

MANUAL ON CHILD PROTECTION FOR AFRICAN PARENTS IN THE UK

A step-by-step guide to help prevent abuse towards children





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abuse towards children**

*"It is easier to build strong children than to
repair broken adults."*

Frederick Douglass

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A step-by-step guide to help prevent abuse towards children

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ABOUT AFRUCA

Africans Unite Against Child Abuse (AFRUCA) was established in May 2001 as a platform for advocating for the rights and welfare of African children following the deaths of children like Victoria Climbié, Jude Akapa and Damilola Taylor in the UK. It became a registered Charity in July 2002 and a Company Limited by Guarantee in October 2002 with a Board of Directors appointed to run the organisation.

AFRUCA is embedded in and has developed out of African communities in the UK as a response to their realisation of the problems African children and parents face and the gaps that exist within the child protection system for African children in the UK.

The 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of The Child and the UK Children's Acts of 1989 and 2004 provide the foundation for all our work at AFRUCA. We aim to promote the best interests of the child in all our activities. Our stance is that culture and religion should never be a reason to abuse children.

Our work includes:

- **Awareness raising and sensitisation:** within African communities and among young Africans about children's rights as enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international conventions and UK legislation promoting the rights and welfare of children.
- **Information, education, and advisory services:** to raise the profile of African children in the UK, increase awareness of their needs, improve policies and practices, and develop the leadership potential of young Africans. Activities include research and publishing reports; media work; conferences, seminars, workshops, and training programmes for policy makers, service providers, parents, faith and community leaders, young people; community meetings; advice and consultancy services.
- **Advocacy and policy development:** working closely with

policy makers to shape the development of policy and regulatory action to promote the welfare of children.

- **Community and international development:** in partnership with others to put in place programmes and projects to help relieve some of the suffering and hardship that African children experience.
- **Family Support:** Working to support families in crisis, at the point of breakdown through effective early intervention services.

For more information about our work at AFRUCA, please visit our website at www.afruca.org

INTRODUCTION

Parenting is not an easy task. Most parents work hard to bring up their children and improve their life chances. Some parents require help and support to perform this role effectively.



This booklet aims to give African parents a greater understanding of the various issues around child upbringing in the UK and to suggest ways of dealing with those issues within the confines of UK laws in order to ensure that a child grows up in an environment that helps to maximise his/her life chances. We want to help reduce the numbers of African children being referred into the Child Protection system and ending up in care due to allegations of **'significant harm'** sometimes as a result of their parents' cultural and religious practices which can be seen as abusive. We also hope that this manual will assist parents to strengthen their skills in their efforts to protect their children from abuse and bring them up successfully in the UK.

This manual has been prepared based on learning from our direct work with African parents across the UK over the past eleven years. AFRUCA does not make any judgement about what sorts of parent-households are best for children. Whether it's a single parent family or a two parent family, our aim is to help ensure that children can grow and develop in environments where they can optimise their potential while achieving their best as members of society.

At AFRUCA, we accept that there is no perfect manual for raising perfect children who are always polite, helpful, well behaved, resourceful, and respectful. For most families, parenting involves a lot of trial and error. However general knowledge about child development, particularly the personal, social and emotional needs of a child are improving. With this knowledge, many people are finding ways to create an environment and to provide appropriate support for a child to develop a positive attitude for themselves and to gain social skills allowing them to interact harmoniously with parents and other members of society. An open mind and a willingness to learn and use new knowledge are what help many parents develop their parenting skills.

To gain as much as possible from studying and using this manual, we also suggest that you read the different booklets in our "*Safeguarding African Children in the UK*" series of publications which also cover some of the issues raised in-depth. Details are at the back of this publication. All these publications are also available on our website at www.afruca.org

We hope you enjoy reading and will gain maximum benefit from doing so.



Debbie Ariyo(OBE)
Executive Director

1. WORKING WITH AFRICAN PARENTS IN THE UK

Without any doubt, there have been significant growths in the number of people from different parts of Africa coming to live in the UK. Africans are coming to the UK for a variety of reasons. Some are here to escape the conflict and war situations in their own countries. Others are here to study. Some are here to escape the harsh economic conditions in their countries and wish to settle down and make the UK their permanent home. Many others are here as victims of human trafficking, brought to the UK to be abused and exploited. Under the government's dispersal programme, many Africans are living across the UK, outside the major conurbations like London and Manchester in isolation, away from friends and family.

Coming to a new country with a different culture, values and belief systems brings correlating social problems with significant implications for the children and communities. As with most migrant groups, social exclusion and poverty are rife among newly arrived African communities. There is a high level of unemployment and underemployment, despite the fact that Africans as an ethnic group have one of the highest levels of educational qualifications. Also, many new migrants lack access to decent housing and a high proportion of Africans live in the poorest urban areas on neglected, deprived council estates in Britain's largest cities. The combination of all these issues often result in an increase in health and mental health problems.

With the current economic situation, local authorities across the country are witnessing unprecedented levels of referrals of children into the child protection system. Certainly across London, the figures are getting higher. In particular, our research shows that children of African origin are also becoming over represented in the child protection system especially under the categories of "Physical Abuse" and "Neglect".

