

# Working with children – Assessment of Competencies Tool (WeACT)

## Foundational Helping Competencies for Children and Adolescents

### 1. NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Check all behaviours that are demonstrated in each category.			
Unhelpful or potentially harmful behaviours	Basic helping skills	Advanced helping skills	
<input type="checkbox"/> Aggressive or inappropriate stance, gestures, or intense staring <input type="checkbox"/> Sarcastic, cold, or overly friendly tone of voice <input type="checkbox"/> Inappropriate physical contact (e.g., rigid or overly friendly contact) <input type="checkbox"/> Shows non-verbal expressions of disengagement and lack of interest in the child (e.g., uses their phone, sighs audibly, turns their body away from the child)	<input type="checkbox"/> Maintains an open posture and appropriate eye contact <input type="checkbox"/> Shows expressions of engagement and enthusiasm (e.g. smiling, clapping, nodding, utterances (uh uh)) <input type="checkbox"/> Friendly tone of voice, appropriate volume and pace <input type="checkbox"/> Finds appropriate physical distance (e.g., respects personal space, doesn't stand too far away) <input type="checkbox"/> <i>None of the above</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Completes all Basic Helping Skills</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Uses comforting non-verbal communication (e.g., sympathetic facial expressions, mirroring or reassuring body language) <input type="checkbox"/> Matches rhythm of communication to child, allowing for silences and longer or shorter pauses <input type="checkbox"/> Gets physically on the level of the child to show attention to the child	
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 1</b> <i>any unhelpful behaviour</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 2</b> <i>no basic skills, or some but not all basic skills</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 3</b> <i>all basic skills</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 4</b> <i>all basic helping skills plus any advanced skill</i>
Notes:			

### 2. VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Check all behaviours that are demonstrated in each category.			
Unhelpful or potentially harmful behaviours	Basic helping skills	Advanced helping skills	
<input type="checkbox"/> Uses harsh, aggressive, or stigmatising words when talking to the child <input type="checkbox"/> Uses explicit words or language inappropriate to the age of the child <input type="checkbox"/> Repeatedly interrupts the child	<input type="checkbox"/> Uses language appropriate to the age and ability of the child <input type="checkbox"/> Clear communication and presentation of information understandable to the child <input type="checkbox"/> <i>None of the above</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Completes all Basic Helping Skills</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates skills to ensure and communicate understanding (e.g., paraphrasing, asking open-ended questions for clarification, and summarising or reflection) <input type="checkbox"/> Uses familiar and appropriate idioms, stories, or metaphors to explain difficult concepts	
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 1</b> <i>any unhelpful behaviour</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 2</b> <i>no basic skills, or some but not all basic skills</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 3</b> <i>all basic skills</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 4</b> <i>all basic helping skills plus any advanced skill</i>
Notes:			

### 3. RAPPORT & RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Check all behaviours that are demonstrated in each category.			
Unhelpful or potentially harmful behaviours	Basic helping skills	Advanced helping skills	
<input type="checkbox"/> Is overly cold, authoritative or distant with the child <input type="checkbox"/> Is too affectionate or close with the child <input type="checkbox"/> Dominates the conversation or focuses only on their own experiences	<input type="checkbox"/> Uses relationship building techniques (e.g., small talk, introductions, relates with own experiences, informal conversations, or doing activities together with the child) <input type="checkbox"/> Makes sure that the conversation is primarily focused on the child's experiences <input type="checkbox"/> <i>None of the above</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Completes all Basic Helping Skills</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Brings up and discusses topics that are appropriate to the age and ability of the child <input type="checkbox"/> Is responsive to the child's needs in the interaction	
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 1</b> <i>any unhelpful behaviour</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 2</b> <i>no basic skills, or some but not all basic skills</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 3</b> <i>all basic skills</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 4</b> <i>all basic helping skills plus any advanced skill</i>
Notes:			

