the reasons (emotional and practical) they believe it ended badly and invite participants to reflect on other possible ways of dealing differently with such a situation.

In case mothers report several practical reasons hindering their communication with their children, because of prison's policies, rules or inappropriate facilities, the facilitator should invite them to suggest ways of facilitating their communication with their children.

It is important for the facilitator to stress that the mothers should always have in mind that the physical distance between them and their children does not imply that there is no possible way to maintain or develop a good relationship based on mutual trust with their children. It is also important to always remember that they are not just prisoners, they are also mothers. In their children's mind they are still their mothers. Thus, by structuring and maintaining consistent and frequent contact with their children, they maintain the important mother-child relationship. In order to pursue such a relationship from a distance it is important to show their child/children

their wish to have a relationship with her/him/them and to avoid any mixed messages, when communicating with them.

On the other hand it is also recommended to discuss further possible ways for a mother not to be frustrated or how to handle her frustration due to the lack of response of their child/ren when she calls or writes them. Besides, it is common for children to feel abandoned by their mothers during this time. Taking into account how the children may feel, it is important for mothers to have realistic expectations in order not to be disappointed. It is highly recommended to have them reflect on or explain their children's negative reactions when they communicate, as it is important for a mother to learn to recognize which reactions of her children are justified and which are not. Emphasize that it is neither to a mother's nor her children's best interest to keep blaming herself or get stuck in feelings of anger or disappointment when a conversation with her child/ren does not end well.

### Suggested Activities

**Note:** You might choose to apply one of the following activities for each of the two sessions.

#### Suggested Activity

**Name:** "I am writing you a letter or I am drawing a picture for you..." (Adapted from Filipou & Karantana, 2010, p. 268-269)

**Objectives:** Expression and recognition of emotions, activation, empathy

**Duration:** 30-35 minutes

#### Instructions

The facilitator gives the following instructions: I would like you to think and write a letter or draw a picture for your child/ren in order to express something important that you did not have the chance to tell them insofar.

As soon as each of you finish, the group will be divided into pairs and you will read your letter or explain your drawing to the other person who will adopt the role of your child. The "child" must give feedback of what s/he understood and how s/he felt.

As soon as you finish, you must change roles, in order for the other member of the pair to convey her message to her child.

At the end we are going to discuss how well your communication with "your child" went but you don't have to read or show the entire group your letter and/or drawing if you don't want to. And this is because the aim of this activity is not to share the content of the letters or the drawings but rather to discover functional ways of communicating with children.

Afterwards, all participants return to the circle and the facilitator asks:

- "How did you feel while writing or drawing?"
- "How did you feel when you had the role of listener, namely the role of the child?"
- "Did your child understand what you wanted to express?"
- "If not, what is that you would change in order for your child to understand you?"

**Note for the facilitator:** In case the group is consisted of an odd number of participants, it can be divided into triads; the third member will be "the observer" who can also give her feedback about the communication she observed between mother and "child". In this case participants must change roles three times.

## Suggested story

**Name:** The meeting of the Little Prince with the fox

**Main topics:** The responsibility of building a relationship, the meaning of maintaining stable communication

**Duration:** 25-30 minutes

## Instructions

*The facilitator reads an excerpt from "The Little Prince" by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (translated into Bulgarian, Romanian and Greek), namely from the chapter referring to the Little Prince meeting the fox. The facilitator might briefly introduce the story of the Little Prince.*



"My life is very monotonous," the fox said. "I hunt chickens; men hunt me. All the chickens are just alike, and all the men are just alike. And, in consequence, I am a little bored. But if you tame me, it will be as if the sun came to shine on my life. I shall know the sound of a step that will be different from all the others. Other steps

send me hurrying back underneath the ground. Yours will call me, like music, out of my burrow. And then look: you see the grain-fields down yonder? I do not eat bread. Wheat is of no use to me. The wheat fields have nothing to say to me. And that is sad. But you have hair that is the colour of gold. Think how wonderful that will be when you have tamed me! The grain, which is also golden, will bring me back the thought of you. And I shall love to listen to the wind in the wheat..."

The fox gazed at the little prince, for a long time.

"Please – tame me!" he said.

"I want to, very much," the little prince replied. "But I have not much time. I have friends to discover, and a great many things to understand."

"One only understands the things that one tames," said the fox. "Men have no more time to understand anything. They buy things all ready made at the shops. But there is no shop anywhere where one can buy friendship, and so men have no friends any more. If you want a friend tame me..."

"What must I do, to tame you?" asked the little prince.

"You must be very patient," replied the fox. "First you will sit down at a little distance from me –like that– in the grass. I shall look at you out of the corner of my eye, and you will say nothing. Words are the source of misunderstandings. But you will sit a little closer to me, every day..."

The next day the little prince came back.

"It would have been better to come back at the same hour," said the fox. "If, for example, you come at four o'clock in the afternoon, then at three o'clock I shall begin to be happy. I shall feel happier and happier as the hour advances. At four o'clock, I shall already be worrying and jumping about. I shall show you how happy I am! But if you

come at just any time, I shall never know at what hour my heart is to be ready to greet you...One must observe the proper rites..."

"What is a rite?" asked the little prince.

"Those also are actions too often neglected," said the fox. "They are what make one day different from other days, one hour from other hours. There is a rite, for example, among my hunters. Every Thursday they dance with the village girls. So Thursday is a wonderful day for me! I can take a walk as far as the vineyards. But if the hunters danced at just any time, every day would be like every other day, and I should never have any vacation at all."

So the little prince tamed the fox. And when the hour of his departure drew near ...

"Ah," said the fox, "I shall cry."

"It is your own fault," said the little prince. "I never wished you any sort of harm; but you wanted me to tame you . . ."

"Yes, that is so," said the fox.

"But now you are going to cry!" said the little prince.

"Yes, that is so," said the fox.

"Then it has done you no good at all!"

"It has done me good," said the fox, "because of the colour of the wheat fields."

## Instructions

"Now that you have heard the story, I suggest dividing into two groups. Take 10 minutes. The first group will discuss what the little prince gained from his relationship with the fox and the other group will discuss what the fox gained from her relationship with the little prince. One representative of each group can keep notes and after you finish, she will read them to the group and we will discuss your conclusions all together".