1.1 RAISING CHILDREN IN THE UK: What Do Parents Tell Us?

AFRUCA has been conducting self-certified Child Protection Training Courses for African Parents across London, Greater Manchester and in other parts of England since 2007. We have worked with almost 3,000 African parents since that time to help raise their knowledge and skills around child upbringing and develop further knowledge of what constitutes 'significant harm' in the context of UK law so children can be protected. Here are some of the key comments made by many of our training participants as issues facing African families in raising children in the UK:

1. Threat and or/use of force or 'discipline' within African families is 'normal' and 'right'.
2. Very high expectations by parents of their children in educational achievement and imposing choices on children is 'good'.
3. State intervention in the family on how children have to be raised and removal of a child for protection is a phenomenon many parents do not agree with.
4. Lack of social support system from extended families and the communities in general unlike back home in Africa (it takes a whole village to raise a child) is a problem.
5. Limited understanding of the various stages of child development and corresponding challenges and how to meet them can affect parenting methods.
6. Poverty, unemployment, poor housing, immigration status can lead to stress and affect how parents relate to their children.
7. Culture and Religion are important to African parents who feel it is essential that these are also passed on to their children.

Most of the parents, when first attending our training programme, claim to practice an authoritarian style of parenting. The methods used are obedience led, expecting all their commands to be obeyed without explanation, without question. We also think that this is the norm among many Africans although, as with every behaviour, this varies from parent to parent. However, many parents still rely on corporal punishment to ensure compliance with their instructions or wishes. In the UK today, based on our research at AFRUCA, African children are over-represented in many local authorities' Child Protection referral figures or on child protection registers/plans under the category of "Physical Abuse."

Many African parents tell us they are keen for their children to attain educational success. Formal education is considered to be the key to success in life and many parents hardly tolerate a child who is underachieving. Children can therefore end up being abused in the process of being compelled to do well and excel at school.

Many newly arrived parents in the UK are not familiar with the notion of government intervention, through Children's Services who are seen as intruding into people's lives by removing children at will. State intervention in this manner is seen as harsh, cruel and uncalled for. Many parents do not see or understand that intervention in a home could be done 'in the best interests of the child'.

The lack of understanding of child development processes, breaches of which can lead to learning difficulties or even disability among children can make some parents believe their child is a victim of malevolent beings. Some parents have been known to abuse their children in the false belief that they are possessed by evil spirits and without accessing the right support and advice may resort to 'spiritual healers'. Families may not even be aware that some of their child's behaviours are really symptoms of certain forms of learning difficulties or disabilities or may realise that too late.

Child-raising is also seen by many as a community affair - it takes a village to raise a child. However, in the UK, the state takes over the community's role in helping parents to raise their children. State protection of the child in the UK is done through a wide array of laws

that are complex, sometimes difficult to understand for newly arrived communities, and not widely known or accessed by families. Many African parents, mainly out of ignorance, breach these laws, and put children at risk of harm. The consequences of breaching these laws can be quite bad for many parents such as having a child removed and placed into the care of the local authority.

The following sections cover a range of useful topics that will help to provide information to parents on how to act to protect their children and to keep them safe.

Key Points to Remember:

- Lack of knowledge of child development processes or the symptoms of disabilities can lead to some parents abusing their children.
- Many parents breach UK laws on Child Protection out of ignorance and need help and support to improve knowledge and understanding.
- Intervention in a home could be done 'in the best interests' of the child.
- African Children are over-represented in Local Authorities' Child Protection referral figures under the category of "Physical Abuse".

2. LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORK ON SAFE GUARDING CHILDREN IN THE UK

In this section we will provide some basic information on the legal and policy framework which guide the protection and safeguarding of children in the UK and how parents are affected by these.

2.1 The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 proclaimed that childhood is entitled to special care and assistance. In this regard, a UN Convention on the (Rights of the Child UNCRC) was promulgated in 1989. Two articles are of special significance to the State's role in safeguarding children.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: Article 19

1. States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.
2. Such protective measures should, as appropriate, include effective procedures for the establishment of social programmes to provide necessary support for the child and for those who have the care of the child, as well as for other forms of prevention and for identification, reporting, referral, investigation, treatment and follow-up of instances of child maltreatment described heretofore, and, as appropriate, for judicial involvement.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: Article 20

1. A child temporarily or permanently deprived of his or her family environment, or in whose own best interests cannot be allowed to remain in that environment, shall be entitled to special protection and assistance provided by the State.
2. States Parties shall in accordance with their national laws ensure alternative care for such a child.
3. Such care could include, inter alia, foster placement, kafalah of Islamic law, adoption or if necessary placement in suitable institutions for the care of children. When considering solutions, due regard shall be paid to the desirability of continuity in a child's upbringing and to the child's ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background.

It is important to note that most African countries, apart from Somalia have signed the UNCRC – just like the UK. It is also important to note that in addition to this convention most African countries have signed the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child which is very similar to the UNCRC. Most African countries therefore have the same obligations as the UK to safeguard children from all forms of abuses.

As part of its obligations, the UK government has put in place a series of laws and guidelines in order to safeguard the development of children growing up in the country. These laws outline what action should be taken when a child is at risk and the consequences for offenders.

2.2 The Children's Act of 1989

The Children's Act 1989 was passed in order to bring together and properly define all the laws affecting children. It outlines the role of the court and local authorities in protecting the welfare of children. The 'duty to investigate' was also granted to local authorities if they

suspect that a child is in danger of suffering 'significant harm'. This is known as Section 47 of the Children's Act of 1989. It also became the duty of the local authorities to provide 'Services for children in need, their families and others'.

Section 47 of the Children's Act 1989

Child protection is considered to be a process of protecting individual children identified as either suffering, or at risk of suffering, significant harm as a result of abuse or neglect. And the local authority is under a duty to make enquiries, or cause enquiries to be made, where it has reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm.