### 4. EMPATHY, WARMTH & GENUINENESS

Check all behaviours that are demonstrated in each category.			
Unhelpful or potentially harmful behaviours	Basic helping skills	Advanced helping skills	
<input type="checkbox"/> Is critical, hostile, or dismissive <input type="checkbox"/> Ignores the child's emotional responses <input type="checkbox"/> Mocks or laughs at the child <input type="checkbox"/> Makes belittling or condescending statements towards the child	<input type="checkbox"/> Gives emotionally supportive responses <input type="checkbox"/> Validates the child's experience from the child's point of view in a clear, confident manner <input type="checkbox"/> <i>None of the above</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Completes all Basic Helping Skills</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Provides hope for improvements in lived experiences on the part of the child, while not overpromising or promoting unrealistic expectations	
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 1</b> <i>any unhelpful behaviour</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 2</b> <i>no basic skills, or some but not all basic skills</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 3</b> <i>all basic skills</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 4</b> <i>all basic helping skills plus any advanced skill</i>
Notes:			

## 5. SUPPORTING THE REFRAMING OF THE CHILD'S NEGATIVE THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS

Check all behaviours that are demonstrated in each category.			
Unhelpful or potentially harmful behaviours	Basic helping skills	Advanced helping skills	
<input type="checkbox"/> Gets angry with the child for sharing their thoughts or feelings <input type="checkbox"/> Makes dismissive or negative comments about the child's negative thoughts or feelings, or blames the child for having them <input type="checkbox"/> Reinforces negative thoughts and feelings	<input type="checkbox"/> Paraphrases or summarises the child's negative thought or feelings (for acknowledgement, clarification, and mutual understanding) <input type="checkbox"/> Offers more realistic or positive alternatives to child's negative thoughts or feelings <input type="checkbox"/> <i>None of the above</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Completes all Basic Helping Skills</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Appropriately confirms the child understands and incorporates the reframing and refocusing going forward <input type="checkbox"/> Actively engages with the child to promote independent reframing of negative thoughts and feelings	
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 1</b> <i>any unhelpful behaviour</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 2</b> <i>no basic skills, or some but not all basic skills</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 3</b> <i>all basic skills</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 4</b> <i>all basic helping skills plus any advanced skill</i>
Notes:			

## 6. ABILITY TO IDENTIFY THE CHILD'S DAILY LIFE PROBLEMS OR NEEDS

Check all behaviours that are demonstrated in each category.			
Unhelpful or potentially harmful behaviours	Basic helping skills	Advanced helping skills	
<input type="checkbox"/> If child's traumatic history comes up, asks unnecessary details about it (e.g., graphic details) <input type="checkbox"/> Assesses needs in an intrusive manner <input type="checkbox"/> Ignores or treats any of the child's issues as trivial	<input type="checkbox"/> Uses child-friendly questions to identify and explore child's daily life problems or needs <input type="checkbox"/> Asks for and listens to relevant life events, current circumstances, or daily stressors <input type="checkbox"/> <i>None of the above</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Completes all Basic Helping Skills</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Discusses the impact of events or stressors on the children's well-being <input type="checkbox"/> If a potentially private or personal topic comes up, promotes and respects confidentiality and its exceptions	
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 1</b> <i>any unhelpful behaviour</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 2</b> <i>no basic skills, or some but not all basic skills</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 3</b> <i>all basic skills</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 4</b> <i>all basic helping skills plus any advanced skill</i>
Notes:			

## 7. PROBLEM SOLVING—APPLIES PROBLEM SOLVING TECHNIQUES FOR THE CHILD'S DAILY LIFE PROBLEMS

Check all behaviours that are demonstrated in each category.			
Unhelpful or potentially harmful behaviours	Basic helping skills	Advanced helping skills	
<input type="checkbox"/> Downplays the problem shared by the child <input type="checkbox"/> Blames or verbally punishes the child for the problem (e.g., humiliation)	<input type="checkbox"/> Explores feasible solutions for the child <input type="checkbox"/> Asks for child's input when exploring possible solutions to child's problems <input type="checkbox"/> Encourages child to implement identified and agreed solutions <input type="checkbox"/> <i>None of the above</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Completes all Basic Helping Skills</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Actively asks about child's emotional needs when exploring potential solutions <input type="checkbox"/> Activates the child in finding solutions to the problems (e.g., by weighing pros and cons and prioritising potential solutions) <input type="checkbox"/> Develops plan of action collaboratively with child, including identifying external support if needed	
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 1</b> <i>any unhelpful behaviour</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 2</b> <i>no basic skills, or some but not all basic skills</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 3</b> <i>all basic skills</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 4</b> <i>all basic helping skills plus any advanced skill</i>
Notes:			