The facilitator can ask:

- "Is there any relation of the topic discussed today with the story you have heard and if yes, what is it?"
- "In which ways is the story you have just heard meaningful in the context of communicating with your children?"
- "Is there anything that a mother gains by maintaining stable communication with her child/ren?"

## SESSION 5

### Optional - Common in all groups

#### Title: Dealing with Difficult Emotions<sup>4</sup>

##### Objectives

- to express emotions regarding separation from their children
- to recognize and verbalize both their own and their children's negative emotions and behaviour related to separation
- to discover functional coping strategies inside prison
- to support their children by identifying their negative emotions

##### Process

The facilitator names the title of the session. She could acknowledge that sharing difficult emotions regarding mothers' separation from their children might not be easy (especially in prison), but it is easier to deal with them when you identify and name them. Many people are not accustomed to identifying and verbalizing their own feelings; if a mother does it for her own emotions she will be able to also understand and verbalize her child/ren's negative emotions; in accordance, she will be able to assist her child/ren in finding healthy alternatives to deal with them.

The facilitator can ask:

- How do you feel about your separation from your child/ren?
- When you feel like that, what do you usually do about it?
- Is there anything that helps you when you feel like that?
- What do you imagine will happen to these feelings if one does not do anything about them (i.e. avoidance)?

The facilitator generalizes, by grouping externalizing (i.e. fighting, blaming others, easily frustrated *etc.*) and internalizing (i.e. social withdrawal, denial, somatization, repression) coping strategies. She might identify some emotions from the mother's perspective that might be related to separation from children, such as anger, distress, anxiety, and dependence. It is important to give meaning to such negative experiences. She might associate them with possible conduct problems in prison due to stress related to separation, such as fighting.

The underlying idea is for mothers to feel able to recognize and verbalize these feelings and emotions towards their child/ren (i.e. anger, sadness, despair) rather than censor them. It is important for the facilitator to give mothers the floor to express their emotions as well as to invite each participant to share her personal strategy when she feels negatively. Moreover she can invite the group to reflect on healthy coping strategies when an imprisoned mother feels unpleasant emotions due to the separation from her children.

Some mothers' coping strategies are the following (the facilitator could suggest them if they are not mentioned by the group):

- to talk with another woman you trust
- to talk with the prison's psychologist

<sup>4</sup> only for experienced facilitators qualified to handle possible emotional outbursts of mothers



- to write your feelings and emotions in a notebook
- to listen to music
- to draw
- to go for a walk in the prison's yard
- to knit, etc.

The facilitator asks how children might feel about being separated from their mother. **The possible ways that children may experience it should be associated with their developmental stage.** It is important to sensitize mothers on children's adverse internalizing or externalizing behaviours (e.g. school-aged children: poor academic performance, bed-wetting). Introduce gender differences in their ways of reacting (e.g. boys are more likely to exhibit behavioural problems, while girls are more likely to display internalizing behaviour). Invite the group to describe examples of such experiences that made mothers and/or children feel badly and to reflect on possible solutions. The underlying idea is that there is a lot they can do even from a distance; the facilitator must stress that despite the fact children might feel almost all of the wide range of feelings discussed at different points in time, it is difficult for them to recognize and even more difficult to express them in a way that they do not hurt themselves or others. Hence, the facilitator emphasizes the role of the mother to enable children to express such negative emotions, verbalize them and to give alternatives to the child, based on their developmental stage and the child's personal characteristics.

### Suggested Activity

**Name:** "Guess my emotion" (Based on Bermúdez, 1997)

**Objectives:** Expression and recognition of emotions, activation, cooperation

**Material:** Pictures depicting emotions (i.e. faces) and/or a list of positive and negative emotions

**Duration:** 30-35 minutes

### Instructions

The facilitator will have prepared a list of both positive and negative emotions. In addition, she might have available some emoticons (pictures depicting emotions) for those participants who do not read. She divides participants into subgroups of 3 and she invites each subgroup to choose one emotion from the list or from the pictures.

"Now in each subgroup one of you will take on the role of a statue and the remaining two will take on the roles of the sculptors; the sculptors will "shape" the statue in a way that will show the emotion you have chosen. The rest of us we will try to guess which emotion the statue shows. Take 10 minutes to prepare it within your subgroup. Remember that neither the statue nor the sculptors talk. When you are ready, each subgroup in turn will present it."

The facilitator can ask and discuss with the group the following:

- *How did you feel as sculptors?*
  - *Did you feel that you had any impact on the emotional state of your statue? If yes, in which, way?*
- *How did you feel as a statue?*
  - *Did you feel powerless? Why or why not?*
- *Was there anything that you liked about this exercise? If yes, what was that?*

- Was there anything you did not like about this exercise? If yes, what was that?
  - Was it easy or difficult for you as a team to show an emotion?
  - Was it easy or difficult for you to understand which emotion was presented?
    - What was the difficulty?
- 

**Note for the facilitator:** You might use this experiential exercise as an example to discuss the role of a mother in influencing or regulating her children's emotions.

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## SESSION 6

### *Mandatory- Common in all groups*

#### **Title: Dealing with Social Stigma**

#### **Objectives**

- to talk about stigma in a social perspective, which is expected to reduce feelings of guilt
- to identify the negative emotions related to the stigmatization of imprisonment
- to discuss how children at each developmental stage may experience the stigma of their mother's incarceration and to sensitize mothers in order to recognize the indicators of stigma in the behaviour of her child/ren
- to connect stigma with the phenomenon of the "conspiracy of silence" (see also Sessions 3 & 4)
- to increase empathy for child/ren; in other words, to raise mothers' awareness in order to be able to "decode" the aggressive or negative behaviour of their children because they feel stigmatized by others
- to enhance mothers' coping strategies

#### **Process**

The facilitator, after announcing the title of the session can apply the activity "Different voices" (see below, at the end of this session) in order for each participant to bring forward her own stereotypes and prejudices, to express her emotions as well as to empathize with people belonging to her intimate social environment, such as her neighbors, her boss, her child/ren's teacher *etc.*

The facilitator combines the "different voices" expressed and associates them with the stereotypes and prejudices that members of a society use in order to understand or relate with other people they might meet. It is recommended to the facilitator to define "stigma", i.e. like this: "Stigma, consisting of prejudices and stereotypes, refers to a negative "label" society attributes to social groups or individuals, mainly because many people feel fear and/or insecurity when they meet people with different types of behaviour or characteristics".

