

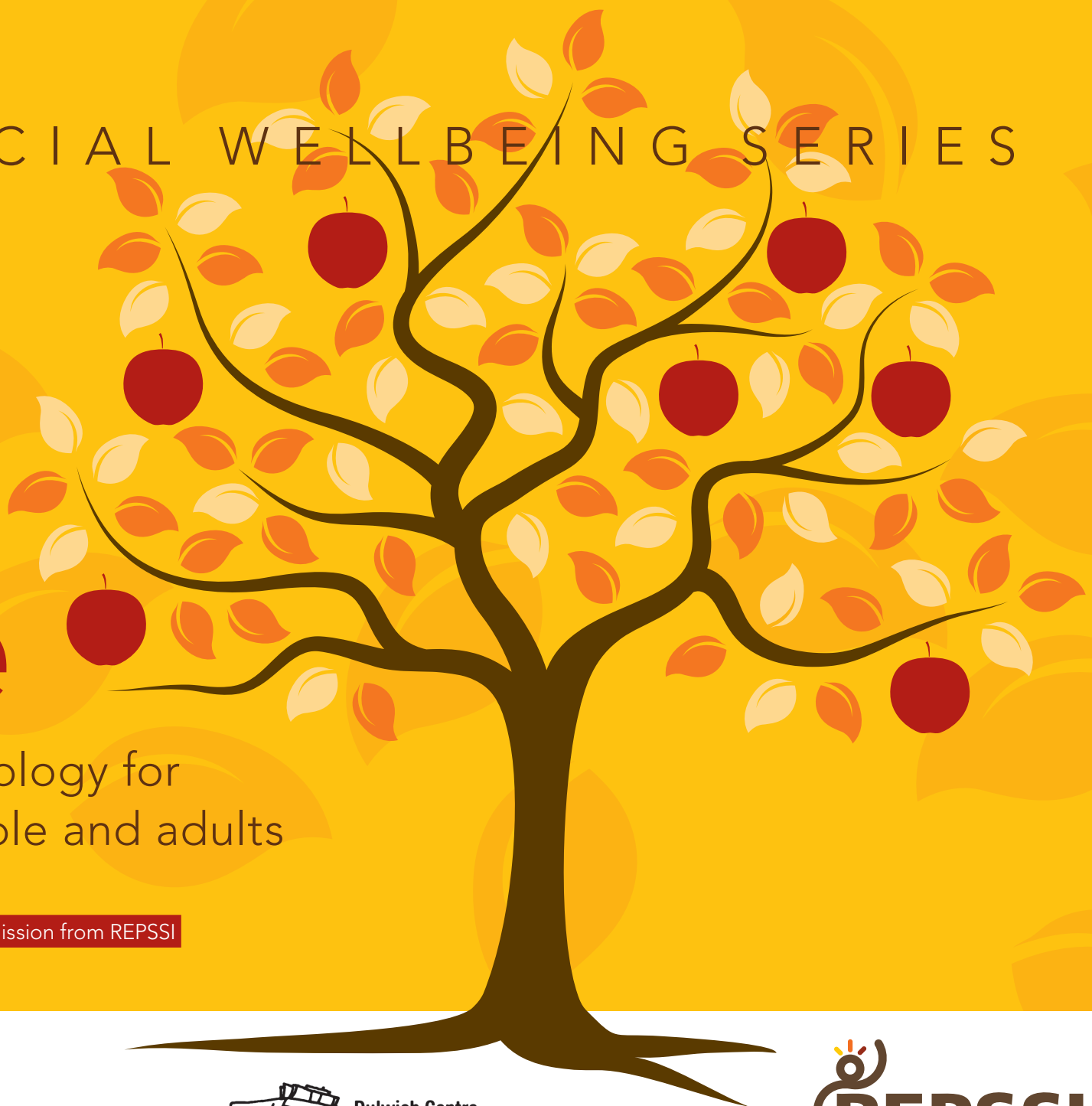
PSYCHOSOCIAL WELLBEING SERIES

Tree of Life

A workshop methodology for
children, young people and adults

Adapted by Catholic Relief Services with permission from REPSSI

Third Edition for a Global Audience





REPSSI is a non-profit organisation working to lessen the devastating social and emotional (psychosocial) impact of poverty, conflict, HIV and AIDS among children and youth. It is led by Noreen Masiwa Huni, Chief Executive Officer. REPSSI's aim is to ensure that all children have access to stable care and protection through quality psychosocial support. We work at the international, regional and national level in East and Southern Africa.

The best way to support vulnerable children and youth is within a healthy family and community environment. We partner with governments, development partners, international organisations and NGOs to provide programmes that strengthen communities' and families' competencies to better promote the psychosocial wellbeing of their children and youth.

A clear objective of the REPSSI tools for the Psychosocial Wellbeing series – of which Tree of Life is a part -- is to strengthen children's sense of belonging and connectedness to their families and communities, as well as to challenge the sense of isolation and loneliness that many children experience in the context of disease, poverty and conflict.

We hope that, in this expanded edition, the Tree of Life will help many people and organizations around the world in their efforts to improve the wellbeing of children.



Catholic Relief Services (CRS) was founded in 1943 by the Catholic Bishops of the United States to serve World War II survivors in Europe. Since then, we have expanded in size to reach 100 million people annually in over 100 countries on five continents.

Our mission is to assist impoverished and disadvantaged people overseas, working in the spirit of Catholic social teaching to promote the sacredness of human life and the dignity of the human person. Catholic Relief Services works in partnership with local, national and international organizations and structures in emergency response, agriculture and health, as well as microfinance, water and sanitation, peace and justice, capacity strengthening, and education. Although our mission is rooted in the Catholic faith, our operations serve people based solely on need, regardless of their race, religion or ethnicity. Within the United States, CRS also engages Catholics to live their faith in solidarity with the poor and suffering people of the world.

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Contents

Acknowledgements	2	Part 3	
Introduction	3	Storms of Life	27
Part 1		Animals in the forest	30
Creating our trees	12	Taking the lessons home	32
Preparing for part one	12	Part 4	
Participants draw and share their trees	15	Our Trees / Our Lives	33
Roots of the tree	17	Certificates and Tree of Life song	34
The ground	18	Preserving our beautiful trees	36
The trunk of the tree	19	APPENDIX 1: Energisers	37
The branches of the tree	20	APPENDIX 2: Questions for Tree of Life	38
The leaves of the tree	21	APPENDIX 3: References	40
The fruits of the tree	22		
The 'Telling'	23		
Part 2			
Forest of Life	24		
Making the forest	25		

Acknowledgements

Like a real tree, the Tree of Life has grown bigger and more wonderful over the years.

Anne Hope and Sally Timmel published a version of the Tree of Life in 1984 in their book: 'Training for Transformation: A handbook for Community Workers, Book 1. Mambo Press, Senga Press, Senga Road, Gweru.

That version was further developed and expanded by Ncazelo Ncube-Mlilo (REPSSI) and David Denborough (Dulwich Centre Institute of Community Practice). Sincere appreciation goes to the Dulwich team, David Denborough, Michael White, Cheryl White and Shona Russell, for their encouragement and guidance throughout the shaping of the Tree of Life project. The Tree of Life methodology with narrative ideas was first published in the International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work in 2006.

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Sincere appreciation also goes to Hope World Wide South Africa - now Olive Leaf Foundation - and its staff and counsellors who displayed amazing enthusiasm in embracing new ideas, demonstrating their desire to provide meaningful support to the children and communities that they serve. Substantive input for the REPSSI publication of the Tree of Life was provided by Ncazelo Ncube-Mlilo, Jonathan Morgan, Noreen Huni and other REPSSI colleagues.

Revisions for the current "Third Edition for a Global Audience" were prepared by Lucy Y. Steinitz of Catholic Relief Services (CRS) based on input from a Tree of Life "Training of Trainers" workshop in June, 2016 in Chennai, India that was co-facilitated by REPSSI's Lynette Mudekunya and Alex Tigere. Many thanks to the "Combatting Trafficking in India" project of CRS that sponsored that workshop and to all the participants and reviewers in India (Jomey Joseph, project lead) who provided input and support for the current adaptation of this manual. This collaboration between CRS and REPSSI has been a joyful process that we believe will help many more trees sprout – and will help many more young people improve their lives wherever they happen to be.

