

ELEVATING PARENTING IN EXISTING UNICEF PROGRAMMES

TECHNICAL NOTE

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Dhanasri Rahul Kshirsagar 19 Years, engages in a practice called Kangaroo Mother Care to her one day old son at SNCU Department Civil Hospital Beed. It involves holding her child to her chest for at least one hour every day. UNICEF is doing its bit to bring down neo-natal mortality and to save the lives of newborns and mothers in the High Priority District of Beed.

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1. THE 'WHY'?: ELEVATING PARENTING IN EXISTING UNICEF PROGRAMMES

The provision of quality parenting and family support is critical towards achieving results for all children.¹ Parents are key architects creating experiences and opportunities for children's health, learning, protection, growth, development and social and emotional well-being throughout the life course. Several countries are implementing parenting programmes and supports. But often their understanding of parenting programmes is fragmented and programmes do not effectively achieve results for children with equity.

UNICEF's Strategic Plan 2018–2021 emphasized UNICEF's contribution to the achievement of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and recognized the need to work across sectors to drive results for the most disadvantaged children and young people. **A key accelerator that can promote achievement of results for children across the five goal areas is the provision of quality parenting and family support.** There is clear evidence that quality parenting has a seminal influence on children's health, well-being and development, and the role of parents is critical.² In its new Strategic Plan (2022–2025), UNICEF has articulated exciting ways of elevating parenting and family support, including by providing preventive support for the health and emotional well-being of caregivers, enhancing support for parents of children with disabilities, increasing support for adolescents who are caregivers themselves, and addressing the needs of parents of young children to promote optimal child development.

¹ UNICEF, *Standards for ECD Parenting Programmes in Low- and Middle-Income Countries*, UNICEF, New York, 2017, https://sites.unicef.org/earlychildhood/files/UNICEF-Standards_for_Parenting_Programs_6-8-17_pg.pdf, accessed 26 March 2021.

² Britto, Pia Rebello, et al., *A Systematic Review of Parenting Programmes for Young Children in Low- and Middle- Income Countries*, UNICEF, New York, 2015, https://bbhosted.cuny.edu/webapps/portal/execute/tabs/tabAction?tab_tab_group_id=_49_1, accessed 26 March 2021.

Elevating parenting and family support across all goal areas of the Strategic Plan will enhance the impact of UNICEF's work towards greater results for children at all ages and stages. It will **empower all parents, caregivers and families** to:

- Provide appropriate direction and guidance to their children in the **exercise of their rights**, which includes providing children with disabilities and children from marginalized communities with equitable opportunities in life.
- **Utilize and demand family-friendly policies** enabling parents with the time, resources and services they need to assume full roles in their children's care. Such policies may cover paid parental leave; breastfeeding support; accessible, affordable, quality child care; child benefits; and adequate wages.
- Provide an **environment of reliable and affectionate relationships** based on respect and understanding, and encourage child-rearing practices that are child-centred and respectful of children's dignity, needs and interests. Ensure safe, healthy, nourishing environments for children, including environments and opportunities for play.
- Facilitate **positive, safe environments free of violence**, neglect or abuse; reduce harsh parenting practices and promote positive parent-child relationships and responsive caregiving.
- Support opportunities for **gender-responsive quality learning** for children, including opportunities that are age-appropriate (from very young children to older adolescents).
- Promote **positive gender socialization** of children and adolescents respecting diverse identities.
- Enable the positive **growth and development** of children up to 18 years of age, including child and adolescent empowerment; and **meaningfully engage** with children and adolescents according to their evolving capacities in family and household decision-making.

- **Understand their own mental health and psycho-social support (MHPSS)** needs and those of their children, from early childhood through adolescence, including their feelings, emotions and thoughts and how these are affected by the world around them. Support the MHPSS needs of adolescents who are parents themselves.
- Participate in community **engagement and social accountability** mechanisms to ensure parents' voices on the design and delivery of child and family policies, provisions and services are heard.

This strategy document provides a common set of definitions, framing principles, approaches and suggested actions for use in UNICEF-assisted programmes to support parents/caregivers and parenting throughout the life course. It can guide efforts to ensure that countries receive coordinated, evidence-based technical guidance in support of programming for parents and caregivers to facilitate the holistic, gender-equitable development of children and adolescents, especially the most disadvantaged, including children with disabilities.

The intended audience for this strategy document is UNICEF staff and consultants from different teams working on programmes to support parents. These teams include (but are not limited to) early childhood development (ECD), communication for development (C4D), adolescent development and participation (ADAP), gender and child protection. The building blocks and approaches presented in this strategy document can be extracted, shared and contextualized with key stakeholders.