The facilitator then relates how "Maria" might have felt about herself being arrested due to the negative emotions others may feel regarding her arrest. If not mentioned, the facilitator might add some negative emotions that the stigma may induce on both the stigmatized person and others, such as: shame, embarrassment, guilt, vulnerability/helplessness, powerlessness, loneliness, confusion, stress, distress, rejection, abandonment.

Finally, the facilitator invites the group to suggest ways of dealing with negative labels attributed to an imprisoned mother, in a way like this: "Now, take into account Maria's feelings and thoughts about herself as well as others peoples' thoughts and feelings about Maria. What would you suggest to her in order to deal with such difficult feelings?" The facilitator might relate this topic with the previous session regarding the different ways a mother deals with difficult feelings. The underlying concept is that one cannot control people's beliefs but she can control the extent to which such criticism might influence her. The facilitator might also introduce the

influence that people's negative labelling regarding maternal imprisonment might have on her parenting practices as a mother by connecting it to the "conspiracy of silence" (see sessions 3 & 4) by saying something like: "Some imprisoned mothers or fathers, most likely because they want to protect their children from such negative labels or criticism, in their effort to hide the stigma of imprisonment, choose to deceive children about their imprisonment (i.e. by telling a lie like "I am in the hospital" or "I am working at a prison" etc).

The facilitator introduces the ways children of imprisoned mothers might experience social stigmatization, i.e. like this: "Let's try to put ourselves in our children's shoes for a while. In which ways can you imagine they might experience such negative criticism or labelling by society?" In addition, she might invite participants to share an example from their children's life (i.e. life at home, school, neighbourhood) depicting children's possible difficulties in dealing with such negative criticism. The facilitator might generalize such attitudes by referring to the developmental stage of the children. For example, school-aged children usually find it difficult to think critically about their mother and, thus, it might hurt them if their peers negatively criticize their mother (Cunningham & Baker, 2003). Boys might "vigorously defend her" (Cunningham & Baker, 2003, p.22) and get involved in a fight. Taking into account "the increased peer groups' influence and desire for acceptance" (Cunningham & Baker, 2003, p. 28) it is anticipated that adolescents might feel embarrassed and ashamed telling their friends that their mother is in prison. It is important for the facilitator to have in mind the wide range of children's coping styles or strategies, including factors such as individual differences within sexes, the nature of the mother-child bond and relationship prior to imprisonment, child's characteristics (i.e. temperament), the quality of children's current living conditions, namely the quality of the relationship with the substitute caregiver, characteristics of the mother's criminal behaviour, including the mother's incarceration history (i.e. previous imprisonment) and children's exposure to abuse and neglect (Cunningham & Baker, 2003).

Finally, the facilitator invites participants to reflect on the ways in which a mother could support her children in dealing with social stigmatization.

The facilitator might suggest:

- listening to their children when they want to share with their mother such experiences
- telling them that they did not do anything wrong. No one has the right to try to make you feel ashamed or guilty
- acknowledging that it is not easy for children to talk about their mother's incarceration but, at the same time, encouraging children to discuss it with people they trust (i.e. a mother might say "Sometimes when I feel angry or sad it helps me to talk to my friend or to my psychologist"). It is always useful to remind mothers that their coping strategies of social stigmatization might set a role model for their children
- reassuring children that "it is ok to love your Mom who is in prison, even if some people don't think you should" (Sazie, Ponder & Johnson, 2003, p.10)

The following issues can also be discussed on the basis of questions like:

— "Before your imprisonment, what did you think of prisoners?"

- "Did you believe that imprisoned women are different from imprisoned men, before you came here and if yes, in which ways?"

— "Have your beliefs about prisoners changed now, after your imprisonment?"

- "If yes, how?"

The discussion that these questions will generate will enable the facilitator to stress the fact

that it is not very difficult for one to understand why most people “label” imprisoned mothers. It will also vividly illustrate social stigma in the context of the great importance people attach to the anticipated reaction of others, namely that this “bad” or negative label is identified as the main characteristic of a person.

### Suggested Activity

**Name:** Different voices (Based on Seikkula, 2008).

**Objectives:** Expression and recognition of emotions, empathy, development of emotional skills

**Material:** Blank pages, pens or colourful markers

**Duration:** 30 minutes

### Instructions

The facilitator tells the group about an event: “I will tell you about something that happened. The fact is that the police came to Maria’s place this morning and arrested her. Maria has a son.”

The facilitator divides the group into two subgroups and instructs them as follows: “Please put yourselves in Maria’s shoes, Maria’s neighbor’s (an old lady living next door), Maria’s boss’s and her son’s teacher’s shoes. Let’s assume that all these people write their thoughts and feelings about Maria’s arrest in their diaries. Please discuss in your group what each of these people are thinking about what happened early in the morning and how they might feel about Maria; before starting the discussion, please choose a representative from each subgroup, who will write down the main points of your discussion (namely, the thoughts and feelings of each person). I suggest that you not criticize each other’s opinions and rather, just write down whatever comes to mind. In order to write both thoughts and emotions, I suggest that you introduce your phrases as follows “I feel...” when referring to emotions and “I think that ...” when referring to your thoughts.

You have 10 minutes. Then, the representative of each subgroup will read her notes and we shall discuss them together.”

## SESSION 7

### *Mandatory - Common in all groups*

#### **Title: Children's Current Living Conditions: the Substitute Caregiver**

#### **Objectives**

- to introduce the importance of establishing and/or maintaining regular and supportive communication with the child/ren's caregiver(s)
- to express their emotions towards the current caregiver(s) of their child/ren
- to express their concerns regarding their child/ren's current living arrangements
- to introduce alternative ways of maintaining a cooperative relationship with the caregiver(s)

#### **Process**

The facilitator announces the title of the session and invites each participant to say which person(s) is/are taking care of her child/ren now and how her relationship is with the person(s). It is likely that most of the participants have already referred to their child/ren's current caregiver(s) in previous sessions.