Section 17 (10) of the Children's Act 1989: A child is a Child in Need if:

- He/she is unlikely to achieve or maintain, or have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining, a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision for him/her of services by a local authority;
- His/her health or development is likely to be significantly impaired, or further impaired, without the provision for him/her of such services; or
- He/she is a Disabled Child.

2.3 The Children's Act 2004

After the death of Victoria Climbié in 2000, the UK government launched an enquiry, headed by Lord Laming, to investigate how they could improve the child protection system. From the results of this enquiry (Laming 2003), the Keeping Children Safe Report (DfES, 2003) and the Every Child Matters green paper (DfES, 2003), were produced and laid the groundwork for the Children's Act 2004. The

Children's Act 2004 outlines the process for combining children's services in order for every child to be able to achieve the five "Every Child Matters" outcomes: being healthy; staying safe; enjoying and achieving; making a positive contribution to society and achieving economic well-being. Since then, a "Review of Child Protection" by Professor Eileen Munro has also taken place to further improve the system of protection for children in the country.

2.4 Categories of Child Abuse

According to UK law, there are four categories of child abuse. These are:

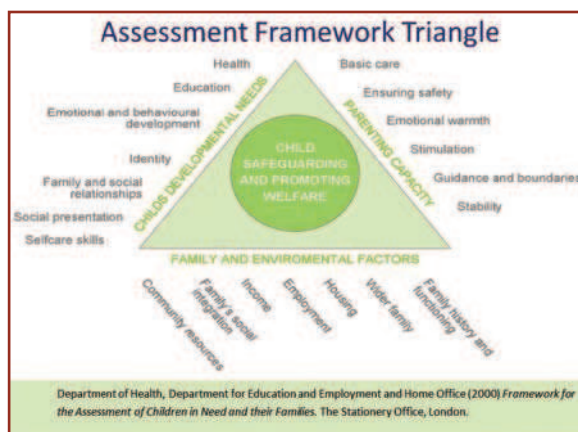
- **Physical Abuse:** including beating, slapping, shaking, burning, suffocation, drowning.
- **Emotional Abuse:** making a child feel worthless, unloved, inadequate, not valued or scared.
- **Sexual Abuse:** forcing or grooming a child to take part in sexual activities, rape, showing them pornographic materials, encouraging sexual behavior.
- **Neglect:** failure to meet the basic physical and/or psychological needs which has effects on a child's development.

In our "Safeguarding African Children in the UK" Series of Publications, we have addressed each of the above categories in broader detail. We encourage all parents to read them to gain a better understanding of how African children can be affected.

2.5 The Assessment Framework

In assessing cases of child safeguarding referred to Children's Services, the Local Authority uses what is called "The Assessment Framework" to determine if the child is in need of services or at risk of harm. The Framework is also used to decide what kind of support systems need to be put in place to ensure the child's overall wellbeing looking at three key factors: The Child's Developmental Needs, Parental Capacity and Family and Environmental Factors. Intervention in families is therefore seen to be done "in the best interests of the child".

Assessment Framework Triangle



2.6 The Child Protection Process

When a child is suspected to be at risk of "significant harm", the following process is followed by the Local Authority involved:

1. Section 47 of the Children's Act 1989 Assessment – an investigation into a child's needs and how they can be kept safe from harm
2. If there are further concerns or if the social worker is unsure the child is safe, there will be:
3. A "Child Protection Conference" – to make a decision about whether a child is still at risk of harm or not, involve parents, children and others
4. Child is then subject to a "Child Protection Plan" – this shows what support the child will receive and from whom
5. CP Plan and "Core Group" – a core group is also known as "team-around-the-child" – a group of people who make sure that the things on the plan happen. Parents are part of this group.

2.7 Safeguarding Children: AFRUCA's Work To Educate The Community

Apart from our work organising *Child Protection Training Programmes For African Parents* nation-wide, AFRUCA has also produced the "*Safeguarding African Children in the UK*" series of publications to highlight different safeguarding issues and to assist members of the African community in the UK to know more about different forms of child abuse and how to identify the signs so children can be safe and be better protected. We have also produced this "*Manual on Child Protection for African Parents*" to help parents further develop their knowledge and skills on Child Protection so they can bring up their children successfully in the UK.

Key Points to Remember:

- The government has the right by law to intervene in families 'in the best interests of the child'.
- Intervention will occur if the government believes a child is at risk of 'significant harm' or is a 'child in need of services'.
- Most agencies use the 'Assessment Framework' to assess if a family needs intervention.
- There are four categories of child abuse: Sexual, Physical, Emotional and Neglect.
- Parents need to improve their knowledge and understanding of what the law says so they do not commit offences by abusing their children due to ignorance of the law.

3. SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN: WHOSE JOB IS IT?

*"What is done to children, they will do to society".
Karl Menninger*

In this section, we will explore the safeguarding roles played by some of the key agencies and institutions who are involved in the lives of children.

It is vital to build a strong partnership to safeguard children. It is the duty of all those around the child to ensure it is protected from harm and abuse. In particular, schools, faith organisations, parents and the government must work together to ensure that children are safe and secure.

3.1 Parents

The good intentions of parents are not enough to safeguard children from abuse and harm. They need to learn and make use of available information about child development and child safeguarding to improve their parenting skills and to provide their children with relevant support and experiences that will 'enable them to have optimum life chances and enter adulthood successfully'. Many parents like to draw on their own experiences as children to determine how to bring up their own children. However, the changes in time as well as in the environment in which they find themselves mean that many adjustments have to be made in order to be effective parents to their children.