Introduction

What is the Tree of Life?

The Tree of Life is a psychosocial support tool based on narrative practices. It is a tool that uses different parts of a tree as metaphors to represent the different aspects of our lives. It involves people drawing their own 'Tree of Life' in which they get to speak of their 'roots' (where they come from), their skills and knowledge, their hopes and dreams, and the special people in their lives. The participants then join their trees into a 'forest of life' and, in groups, discuss some of the 'storms' that affect their lives and ways that they respond to these storms, protect themselves, and each other. The use of metaphors and carefully formulated questions invites children and others to tell stories about their lives in ways that make them stronger and more hopeful about the future.

While it was not designed for catharsis or as a bereavement tool, the Tree of Life opens up space to facilitate conversations about hardship, bereavement and loss. It has been used extensively for this purpose with children in many different contexts. The Tree of Life experience allows children and adults who are severely affected by disease, poverty, violence and conflict to tell, hear, and explore stories of loss without remaining trapped in expressions of negativity or grief. It simultaneously opens up spaces and opportunities to tell, hear and explore stories of hope, shared values and connection to those around them as well as to those who have died.



Participants often report a deeper sense of belonging, identity and inner confidence after completing a Tree of Life workshop. Through this edition, we hope to extend the experience to an even broader array of contexts, for example in the aftermath of war, humanitarian crises and exploitation.

Who developed the Tree of Life, and why?

The Tree of Life methodology was co-developed through a partnership between REPSSI in southern Africa (www.repssi.org) and Dulwich Centre Foundation in Australia (www.dulwichcentre.com.au). Ncazelo Ncube (REPSSI) and David Denborough (Dulwich Centre Foundation) initially developed this Tree of Life approach to assist colleagues who work with children affected by HIV/AIDS in southern Africa. This approach has proved so successful and popular that it is now being used with children, young people, and adults in a wide range of countries across Africa as well as in Australia, Brazil, Canada, Russia, India, Nepal, the USA and elsewhere. The current edition is intended to further expand the Tree of Life's global reach. It was adapted by Lucy Steinitz and her colleagues at Catholic Relief Services, following a training workshop by REPSSI in Chennai, India in June, 2016.

The Tree of Life helps participation avoid re-traumatisation (sometimes called secondary traumatisation) that can be caused by the retelling of the original trauma without the appropriate support. By contrast, the Tree of Life enables people to speak about their lives in ways that are not retraumatising. Instead, the Tree of Life helps participants strengthen their relationships with their own history, their culture, and significant people in their lives in a positive way.

The Tree of Life utilizes metaphors, which in many cultures and communities evoke powerful meanings and associations for the local people. These meanings and associations embrace important values, skills and knowledge about life. These values, skills and knowledge can support people to find answers to their problems and challenges. In the various contexts where the Tree of Life tool has been used, people have engaged easily with the tool due to the appealing nature of the metaphors that are associated with it.

Who can benefit from the Tree of Life?

The Tree of Life has been used to support:

- Young people affected by HIV and AIDS, and by extreme poverty
- Children in school and other social settings where they spend their time, for example, in community-based safe-spaces or children's clubs
- Paraprofessionals working with groups of children affected by conflict and war
- Children who have lost parents or other loved-ones due to armed conflict
- Refugees and immigrants
- People whose communities have suffered from a natural disaster
- Young people and adults, especially women, who have experienced domestic violence, abuse, trafficking or other forms of exploitation
- Mental health practitioners working with adults who are experiencing mental health struggles

The Tree of Life may also be used as a counselling tool in shelter homes or in conjunction with one-on-one counselling by trained professionals. Adults have also engaged in a Tree of Life workshop and found it meaningful, both for their own lives and in their role as parents or caregivers of children.

The Tree of Life was originally designed for children and young people aged between 5 (five) and 20 (twenty) years. However, this does not mean that the process cannot be adapted for use with older participants. Many adults - especially secondary caregivers who work with children - have found making their own Tree of Life to be an invigorating and enriching experience that allows them to feel deeply connected to other people in their lives. Adults who have completed their own Tree of Life have said that they have found this to be supportive and sustaining in their work with children and

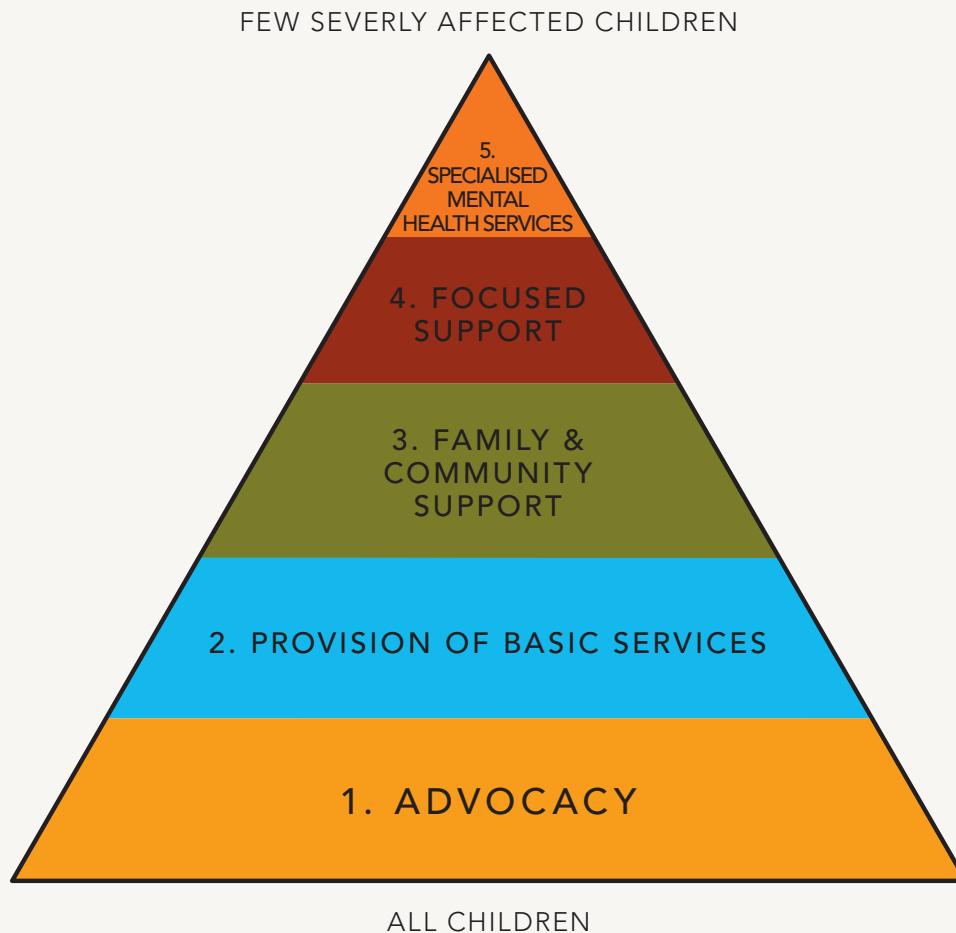
communities in crisis. Before a counsellor takes a group of children through the Tree of Life, they are required to make their own Tree of Life to familiarise themselves with the process.

How does the Tree of Life support children and adults?

Tree of Life helps provide psychosocial support; that is, the emotional healing, spiritual strength and meaningful expression that help people recover from loss, trauma and other types of hardship. Psychosocial support includes love, care, protection and life-skills. Generally, psychosocial support is best provided by families and communities, although others can also help - for example through workshop tools like the Tree of Life.

There are different levels of psychosocial support, as illustrated by the diagram below. Add this diagram back in from the original text or draw it again. The Tree of Life most often targets Advocacy, the Provision of Basic Services and Family and Community Support (the first, second and third levels below). By contrast, focused and specialized support (the fourth and fifth levels, or cases of more severe need) are usually identified elsewhere in the community, to be called upon if needed.