If there are IMs having their infants living with them in prison in the group, the facilitator might ask the same question regarding the child/ren they have outside the prison and the person(s) who is/are going to take care of the child/ren<sup>5</sup> after the determined (usually by law) period of time.

In case there are IMs whose children live in institutions, the facilitator might ask them who they would choose to act as caregiver of their children if they were given the choice.

The facilitator can assess whether or not mothers have any concerns about the safety and the well-being of their children and their relationship with the caregiver(s) by asking questions like:

- *Do you feel confident that your child/ren live in a safe environment?*<sup>6</sup>
- *If not, is there anything you can think of that could change this situation? Or have you found a solution for this?*
- *How do you feel about the person who is taking care of your child/ren?*
- *Do you feel that the relationship you maintain with your child/ren is influenced by the current caregiver? If yes, in which way(s)? If no, why not?*

Cases where there is not major concern for children's safety and/or well-being can be an excellent opportunity for the facilitator to stress the importance of the sense of belonging and security for children's well being. The underlying concept is to assist mothers in understanding

<sup>5</sup> for mothers having only one child who is still living with them in prison, this topic should be discussed in a preventive perspective, namely in order to enable them to build or enhance from beforehand a fruitful relationship with the future caregiver.

<sup>6</sup> in case there are major concerns that a child is at risk, the country's National regulations and laws for child protection (see *Appendix III: Guidelines/Protocol for handling child abuse and neglect cases* in the National versions (Bulgarian, Greek, Romanian & Hungarian) of the "Raising a Child through Prison Bars: A Manual for Professionals") must be closely followed.

the importance of expressing their appreciation and in showing their support for their children's caregivers for their children's well-being rather than "bickering over issues related to children" (Mackintosh, Myers, & Kennon, 2006, as cited in Kennon, Mackintosh & Myers, 2009). In this context, the importance of communicating with the children's caregiver or expressing their gratitude to him/her/them, as well as taking into account the great responsibilities s/he/they have taken on, can be discussed. If they feel that it is very difficult for them to feel gratitude or to feel anything positive about their children's current caregiver, the facilitator might create a floor for discussing possible ways that such a relationship might hinder their own relationship with their children.

The facilitator might also lead the discussion further in order to reveal that supporting and maintaining good relationships with the children's caregiver(s) is another way of being a mother from prison because it means that the mother truly cares about her children's need for a safe and reliable living environment.

It is advisable to discuss the underlying emotions, attitudes or thoughts that might make communication with the children's current caregiver(s) difficult. The facilitator can investigate whether mothers feel that their children's attitudes and behaviours towards them are influenced by the quality of the relationship they have with their children's caregiver.

Finally, the facilitator invites participants to introduce ideas of communicating with the caregiver(s) in ways that allow positive feedback (e.g. not complaining, express her "difficult" feelings to him/her). Role-playing can also be used (i.e. conversation on the phone between the mother and her sister, who is her daughter's current caregiver).

## SESSION 8

### *Mandatory - Common in all groups*

#### **Title: Child Abuse, Discipline and Setting Limits for Children**

#### **Objectives**

- to prevent violent behaviour toward children
- to increase knowledge about positive disciplinary techniques
- to discuss the importance of setting boundaries for a child based on his/her psychosocial development, while taking into account that the parental role is undertaken for a substantial period by other(s)
- to introduce alternative ways of problem solving with their children and conflict resolution
- to introduce and to sensitize them on child abuse and neglect (CAN) indicators

#### **Process**

The facilitator announces the title of the session and she might start a discussion on the basis of the following questions:

- *Is setting limits and boundaries for children a positive or negative (parenting) practice?*
- *Do you set any limits or boundaries for your children?*
  - *If yes, what kind of limits and in which ways do you set them?*
- *Do you feel that, after your imprisonment, you put the same, more, or less limits on your children?*
  - *(If any change in the parenting style of setting limits), for which reasons do you attribute this change?*

The facilitator explains that limits might be protective for children as long as the parent doesn't set too many of them and they are appropriate for the child's developmental stage. In order for the facilitator to put participants in their children's position, she also asks:

- *"Have there been any times in your life that you had to obey unjustifiable and/or unfair rules?"*
  - *"If yes, how did you feel in such a situation?"*

Personal experiences regarding their arrest and/or imprisonment may come up. It is suggested to the facilitator to focus on the participants' feelings and emotions in regards to this situation and to correlate it with the situations where children have to obey unjustifiable and/or unfair boundaries or rules set by their mother/father.

In order to introduce the issue of discipline, the facilitator may ask participants:

- *What is the purpose of disciplining children?*

The facilitator can explain the meaning of discipline if needed, as follows: "Discipline ... is a means of helping the child learn acceptable ways to deal with personal feelings and desires". She may further distinguish discipline from punishment in a way like: "Punishment ... is a reaction to misbehaviour that is usually hurtful and may even be unrelated to the misbehaviour" (Gebeke & Botherson, 2006).

The facilitator may then ask if mothers believe that corporal punishment is effective in changing children's behaviour. The facilitator may also invite those who are for and against



corporal punishment to share their arguments (i.e. why they believe corporal punishment is effective or ineffective).

After participants have expressed their arguments, the facilitator summarizes (or explains) that corporal punishment is a method of discipline that is very often used by parents, but this kind of method is not recommended at all, as it has a very negative impact on the development of children. Mothers can be asked what the negative effects of corporal punishment are, according to their opinion; the facilitator can afterwards add from the following list any effect that hasn't been mentioned by the participants.

### **Negative effects of corporal punishment**

It is a method that some times results in the compliance of children to the requests of the parents, but this kind of response does not last. Besides, in order for the child to keep on complying with the parents' requests, parents usually go on, punishing more and more the children and, this way, very soon corporal punishment can be converted to physical abuse (Gershoff, 2004). The facilitator must emphasize how unclear the boundaries between corporal punishment and physical abuse can be. She should also introduce the different types of child maltreatment (i.e. psychological, sexual, and physical abuse as well as neglect).

