

THE "CHILD" SYSTEM MANUAL

Comprehensive Help for International Little Destitutes {A manual for those working with street children.}

- Wear simple clothes, and avoid wearing make-up and fancy jewellery. Do not wear uniforms. The more ordinary your clothes, the more easily children will identify with you. Through your appearance, you can communicate that you are part of their way of thinking. Do not be afraid of, or take personally, any of their reactions.
- "When talking to a street child, try to sit on a physically equal level with him/her. If possible, sit down and maintain an eye-level posture while conversing with a child. Look at him or her in the eyes, but do not expect them to do the same. It is normal that a child would avoid your gaze. As the child starts to feel at ease and develop trust in you, however, their gaze will become steady.
- Try to know the language of the children. They coin their own terms for places, people, events - especially danger signals. By knowing their codes, you will get to know them better... how they perceive things, how they survive. By speaking their language, you can see into their inner world more easily.
- Try to always remember the name of the child you help. Remember specifics that he/she has told you about his/her problems.
- Try to know the work the children do, and the games they play. Try to join in these two activities. If they are scavengers, join them in one of their sorties; if they push carts, accompany them, and discover what it is like to push carts. Street children are known to dance in the streets; dance with them, too. If they are playing "hide-and-seek", volunteer as the "den".
- Avoid giving money to the children. "When they ask you, try to know what they need it for. If it is really urgent, like someone is sick, try to go with the child and bring the sick person to a health facility. If a child is hungry, buy food instead. Don't tempt them unnecessarily with money. They do not know how to spend it properly, and will probably waste it, use it for a bad habit, or get it stolen.
- "When a street child offers you food, take it and eat it, even if it does not seem clean. (Your immune system will protect you). Always offer them some of your food. Sharing is the first sign of a relationship on both sides.
- "When a child touches your hand or leg or shoulder, **do not wipe it**. Wiping is a sign of insult. "When in their quarters, do not cover your nose, even if the place smells bad. **If you are afraid of dirt or disease... you are in the wrong occupation**. Better give it up today. Try to reciprocate the touch of a child. He or she will feel more secure and loved. Street children have a greater need for cuddling, as they usually do not experience this ever. However, remember to wash your hands later... in private, many street kids suffer from scabies.
- Refrain from moralizing or religious preaching, especially during the initial stages of interacting with street children. Draw out from the children themselves the ideas of what is good and what is bad. Do not try to convert them to your personal religion. They are individuals, and should be encouraged to follow the faith of their choice or heritage.
- When a child starts to talk about problems, listen well. Ask open-ended questions - those not answerable by yes or no - so that he/she can give more details about his/her situation. Avoid probing questions. Make sure you stay on eye-level. Try to find out as much as you can about the child's history and give a lot of reassurance that what the child says to you is not going to create a dangerous situation. Tell them where they can find help locally.