Multilayered, Integrated Psychosocial Support



Levels of Psychosocial Support (PSS)

5. Specialised Mental Health Services:

Psychiatric, clinical psychological, specialised traditional healer services for the few children with more severe responses

4. Focused Support:

Additional non-specialised support for children who are not coping and who are showing signs of distress

3. Family and Community Support:

Everyday care and support provided by caregivers, friends and community members

2. Provision of Basic Services:

Shelter, food, health and education, into which PSS needs to be mainstreamed, to reach many children and support ways of coping

1. Advocacy:

Influencing policy and changes to the social conditions that affect the wellbeing of millions of children

Adapted from Inter Agency Standing Committee, 2007

The Tree of Life is rarely used as a stand-alone intervention. It can – and should --be integrated with other activities that enhance individual and family wellbeing. These additional activities may be offered by the same organization that facilitates the Tree of Life, or else by another provider, for example by a school, health centre, or government social services.

How does the Tree of Life focus on positive things?

Narrative practices place emphasis on ensuring safety when working with children, individuals and communities. This refers to “emotional safety” as well as physical safety. Safety can be compromised in counselling by asking those who are experiencing problems to continuously retell problem-saturated stories (stories that focus only on problems and pain). Many of the participants in a Tree of Life workshop might have been asked to talk repeatedly about their experiences of trauma and suffering. This is harmful and potentially re-traumatizing. These stories are devoid of hope and may be thought of as the “**first story**”.

The Tree of Life tool is deliberately designed to support participants into exploring the “**second story**” of their lives. The second story is about the skills, hopes and dreams that an individual has for his or her life. It is an encouraging and invigorating re-telling that provides a firm base for someone to proceed with life, despite the problems that he or she could be facing. Without the Tree of Life, these stories rarely get told and celebrated in the community or in counselling contexts where the focus is usually on the negative issues.

The Tree of Life experience invites participants to step into a therapeutic process by initially exploring the precious things about their lives. This includes their family history, important relationships, skills and competencies, as well as other things of which they are proud. All of this is done before discussing problems. Starting the process by first exploring the good and positive aspects of the participants’ lives challenges the feelings of hopelessness, desperation, depression and defeat. Although no one should deny that bad things that happen, it is important to emphasize the positive in order to build strength and emotional resilience for the future. By the end of the workshop, the intent is for participants to feel more empowered, positive and hopeful about their lives.



Tip: Avoid upsetting questions

The expression “to open a can of worms” is one with which most counsellors working with troubled children and groups are familiar. Often in counselling contexts, counsellors realise that they have asked someone a question that seemed very simple and straight forward, but has led to a very emotional and painful response. That response may be one that the counsellor is not prepared for and, at most times, one that the child or individual is unable to contain (hence the expression, “opening up a can of worms”). When this occurs, sometimes other members of the group may also join in with their own tears, pain and distress. Such experiences are re-traumatizing for individuals seeking counselling support and can also be difficult, challenging and disheartening for counsellors. Because of this, care should be taken in advance to avoid any potentially upsetting question that may lead to marked distress in the child or individual concerned.

The Tree of Life is designed to offer a safe space for participants to revisit some of the difficulties that they have experienced in their lives, but in a way that does not further traumatise them. The Tree of Life allows children and adults facing challenges to create a distance between themselves and the problems, thereby enhancing their feeling of control and self-efficacy. Furthermore, the Tree of Life tool deliberately avoids asking individual children to share details about their personal problems and circumstances in the group context. This can be very unsafe, particularly where there is an obvious lack of follow-up services for individual children.

During the Tree of life experience, only commonly experienced problems are shared with the group and the solutions to problems are discussed collaboratively. The emphasis here is on common problems. Participants should be supported to see that they are not on their own, but rather that they belong to their families, communities, peer groups etc. This challenges the sense of isolation and loneliness often felt by people who have experienced severe distress and trauma. Strengths are identified and positive solutions are sought, wherever possible.

How does the Tree of Life strengthen relationships?

The Tree of Life process deliberately invites participants to reflect, honour and acknowledge the precious relationships that they have with their caregivers, families, peers, community members etc. This is especially important when the participants are young. At the end of the workshop, participants are given a certificate to take home that acknowledges their active participation in the Tree of Life workshop. This ceremony and these certificates also honour the contributions of important people in the lives of participants. Participants are

also given the opportunity to write a letter or draw a picture of appreciation to an individual or individuals who have especially supported them. It is hoped that this will enable caregivers and families connect in important ways to participants' experiences, as part of the support process.

How should counsellors be selected?

The quality of the Tree of Life experience depends in large part on the sensitivity and support provided by the counsellors who facilitate the Tree of Life process. It is not necessary to have a university degree for this purpose. Over the years, we have learned that religious leaders, teachers, NGO staff and volunteers often make excellent facilitator-counsellors of the Tree of Life methodology, provided they are trained in the methods. More than one's formal education, what matters is the counsellor's caring personality, good listening and facilitation skills and positive attitude. That said, the lead counsellor should have at least some previous training in psychosocial care and support or be very familiar with the values and principles thereof.

REPSSI has found that the optimum ratio of counsellors to participants is 1:3, or with experienced counsellors, 1:4 or 1:5. Although this may be difficult, the point is that one counsellor should always be close at hand when each participant tells her or his story (i.e. the oral narrative).

The absolute minimum number of counsellors is 2 at every Tree of Life workshop. With just 2 counsellors, the workshop may take more time. One counsellor may be designated the "lead" and the other may focus on providing one-on-one support, if needed. Counsellors should assist each other and also provide support to participants who may need one-on-one attention or help with

writing. Because of these different roles, the terms counsellor and facilitator are used interchangeably in this manual, although the word counsellor is generally preferred.

Counsellor training is best achieved by going through the experience of making one's own Tree of Life; that is, by actively participating in a Tree of Life workshop led by others. It is preferable for a trainee to undergo the experience of being a participant more than once. A new counsellor should be matched with a more experienced counsellor at least a few times before taking the lead role.

How long is the Tree of Life workshop?

The Tree of Life workshop generally takes 8 hours (one full day) to complete, although some counsellors have reported taking longer (up to two days). The latter may occur if all participants tell the story of his or her Tree of Life in detail or if there are just 2 counsellors available.

For the one-day workshop, Part One is estimated to take 4-5 hours (that is, an entire morning), while Parts Two to Four can take a little less time in total – 3-4 hours (an afternoon).

Because Tree of Life is a full-day four-part exercise, there is a need for mini breaks and "energisers" between the different parts. This allows the counsellors and participants to "catch their breath" and remain energised through the process. No set time is established for this, but counsellors should break when they feel that energy is flagging or the atmosphere has gone too heavy. Suggested energisers are included at the back of this manual, or participants may offer their own.

If the Tree of Life workshop is extended to more than one day, the break should occur between two different parts.

The use of culturally appropriate metaphors

Trees are generally found in most communities in the world and they are usually associated with life, nourishment, shelter, strength, security, healing etc. But where there are few trees (for example, in a desert country) or forests are associated with danger, a different metaphor may be introduced (e.g. a "garden" instead of a forest). It is essential that the ideas and methods used in counselling fit with the local culture and context. Failure to merge facilitation practices with local culture is an imposition and not helpful to the children and adults seeking support.

Consent/ assent forms

For children to participate in this workshop, it is often required that their parents or legal guardians give their consent. This may require a separate meeting where the purpose and process is explained, before they are asked for their signed agreement (i.e. with a signature or thumbprint). Children may also be asked to sign their assent to participate in advance. Signed consent/assent forms should be kept by the facilitating organisation.

What materials are needed?

- One large flip chart sheet-of-paper for each participant. Alternatively, use butcher papers or light-coloured cardboard paper.
- Smaller paper for writing letters (or drawing a picture) to significant others.
- Colourful writing materials such as crayons, paints (food colouring works as readily available and inexpensive paint), flipchart markers etc. Pencils and pens are also required.
- Handmade certificates for each participant.
- Tape or sticky material to paste the participants' pictures on the walls.



How should the workshops be organised?