- It does not promote the internalization of moral values. Therefore, children are not taught the value of empathy and altruism (Lopez, Bonenberger & Schneider, 2001).
- As corporal punishment uses violence, it also produces violence. It increases the aggressive behaviour of children and adolescents inside the family, at school and in their social environment.
- Whenever corporal punishment is used as a means of discipline, the effectiveness of other non-violent means of bringing up a child drops dramatically; thus, corporal punishment is undermining all other positive parental practices, ironically ending up with a deficit in the child's discipline (American Academy of Pediatrics, Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health, 1998).
- It has a negative impact on the relationship between parents and children. Children have feelings of fear and anger towards their parents and they feel anxious when they are near them. Therefore, they may try to avoid them and they will not feel comfortable to ask for their assistance when they need it.
- When corporal punishment is used to discipline children 4-9 years old, it may lead to an exaggeration of aggressive behaviour. Furthermore, it may evoke intense anxiety, fears, low self-esteem and depression (Eamon, 2001).
- During adolescence the use of corporal punishment has been associated with substance abuse, violent crimes, use of violence in social relationships and antisocial behaviour. It has also been associated with emotional problems, low self-esteem, anxiety disorders and depression (Banks, 2002).
- Intergenerational use of violence. Parents often rely on certain disciplinary styles, because they had received the same style of discipline when they were children. In these cases it would be productive for the group, for the facilitator to encourage participants to talk about their childhood and the way their parents treated and disciplined them. Through this process it will probably be easier for them to identify with their children and to better understand the negative effects the use of violence had in their own lives.

Finally, the facilitator invites participants to reflect on, and share among each other, alternative positive methods of discipline.

### **Mothers of infants**

Corporal punishment at this age has increased possibility, in comparison to older children, to end up lethal; in addition to this, corporal punishment can be very traumatic for the infants and it is possible to provoke an inhibition of his/her growth. A description of the Shaken Baby Syndrome can also be made in an as simple way as possible, namely: At this age, babies often cry a lot; some parents, especially when they are frustrated themselves, in order to make babies stop crying, shake them strongly. This might be a very dangerous practice; it can cause internal brain bleeding with severe consequences for the child. It has been confirmed that a number of children's fatalities are due to baby shaking.

For infants who have experienced violence, it is possible to show inhibition in the development of speech, of their mobility and of their cognitive abilities. Mothers who feel tired and overwhelmed by their infant's needs should be trained that it is ok to ask for help without feeling guilty. In other words they should ask for someone near them to take over the baby, in order to spend some time to relax and think over what has made them so angry. In addition, they should ask for help, maybe from other mothers, if they need to make sense of their child's behaviour.

### **Mothers of children in early childhood**

It is a time when mothers can start talking to their children about their behaviour and explaining to them why they have to set limits on their behaviour. It is a time that children are able to understand the connection between their behaviour and the consequences of it. Limits have to be clear and consistent and must be explained to the children. At this age rules should be mostly for issues that have to do with the safety of the children and with socially accepted behaviour, but only for domains considered really important; if there are too many rules, children are not able to assimilate them and they get confused and angry.

### **Mothers of school-aged children**

Discipline is now an issue of respect. If there is a good and trusting relationship between mothers and children, children are more able to recognize when their desires and behaviour are inappropriate and for what reason. Mothers, when they set rules (limits) for their children, should always take into account the children's personality as well as their desires and needs.

### **Mothers of adolescents**

If mothers of adolescents want their sons and daughters to behave themselves, they should respect their needs and their road to independence. They should be available to discuss with them what has made them angry and why the rules are very important. They should also talk to them about their own fears of letting them go and of giving them all the freedom they demand. It is very important for mothers to try to listen to their children and make an effort to understand their feelings. Furthermore, it is usually very helpful for adolescents to listen to the expectations their mothers have of them, as long as mothers do not exaggerate and as long as they respect their children's abilities.

## SESSION 9

### *Mandatory - Common in all groups*

#### **Title: Love and Violence in a Couple's Life**

#### **Objectives**

- to sensitize participants on indicators of healthy and unhealthy relationships
- to sensitize them on the warning signs of an abusive intimate partner relationship
- to sensitize them on issues of power/force in relationships

#### **Material**

- CD or DVD player
- A song about intimate partner violence like the song "Malo" by Bebe (wherever it has been translated into your national language); a brief video can also be used, instead or in addition to the song, whenever available

#### **Process**

The topic might be introduced by participants after listening to the related song (see Annex); the facilitator, instead of announcing the title of the session, invites participants to listen to the song and pay attention to its lyrics in order to discuss it. She might have the lyrics of the song available for those participants who are able to read. (The facilitator, instead of the song, might use an excerpt from a movie or a popular TV series wherever there is a Video/DVD player and a television available). The facilitator may afterwards ask:

- *To which topic does the song/video refer to?*
- *Was there anything that impressed you about the lyrics you have heard/ the scene you have watched?*
- *Do you think that the song/video describes a healthy or an unhealthy relationship?*

After the discussion, the facilitator may introduce the Activity "Healthy and unhealthy relationships- Recognizing the warning signs" (see below in this session) aiming at sensitizing participants on indicators of a healthy or unhealthy relationship, in the following way: "Let's work now in subgroups and discuss what characterizes a healthy or an unhealthy relationship".

Either before or after this activity, the facilitator can conduct the activity "Persons and Things" (see at the end of this session).

