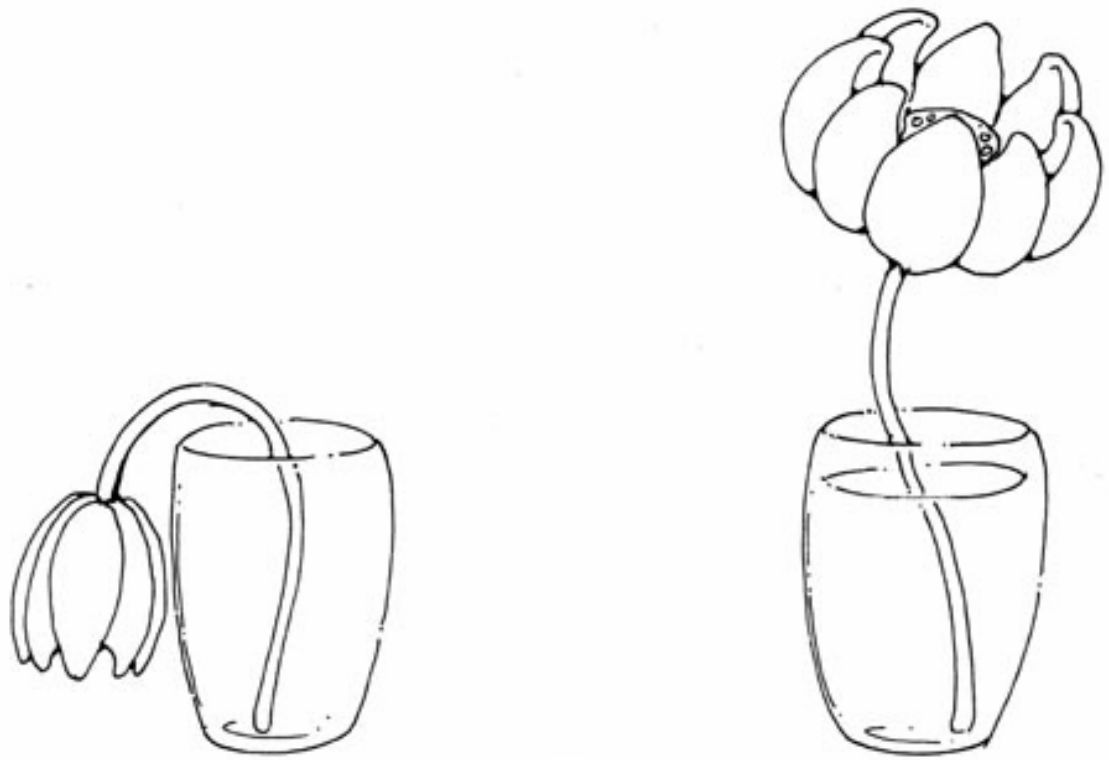


ABDUL AND SERI



*and how children with
diarrhoea need liquid
just as a flower needs
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A

bdul ran home from school almost as fast as on the day his sister Seri was born. As soon as he saw her in the courtyard his eyes lit up, for although Abdul was eight years old he loved to play with his little sister.

She was only one and a half years old. She would clap her hands in delight when he made funny faces at her or giggle when he counted her toes. He had helped her with her first steps picking her up gently when she tumbled.

But what was wrong today? Usually Seri toddled straight to her favourite Abdul with her arms outstretched. But now she just sat on the porch and gazed up at him with dull eyes. Quickly he lifted her up to his hip. He noticed that she had an unpleasant smell about her.

Then the grandma greeted him with a tired voice. Worried, Abdul asked her “Is Seri sick? Why does she act like this? ”

“She’s had several watery bowel movements today,” answered grandma,” and she’s been very fussy, Abdul, you must not let her have any food or drink so that the diarrhoea will stop and she will get better.”