- The ideal number of children for a Tree of Life workshop is twelve (12). With young children aged 5-7 years, the group should be smaller (10 children at most) and the number of counsellors should increase. With older children or adults, the group can be somewhat larger (up to 16), with fewer counsellors.
- Remember that at least one facilitator – preferably more, especially with younger children – should be able to serve as a support counsellor to provide one-on-one support, referral and follow-up, if needed.
- Age cohorts should be kept separate – there should not be a mix of younger or older children or children with adults.
- Genders can be kept separate or can be mixed, depending on the local culture and the type of trauma that many of the participants have experienced. For example, for survivors of trafficking or sexual abuse, separating female and male participants is important.
- Most older children and adults will be able to write down their thoughts as well as draw their Trees of Life. Younger children and others with low literacy should be asked if they want a counsellor to write down what they say about their Trees of Life on the paper next to their drawing. If they want this assistance, the counsellor should only write what he or she is instructed to write by the participant.
- The lead counsellor should adequately brief the others about the process and the support that they will need to provide during the workshop. The support counsellor(s) should know in advance about local resources that might be available to help children who experience a lot of distress. If there is any sensitivity that might need special attention, they should also be discussed beforehand so that the counsellors can plan accordingly.
- Certificates should be prepared prior to the workshop, except for filling in the participants' information.

- Snacks and refreshments should be available for participants, as the process is a long one.
- A list of energisers should be ready for use during the exercise (see Appendix 1)
- Plan a song that the group can sing when certificates are issued. Ask participants for ideas for a song.
- Consider inviting parents, caregivers, friends, and community members to witness the certificate ceremony at the end of the process. Use the participants' local language as much as possible.

Introducing children to the Tree of Life experience

Rather than be prescriptive and providing rules for introducing the Tree of Life process to children, counsellors are encouraged to plan their own introduction to the workshop. Counsellors are encouraged to be creative, innovative and locally appropriate.

Here are some suggestions to consider when talking directly with children. These may be adapted for adults.

- Begin the process by explaining to the children that they have come together to support and provide each other with encouragement using the Tree of Life method.
- Lead a short discussion about trees in general. Children are usually keen to show and share their knowledge about trees. They may talk about the different kinds of trees that they know and see in their communities, etc.
- Ask the children to talk about the different parts of the tree (trunk, roots, branches, leaves, fruits) and also about forests of trees.
- Explain that the purpose is to make a Tree of Life and to give each other support.

- For example, you may say, *"The Tree of Life is an activity in which people draw a tree on a big piece of paper. We draw the roots, the ground, the branches, the leaves and the fruits. We ask you to imagine that you are a tree and what it would be like to think of parts of your life as parts of a tree. For example, the roots are where you come from. And the branches are your hopes, dreams and wishes. And the leaves are important people that have been or are in your life"*.
- Explain that all participants will be invited to draw a Tree of Life, and get a chance to share their drawing and their story, if they want to.
- Present your own Tree of Life that you have prepared previously (perhaps, when you were in training as a facilitator). Alternatively, if you have examples of other Trees of Life from previous workshops (that the creators gave you permission to show) share these with the children to give them a good sense of where they are going. But be sure that others don't copy from these – so once you have shown them, put them away again.
- Tell the children that if they do not want to participate, that it is okay. No one should be forced to do any of the exercises.
- Allow time for questions and discussion.
- Once you have managed to draw the interest and attention of the children, invite them to spend the day together with the counsellor and create their personal Trees of Life.

At the beginning of each Tree of Life workshop, counsellors should also initiate a discussion about confidentiality with all participants. Remind the participants that personal information that was said and heard in the group remains in the group. Counsellors should provide examples of what is appropriate and inappropriate to share outside the group.



Creating our trees

PART 1

Preparing for part one

Prior to the workshop, the counsellors must make a decision related to the way they want to implement the telling or sharing of participants' stories, which is an important part of the Tree of Life experience. This activity begins in Part One of the workshop, which works as follows:

All participants should draw the entire tree first, starting with the roots and the ground, following the counsellor's prompts. With this approach* all the drawing occurs first and the writing takes place later when the counsellor asks the participants to add words (a short narrative or some additional drawings) to each part of the tree. Remember that participants who are not comfortable writing (perhaps because they are too young or semi-literate) may need help putting words to paper on their trees. This is important because detailed writing helps the counsellors retell rich, believable stories later in the day.

When this is finished, each person shares (tells) about the whole tree that she or he has made. In total, Part One of the workshop takes between 4-5 hours, including breaks (lunch, snacks). This breaks down as follows:

Part One

Draw the whole tree first, in response to prompts.

Time (approx..)



Afterwards, add the writing to each part of the tree. After that is completed, each person shares (tells other participants) what she and he has included in their whole tree (starting from the roots).



with breaks in between

Each person shares what she and he has included in their whole tree (starting from the roots). This activity is the Telling of the story, which can occur in front of the whole group or in small groups.



with breaks in between

In the last of these activities, counsellors should decide whether participants should share in one group, or divide into smaller groups for this process. With either arrangement, it is important that all participants are given sufficient time and encouragement to describe, in detail, what they have written or drawn on their tree, and why. This is always a very powerful experience, but it can become quite emotional. Counsellors should be prepared that very sensitive information may be shared, so it is important that a caring and supportive atmosphere is maintained at all times.

WHOLE GROUP OPTION: With adults and older children, sharing may be done by each person among the whole group; that is, with all of the participants. This is a very powerful process but it can be intimidating for some. Also, it can take a long time; for example, if there are fifteen participants and each shares for 10 minutes, that lasts two and a half hours exclusive of breaks.

SMALL GROUP OPTION: With younger children or those who are unaccustomed to speaking out loud, sharing may be done in small groups or clusters of participants. This arrangement may also be preferred in some cultures or in mixed-gender groups. If the sharing stays within small groups or clusters, the counsellors should circulate between them to offer encouragement and support.

It is important to remember that even though there is no explicit encouragement to focus on difficulties, participants inevitably speak of their challenges within the context of their strengths and hopes. Counsellors must be prepared for this. It is essential that the voluntary disclosure of challenges happens within a setting that is as safe, supportive and confidential as possible.

At the end of the sharing, all participants' trees should be placed on a wall where the workshop is held so that everyone may have the opportunity to look at the trees of others.

This entire process is described, step by step, below.

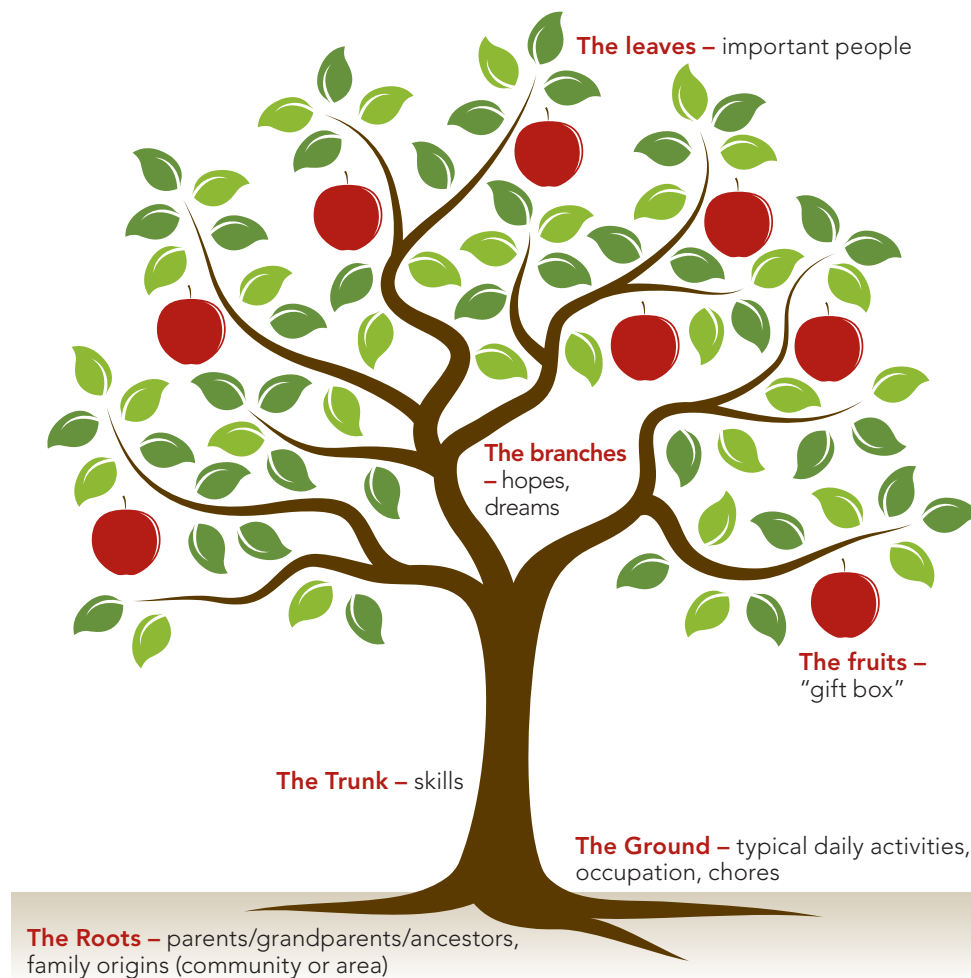
An alternate method is sometimes suggested, whereby participants would talk about what they have drawn or written after each prompt, rather than wait for the telling until the entire tree has been drawn. This is not ideal, as the Tree of Life is best experienced as a coherent narrative with the support of a skilled counsellor who provides positive enquiries and affirmation.