## 8. SAFE IDENTIFICATION OF CHILD ABUSE, EXPLOITATION, NEGLECT, VIOLENCE, & SELF-HARM

Check all behaviours that are demonstrated in each category.			
Unhelpful or potentially harmful behaviours	Basic helping skills	Advanced helping skills	
<input type="checkbox"/> Threatens to report child's disclosure of abuse to perpetrating party <input type="checkbox"/> Makes dismissive statements about, or blames or punishes child for abuse, exploitation, self-harm etc. <input type="checkbox"/> Assesses risk of harm in an intrusive manner, or in an unsafe space (e.g., discussing it in front of a group or in a non-private space) <input type="checkbox"/> Does not address clear signs of potential risk of harm	<input type="checkbox"/> Safely points out or verbalises signs of harm or high risk of harm <input type="checkbox"/> Explores in a safe, child-friendly, and appropriate manner if harm or high risk of harm is present (appropriate to their role and without investigating) <input type="checkbox"/> Promotes and respects confidentiality and its exceptions <input type="checkbox"/> <i>None of the above</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Completes all Basic Helping Skills</i> <input type="checkbox"/> When necessary, explains referral pathways and process <input type="checkbox"/> When necessary, tries to obtain assent from the child to make appropriate referral <input type="checkbox"/> Manages child's expectations about the follow up in a reassuring way	
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 1</b> <i>any unhelpful behaviour</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 2</b> <i>no basic skills, or some but not all basic skills</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 3</b> <i>all basic skills</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 4</b> <i>all basic helping skills plus any advanced skill</i>
Notes:			

## 9. GIVING FEEDBACK TO THE CHILD

Check all behaviours that are demonstrated in each category.			
Unhelpful or potentially harmful behaviours	Basic helping skills	Advanced helping skills	
<input type="checkbox"/> Gives harsh or unfair feedback to the child <input type="checkbox"/> Presents feedback in a way that criticizes the child	<input type="checkbox"/> Gives feedback at the appropriate time <input type="checkbox"/> Gives feedback in a constructive and positive manner <input type="checkbox"/> Feedback is adapted to the developmental stage of the child <input type="checkbox"/> <i>None of the above</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Completes all Basic Helping Skills</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Uses appropriate feedback techniques (e.g., sandwich method, using clear examples or suggested solutions) <input type="checkbox"/> After giving feedback, checks if it was clear, understandable and accepted	
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 1</b> <i>any unhelpful behaviour</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 2</b> <i>no basic skills, or some but not all basic skills</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 3</b> <i>all basic skills</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 4</b> <i>all basic helping skills plus any advanced skill</i>
Notes:			

## 10. ACKNOWLEDGES & PROMOTES CHILD'S AGENCY IN THE SESSION

Check all behaviours that are demonstrated in each category.			
Unhelpful or potentially harmful behaviours	Basic helping skills	Advanced helping skills	
<input type="checkbox"/> Does not allow the child to contribute or make suggestions, or ignores their suggestions and contributions <input type="checkbox"/> Forces child to contribute ideas or suggestions, or be part of decision making, even when it visibly distresses the child <input type="checkbox"/> Punishes a child for negative feedback, suggestions or contributions	<input type="checkbox"/> Ensures that the child understands what the activity is about and what their role is in it <input type="checkbox"/> Acknowledges the child's contributions, suggestions and feedback <input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates flexibility within the scope of the session based on contributions, suggestions, or feedback from the child <input type="checkbox"/> <i>None of the above</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Completes all Basic Helping Skills</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Pro-actively and openly seeks contributions, suggestions and feedback from child <input type="checkbox"/> Actively ensures the child influences and is part of decision making when appropriate <input type="checkbox"/> Communicates what happens with the child's input and how much influence they are expected to have	
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 1</b> <i>any unhelpful behaviour</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 2</b> <i>no basic skills, or some but not all basic skills</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 3</b> <i>all basic skills</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 4</b> <i>all basic helping skills plus any advanced skill</i>
Notes:			

## 11. BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT—DEMONSTRATES BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT SKILLS