## Suggested Activity 1

**Name:** Healthy and unhealthy relationships – Recognizing the warning signs. [Activity 3.3.<sup>7</sup> of Module 3: Healthy & Unhealthy Relationships, retrieved from Booklet III and IV of EAVN (2011<sup>a, b</sup>)]

**Objectives:** Raising awareness on the characteristics of healthy vs. unhealthy relationships and on the warning signs of abusive relationships

### Material

- A set of stickers, each of which describes a healthy or unhealthy behaviour in a couple's relationship [retrieved from Worksheet 11 of GEAR Booklet IV, (EAVN, 2011<sup>b</sup>)]
- Blank stickers
- Markers
- 2 blank sheets of paper (A5 size) entitled "Healthy Relationships" and "Unhealthy Relationships"
- Sticky tape

**Duration:** 30 minutes

## Instructions

The facilitator, after dividing participants into two subgroups, provides to each one a set of stickers describing both healthy and unhealthy behaviour in intimate relationships and a set of blank stickers. She instructs participants in each subgroup to discuss and co-decide which of the behaviours indicate a healthy and which an unhealthy relationship; participants are also encouraged to write on the blank stickers their own sentences, namely different behaviours indicating that a relationship is healthy or unhealthy. They have 10 minutes at their disposal. The facilitator, then, invites both groups to stick the appropriate labels on the 2 large sheets of paper that are entitled "Healthy Relationship" and "Unhealthy Relationship". After that, the facilitator may initiate a discussion by asking:

- According to your opinion, what is the main characteristic of a healthy relationship?
  - *How does each partner behave towards each other?*  
(the facilitator can locate and circle on the large sheet of paper the answers that are mentioned by the group's members)
- According to your opinion, which is the main characteristic of an unhealthy relationship?
  - *How does each partner behave towards each other?*  
(the facilitator can locate and circle on the large sheet of paper the answers that are mentioned by the group's members)
- *An unhealthy relationship might be transformed into an abusive relationship. Which of the characteristics of an unhealthy relationship could be warning signs that an unhealthy relationship could become abusive/violent?*

<sup>7</sup> Adapted from:

Alberta Health Services. Retrieved April 10, 2010 from: [www.teachingsexualhealth.ca/media/lessons/CALM\\_RelationshipsLess4.pdf](http://www.teachingsexualhealth.ca/media/lessons/CALM_RelationshipsLess4.pdf). (Original source: Beyond the Basics: A Source book on Sexual and Reproductive Health, p. 262).

The White Ribbon Campaign. (2007). White Ribbon Campaign in a Box - Promoting Healthy Equal Relationships: A guide book for teachers and community leaders for Ontario youth ages 11 to 14. Toronto: White Ribbon Campaign

(the facilitator can locate and circle with a different color the behaviours correctly mentioned; she must also correct any mistakes and add warning signs, if not mentioned by the group)

- *Do you all agree with the lists you have made regarding healthy and unhealthy relationships?*
- *Why might it be difficult for a woman to identify that her relationship is unhealthy?*
- *If a woman has an unhealthy relationship, what can she do?*
- *Why do some women remain in unhealthy relationships?*
- *Do you believe that the quality of a couple's relationship affects the child/ren in any way? If yes, in which ways?*
- *Do you believe that boys are influenced differently than girls (as children and in their adult relationships)?*

***What did you learn from this activity? Did you gain something that you could apply to your life and your relationships?***

## Suggested Activity 2

**Name:** Persons and Things [Activity 3.4. of Module 3: Healthy & Unhealthy Relationships, retrieved from Booklet III of EAVN (2011<sup>a</sup>)<sup>8</sup>]

**Objectives:** Sensitization on the impact of power and control in persons and in relationships

**Material:** No material is needed

**Duration:** 15-20 minutes

## Instructions

The facilitator divides the group into three subgroups and gives to each one of them the role of the persons, the things and the observers. She explains the role of each group with the following instructions:

**Persons:** *You can think, feel and make decisions in order to tell the things what to do.*

**Things:** *You cannot think, feel or make any decision. You must do what the "person" orders you to do. In case you would like to do anything else you should first obtain permission from the person.*

**Observers:** *You just observe them silently without intervening or talking.*

The facilitator, after creating triads consisting of one person, one thing and one observer, provides the following instruction: *From now on, and for 1 minute, each person can tell her thing to do whatever she wants; each thing must obey the person; the observer just observes.* After a minute, the facilitator instructs participants to change roles so that "Persons" become "Things", "Things" become "Observers" and "Observers" become "Persons". After one more minute participants change roles once more in order for all participants to have taken all three roles. The facilitator can afterwards initiate a discussion by asking:

<sup>8</sup> Adapted from: Instituto Promundo, Salud y Género, ECOS. (2009). Working with Young Women: Empowerment, Rights and Health. Rio de Janeiro: Instituto PROMUNDO. Retrieved July 30, 2009 from [www.promundo.org.br/materiais%20de%20apoio/publicacoes/MANUAL%20M.pdf](http://www.promundo.org.br/materiais%20de%20apoio/publicacoes/MANUAL%20M.pdf)

- **the “Things”:**
  - How did the “persons” treat you?
  - How did you feel?
  - Did you feel powerless? If yes, why? If no, why not?
- **the “Persons”:**
  - How did you treat your “thing”?
  - How did you feel treating someone this way?
  - Did you feel powerful? If yes, why? If no, why not?
  - Why do you think “things” obey your orders?
- **the “Observers”:**
  - How did you feel as “observer”, doing nothing?
  - Did you feel that you influenced what was happening?
    - If no, what do you think that you could have done?
  - Does it happen in our daily life to be “observers” in situations where some people treat others like things? Do we intervene? Why or why not?

### General Discussion

- In your daily life, which role do you usually take and why?
- If you were able to choose among the 3 groups, which one would you choose and why?
- In your daily life, are there people who treat others like “things”?
  - Why do people treat others in this way?
- In our society,
  - do women usually belong to one of these groups? Which one?
  - do men usually belong to one of these groups? Which one?
  - Why do you think this happens?
- Can you think of types of relationships where one person has more power over the other? (e.g. men and women, youths and adults, parents and children, students and teachers, employees and employers, etc.)
- What could be the consequences of a relationship where one person treats the other person like a “thing”?