Participants draw and share their trees

The aim of the first two parts of the Tree of Life process is to build and acknowledge a “second story” about each participant’s life. (As described above, the “first story” is about the hardship and losses that each participant has experienced in the past. The “first story” is NOT the focus of the Tree of Life, and may not even get mentioned in the workshop.) The “second story” consists of the skills, abilities, hopes and dreams of each participant, and the histories (or stories) behind each of these. Also emphasized are each participant’s origins or identity, and the relationships (sense of belonging) that each person has. Each of these aspects corresponds to a different part of the Tree of Life.

As the participants draw and share their own Trees of Life, the counsellors have many opportunities for rich conversations and explorations of participants’ “second stories”.

As with the all parts of the Tree of Life workshop, this process is equally suited for children and adults, but children may need some extra encouragement and one-on-one support by the counsellors.



Preparation

- Write the main prompts (different parts) of the tree on a flip chart paper as a reference. For example the roots, ground, trunk, branches, leaves, etc. Keep this available for all to see throughout Part 1 of the workshop.
- Ask the counsellors to move around the room or space and support (encourage) the participants as they draw their Trees of Life.
- Decide whether to follow Approach A or Approach B (above) and whether sharing will be done in one large group or in several smaller groups or clusters.
- Be sure to have all materials available for the participants, prior to the first session

Drawing the Tree.

Drawing the Tree of Life should be guided by the process, explanations and prompts given below. When the counsellor refers to a specific prompt – for example, the roots, the ground, the trunk of the tree, etc. – the participants should draw that part of the tree. The counsellor should explain that each part of the tree has a special meaning or symbolism, and that time will be given during the workshop to add words or additional drawings that will make each participant's tree special and unique. Time will also be given during the workshop for all participants to share what they have drawn and written with others.

Give each participant a large sheet of paper and access to coloured markers, pens, or crayons (these can be shared). Tell the participants that each person's tree will be different, and that is okay. Point out that each person's Tree of Life will eventually cover the entire page.

Sharing (also known as the Telling)

Take note of the decision that must be made (described above) about whether the sharing should take place with all the participants together or in small groups. As participants share their stories, counsellors should undertake the following:

- Take careful notes in preparation for the Words of Encouragement exercise (See PART TWO during which participants will retell each other's Tree of Life story back to them and highlight aspects of support, special skills and hope).
- Highlight orally those words or phrases that stand out in the telling that express hope, special skills, special connections, special gifts etc.
- Encourage participants to write these attributes down for the re-telling later on, along with the counsellor's observations of participants' positive values, e.g., courage, kindness etc.

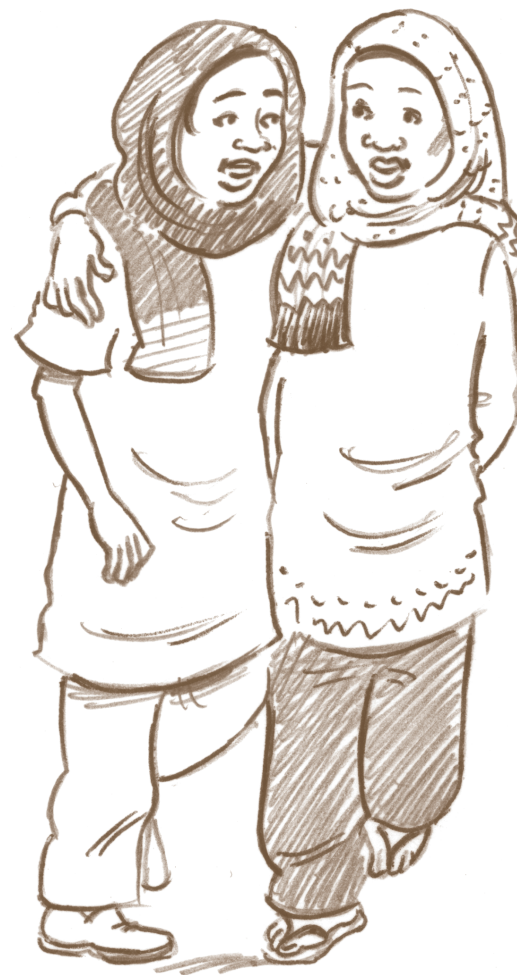
Roots of the tree

Each part of the tree is a metaphor – it will be used to describe an important aspect of each person's life.

Start by inviting participants to draw the roots of their tree:

- Where they come from (i.e. village, town, country);
- Their family history (origins, family name, ancestry, extended family); and,
- Those who have taught them the most in life.
- Also, as they reflect on their history, invite them to think about their favourite place at home and or a treasured song or dance or cultural celebration.

Children who are drawing the Tree of Life may not know much about their family histories. This is okay. They should be given the opportunity to go home and ask their parents or other caregivers for this information. If they choose to take their Tree of Life home, they can add this to their roots at a later time. Note: Be careful not to press children on this issue. For example, for children who have been abandoned or are living in a children's home, the third and fourth bullet above should suffice.

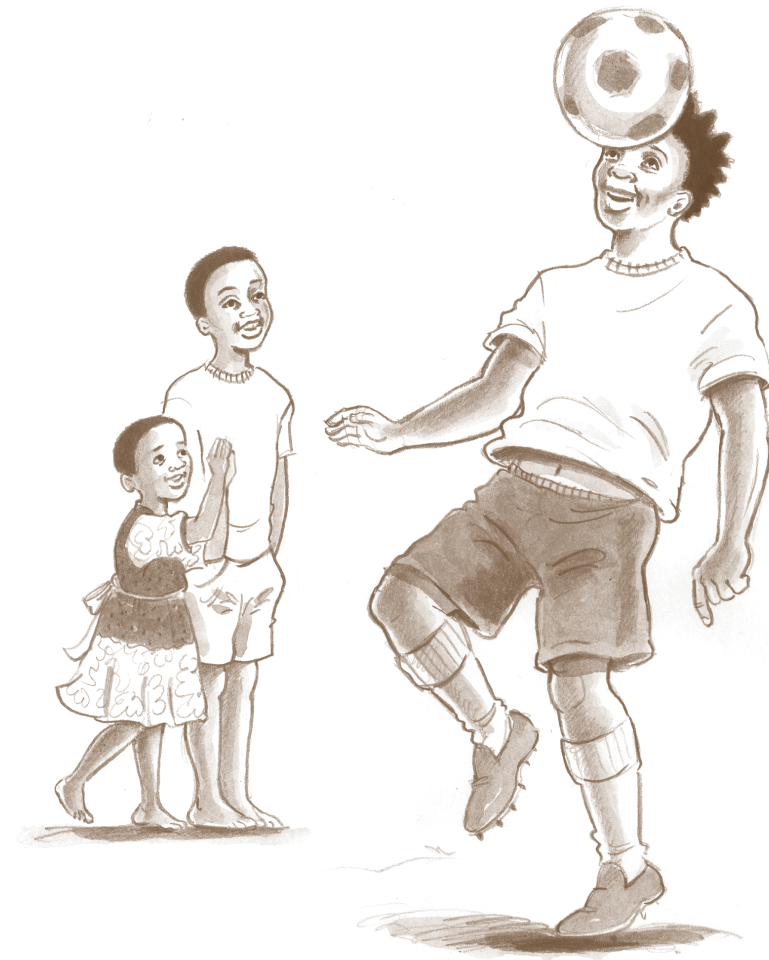


The ground

The ground metaphor around the tree provides space for participants to focus on their lives at present. Using words and drawings, they should describe some of the activities that they do during their regular daily life, including daily chores, things they like to do, and also things they sometimes forced to do.