Check all behaviours that are demonstrated in each category.			
Unhelpful or potentially harmful behaviours	Basic helping skills	Advanced helping skills	
<input type="checkbox"/> Emotionally punishes the child (e.g., beating, shouting, humiliation, isolation or singling out the child) <input type="checkbox"/> Is inconsistent in behaviour management between children or similar situations <input type="checkbox"/> Takes sides in conflicts between children <input type="checkbox"/> Does not intervene in harmful, problematic or disruptive behaviour	<input type="checkbox"/> Attends to child when they become noticeably distracted, distressed or angry <input type="checkbox"/> Uses age-appropriate behavioural management or positive discipline techniques to address child's negative behaviour <input type="checkbox"/> Uses positive reinforcement to encourage the child's positive behaviours <input type="checkbox"/> <i>None of the above</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Completes all Basic Helping Skills</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Gives child opportunities for self-correction or self-reflection <input type="checkbox"/> Uses strategies to prevent misbehaviour by noticing and preventing triggers or distractions <input type="checkbox"/> Clearly communicates behavioural expectations and the consequences for not following them if a child repeatedly misbehaves	
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 1</b> <i>any unhelpful behaviour</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 2</b> <i>no basic skills, or some but not all basic skills</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 3</b> <i>all basic skills</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 4</b> <i>all basic helping skills plus any advanced skill</i>
Notes:			

## 12. ORGANISES SESSION OR ACTIVITY EFFECTIVELY

Check all behaviours that are demonstrated in each category.			
Unhelpful or potentially harmful behaviours	Basic helping skills	Advanced helping skills	
<input type="checkbox"/> The session lacks clear structure and becomes chaotic <input type="checkbox"/> Does not help children if they are confused by the activity or purpose of session	<input type="checkbox"/> Has a clear structure for the session, including necessary resources <input type="checkbox"/> Manages time effectively during the session <input type="checkbox"/> Explains activities and session goals to all participants <input type="checkbox"/> <i>None of the above</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Completes all Basic Helping Skills</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Ensures children are familiar with and understand the rules of the session <input type="checkbox"/> Ensures session goals are achieved and planned themes are addressed	
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 1</b> <i>any unhelpful behaviour</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 2</b> <i>no basic skills, or some but not all basic skills</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 3</b> <i>all basic skills</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 4</b> <i>all basic helping skills plus any advanced skill</i>
Notes:			

### 13. ABILITY TO BE INCLUSIVE

Check all behaviours that are demonstrated in each category.			
Unhelpful or potentially harmful behaviours	Basic helping skills		Advanced helping skills
<input type="checkbox"/> Marginalises a child based on characteristics like ethnicity, religion or gender <input type="checkbox"/> Ignores certain children in the group <input type="checkbox"/> Allows a child to exclude, marginalise or discriminate against their peers <input type="checkbox"/> Chooses activities that could exclude some children	<input type="checkbox"/> Actively encourages children to participate and join the sessions or activities <input type="checkbox"/> Intervenes when a child is marginalised, discriminated against or left out of activities <input type="checkbox"/> <i>None of the above</i>		<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Completes all Basic Helping Skills</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Selects, adapts, and conducts activities that allow all children to participate, regardless of their background, identity or abilities <input type="checkbox"/> Finds balance between pushing and being respectful of the child's boundaries
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 1</b> <i>any unhelpful behaviour</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 2</b> <i>no basic skills, or some but not all basic skills</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 3</b> <i>all basic skills</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Level 4</b> <i>all basic helping skills plus any advanced skill</i>
Notes:			

#### Acknowledgement:

This scale is adapted from the original WeACT scale, which was copyrighted CC BY-NC-SA by War Child Holland in 2021, informed by research described: in Jordans MJD, Coetzee A, Steen HF, Koppenol-Gonzalez GV, Galayini H, Diab SY, Aisha SA, Kohrt BA. Assessment of service provider competency for child and adolescent psychological treatments and psychosocial services in global mental health: evaluation of feasibility and reliability of the WeACT tool in Gaza, Palestine. *Global Mental Health*. 2021;8:e7. <https://doi.org/10.1017/gmh.2021.6>

War Child Holland is acknowledged for developing the WeACT tool and giving WHO permission to publish and disseminate it on the EQUIP platform. See full acknowledgements and copyright information on <https://whoequip.org/en-gb>.

