



Chapter One

1 Children's Participation in Health and Education

Why do it?

When children are actively involved in learning then what they learn is more likely to have an impact on their development and on their lives. When we teach a child about a health issue it is vital that this learning does not just stay in her head or get forgotten but that it has an impact on what that child does, in the context of her life with others in a family and community.

About Mary

When 9-year-old Mary learns about how germs spread, she is then taught how to prevent this by washing her hands (with soap) before eating or after toilet. This leads to Mary actually doing it. So her knowledge combined with her skill leads to changed behaviour - at least this is the theory.

But what if Mary finds out what the barriers are to having soap and water available to children near a toilet, or before meals at home and school? And then finds out what makes people wash their hands or not wash their hands? These are more interesting questions for her to ask and investigate. Often it is not the **INFORMATION** that children lack but the **SKILLS** or the **MOTIVATION** or **ENVIRONMENT** that support or put up barriers between a person and the practice of good health behaviour.

Mary can find out information with the support and input of her friends and family members.

When children look at what health behaviours are the best, **PLUS** the support or the barriers that exist between people knowing what to do (information) and actually doing it (skills, motivation and environment), then children can help to strengthen the support and break down the barriers.

When they do this their health behaviour (and others' too) is more likely to change or develop as a result. Once Mary has a rounded picture of why something is as it is, she can then **contribute to its solution**, sharing information with friends, family members and siblings and supporting developments or changes in their behaviour.

Not only is Mary involved in this important activity, she is learning many useful skills. She is **gaining confidence** by doing something real and useful and she will probably get attention and earn praise for it. These extra benefits contribute to Mary's development.

THIS is why it's useful and important to promote children's participation.