It is really the duty of parents to ensure their children are safe and secure at home and that places where they take their children are suitable enough to guarantee their safety. There are two key places where most children in the African community attend regularly – the school and the place of worship.

3.2 Schools

After the home the school setting is where our children spend most of their time. Therefore the school environment is quite vital in the development of our children. In this regard a sincere, transparent and close partnership between parents and the school is of paramount importance. All schools have a strong obligation towards the children who attend (in loco parentis) and it is their duty to ensure children are kept safe from harm while in their care. However, parents need to ensure that they are always in close communication with the school to ensure their children's needs are being met. Parents must act if they believe their children's safety is being compromised in a school setting.

3.3 Bullying in Schools

Child-to-child bullying is a reality which can have a devastating impact on many children. Newly arrived African children are particularly vulnerable to bullying for many reasons including their accents, names, and because they tend to excel academically even though they have only been in the country for a short while. Other children can suffer bullying because of disability or other forms of learning difficulties. Children like Damilola Taylor and Jude Akapa, two newly arrived children were subjected to bullying and ended up being killed as a result. Parents must therefore never take the issue of bullying lightly but take immediate action if their children disclose bullying. The first step is to talk to the school to ensure action is taken. Most schools do have a zero-tolerance of bullying, although some schools are not that effective in dealing with it. All disclosure by children must be documented by parents as evidence. If the school does not act to protect your child, you must report to the police or to children's services and not stop until action is taken.

Parents must encourage their children to talk if they are being bullied. They must never keep bullying a secret. However, it is important that parents act when their children disclose bullying and abuse. The first step is to comfort and assure your child. It is not their fault they are being bullied. Some parents encourage their children to "fight back" if they are being bullied. However, the child can end up being accused of bullying as well.

Parents must seek immediate advice and support if their children are being bullied. There is a lot of material on the internet to inform parents on what to do.

For example the website www.bullying.co.uk has a lot of guidance material for parents on bullying.

3.4 Staying Safe on the Internet

Bullying is also not limited to physical abuse. There is a lot of bullying on social network sites like Facebook, Bebo, Myspace and Twitter. Mobile phones, especially those with cameras have become objects of bullying in many ways. Parents need to ensure their children know how to keep themselves safe when they are online. We have covered more on this in Section Six.

Note: For further information about how to protect your child against bullying, please visit www.bullying.co.uk

3.5 Faith Organisations

Most Africans regularly attend a place of worship or another with their children. Children are expected to be involved in faith activities – for example by attending Sunday School or a Madrassah. It is the duty of all faith organisations to ensure their environments are safe places for the children who attend. It is also important for faith groups to ensure children who are abused elsewhere can have access to support and help when they do attend. Faith groups must ensure their practices do not lead to children being abused physically, emotionally, sexually nor lead to child neglect and harm. Faith workers, paid or voluntary, must have a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) Disclosure to ensure they have not committed offences which make them unsuitable to work with children. All faith organisations must therefore ensure they have strong Child Protection Policies in place. This must be communicated to all those who attend.

AFRUCA's Work with Faith Organisations in Yorkshire and Greater Manchester

AFRUCA has been working very closely with African Pentecostal churches in Greater Manchester and in Yorkshire to develop an Audit of their activities and carry out Risk Assessments of how these can have negative impacts on children. We are also working with them to find alternative ways of doing things so children are not harmed by developing Child Protection Policies and Procedures which are regularly monitored. As part of the Policies, churches must have stringent recruitment procedures in place. All those being employed to work in faith settings including volunteers must have a Criminal Records Bureau disclosure. References must be taken for all staff to ensure people can vouch for their characters. The faith organisation must have a Child Protection Officer who co-ordinates all activities relating to Child Safeguarding and ensure faith practices do not affect children. It is vital that parents are aware of what their faith organisation is doing on child safeguarding or that parents can work with them to bring about changes, if there is nothing already in place.

What Must A Parent Do If He/She Suspects A Child Is Abused in School or A Place of Worship?

If you suspect your child is being abused or has been abused, it is important to deal with it in a calm, caring manner so as not to upset the child further. You should talk to your child to gain as much information as possible, but children often keep their problems to themselves so you must be patient and always reassure the child that they did nothing wrong.

Next you should contact the school or the faith organisation, speaking to the head teacher or faith leader or child protection officer to disclose the case. If possible, keep a diary of dates and events related to the issue. All schools have a duty to investigate accusations of abuse and follow procedures outlined by the local safeguarding children board. All faith groups must also have internal Child Protection Policies and Procedures which detail what must be done if abuse is disclosed. The authorities or children's services must then be contacted and they would decide on the best way to investigate.

Schools and faith groups should always be cooperative but if you find they are not, you should contact and report the issue to your local children's services. You will find their numbers online via your local authority website. You must not give up or be discouraged by the failure to act. It is important for parents not to shy away from reporting suspicions of abuse. It is a very serious crime and other children could be at risk if the matter is not dealt with promptly. Your child can also be at risk of further abuse.

Parents who do not have the right to be in the UK and whose children have suffered abuse must not be afraid of reporting to the authorities. Your child's welfare is paramount and is not an immigration matter. Agencies have a statutory duty to act to protect your child and your immigration status should not get in the way.

For more information about Child Protection in Faith Settings, you can also read our "Manual on Child Protection For African Faith Organisations in the UK" available from AFRUCA.

Key Points to Remember:

- It is the role of parents to ensure their children are safe in the home and in other places where children go.
- Schools have a statutory obligation to protect the children in their care from abuse and harm.
- Faith organisations have a responsibility to ensure their practices do not harm your child. They must put different Policies in place to ensure children who attend are safe guarded.
- If you detect your child is being abused in a school or a faith organisation, you must report to the agency involved. If there is no action, you must contact Children's Services.
- Agencies have a statutory duty to protect children. Your immigration status should not get in the way.