## Abbreviated instructions for standardized role plays

If using standardized role plays, the following prompts can be used when eliciting different competencies. For full details on performing standardized role plays see <https://equipcompetency.org/>.

### 1. NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Actor instructions: *Use body language, including facial expressions that show your emotional state (e.g. nervous, shy, upset or more relaxed), in ways appropriate for the age and culture of the child or adolescent in the role play.*

### 2. VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Actor instructions: *Respond with language that fits the age and culture of the child or adolescent in the role play. Use short or limited answers if the helper asks closed questions such as “Do you, did you, can you...?” Respond with fuller thoughts or stories if they ask open-ended questions such as “Please tell me about, please share with me, how did that...?”*

### 3. RAPPORT & RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Actor instructions: *Wait for the helper to start the conversation. Do not offer your name or personal information unless asked.*

### 4. EMPATHY, WARMTH & GENUINENESS

Actor instructions: *During the session, use body language, including facial expressions that show your emotional state (e.g. nervous, shy, upset or more relaxed), in ways appropriate for the age and culture of the child or adolescent in the role play (this is the same prompt as for Item 1). In addition, do not open up about your feelings or emotions unless the helper asks.*

### 5. SUPPORTING THE REFRAMING OF THE CHILD’S NEGATIVE THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS

Actor instructions: *At the start of the role play, share a negative or self-critical thought, for example, “I will never be able to solve this,” “I will never have any friends,” “I will never be able to pass my exams.”*

### 6. ABILITY TO IDENTIFY THE CHILD’S DAILY LIFE PROBLEMS OR NEEDS

Actor instructions: *Only share information about a need or a problem in daily life if asked by the helper, for example, if the helper asks “What is bothering you?” or “What is worrying you?”*

### 7. PROBLEM SOLVING—APPLIES PROBLEM SOLVING TECHNIQUES FOR THE CHILD’S DAILY LIFE PROBLEMS

Actor instructions: *Share a daily life problem with the helper, such as, “I am worried about exams in school,” “I lost my toy,” or “I am not sleeping well, because I have to sleep alone.” The problem should be appropriate to the age and context of the child or adolescent in the role play (do not to pick a problem that is linked to a situation that requires safe identification; see item 8).*

### 8. SAFE IDENTIFICATION OF CHILD ABUSE, EXPLOITATION, NEGLECT, VIOLENCE, & SELF-HARM

Actor instructions: *During the role play, express that “Sometimes when I go to sleep, I wish I wouldn’t wake up in the morning.” If asked if you would ever hurt or kill yourself, explain “Sometimes I think about dying, but I wouldn’t hurt myself on purpose.” If asked about reasons for living, describe, “I want to stay alive to care for my family.” If asked about any prior attempts, reply, “No, I have never tried to kill myself.” If relevant to the context, an alternative is to express risk of harm from others: e.g. “Sometimes, when my mother is angry, I’m afraid she might hurt me.”*

### 9. GIVING FEEDBACK TO THE CHILD

Actor instructions: *If the helper asks for feedback about suggestions (e.g. they ask if you understand or can act on the suggestions made), reply that some of the advice is helpful but some of it would be hard in your situation, e.g. “I know it’s important, but I just worry that I couldn’t do those things we talked about.”*

**10. ACKNOWLEDGES & PROMOTES CHILD'S AGENCY IN THE SESSION**

Actor instructions: *During the role play, respond with comments such as "Kids don't get to make any decisions. Adults are always telling me what to do." or, "No one ever lets me decide what to do."*

**11. BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT—DEMONSTRATES BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT SKILLS**

Actor instructions: *During the role play, become more physically restless in an ageappropriate manner, start tapping your foot loudly, get up and walk around the room, or fidget disruptively with a pencil or notebook or other item in the room.*

**12. ORGANISES SESSION OR ACTIVITY EFFECTIVELY**

Actor instructions: *For group role plays, child or adolescent #1 appear restless and repeatedly asks, "Can we take a break soon? We've been talking about the same thing over and over again. Aren't we doing anything else today?"*

**13. ABILITY TO BE INCLUSIVE**

Actor instructions: *For group role plays, child or adolescent #1 dominates the discussion by speaking frequently. When child or adolescent #2 begins to share their experience, child or adolescent #1 repeatedly interrupts, making it difficult for child or adolescent #2 to fully express themselves.*