Tell participants to draw the ground above and next to their tree's roots, and then reflect about their lives at present. Remind them that you will offer some suggestions about what to draw or write near the ground, but they should only include what they want – they can leave other things out. Your suggestions are:

- With whom the participant lives now
- What activities or routines the participant engages in every day
- Common chores and activities
- His or her favourite song or place when at home



The trunk of the tree

The trunk metaphor invites participants to talk about or represent in drawing some of their skills.

When the focus turns to the trunk of the tree, it is an opportunity for participants to consider and represent in drawing and in words, some of the things they are good at doing. In our everyday language we may refer to these things as the following:

- Skills they have learned to do at school or in the home
- Talents
- Things that the child does well
- Things that other people tell the child that he or she is good at doing
- Special skills, like being kind to others, taking care of others, (these may be things he or she does every day without thinking much about)



Tip: How to identify children's skills

- Skills may become apparent when the participants start talking about what they do in their daily life.
- These could also be skills that the individual has demonstrated during an activity such as a life skills camp, support group, or whatever the relevant context may be in the days preceding the Tree of life experience.

- While drawing the trunk, discussions about the history of these skills can also move into discussions about special memories of significant others that the participants can recall in their lives. These are valued memories that the participants hold as very dear and precious.
- Counsellors should always pay attention to the different skills that children display. These might include skills in physical acts, skills of caring, kindness and so on. During the Tree of Life process, counsellors should draw attention to how the child has demonstrated these skills. Counsellors can also assist the child to include these on the trunk of their tree.
- When the children share their trees in the group, counsellors can ask them questions about the histories of these skills, how long the child has had them, and how they came to learn these skills. Did they learn them from anyone in particular? This enables stories to be told about these skills. The information from these stories can also be recorded on the tree.
- Counsellors should encourage children to remind other group members of skills that they may have observed in them, just in case their friends forget to put these skills on their trees. It is exciting to observe the little whispers and movements that the children make as they go to their friends to share their observations and make these reminders.

The branches of the tree

Branches may be curved or straight, thick or thin. They represent the hopes, dreams and wishes of the participants. These hopes, dreams and wishes should be written down (or drawn with a picture or symbol) – one per branch. (If the participant has more, just add more branches!)

When the participants are sharing with the group about the branches of their tree, the counsellors should offer acknowledgement and encouragement.

Counsellors may ask questions about:

- The histories of these hopes, dreams and wishes
- How these hopes, dreams and wishes may be linked to significant others like caregivers, family members, and other community members, or to environmental considerations such as peace, access to land, or climate change. How have participants managed to hold on to these hopes and dreams even during hard times? What has sustained them? What do they do to keep from giving up?

When working directly with children, it is always inspiring to realize that, despite the difficulties that children experience, they still have hopes and dreams about a better life and a better future. During the Tree of life experience, several hopes and dreams that children have for their lives have been captured.

These include:

- Growing up to become doctors, pilots, teachers, farmers, etc.
- Living in a more peaceful world
- Being allowed to go back to the village/ country where they came from
- Parents getting better and recovering from illness
- Just having enough food to go round in the family
- Finding ways to stop violence and crime
- Doing well in school and getting a good job
- Getting married and having children
- Taking care of elderly grandparents who have loved and supported them

An enquiry into the histories of these hopes and dreams has always shown that they are linked to significant others (to family members, teachers, friends, etc.). Counsellors have shared stories about hearing children talk about how, for example, their deceased parents always wanted them to do well in school and grow up to be a success in life.

The leaves of the tree

The leaves of the tree represent the people who are important to us. These may be people who are alive as well as those who have played an important role in the past and people in their lives who are providing them strength and support to stand tall and face challenges. Ask participants to write the people's names or their relationship on the leaves or next to them. Be very inclusive here and encourage participants to mention anyone who is, or was, important to them, e.g., mother, father, aunt, grandparent, friend, teacher, pets, heroes, religious leaders, etc.



Tip: Including the memory of those who passed

- *Emphasise that it is absolutely okay to label leaves with names of those who died or disappeared*
- *Explain that when our loved ones die they remain important and connected to us or sometimes have gone away because of the family conflict or split families*

NOTE: The leaves metaphor can be sensitive, especially with children. When children are sharing about the leaves on their trees, the counsellor may ask the children why these particular people are the most special to them. If at any time during this process, children talk about some people who may have died and become about this, counsellors should ask the following questions:

- Did you have lovely times with this person?
- What was special about this person to you?
- Would this person like it that you remember them in these ways?

These questions invite the children to tell stories about what was significant about their relationship with the person who has died. This can contribute to an honouring of this relationship. It may also lead to stories about how the child continues to think about and remember those who have passed away.

The fruits of the tree

The fruits of the tree represent gifts that the participant has been given. These do not have to be material gifts but could be acts of kindness, care or love from others. At this point should we tell the participants to look at what they have written on the leaves branches, trunk, ground and roots in order to refresh their minds and think about the impact these people have had on them.¹

Examples of gifts that participants have mentioned receiving include:

- “Kindness, care and support from my mother when she was alive”
- “My uncle worked hard to earn money so that I can go to school”
- “Clothes, food and shelter from my family”
- “Respect from my husband”
- “Support from my sister”
- “Spiritual guidance from a religious leader”
- “Protection from my big brother after the earthquake”

When the participants are sharing about their gifts, the counsellors can ask:

- Why do you think the person gave you this?
- What did that person appreciate about you that would have led her or him to do this?
- What do you think you might have contributed to that person’s life?



Tip: Encouraging positive memory

If the participant has difficulty in identifying any gifts, the counsellor can draw upon earlier conversations with that participant. Counsellors can also prod gently with questions to encourage each participant to mention at least a few things from the past. It is important for all participants to articulate at least some positive recollections in this context.

¹ Some Tree of Life groups for adults (not children) have inserted the Gift Box exercise from REPSSI’s Journey of Life training here, or else referenced it for those who have done this in the past. Facilitators who are not familiar with this activity are advised to review it at www.repssi.org

The 'Telling'

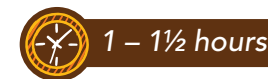
After completing the tree with all the words and phrases that describe the different parts, participants should take turns telling each other about their trees, starting from the roots and working their way up. As described below, this can be done in front of the group as a whole or in smaller groups. It is best for a counsellor to be present to guide the telling with affirming words, gentle queries, and positive feedback. Also, if a participant becomes upset, the counsellor is there to provide support.

Parts Two, Three & Four

Time (approx..)

PART TWO: Making the forest and Retelling:

All the trees are put on the wall, creating a strong forest. The counselors tell about each person, based on their trees.



PART THREE: Storms of Life:

Although this workshop emphasises the positive, examples of loss and hardship will inevitably emerge. Part Three encourages participants to think about ways they can overcome these "storms of life."



PART FOUR: Our Trees / Our Lives:

Celebration as we look towards the future.





Forest of Life

PART 2

Making the forest



1 – 1½ hours

This is a fun, upbeat activity for participants that allows them to offer support and encouraging words to one another. It is often accompanied by laughter, hugs, smiles and pride as the participants receive sentiments of encouragement from their group members.

Words of Encouragement

When participants have completed their trees and (some have) shared their stories, invite them to:

- Stick their drawings on the wall to form a beautiful forest of trees. Emphasise that this forest is calm and peaceful right now, and that each tree is important, strong, and adds value to the forest.
- Once a beautiful forest has been created, ask the participants to come forward and write something positive that they heard about their group members or friends when they presented their trees. (Even if they do not know the other participants, they can still write words of encouragement, support and appreciation.)



Tip: Respecting different approaches

In some cultures and contexts, participants may not want to have their trees written on by others. It is important to respect this, and to offer the option of using sticky paper or taping comments (words of encouragement) next to trees. Alternatively, participants can tell their friends or group mates what they appreciate about them without writing on their trees.