4. CHILD DEVELOPMENT: UNDERSTANDING YOUR CHILD

*"Do not ask that your kids live up to your expectations.
Let your kids be who they are, and your expectations
will be in breathless pursuit."*

Robert Brault

No two children are ever the same. Each child is unique and therefore has individual needs. It is important to understand that the same ways of raising two children could produce different outcomes depending on the individual child's personality, experiences and developmental stage.

Indeed parents often find themselves asking 'What is normal?' or 'When should I expect that my child will be able to perform certain tasks?' Some parents ask 'how can I know if I am expecting too much or too little from my child, given his age?'

Remember: Effective parenting requires a clear understanding of the developmental abilities and limitations of children at different ages.

4.1 Stages Of Child Development - 'What Is Normal?'

Infancy and childhood are times of rapid growth and development at all levels - physical, mental, emotional, and moral. It is the beginning of a process that will continue until we die. If not handled appropriately, parents, with the best intentions in the world for their children, could impair the physical, emotional, spiritual and moral development of their child.

The early years foundation stage (0-5 years) plays a vital role in what the child becomes in later years. Many organisations like the NSPCC have produced a range of publications to help parents deal with their children's behavior. The UK Department for Education and

Skills have also issued the Early Years Foundation Stage Practice Guidance (2007). It sets standards for Learning, Development and Care for Children from birth to five. It sets out among other things, what providers need to do in the various areas of learning to support a child go through those stages successfully. It is during this stage that anomalies can be detected and corrected in time.

The guidance spells out the different areas of development and how service providers can support the child to get the right outcomes from each one of them. They include: dispositions and attitudes; self confidence and self esteem; making relationships; behavior and self control, self care and sense of community. We have highlighted below some excerpts from some of the above publications as a short guide to help African parents get the basics about child development and to allow them to interact better with service providers in matters to do with their children.

4.2 Child Development by Age: What to Expect

Birth to 12 Months

It is widely believed that the main job or task for infants in the first year of life is to grow and thrive. Infants require careful attention, plenty of sleep, good nutrition, and lots of interaction with parents and caregivers.

12 months to 36 months

A child's main job or task during this stage is to begin developing competence in basic motor skills and a sense of individuality. This involves play, exploration, mastery of skills (for example, walking, using words to communicate, eating alone), and the inevitable temper tantrums that result when early attempts at self-assertion end in frustration.

3 years to 6 years

Mastery of social skills and language, and the development of initiative and a sense of purpose are hallmarks of this developmental stage. During the preschool years, imagination develops and children enjoy stories and make-believe.

6 years to 12 years

Peer relations, expanded social skills, and intellectual development are key issues in this developmental stage. In the UK, school-based education begins and children suddenly must learn how to deal with rules, conflicts, and frustrations that occur outside of the home.

Adolescence (12 to 20 years)

This is the period when the child's spirit 'breaks through'. The need to create a personal identity, to fine tune self-image, and to establish independence are the overriding tasks of adolescence. In the wake of the physical and hormonal changes of puberty, children grapple with their emerging sexuality and with the so-called emotional roller coaster of a changing biochemistry.

4.3 Childhood Difficulties and the Branding of Children As Witches

It is possible that some children are unable to demonstrate certain characteristics expected of their age range. Some children can experience problems with behavior and feelings. Others might experience mental health difficulties or physical disabilities. Parents must seek appropriate medical help as soon as possible if they think there is something not quite right.

Some common mental health disorders experienced in childhood include:

- Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD)
- Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)
- Psychotic Disorders

Many of these childhood disorders can be controlled by medication and other medical and psychiatric support and interventions. They should never be a reason to abuse your child or to incite harm against children. Children who are going through such difficulties require a lot of love, support, affection and attention from those closest to them, not abuse.

AFRUCA totally condemns the practice of labeling children as witches or as possessed by evil spirits because they have one form of mental disorder, a physical disability or another. Parents should be careful of branding their children in any way or allowing others to do the same. Childhood disorders are not a reason to brand children as witches or to inflict harm on them because someone thinks they are possessed by the devil.

Parents can learn more about common childhood mental health and psychological disorders by visiting the website: "Child and Adolescent Mental Health" at www.cahm.org.uk

Key Points to Remember:

- All children are unique and have individual needs.
- Parents need to learn and understand what happens during the different stages of child development.
- Some children will have or experience various childhood disorders. Parents must seek help as soon as they discover there is something not quite right.
- Childhood disorders are not a reason to brand children as witches or as possessed by evil spirits. Many of these conditions can be controlled by medication.
- Children with disorders require a lot of love, help, support and affection from their parents, not abuse and harm.

5. LEAVING CHILDREN HOME ALONE

The absence of extended family members in the UK and the usual support they give in raising children back home leaves many African parents isolated and in a dilemma regarding how to cope with child-care. Many parents have therefore been in trouble with the law as a result of leaving their children home alone, only for those children to end up being harmed as a result. Leaving children alone comes under the child abuse category of "Neglect". Our research shows that children of African origin are becoming over represented in the child protection system especially under the categories of "Physical Abuse" and "Neglect".

Even though there is no minimum age at which children can be left alone, it is an offence to leave a child alone when doing so puts him or her at risk of harm. Under *The Children and Young Persons Act 1933*, parents in England and Wales can be prosecuted for wilful neglect if they leave a child unsupervised "in a manner likely to cause unnecessary suffering or injury to health". The law does not give details of what amounts to wilful neglect, unnecessary suffering or injury to health - but punishment can range from a fine to 10 years imprisonment.