**What did you learn from this activity? Did you gain something that you could apply to your life and your relationships?**

**Notes for the facilitator:** these activities may trigger memories of personal experiences of abusive relationships. It is suggested not to allow participants to engage in detailed descriptions of abuse incidences in order to avoid flashbacks in case an abused woman is suffering PTSD. In general, if abusive relationships are revealed to the group the facilitator **MUST NOT:**

- show disbelief, no matter what an abused woman describes
  - show her surprise, no matter what she is hearing
  - overreact
  - be overprotective
  - offer advice of what she thinks the abused women should or should not have done
- The facilitator must also control (e.g. by use of general comments) any negative reactions of the group members towards the same direction; if for example, a participant says to another who

*described her abusive relationship something like: “you should have left him the first time he hit you” the facilitator may respond with a general comment like: “many women suffer this type of abuse for long periods of time, without leaving the abusive relationship; and, most of the times, she has legitimate reasons for that. Can you think of any reasons that would hinder a woman from leaving from such a relationship?”)*

*The facilitator can steer the discussion away from personal abuse experiences, while still discussing with the group myths and realities regarding intimate partner violence, by using examples from popular TV series, movies or real cases presented by the media (if there is a TV set and Video/DVD player available, appropriate excerpts can be shown).*

*If the facilitator is inexperienced on IPV issues, in order to coordinate the discussion she can refer to the “Expected Outcome” part of activity 3.3 and to the ANNEX A: Background Theoretical Information of Booklet III (EAVN, 2011<sup>a</sup>) as well as to any other source related to intimate partner violence (e.g. SURT, 2008).*

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## SESSION 10

### *Optional<sup>9</sup> - Common in all groups*

**Title: Preparation of two leaflets** (targeting IMs and children of IMs respectively)

#### **Objectives**

- to make their own suggestions to other imprisoned mothers regarding information they consider to be important
- to propose names or titles for such leaflets
- to contribute to the creation of material that will be addressed to their needs
- to reflect on topics or ideas they consider as important to be included in a leaflet for children
- to feel helpful to the others, such as the imprisoned mothers in general
- to express their creativity
- to increase their confidence as a parent

#### **Material**

- blank pages or notebooks
- colourful markers

#### **Process**

The facilitator announces the title of the session. Then she divides the group into two or three subgroups and instructs them as follows: "Let's work together in teams, discuss and write down your suggestions (in short phrases or sentences) to a mother who has just entered prison and does not have any information you consider to be important for her. Have in mind that your intention is to make her life in prison easier in regards to her relationship with her child/ren. In other words, is there anything she should know in regards to her child/ren when entering prison? You have 10 minutes. Please choose one representative from each subgroup to write down your thoughts. After you have finished, each subgroup will present its ideas."

After each subgroup has presented its suggestions, the facilitator introduces any ideas that have been discussed during previous sessions or any other ideas, in a way like this: "What about ....? Do you think this is helpful information?"

#### **Suggested topics for the IM's leaflet**

- Information about legal issues related to children and/or their parental status, rights etc.
- Unknown residence of the child/ren and how to learn where the child/ren is/are
- The benefits of participating in a Mothers' Discussion Group

<sup>9</sup> In the context of the DAPHNE project, this Session was mandatory in order for the imprisoned mothers to contribute to the development of the respective leaflets; in future implementations, however, it could be included as an exercise aiming to enhance sharing of useful information among the members of the group.



- Legal rights in order not to lose custody of their child
- Prison's regulations in regards to children's visitation
- To tell or not to tell? [Five/Ten reasons for telling or not telling your child/ren that you are in prison]
- Specialized social or other services (e.g. help lines) for mother/children/family
  - while the mother is in prison
  - after the mother's release

In this session the facilitator might invite participants to recapitulate the topics discussed in previous sessions.

The same instructions could be given for the development of a **leaflet addressing children** of imprisoned mothers (CHIM), like this: "if you put yourself for a while in the shoes of a child whose mother is imprisoned, what is that you would need to know about your mother's imprisonment? You could have in mind the questions or the conversations you have with your children from here. Which are the things they usually ask about or what is important for them to know? Please take into account their developmental stage". Mothers can also be asked to offer their ideas about things they would like their children to learn about their mother's thoughts and feelings and/or about prison, imprisonment, etc.

The facilitator might also suggest more topics, e.g. "What does jail mean?"

Finally, the facilitator can invite mothers to draw something that they would like to be included in a leaflet for imprisoned mothers and/or in a leaflet for children of imprisoned mothers.

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**Notes for the facilitator**

- *Obtain the creators' consent in order to include their creations in a leaflet and/or in an exhibition*
  - *The development of a leaflet addressing CHIMs would be derived mainly from the implementation of the CHIP-Support Groups. However it is meaningful for mothers to empathize with their children's need for concrete and factual information.*
-

## SESSION 1 1

### *Optional<sup>10</sup> - Common in all groups*

#### **Title: Preparation of the Special Day**

#### **Objectives**

- to talk about their feelings and concerns in regards to this common activity
- to discuss their expectations of such an activity
- to introduce realistic expectations
- to promote self-confidence as a parent

#### **Process**

This session focuses on the implementation of the activity named “A *Special Day*”, in the context of the Family Ties Building Activities of the DAPHNE project under which this series of Manuals were developed.

The facilitator must repeat the conditions that should be fulfilled in order for a child to be eligible to be invited in prison to visit her/his mother and to spend some hours together, playing creatively together and as a group with other mothers and children, having lunch, creating paintings, dolls, drawings *etc.*

The pre-conditions set in the context of this project in order for a child to be eligible to be invited to participate in the “Special Day” include:

- Her/his mother must not be convicted of crimes against her children
- The child must be aware that his/her mother is imprisoned
- An adult person must be available and willing to escort, drop off and pick-up the child/ren from the place of residence to the prison and vice versa (the adults who escort the child/ren do not participate in the activities).
- The adult who has custody of the child/ren (if different from the mother) must have given his/her consent in order for the child to participate in such an event. In cases where the mother is the sole adult who has her child/ren’s custody, she should sign a consent form according to which she gives her consent for her son/daughter to participate in this activity.
- The child’s place of residence should be in the same country where the mother is imprisoned. Children living in a different country can also participate but only if they enter the country under the responsibility of the adult who has custody of them.

The facilitator should encourage mothers to participate in the organization of the Special Day. For instance:

- to make invitation cards and/or handmade presents for the child/ren
- to decorate the room
- to suggest activities that they would like to have included which they know (or assume) that their child/ren would enjoy.

<sup>10</sup> In the context of the DAPHNE project, where Special Days were conducted this Session was mandatory. For future implementations, however, it is characterized as “optional” because it is closely related to the opportunity to conduct such an activity or not.