This strategy document does not call for new programming but rather identifies ways to strengthen and elevate parenting within existing programmes in a coherent manner.

2. THE 'WHAT': DEFINITIONS AND KEY PILLARS

Throughout this document, 'parents' is not limited to biological and adoptive parents but extends to any guardian or caregiver providing consistent care to children and adolescents. The term includes fathers, mothers, siblings, grandparents, other relatives, legal guardians and foster caregivers; it includes both adults and adolescents who may be parents themselves.

Family is used here in a broad way to be inclusive of diverse family forms. It refers to the most significant intimate group, which can be defined by kinship, marriage, adoption or choice. Hence, family is recognized to vary in composition and the nature of the relational tie between family members and is not understood exclusively as the nuclear family or connection by kinship.³

Parenting refers to the interactions, behaviours, emotions, knowledge, beliefs, attitudes and practices associated with the provision of nurturing care for children.⁴ In this view, parenting is a process of promoting and supporting the development and well-being of the child; it is the entrusted and abiding task of parents to prepare children, as they develop, for the physical, social, emotional and economic conditions in which children live, work, play, learn and thrive. Amid the many influences on children, parents and caregivers are critical to children's development, protection, empowerment, adjustment and life-long success.⁵

Parenting support is a set of services and other activities oriented to improving how parents' approach and execute their role as parents and to increasing parents' child-rearing resources (including information, knowledge, skills and social and emotional support) and competencies.⁶

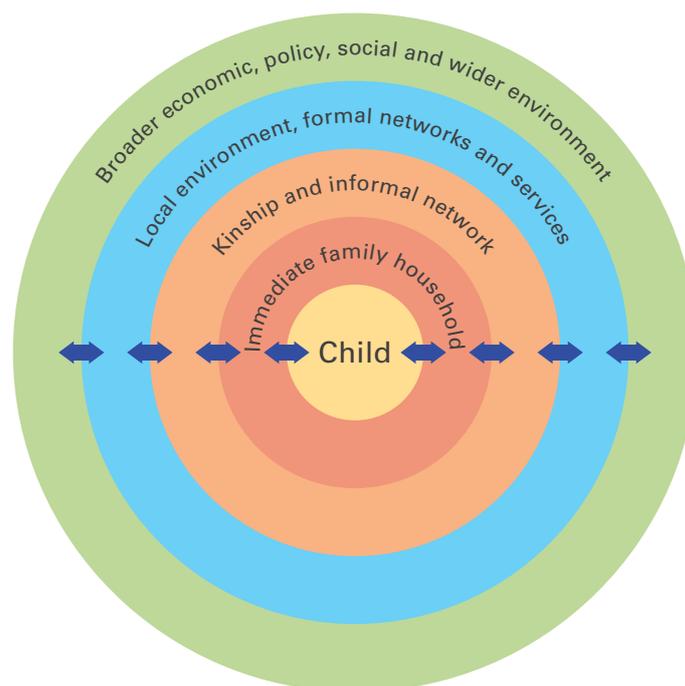
³ UNICEF Office of Research–Innocenti, *Family and Parenting Support Policy and Provision in a Global Context*, UNICEF, Florence, 2015, https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/01%20family_support_layout_web.pdf, accessed 8 June 2020.

⁴ UNICEF, *Standards for ECD Parenting Programmes in Low- and Middle-Income Countries*.

⁵ UNICEF Office of Research–Innocenti, *Family and Parenting Support Policy and Provision in a Global Context*, UNICEF, Florence, 2015, https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/01%20family_support_layout_web.pdf, accessed 8 June 2020.

⁶ UNICEF Office of Research–Innocenti, *Family and Parenting Support Policy and Provision in a Global Context*, UNICEF, Florence, 2015, https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/01%20family_support_layout_web.pdf, accessed 8 June 2020.

Figure 1. Environmental systems framework



Family support is a set of services and other activities oriented to improving family functioning and grounding child-rearing and other familial activities in a system of supportive relationships and resources, both formal and informal.⁷

Note: While parenting support and family support have distinct orientations, both are important. They complement each other in providing a focus for policies and plans to promote child and adolescent development.

In UNICEF's view, those working to provide support for parents and families should consider the following three elements:

1 Levels: UNICEF employs an environmental systems framework to help identify and delineate the multi-levelled environment in which a child develops (see Figure 1). In this framework, the child is nested within various systems: from the immediate household environment; to kinships and informal networks; to the larger local environment, formal networks and services; to the broader economic, policy, social and wider cultural environment. This framework demonstrates the **diversity of inter-related influences** on a child's growth and development throughout the life course and indicates important areas for support.