There are many important things to decide before leaving a child alone. For example, a child of 12 years could be more matured than a child of 14 years and could be well capable of self-care. Children with disability should not be left alone prior to the age of 16 because they might be incapable of looking after themselves. Most children left alone must know how to get help, must not be left alone for a long period – for example no longer than 30 minutes and must know what to do in case of an emergency. Children should also not be left alone with a child-minder or baby-sitter younger than 16 years. The practice of using children as domestic servants is therefore not only wrong and illegal in itself, it can also put your own child at risk of harm.

5.1 Other Key Points To Consider Before Leaving Children Alone

- Is the child old or mature enough?
- How long will the child be left alone? For example, is it okay to leave a 15 year old alone for a week or a 6 year old overnight?
- Where will the child be left?
- How often will the child be left?
- Will the child be with other children?
- Is it okay to allow children to play outdoors for a long period?
- Is it acceptable to allow children to go out without knowing where they are going or who they are with?

5.2 If you have to leave your children alone

- Make sure your child knows the exact details of where you are going and when you are going to return.
- Call home on a very regular basis to check on the children. Talk to each child separately to make sure they are all fine.
- If you are not expecting anyone to visit the home when you are not around, make sure you tell your children.
- Leave a contact phone number and make sure you answer if it does ring.
- Your children must know what to do to keep safe in the house. They must know the potential dangers, what to do and what not to do.
- They must not answer the door to anyone. They must only answer the door to someone they know you have specifically asked to check on them because you are not there.
- Instruct them about what to do in an emergency. For example, they must know how to contact the emergency services.
- Prepare meals for your children before going out so they would not have to use the cooker with the potential of causing a fire or getting burnt.
- Put obvious dangers out of the reach of children for example, sharp objects like knives, also plastic bags, medicine and matches.
- Make sure that your child is happy with the arrangements and

- confident about being left.
- Have a discussion about it afterwards to ensure everything went well.

Key Points to Remember:

- It is an offence to leave children alone if doing so puts him or her at risk of harm.
- Some older children are more mature and can be left alone. Others might not be.
- Children with a disability should not be left alone as they might require continuous care and support.
- Make sure your child is happy and confident with being left alone.
- If you have to leave your child alone for a short while, please consider all our suggestions above before doing so.

6. CHILDREN AND THE INTERNET

The law does not give an age at which children are allowed to go on the internet. However, children can be exposed to a lot of dangerous material on the internet and it is important for them to be protected from such dangers. If they are old enough, parents must sit down and talk to their children about the “Dos and Don’ts” of being on a social networking site, so they can protect themselves from abuse and harm.

6.1 Some useful tips on Protecting Children Online

- **Talk to your child about their activities online:** This will also give you a chance to find out what interests them, and prepare you for potential dangers they may face. By showing interest, they would be more likely to talk to you about any problems they have online.
- **Set boundaries:** Do not allow your child lengthy unsupervised time alone on the internet. Set controls on chat rooms and social sites so that they can be protected from ‘grooming’.
- **Computers and Internet devices should be kept where you can monitor them:** It is important to always be vigilant of your child’s activities online and giving them access in their bedrooms or play areas can be dangerous.
- **Keep up to date with technology:** As your child grows, he/she learns new skills even quicker than you do! Therefore, it is important that you retain control of the technology available at home.
- **Use parental controls:** Parental controls are a good way of limiting your child’s activities online. It is not just about blocking or locking access to certain sites but they help to set appropriate boundaries - giving your child some freedom to explore, while filtering out unwanted, dangerous material. Learn how to set your internet parental controls.

- **Ensure your child is aware that not everyone is who they say they are:** You must train your child not to engage in conversations with strangers. However, if the situation arises, it is paramount that they are aware that not everyone online is who they say they are. It is also important they understand never to give out their personal information such as name, addresses, telephone numbers or schools they attend.
- **Know what to do if something goes wrong:** Just as in the offline world, you want to help your child when they need it. Therefore, it is important to know when and how to report any problem. If you believe your child is at risk, you must inform the Police.

Bullying UK said they have had experiences of young people using the internet who have been persuaded into dangerous situations by adults. This is an offence called '**grooming**'.

Internet safety tips for your child:

- Never give out your real name.
- Never tell anyone where you go to school.
- Only meet someone from a chatroom in a public place with one of your parents or another adult. If they are genuinely who they say they are they will be happy to do this.
- Never give out your address or telephone number.
- Never agree to meet anyone from a chatroom on your own.
- Tell an adult if someone makes inappropriate suggestions to you or makes you feel uncomfortable online.

Danger signs:

- If the person tries to insist on having your address or phone number.

- If the person emails you pictures which make you feel uncomfortable and which you would not want to show to anyone else.
- If the person wants to keep their chats with you secret.
- If the person tells you that you will get into trouble if you tell an adult what has been going on.
- If the person wants you to email them pictures of yourself or use a webcam in a way which makes you feel uncomfortable.
- If the person shares information with you and tells you not to tell anyone else about it.
- If the person wants to meet you and tells you not to let anyone know.

You can read more about protecting children online at www.bullying.co.uk or at www.nspcc.co.uk

Key Points to Remember:

- The law does not say how old a child should be before they can join a social networking site. It is up to you to ensure your child is protected.
- If they are old enough, you must talk to your child about the "Dos" and Dont's" of being on the internet.
- Always set parental controls for internet usage. Learn how to do this to protect your child online.
- Not everyone online is who they said they are. Protect your child from online grooming by instructing them never to give out their personal details on the internet or to anyone they meet online.