Abdul thought for a moment and then he took a deep breath. “But Grandma,” he cried out “in our health club at school our teacher told us that a watery stool was very dangerous. If the body loses the water it is like plant that isn’t watered. First it gets weak and then it dies. We have to give Seri enough to drink so she won’t



be weak like that.

Grandma could feel how much Abdul believed in what he was saying and she was very proud that her grandson had a chance to go school and learn new things, but still no one had even given and food or drink to a child with watery stools as long as she could remember. Then while Abdul looked at her with pleading eyes and waited for her response she thought of one of her own children that she had lost after two days of watery stools. And what about little Tina next door who had died the same way? Grandma sighed

and said gently to Abdul : “Perhaps your teacher is right, we should try the new way.”

“Our teacher showed us that we could mix a drink with sugar, clean water and a very small pinch of salt,” he said, “but she also told us that ordinary weak tea with a little sugar would work well”. Grandma smiled. She had made tea already and so they made it weak with some more boiled water and when it was cool enough gave it sip by sip to Seri who finished the whole glass and then another.

Suddenly Seri vomited and Grandma looked as if she were about to scold Abdul. “My teacher says not to worry if the child vomits in the beginning. Just try again,” and he gave Seri another glass but this time he helped her drink more slowly. A little later Seri, already looking a little happier, squirmed off Abdul’s lap and pointed to the tin where they kept the biscuits she loved. Abdul gave her one then suddenly, and much to Grandma’s dismay, she made another watery bowel movement. “Don’t worry Grandma, she is already a bit better,” said Abdul.” Look how eager she is to have the biscuit, and she is still thirsty. She is trying to reach the glass.”

So they went on giving drinks to Seri. They also gave her coconut milk, which she loved, and fruit juice. Gradually she became brighter and happier as a flower does when we give it water.

Later when mother came home she was worried. Was this new way the right one? But by this time Abdul had Grandma on his side. Seri was still taking a little milk from her mother and in addition they went on giving her more drinks and food when she asked for it. When the diarrhoea had stopped a day later they gave Seri

extra food to build up her strength as Abdul's teacher had told him to do.

Next day when Abdul came to back from school he told them: "I told the teacher. She says she is very proud of me.

"And so I am," said a voice behind him. It was the teacher who had come by on her way home, "and I am so happy that you listened to him. I hope he was polite and respectful as I have always told the children to be."

"Of course he was" said Grandma.

A NOTE TO TEACHERS

About the story

This straightforward story on the importance of oral rehydration is set in Indonesia but it is suitable for use by children of almost any age in any country (and that means most countries in the world) where Diarrhoea and dehydration are a menace to children. Rehydration therapy is one of the greatest contributions which Primary Health Care has given since the 1970s and knowledge about it has saved millions of lives. In many cases children have passed on this knowledge. And NO children should leave school without it.

This story has been slightly modified from the original where Abdul made and gave to Seri a 'special drink' made with one cup of water, a level spoonful of sugar and a pinch of salt. Since then there has been some expert difference of opinion on the use of the special drink as against the made-up rehydration salts package but all agree that the key to fighting dehydration is getting liquid back into the child and 'Facts for Life' (and the current Indonesian Health programme) specifically recommends the use of the liquids which Grandma and Abdul give Seri to drink.

Activities

Surveys

One key activity is for children to find out about current ways of treating diarrhoea. It may now be that the custom of withholding liquid may no longer be widely practiced, but there are many others which are nearly as dangerous. They include withholding food, giving oral rehydratation salts in little spoonfuls like medicine and purchasing antibiotics (often fake) at great cost. Once children have done their survey they can then discuss how *they* can spread the right information

The flower

The flower, with and without water, is a powerful symbol and possible in any classroom.

Retelling

Retelling the story from the grandmother's point of view raises many points about customs and life skills. What would have happened if Abdul had been rude and not respectful?

Other

Many other activities recommended in part 1 are possible with this story

Source: Werner and Bower Helping Health Workers Learn Palo Alto Hesperian Foundation 1982 (modified) Original story from Indonesia Dr. Jon Rode