2 Domains: UNICEF utilizes multiple sectors, entry points and service delivery platforms, including health, hygiene, nutrition, protection, education, safety and care.

3 Ages: UNICEF programming takes a **life course approach** to parenting, encompassing early childhood, middle childhood and adolescence.

Underlining **all of UNICEF's parenting support work** are the following key pillars:

- Promoting and infusing a **rights-based approach and key normative principles** such as gender equality, racial equality and inclusion of children with disabilities⁸
- Ensuring **context-specific action** taking into account diverse cultural contexts (e.g., indigenous communities) while focusing on the most vulnerable, in both humanitarian and development settings
- Taking a **system-strengthening approach** with the ongoing identification of opportunities to institutionalize parenting programmes into national- and local-level systems, building on existing platforms.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Disability-inclusive programming requires adopting the 'twin-track approach' in which considerations for parents and children with disabilities are included in mainstream programmes while interventions targeted specifically for parents and children with disabilities are provided. For more information, see PD–Disability, 'Twin-track approach', UNICEF, 2020, <https://unicef.sharepoint.com/sites/PD-Disability/SitePages/Twin.aspx>, accessed 26 March 2020.

3. KEY ACTIONS NEEDED TO ENHANCE PARENTING SUPPORT THROUGHOUT THE LIFE COURSE

EARLY CHILDHOOD (from conception to age of school entry) is a critical period in children's development. It requires parenting and family support to ensure that every child is able to have the best start in life, setting a foundation for healthy development, life-long learning and social cohesion.

A stable environment in which children can develop and thrive is one that is sensitive to their health and nutritional needs, provides protection from threats, and offers opportunities for early learning and interactions that are responsive, emotionally supportive and developmentally stimulating.⁹

⁹ Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University, *Key Concepts: Toxic Stress*, <http://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/toxic-stress>, accessed 30 December 2020.



Nurturing care framework

To reach their full potential, children need five inter-related and indivisible components of nurturing care: good health, adequate nutrition, safety and security, responsive caregiving, and opportunities for learning. Nurturing care refers to conditions created by public policies, programmes and services that enable communities and caregivers to ensure children's good health and nutrition and protect them from threats. Nurturing care also means giving children opportunities for learning through interactions that are responsive and emotionally supportive.¹⁰

'Nurturing care' consists of a core set of inter-related components, including behaviours, attitudes and knowledge about caregiving (e.g., health, hygiene and feeding care), stimulation (e.g., talking, singing and playing), responsiveness (e.g., early bonding, secure attachment, trust and sensitive communication) and safety (e.g., routines and protection from harm, abuse, neglect and environmental pollution).¹¹ In addition, by the age of 3 years old children develop a sense of gender identity; and by age 5 they develop a sense of gender stability. For children with developmental delays or disabilities, the provision of early intervention is essential to support optimal development.

Adolescents who are parents themselves are a noteworthy focus for ECD life-course programming, and it is important to keep in mind that adolescent parents are still children themselves. Adolescent parents may have their learning disrupted and may need added support from their own parents and caregivers. Ensuring the mental health and well-being of adolescent parents is an important step in ensuring the holistic development of their children.

UNICEF emphasizes the following broad actions to enhance parenting support for children in early childhood:

For the care of children 0–3 years of age:

- Equip parents and caregivers to promote nurturing care, including responsive care, developmental and age-appropriate play and communication, and early learning. Enhance systems of nurturing care through multi-sectoral packages, especially those focusing on stimulation and responsive care of children.

Inclusivity is a key principle; nurturing care should be supported for all children, explicitly including children with disabilities.

For the care of children throughout the entire period of early childhood:

- Ensure that time, resources and services for parents of young children are made available through the adoption of family-friendly policies. Promote policies that are gender responsive and supportive of parents of young children in their care responsibilities. Ensure that this support is well articulated for parents of children with disabilities.
- Promote safe and healthy environments for parents to engage with children, through active play, games, talking together and green spaces for children to develop their innate biophilia.
- Ensure access to essential services to address the needs of young children and parents, and ensure that routine health, nutrition and social services in particular provide support for child development; these services are the most common points of contact between systems and parents of young children. Key parent encounters with systems need to include parental counselling with a focus on how to support their children's health and development.
- Establish online and offline platforms with information and support for parents of children with disabilities.
- Support early intervention and inclusive education policies and services based in the family and community for children at risk of violence, abuse, neglect or exploitation and for children with developmental delays and disabilities.

¹⁰ World Health Organization, United Nations Children's Fund and World Bank Group, *Nurturing Care for Early Childhood Development: A framework for helping children survive and thrive to transform health and human potential*, WHO, Geneva, 2018, <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/272603/9789241514064-eng.pdf?ua=1&ua=1>, accessed 2 February 2021. The Nurturing Care Framework was developed focusing specifically on the period from conception to age three. However, the principles apply to all age groups.