7. DISCIPLINE – SPARE THE ROD, SPOIL THE CHILD?

*"When a child hits a child, we call it aggression.
When a child hits an adult, we call it hostility.
When an adult hits an adult, we call it assault.
When an adult hits a child, we call it discipline."*

Haim Ginott

7.1 Physical Chastisement

UK legislation does say that parents can use 'reasonable chastisement' to control their children's behaviour. However in doing so, they must not use any implements or leave a mark on the child's body - **Section 58 of the Children's Act 2004**. As an organization, AFRUCA believes "reasonable chastisement" can cause harm to children which might not be detectable, not only because of the skin pigmentation of many African children but also because research has shown that regular beatings or even smacking can lead to long term emotional harm.

The issue of physical punishment or '*discipline*' is very common among African families both in Africa itself and the Diaspora. Many parents grew up in environments where the notion of discipline and '*good home training*' were paramount in the upbringing of children. A lot of people strongly believe that children who are brought up with good discipline grow up to be respectful, courteous and know how to behave appropriately in society. However, discipline in the sense in which they understand it translates into physical chastisement and using violence to correct behaviour. In particular, many Africans believe that the UK culture of 'reasonable chastisement' means children are being brought up with no respect for authority and society.

Many parents who attend our parenting classes express their fear that a lack of discipline will lead their children into becoming disrespectful, uncontrollable and that they will end up joining gangs and become involved in crime and criminality. A recent debate generated by the MP David Lammy (Haringey) about lack of discipline among children leading to the 2011 London riots was seen to be widely supported by many parents, including many African parents.

At AFRUCA, the key question we always ask parents is: "Is it possible to instill discipline in a child without physical chastisement"?

There are lots of African families nation-wide who have fallen foul of the laws because of their insistence on using harsh physical punishment as a way of disciplining their children, contrary to the dictates of the law. The statistics are there to confirm this. For example, in many London authorities, most of the black children referred into the child protection system are under the category of physical abuse and neglect. Every year, AFRUCA assesses many cases of child abuse. Almost all them involve allegations of physical abuse against the parents.

Many local authorities see physical chastisement, corporal punishments and similar harsh forms of discipline as Physical Abuse and will take strong action against parents who abuse their children in this way.

AFRUCA believes it is possible for parents to bring up well adjusted, disciplined children without using any force or violence. Certainly, there are many African parents who do not beat their children, yet they are well behaved. We have therefore been working with parents to show how it is possible to do so.

7.2 Self-Discipline

*"Don't worry that children never listen to you;
worry that they are always watching you."*

Robert Fulghum

It is important for parents to understand that children watch their every move. Children are like sponges - they soak in their parents' behaviours and actions - whether good or bad. As parents it is important to be a good role model for your child and to instill in them good morals and understanding about the world and relationships. Simply put: If you don't want your child to do it, then don't do it yourself!

Self-discipline is therefore a very important part of discipline and a way to encourage good behaviour in your own children.

7.3 Discipline is Not Punishment

It is also better to think of discipline as teaching rather than as punishment. Discipline should reinforce “positive behaviour” rather than create an atmosphere of harm or fear.

7.4 Discipline – What Should It Be?

Discipline must be focused on teaching the child right from wrong and an understanding of how their actions affect others. It should not be about inflicting pain and fear on the child or forcing the child to obey orders without questioning.

Discipline should involve helping a child to learn:

- Good behaviour;
- How to respect the rights of others;
- How to realise behaviours that are acceptable and which are not;
- How to feel secure and loved, self-confident, self-disciplined and knowing;
- How to control his/her impulses; and
- How not to get overly frustrated with the normal stresses of every day life.

These values must be instilled into the child during the early years foundation stage. Parents will find it hard to inculcate them after this stage has been mishandled.

Key Points to Remember:

- Discipline is not punishment. You don't have to beat your child to instill discipline in them.
- If you don't want your child to do it, then don't do it.
- Discipline is about correcting behavior and teaching children right from wrong. It is not about punishment.
- Discipline must start during the very early years. It will be difficult to instill discipline when the child is older.

8. MANAGING BEHAVIOUR: WHAT SHOULD PARENTS DO?

There are skills parents can use to manage their children's behaviour right from a very early age without resorting to smacking, beating, shouting or any other negative behaviour and we have provided some examples here.

8.1 BABIES (under 2s)

Babies become tiresome and difficult when their needs are not being met. They behave as they do in order to have their needs met. When they cry or don't sleep, they're not behaving 'badly', or being 'naughty' or to wind you up. It is simply that something is wrong that they need to be taken care of.

Parents should:

- Always ensure that your baby's basic needs are taken care of, that they are well fed, clean, and not unwell (for example, from colic).
- Introduce routines to give them a sense of normalcy and to start the process of boundary-setting.
- Babies, thrive on love and affection so giving your baby lots of hugs, cuddles and kisses, from the earliest moment, will help give them a sense of contentment and stability.
- Communicating often with your baby, talking to them, reading and playing with them, all helps to make them feel safe, happy and secure.
- 'Baby-proof' your home so your baby can start to move around with ease and discover things around them without the risks of injuries or accidents.
- Use distraction with older babies; take their mind off the issue if they are being particularly difficult, by focusing on some thing else.

