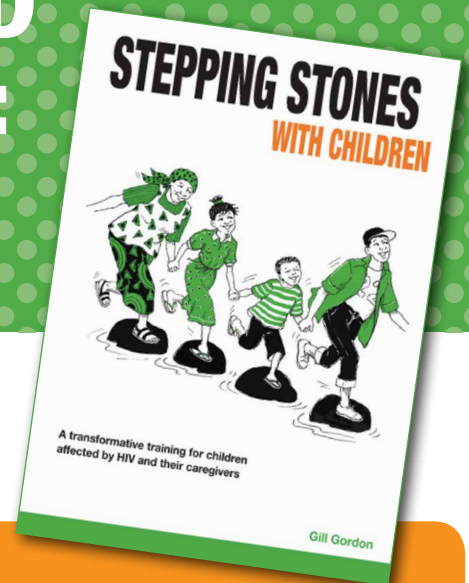


HIV & AIDS, SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH:

How to communicate effectively with children



★ What is *Stepping Stones* about?

The *Stepping Stones* training approach is a highly participatory process that facilitates active peer group interaction in a community. It has been tested and proven successful in addressing various issues related to HIV and intimate partner violence, for over two decades in many different contexts worldwide. The process is effective in addressing gender, inter-generational and human rights issues in the context of HIV. The following *Stepping Stones* manuals have been in use in different regions and languages:

- Original *Stepping Stones* developed and published in rural Uganda including teenage girls and boys as well as adult men and women
- *Stepping Stones Plus* addressing sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and HIV in the context of anti-retrovirals (ARVs) and peri-natal care
- *Stepping Stones for Peace and Prosperity* designed for post-conflict settings
- *Stepping Stones with Children* for use with children aged 5–14 years living with and affected by HIV and their caregivers.



“The training opened my eyes on many issues of child abuse, parenting and guidance, how to create an environment that is child-friendly. I learned that our children are exposed to HIV and AIDS at an early stage that I personally never envisaged before. This revelation has in many ways changed my perception on how to communicate with my children and their peers.”

Participant from training in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania



“I have improved a lot on communicating my feelings and turning negative situations into ones full of hope and expectation.”

Participant from training in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

★ How does *Stepping Stones* involve children?

The new *Stepping Stones with Children* manual is designed for use with children aged 5–14 who are affected by HIV and AIDS, and their caregivers.

The training is not *for* but **with** children – meaning effectively involving children in all dialogue on sensitive issues; sexuality, HIV disclosure, reproductive health, gender, power, and violence among others.

In pairs, trained facilitators work with two children’s peer groups organised by age (5–8 year olds and 9–14s). Through their own stories, role-play, drawings, mind maps, ability spotting and dreams, children are supported to analyse their situations, experiences,



strengths, desires and aspirations. Meanwhile, two other facilitators work concurrently with the children's caregivers on the same topics. This process enables the caregivers to understand the sensitivities of these issues as well as the importance of discussing them with their children.

The process provides an opportunity for the children and their caregivers to meet and to harmonize their understanding as well as hear the children's views communicated in their own way. Through drawings, songs and role-plays, children present their views on the different topics to their caregivers, health workers, teachers and peers. Gradually, children living with HIV and their caregivers establish and strengthen open and genuine dialogue around these sensitive areas.



★ How does working with children strengthen outcomes of HIV and AIDS and SRHR programmes?

Active participation of children in the *Stepping Stones* approach provides various advantages:

- Children can inform the design of HIV and sexual health education messages in a language that they understand and is culturally acceptable.
- Working in these peer groups is proven to be a good approach to building positive influence around sexuality and SRH.
- The *Stepping Stones* approach facilitates the formation of peer support groups, enabling children and caregivers to have others in whom they can confide and communicate their anxieties and questions.
- Through presenting their views, children are able to communicate their ideas for positive action and these can be followed up over time to establish which changes have happened.

The *Stepping Stones with Children* approach:

- ✓ builds caregivers' warmth and appreciation of the children
- ✓ successfully reaches out to the 5–8 year olds, who continue to be excluded from discussions on sexuality and HIV for lack of appropriate messages
- ✓ can also create a new generation of trainers (the young trained teenagers) who will successfully communicate to their peers on sexuality, HIV and gender-based violence among others.

★ Interested in the training for your staff?

Contact Ellen Bajenja ellen@salamandertrust.net or Laura Pulteney laura@salamandertrust.net

Stepping Stones with Children (2016) is published by Practical Action Publishing.

The training package is available to buy at: <http://tinyurl.com/PAPStStwC>

If you would like to apply for free copies, click [here](#)

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