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## Helping Traumatized Children

by Margaret Hill

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### “What about our children?”

“I’m a vicar of a church of 800 members in northern Uganda. For the last 20 years, the LRA (rebel group) have terrorized our area. Many of my members are living in Displaced People’s Camps. Most of the children have spent many nights sleeping in church halls or on the street because they could have been abducted by the rebels if they had stayed in their houses. We have received healing for ourselves through the seminars using the book “Healing the Wounds of Trauma: How the Church Can Help.” Now what about our children? The UN and other organizations help child soldiers who came home and other special cases, but how do we help the thousands of ordinary children in our churches? We need some tools and training.”

As we listened to pleas like this, it became clear that the church leaders were looking for a way to listen to the pain of the children and to know how to go about this. As Jesus first listened to the two disciples on the Emmaus road before opening the Scriptures to them, in the same way the church leaders learned to listen to the stories the children had to tell. Some people might say that this just stirs up bad memories, but in fact over and over again, the leaders have found that suppressing bad memories does no end of harm. Scripture tells us that Jesus, Paul, David and others expressed their pain to others.



### Lessons for traumatised children

Church leaders in many countries in Africa were aware of the need to help traumatised children, particularly in situations where a large number of children were affected. In response to this, Debbie Braaksma, Lyn Westman and myself developed lessons for traumatised children who were between 8 and 14 years old. The course consists of ten units covering the following themes:

1. I am important to God
2. Bad things happen
3. We hurt because life isn’t like God planned it to be.



4. Feeling alone
5. When relationships don't work
6. Loss and grief
7. Bad things can happen children
8. The cross
9. Forgiveness
10. Rebuilding lives



Each chapter begins with the story of two children, then has games and exercises on the theme, and then a Bible story followed by an activity and a memory verse.

The Bible stories fit with the theme of the main lesson as far as possible. For example, the first lesson is about the fact that each individual child has been made by God and is important to him. The story of Creation teaches this. The second lesson is about the fact that bad things do happen in our world,

and the chosen Bible story is the Fall. All the rest of the lessons use the story of Joseph. This was chosen because Joseph suffered many injustices, but at the end was able to forgive his brothers and save his people from starvation. It is a good exciting story as well!

These materials have been used now in Northern Uganda, Liberia and Thailand. As the children engaged with the materials, and particularly with Scripture, they experienced at a certain degree of healing. In addition, church leaders, youth workers and orphanage staff learned how to use these materials and how to teach them to others.

## **Scripture meeting children at their point of need**

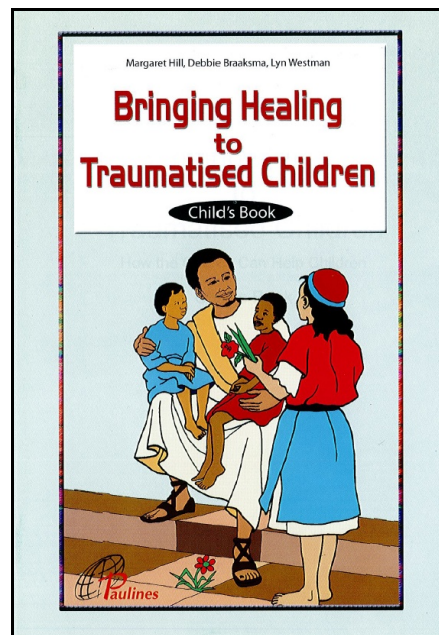
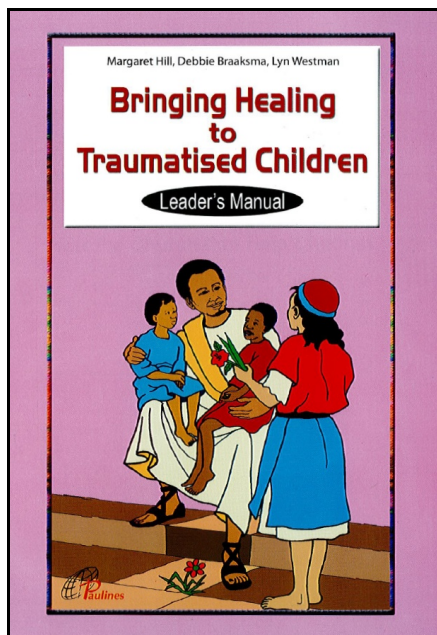
Scripture has the most impact when it meets people and children at their place of need. In the same way as Jesus came beside the two on the Emmaus road, we can come alongside hurting children and help them engage with the Bible stories. Here is what the leader of one group of children in Uganda said:

“As I saw the children in my group of eight 10-11 year olds (four boys and four girls) interact with each other during the workshop, they seemed to gradually move from being unsure of what they could talk about concerning the hurt and grief in their lives to finding creative and expressive ways to deal with those feelings. They moved from topics that are rarely, if ever, discussed to writing songs, creating pictures, drawing simple life maps, talking openly, and asking good questions about suffering, sin, and

loss. They also asked questions about God. Two of the kids prayed to receive Christ into their lives on the Thursday afternoon of the workshop. Another three had previously accepted Christ. Another three were not yet ready. I think the workshop gave all the kids a way of expressing thoughts and emotions that they had no outlet for before. It helped them know that what they are feeling is normal and that God cares deeply about them. One of the boys who accepted the Lord drew a 'life map' that showed having to move from his parents when they died to his grandmother's, then being very sick as a child, then moving to an uncle's, then to his grandfather's home among other things in the course of his 11 years. The message that Christ will always be with you and help you is important for these kids."

## Ordering books

The books referred to here are published by Paulines Publications Africa. There is a leader's book and a book for the child. They are called "Bringing Healing to Traumatized Children." They are available through the [www.wycliffe.org](http://www.wycliffe.org) site (click on "Shop").



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This document is available for download at: <http://www.scripture-engagement.org>

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