The retelling

The retelling is done by the counsellor(s), by talking affirmatively and positively in front of others about each participant (that is, about each tree in the forest).

- The counsellors should refer to their notes from “the Sharing” (see PART ONE) and highlight the participants’ exact words and expressions as much as possible, with regard to the skills, hopes, dreams, gifts, relationships, etc.
- The counsellor can also refer to the trees themselves and speak about the strong and firm roots that each participant has, as well as mention the dreams and hopes that each person expressed for him or herself.
- It is also important to mention the people with whom each participant feels connected, who have taught and supported them in the past and who continue to take up this role in different ways.

- Give specific examples of some of the people mentioned, who may include parents, friends, faith leaders, community counsellors, social workers, teachers, grandparents, siblings and other relatives.
- During the retelling, it is important to acknowledge that some of these precious people may have died or left them because of family conflicts, but they are still remembered in loving memory for the many wonderful things that they did for the participant.

The retelling is very important because of the re-enforcement and public affirmation it gives each participant. This gives the individual key take-home messages that she or he can refer back to, as needed. Do not rush this process. While the retelling can be adapted (for example, to be done simultaneously in two or more smaller group rather than in front of all of the participants), a counsellor must be present to lead the retelling for each participant.



Storms of Life

PART 3



1 – 1½ hours

with breaks in between

“Storms of Life” is a metaphor to explore some of the problems and hazards that even beautiful trees face. This metaphor makes it easier for participants to name the ways they respond when the storms come into their lives.

Introduce the idea of the Storms of Life by:

- Inviting participants to hold onto the beauty and strength of the trees, even though they realize that strong and beautiful trees sometimes have to face storms and winds.
- Counsellors may say, “We have lovely trees which have strong roots, beautiful leaves and fruits. As beautiful as our trees and forest are, can we say that they are completely free from danger?”

You will find that the participants have a very quick answer to this question and have ample knowledge about the forces in life that are very unkind to trees.

Participants may talk about:

- Cutting trees
- Urinating on trees
- Kicking trees
- Flooding
- War
- Animal damage
- Lightning or fire
- Aging of trees
- Drought

Practitioners who use the Tree of Life in different contexts say they have found that the conversation on the hazards faced by trees is a safe entry-point for a discussion among participants about the dangers and problems they face in their lives.

To specifically invite children or adults to talk about the problems that they face, counsellors may say: “We have likened our lives to beautiful trees in a forest. Would we be right to say that, like trees and forests, children (or people) also face dangers and troubles in their lives?”

Participants usually respond with a collective YES to this enquiry. Even when talking with children, it is interesting and energising to observe that they usually respond to this question without appearing sad or burdened. They stand in solidarity to name these problems and injustices.

Some of the dangers mentioned by children in their communities may be:

1. Being forced out of school
2. Hazardous work at a young age
3. Forced early marriage
4. Violence in their homes or neighborhoods
5. Bullying
6. Stigma of a trafficking survivor

The counsellor should emphasise that there is no need for shame, nor should anyone feel defined by these problems. After naming the problems, it is important to bear the following points in mind, especially when working with children:

- Rather than just talking about the problems, explore with the children the effects that these problems have on their lives.
- Be prepared for children to talk about how these problems cause them to feel sad, withdrawn, perform poorly at school or drop out from school. *Take note that, however bad these problems may be, children can often find strength and comfort in being able to name the effects of these problems and hazards in their lives, especially when others (that is, other participants and/or the counsellors) affirm that they are not alone and that other children sometimes feel the same way.*
- Encourage children to think about how they can help each other and who else in the community might also be able to offer support.
- When the storms of life have been named and the effects of these have been thoroughly traced, counsellors can ask whether or not it is children's fault that such things happen to them. Children have been, by and large, very clear in answering "no" to this question.
- Should children answer "yes", counsellors should **reinforce that they are not to blame**. The counsellor can ask, "Are the tree to be blamed for these storms?" The response is NO. Then the counsellor can reinforce that the tree cannot be blamed, and also not the child. *If needed, be specific that child labour, abuse, child marriage and sex trafficking are never a child's fault; rather, there are other causes. They are also not alone and there are people who can help them – also if they live on the streets, abuse alcohol and drugs, think about committing suicide, etc.*

- Be prepared that follow-up support may be needed for some participants. The support counsellor must be aware prior to the workshop that each community has its own resources to help – for example, within local government, NGOs and/or informally in the community. Many countries also offer access to a toll-free Childline telephone service that can provide phone-based counselling, information, support and referral.



Animals in the forest

Tell participants to focus for some minutes on animals that live in the forest that they like – that are not dangerous and of which they are not afraid. Ask participants to name some of these animals, for example, small monkeys, deer, rabbits, etc.

Next, ask participants to talk about what these animals in the forest do when the storms come. This allows participants to convey many ways in which animals respond: hiding, running to a protected place until it is safe to re-emerge, protecting younger animals, imagining they were elsewhere, etc. This metaphor makes it easier for participants to name the ways in which they also respond when the storms come in their lives.

When the different ways in which animals respond to storms have been adequately explored with participants, counsellors can say: “I wonder what children (or people) do when these problems and storms come into their lives. How do they respond? Are there different things that they can do? If they are, I would love to know what kinds of things they do or can do.”

Many counsellors who work with the Tree of Life say they find this kind of questioning gives participants an opportunity to bring forth their skills and knowledge, and helps them to realise that they are not passive recipients to the hazards that come their way.

A counsellor who worked with the first group of children to experience the Tree of Life with narrative ideas in Soweto, South Africa, wrote:

I still remember very clearly the responses of the children at Jabavu clinic. I remember the pride and energy with which they named their skills and knowledge about responding to the problems that they had named. These children spoke of the ways that they share problems with caring adults and friends in their community. They also spoke about a range of initiatives that children can take to protect themselves:

- *Talk to someone you trust*
- *Talk to a neighbour*
- *Run away to protect yourself*
- *Talk to your teacher*
- *Pray about the problems*
- *Ask for help*
- *Talk to a social worker*
- *Make a report to the police*
- *Talk to a friend.*

As the children named these initiatives, it was as if they had special knowledge that might one day become very important in their own lives.

It is also important to help participants think and talk about the following:

- Are storms always present in their lives?
- Are there times when their lives are free of storms?
- What do they do when the storms have passed? What else could they do?
- Emphasise that there are some times in their lives that are free from storms, and that storms are not always present.
- Explain that these are precious times that give us strength and that they should be celebrated.



Taking the lessons home

As the **Tree of Life** process draws to a conclusion, ask participants the following question:

How can we hold on to our precious hopes and dreams during difficult and stormy times in our lives?

On a flip chart paper or a chalkboard, counsellors should write down some of the answers that they hear.

Linking children back to their families and communities

One of the major objectives of the Tree of Life process is to strengthen the linkage between participants and their own families and communities. This is especially important for children and it is done through a constant and deliberate effort throughout the exercise to create opportunities for children to talk about their valuable relationships and connections. The intent is to help children and families to enhance their care and support for each other, improve the quality of their daily lives, and offer opportunities for improved, positive communication within families and communities.

Expressing appreciation

The counsellor can invite participants to draw a picture or write a letter to someone else in their lives who is very important to them – perhaps a parent, caregiver, child or friend. If they choose to write a letter, participants can share their experiences of doing the Tree of Life. They can also express their appreciation for the support and care that they receive from their caregivers. If they draw a picture, this can become a “Thank You” card that also expresses appreciation but without the use a lot of words. Depending on the age of the participant or the local culture, the different approaches can be used.



Our Trees / Our Lives

PART 4

Certificates and Tree of Life song



1 hour

Ending the Tree of Life activity calls for a celebration. How this celebration takes place may vary, depending on the local culture and age of the participants. In all situations, however, it is important to include a small ritual and to honour the participants' knowledge, hopes and dreams as well as their special connections to others.

Every participant should receive a certificate of participation. For young children, the counsellors may record some of what they have heard each of the participants say on their respective certificates. Community members can be invited to witness this celebration, which can end in song.

