

Children and accidents

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Children And Accidents

By

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CHILDREN AND ACCIDENTS

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The industrialized countries are no longer the only ones in which accidents involving children and young people are a source of concern : the developing countries are now faced with the same problem, and many have become acutely aware of it in recent years. Although other causes of illness and death remain more frequent there than in the developed countries, accidents are equally numerous or more so, and often more serious.

One must first define the two words in the title : "Children and accidents" :

- children, with their possibilities and their limits, their behaviour at the various phases of psychomotor development;
- the accidents with which they are more specifically threatened and how they may be classified according to their severity, as judged by their consequences.

With its extremely varied dangers, a multitude of circumstances with effects which may be insignificant just as they may be dramatic for the same risk, the scene of the accident is one on which an individual, with all of his or her physical, psychological, social and cultural characteristics, in the framework of his or her human milieu and the physical environment, suddenly encounters an outside force, an "injuring agent" which acts upon and wounds him or her. These four heroes of the drama play out a complex situation in several acts, the results of which is not necessarily the "happy ending" found in some films or in fairy tales.

Some numerical, general or factual data amply prove the severity of this problem in the developing countries, and the first step, in any country willing to start a preventive programme, is to study in detail the circumstances under which accidents occur : the risks linked with the environment, the errors committed by the adults in charge of children. In this respect, it can be said that a community approach may contribute to a better understanding of the problem, thus making better prevention possible.

"Know the risks better in order to combat them better" : this is the strategy to be used to fight the accidents which are

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unfortunately an element in the daily life of everyone. For this reason, the World Health Organization has launched a vast research-action programme on traffic accidents for people of all ages. True to its vocation to help children and young people, but with a marked preference for the developing countries, the International Children's Centre has combined its efforts with those of WHO; its studies and research, as well as its preventive actions, are concentrated on children and adolescents, but they cover all accidents rather than limiting themselves to traffic accidents.

A special issue of the ICC periodical "Children in the tropics", as well as the technical reviews prepared on "Children and accidents" will be used as a background for developing some pieces of information on this important topic; these pieces should help prepare specific programmes for the various medias.