8.2 TODDLERS (under 3s)

Most naughty behaviour in toddlers is part of normal development. All toddlers test limits, try to be independent, get into everything, get mad and have tantrums. To deal with this:

Parents Should:

- Praise and celebrate the good behaviour that you want to encourage. This is known as "Positive Reinforcement".
- Ignore behaviour you don't like, it is less likely to be repeated because it is not getting any attention. This is called "Tactical Ignoring". Be consistent with your approach.
- Try not to use the word 'No'. It is better to be more specific and positive. For example, say: 'Please do not...'
- Allow your toddler to explore and be adventurous as much as possible as long as they are safe.
- Always acknowledge your child's feelings, telling them – 'I know you're upset', etc.
- Always remain calm and reasonable yourself. Remove yourself from the situation if you have to, always try to keep your temper under check. Remember calm parents often have clam children because children often imitate what they live with.

8.3 SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN (3-5)

Being 'cheeky' or disobedient may show a natural desire in your child to assert independence and show that he or she has a mind of their own. To deal with this:

Parents should:

- Encourage your child to think for themselves and be their own

person, but be firm about which behaviour you find acceptable and unacceptable.

- Listen to your child talk about friends, their day, any worries they may have that may make behaviour worse.
- Keep criticisms to a minimum - only criticise behaviour, never your child.
- A 'broken record' approach can work well - calmly repeating what you expect your child to do.
- Develop a strong bond with your child, involve them as much as you can in your life, and try as hard as you can to be actively involved in their life.

8.4 AGE 5 TO PRE-TEENS

At this age, children are usually very inquisitive and adventurous. There would be a lot of opportunity for them to get into trouble or begin misbehaving.

Parents Should:

- Try as much as possible to structure their routines.
- Allow some negotiation on punishment and rewards - by having their input listened to, they feel more responsible and are more likely to adhere to your rules.
- Try not to let their bad behaviour affect you. Remain calm but firm.
- Draw up a contract if possible so that you can point out where they have succeeded or failed. This would make negotiations easier.

8.5 TEENAGERS

It is normal for young people to challenge you more - their friends

start to exert a greater influence and they just can't go along with everything parents want.

Parents Should:

- Not take bad behaviour personally.
- Keep communicating, keep talking, keep engaging.
- Try not to use threats or orders.
- Talk and negotiate solutions when there is a disagreement.
- Speak in a non-judgmental tone.
- Have open discussions about all subjects.
- Share your personal experiences so they understand where you are coming from.

9. AFRUCA'S 20 WAYS TO BE A GREAT PARENT WITHOUT BEATING OR SMACKING

"Parents who are afraid to put their foot down usually have children who step on their toes."

Chinese Proverb

- 1.** Children imitate behavior. This is called 'modeling'. Be careful about the signals you are sending out to your children. Be a good example of how you want your child to behave.
- 2.** Criticise the behaviour, not your child. The focus should be on what your child has done, not on his or her personality.
- 3.** Never compare your child to another child – even if they are siblings.
- 4.** 'Angry discipline' is wrong discipline. Never discipline your child out of anger, frustration or other negative emotions. If you are angry because of something that has happened, take time to calm down before taking any action.
- 5.** If someone else has made you angry, do not take it out on your child.
- 6.** If a punishment is necessary, then removal of privileges, 'time-out' or 'natural consequences' all work better than smacking, shouting or using abusive or demeaning language.
- 7.** Develop a strong bond with your child. Involve them as much as possible in your life and try to be actively involved in their lives. Spend a lot of positive time together with your children.
- 8.** Set boundaries from a very young age. Establish simple rules with clear consequences for breaking rules. Very importantly,

be consistent by following through if your rules are broken. You lose control if you enforce a rule one day and ignore the rule the next.

- 9.** Reward good behavior with praises, hugs, kisses, approval and love so it will increase.
- 10.** Enjoy, celebrate and encourage your children. Show your children you love and are proud of them.
- 11.** Encourage your child to think for themselves and be their own person. But be firm about behaviour you find acceptable and unacceptable.
- 12.** Calm parents have calm children!
- 13.** No one is too old to apologise. If you have made a genuine mistake, say sorry.
- 14.** For younger children: ignore behavior you don't want repeated. If it is repeated, deal with it within the boundaries you have set.
- 15.** Spend time at the end of each day to talk to your child. Find out about their day in school, their experiences and discuss any problems they may have.
- 16.** If you make any promises to your children, try and keep them. If you cannot, let them know why it is not possible.
- 17.** If your child makes a disclosure or reports any abuse or bullying, make sure you deal with it as soon as possible.
- 18.** Allow children some control-choices. Let them have some input into decisions in family affairs. They will feel more valued.
- 19.** School-Parents evenings are important. Ensure you attend as regularly as possible. This will show your children that you

care about them and their education.

- 20.** Lastly, never ever call your child stupid, idiot or use other derogatory or demeaning language. This is the best way to break down their psyche and destroy their self-confidence.

10. USEFUL RESOURCES FOR PARENTS

We hope parents have found this publication useful. There is a lot of information out there that can help parents do the job of bringing up their children better. At AFRUCA, we have produced a range of material to help parents and other members of our community. Here is a list of publications where parents can get additional information on parenting.

Other AFRUCA Manuals:

- Manual for African Faith Organisations on Child Protection

Safeguarding African Children in The UK Series:

- What is Child Abuse?
- What is Child Trafficking?
- What is Emotional Abuse?
- What is Female Genital Mutilation?
- What is Private Fostering?
- What is Physical Abuse?
- What is Sexual Abuse?
- What is Witchcraft Abuse?

Websites:

www.afruca.org

www.bullying.co.uk

www.cahm.org.uk

www.nspcc.co.uk

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