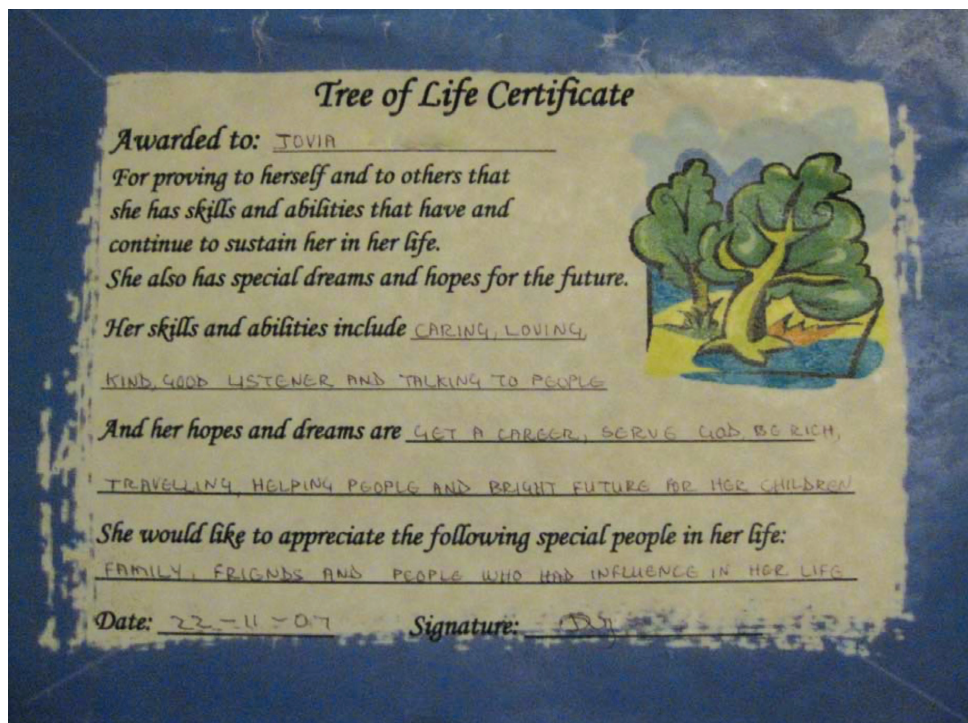
Two other options are this:

1. Give everyone an A-4 paper and ask them to write their names in the middle of it. Then, each participant should ask another to paste the paper on her or his back. Everyone in the room should write a nice thing about the participant on the paper, but it should be kept secret to the person on whose back the paper is pasted. Comments like, "I like your smile", "I hope to see you soon", or "You are very kind", are good examples. Counsellors should remind participants that comments should be only positive and that

the writers can choose to sign their names, but are not required to do so. Counsellors may also have to remind participants not to use markers that can ruin clothes. This can be avoided by taking a piece of cardboard or a notebook to place under the paper when writing. After everyone is done, participants can look at what others wrote about them. This can become a much-treasured keepsake.



2. Give each participant a blank certificate (see sample below)². Then invite everyone to fill it in for someone else based on some of the things that are on that person's tree, or that they heard from that person during the sharing ("telling" and "retelling") activities. The certificate should focus on:
 1. Their skills and abilities
 2. Their dreams and hopes for the future
 3. Special people they want to appreciate in life



² Dulwich Publications: The International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work 2006 No. 1 (The Tree of Life Project by Ncazelo Ncube-Mlilo)

Preserving our beautiful trees

End the process with a discussion about what happens to the beautiful drawings. Do they remain as an exhibition? Does each participant take theirs home? Everyone should agree on whatever is decided.

Note that this discussion should feed into a reminder about confidentiality. Remind the participants that personal information that was said and heard in the group, remains in the group. Counsellors should provide examples of what is appropriate and inappropriate to share outside the group. Explain that the beauty of the trees can stay within the participants' hearts and minds to support them in their lives. It is important to end the day by asking participants how they experienced the process. You can use the reflection exercise on the last page to end the workshop.

Unless another agreement is reached beforehand, allow participants to take home their own Trees of Life.

APPENDIX 1: Energisers

Earlier we stated that the Tree of Life is a long activity (at least 8 hours) and that participants will need refreshment breaks plus energisers. Below are a few examples that counsellors might want to use. Participants may want to suggest others.

1. JUGGLING BALL GAME

Everyone stands in a close circle. If the group is very large, it a crumpled paper ball to someone in the circle, saying their name as they throw it. Continue catching and throwing the ball, establishing a pattern for the group. To do this, each person must remember who they receive the ball from and who they have thrown it to. Once everyone has received the ball and a pattern is established, introduce one or two more balls, so that there are always several balls being thrown at the same time, following the set pattern.

2. WHAT WE HAVE IN COMMON

The counsellor calls out a characteristic of people in the group, such as "wearing something that is red".

All those with red should stand up or enter the middle of the circle. As the counsellor calls out more characteristics, such as "likes football", people with the characteristic move to the indicated space.

3. TAXI RIDES

Ask participants to pretend that they are getting into taxis. They should start by running in a circle and then the facilitator calls out, "Taxi for three!" or "Taxi for four!" and so on. With this, the participants have to gather into the right-sized groups. End with a taxi for everyone (so no one feels left out).

4. TOUCH SOMETHING BLUE

Ask participants to stand up. Explain that the counsellor will tell everyone to find something blue, and that they have to go and touch it. This could be a blue shirt, pen, shoe or whatever. Continue the game in this way, asking participants to call out their own suggestions for things to touch.

5. I LIKE YOU BECAUSE

Ask participants to sit in a circle and say what they like about the person on their right. Give them time to think about it first!

6. GROUP MASSAGE

Ask the group to stand in a circle and turn sideways so that each person is facing the back of the person in front of them. People then massage the shoulders of the person in front of them. Counsellors should consider whether this activity is culturally appropriate, among different genders or among different age groups, before using it.

7. REFLECTING ON THE DAY

To help people to reflect on the activities of the day, make a ball out of paper and ask the group to throw the ball to each other in turn. When they have the ball, participants can each say one thing they thought about the day.

APPENDIX 2: Questions for Tree of Life

Roots	Your history	Where do you come from? (region, village, town) What is your family history? (origins, family name, ancestry, extended family)
Ground	Your life now	Who are the people you love the most (they can be alive or dead) Who do you live with now? What do you do every day? What is your favorite song or place when at home?
Trunk	Your skills	What are you good at and proud of? What do you do well? What do other people say you are good at? (These can be things like sport or school work or they can be special skills like being kind to others, taking care of others). What values do you live by such as kindness, courage and respect? Who taught you these values and skills?
Branches	Your hopes, dreams and wishes	What are your hopes dreams and wishes? What is the history of these hopes, dreams and wishes How are these hopes, dreams and wishes linked to important people in your life (who may be alive or may have passed away) How have you been able to hold onto these hopes dreams and wishes even through difficult times

Leaves	People who are important to you	Who has been important to you in your life? These people can still be alive or they may have died? Did you have lovely times with this person? What was special about this person to you? If this person has passed away, would this person like it that you remember them in these ways?
Fruits	Gifts that you have been given (including both material and non material gifts)	What gifts have you received in your life? Why do you think the person gave you this? What did they appreciate about you that would have led them to do this? What do you think you might have contributed to their life?
Flowers	Gifts you have given to others	What gifts have you given to important people in your life (material gifts or gifts of love, kindness and helpfulness) What did you appreciate about this person that led you to give them these gifts? What do you think you contributed to their life?
Forest of Life	Psychosocial support	Children offer verbal and written support to each other – with permission they write messages of appreciation and encouragement on the other Trees of Life
Retelling		Done by the facilitator – retells the story of this person's tree
Storms of life	Some of the problems and challenges faced	Children can respond to this in terms of collective problems faced by children (which makes this safer than if pressured to respond with personal stories of trauma, abuse, poverty etc.)
Animals in the forest		What animals are in the forest when there is a storm? What do these animals do when the storm comes? (survival mechanisms) What do children do when these problems and storms come into children's lives? Are storms are always present in their lives? Tell us about the times that their lives are free of storms? Explain that these are precious times that give us strength and they have to be celebrated.

APPENDIX 3: References

1. Dulwich Publications: The International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work 2006 No. 1 (The Tree of Life Project by Ncazelo Ncube-Mlilo)
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