The facilitator can also invite the group to discuss the following issues, by asking:

- *How do you imagine this Day?*
- *Could you imagine your child/ren's behaviour during this event?*
- *Could you imagine your attitude and behaviour?*
- *Is there anything that seems difficult for you to handle regarding such an activity? –If yes, what?*
- *Do you believe that your child/ren might face any difficulty during such an activity? –If yes, what?*

The facilitator should also explain that all mothers in the group are invited to participate in this Special Day if they would like to, regardless of whether or not they are eligible and/or willing to invite their child/ren to participate. The feelings of the mothers whose child/ren are not going to come should be discussed. The facilitator might invite these mothers to undertake different roles in the organization, such as creating something for the room's decorations (i.e. a drawing, a quote) or helping other mothers to create some souvenirs which will be offered to the children.

Creations developed during and after this session could be collected and presented at an exhibition that will be organized after this Special Day. Participants could be invited to contribute to such an activity as well, by giving their ideas for the organization of it or by participating in the organization (if it is allowed to be displayed in the prison).

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**Note to the facilitator:** *the facilitator should have in mind that, during the Special Day, some mothers may have the tendency to withdraw from the group for long periods of time, in order to be alone with their child/ren. In order to prevent such an unfortunate event, which can negatively affect the group spirit and the celebration atmosphere of the Special Day, it is very important to let mothers know in advance that, during this Day, they will have enough "private" time to talk with their children but that the rest of the time mothers, children and facilitators will have to spend time together, as a group.*

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## SESSION 12

### *Mandatory - Common in all groups*

#### **Title: Looking Back – Looking Forward – Saying “Goodbye”**

#### **Objectives**

- to talk about their feelings regarding their participation in the Group
- to talk about potential benefits of such an experience
- to talk about potential negative emotions or thoughts during the sessions
- to make their proposals for improving similar future activities
- evaluation

#### **Material**

- Roll of paper or colourful pieces of cardboard
- Colourful markers

#### **Process**

The facilitator announces the title of the meeting. Then, she narrates the topics, the cohesion of the group and other remarks she had made from all the previous meetings. “We started as a group with many members who we did not know each other, we set the conditions of our meetings ... soon our discussions proved that although each mother, each child and their relationship are unique, many of the experiences that you have shared had a common basis...”

The facilitator invites participants to express their emotions in regards to their participation in this group by asking questions like:

- *How do you feel about the experience you had?*
- *What did you like during our meeting and what didn't you like?*
- *Would you change the name of our group “Discussion Groups for Mothers”?*
- *Would you suggest to other imprisoned mothers to participate in such a group?*
  - *For which reasons?*
- *Were there any topics you would like to have discussed but weren't?*
  - *Which are they?*
- *Was there anything that you would like to suggest in order to improve such a mother's group in the future?*
- *Was there any difficulty you experienced during your participation in this group?*

The facilitator should be prepared at this time to also listen to possible negative feelings that mothers may have experienced during the group sessions and discuss them. Being available to listen, discuss and elaborate on aggressive feelings is also a way to present in vivo how mothers could manage other people's aggressive feelings in their environment, e.g. their children's aggressive feelings.

Afterwards the facilitator invites participants to write on a roll of paper or on colourful pieces of cardboard whatever comes to their minds, depicting their experience in this group; participants can either write or draw or both.

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# Annex

**Session 9:** Lyrics (translated in English) of the song "Malo" by Bebe (available also in Spanish and Greek language)

## Bad

You appeared one cold night  
With a smell of dirty tobacco and gin  
Fear went through me  
While I crossed my little fingers behind the door  
Your pretty little boy's face  
Has been eaten by time through your veins  
And your male chauvinist insecurity  
Can be seen every day in my little tears

Once more, please don't, I'm tired and  
my heart can't bear it any more  
Once more, please don't, my love  
Don't shout, the children are sleeping  
Once more, please don't, I'm tired and  
my heart can't bear it any more  
Once more, please don't, my love  
Don't shout, the children are sleeping

I'm coming back with fire  
I'm going to burn your steel fist  
And courage will come out of the purple in my  
cheeks  
To get back for all the injuries  
Bad, bad, you're bad  
You don't hurt the one you love, no  
Stupid, stupid, you're stupid  
Don't think you're better than women  
Bad, bad, you're bad  
You don't hurt the one you love, no  
Stupid, stupid, you're stupid  
Don't think you're better than women

The day is gray when you're here  
And the sun comes out again when you go  
And the sorrow in my heart  
I have to swallow it over the burner  
My pretty little girl's face  
Is getting old in silence  
Each time you call me a whore  
Your brain gets smaller

Once more, please don't, I'm tired and  
my heart can't bear it any more  
Once more, please don't, my love  
Don't shout, the children are sleeping

Once more, please don't, I'm tired and  
my heart can't bear it any more  
Once more, please don't, my love  
Don't shout, the children are sleeping

I'm coming back with fire  
I'm going to burn your steel fist  
And courage will come out of the purple in my  
cheeks  
To get back for all the injuries  
Bad, bad, you're bad  
You don't hurt the one you love, no  
Stupid, stupid, you're stupid  
Don't think you're better than women  
Bad, bad, you're bad  
You don't hurt the one you love, no  
Stupid, stupid, you're stupid  
Don't think you're better than women

I'm coming back with fire  
I'm going to burn your steel fist  
And courage will come out of the purple in my  
cheeks  
To get back for all the injuries  
Bad, bad, you're bad  
You don't hurt the one you love, no  
Stupid, stupid, you're stupid  
Don't think you're better than women  
Bad, bad, you're bad  
You don't hurt the one you love, no  
Stupid, stupid, you're stupid  
Don't think you're better than women

Bad, you're bad  
You're bad because you want to be...  
Bad, you're bad  
Don't shout at me, it hurts...

You're weak and you're bad  
Don't think you're better than me or anyone...  
And now I'm smoking a cigarette  
And I blow the smoke into your little heart  
Because, bad, you're bad, you...  
Bad, you're bad, yes...  
Bad, you're bad, always...  
Bad, you're bad.













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## External Evaluation

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