¹¹ Britto, Pia R., et al., *Nurturing Care: Promoting Early Childhood Development*, *The Lancet*, vol. 389, no. 10064, January 2017, pp. 91-102, [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(16\)31390-3/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(16)31390-3/fulltext), accessed 26 March 2021.

- Focus on parents' mental health and emotional and social well-being and build their stress management and coping skills during early childhood and while the mother is pregnant.
- Enhance parents' and caregivers' knowledge, perceptions, beliefs and attitudes about parenting.
- Enhance parents' and caregivers' ability to talk to their young children about bullying, child protection issues such as exploitation and violence against children and how to protect themselves (if applicable); increase parents' ability to teach their children empathy for others and to know where to seek help for both parents and for their children. Ensure parents understand there are alternatives to corporal punishment, and support parents in teaching their children about the consequences of actions and concepts of fair play.
- Enhance children's self-esteem by giving them opportunities to be useful; enhance parents' ability to speak positively, to avoid making negative comparisons among children and to be good role models.
- Generate community demand for embedding children's foundational and transferable skills in school, out of school and in educational training systems.
- Enable children of all genders to become agile and adaptive learners and citizens and equip them to navigate personal, social, academic, emotional and economic challenges. These include skills such as creativity, communication and problem solving.
- Promote positive gender norms and socialization by encouraging and modelling gender-equitable behaviours including sharing of child-care responsibilities and household tasks and treating children equally among household members.¹²

MIDDLE CHILDHOOD (from 6 to 10 years of age) is characterized by rapid skills development; it is a time when children form peer attachments and develop more complex social and emotional skills (i.e., learning right from wrong). In middle childhood, children are better at controlling emotions and behaviours than when younger and become more independent. Friendships become important. In the latter part of this period,

children also start to become curious about their bodies and some may experience the onset of puberty.¹³ As children start to gain independence, it is important for parents to start talking to them about how to keep safe from violence and stay healthy. The focus of parenting actions should be on helping children manage their behaviours and building their self-esteem through relationship building and positive discipline strategies.

UNICEF supports the following key actions to enhance parenting support for children in middle childhood:

- Promote safe and healthy environments for parents to engage with children, including through active play, games, talking together.
- Promote children's education on global citizenship, STEM, and caring for the environment.
- Endorse policies for disability-inclusive education and access to facilities and services.
- Nurture and stimulate development by promoting children's self-esteem and confidence, giving them more independence and providing positive reinforcement (e.g., giving praise and rewarding good behaviours).
- Improve parental skills for bonding and engaging with children on boundaries, rules and decision-making.
- Enhance parents' skills to communicate about the negative effects of bullying, child protection issues and how to protect themselves, and to teach their children empathy for others.
- Support parents in understanding their children's emotions and social needs and the importance of their own and their children's mental health.
- Enhance parents' understanding of gender, including their own beliefs linked to social norms; support actions to promote gender-equitable norms, roles and expectations; and provide age-appropriate, practical information on sexual and reproductive health.
- Bolster parents in dealing with child protection concerns and in addressing gender-based violence and harsh discipline in the household, in schools and online from early childhood through adolescence.

¹² UNICEF, *A Summary Note on Promoting Positive Gender Norms and Socialization: Examples from Global Mapping Report*, UNICEF, New York, 2019, [https://unicef.sharepoint.com/teams/PD-Gender-Hub2Int/DL1/Summary%20Note%20on%20Promoting%20Positive%20Gender%20Norms%20%20&%20Socialization%20-%20Examples%20From%20Global%20Mapping_Final_Dec2019.pdf?csf=1&e=ULdrTJ&cid=96af91d3-8aff-4c6d-b5f6-
ea5fc7a739bf](https://unicef.sharepoint.com/teams/PD-Gender-Hub2Int/DL1/Summary%20Note%20on%20Promoting%20Positive%20Gender%20Norms%20%20&%20Socialization%20-%20Examples%20From%20Global%20Mapping_Final_Dec2019.pdf?csf=1&e=ULdrTJ&cid=96af91d3-8aff-4c6d-b5f6-
ea5fc7a739bf), accessed 26 March 2021.

¹³ For most children, however, puberty starts at around age 12 years or older.



MHPSS systems for parents: Caring for the caregiver

In accordance with evidence from *The Lancet* and UNICEF recommendations on ECD and nurturing care, preventive support for caregiver health and emotional well-being is key to optimal child development. Yet there is currently very little support for the emotional well-being of caregivers in low- and middle-income countries. To address this issue, UNICEF is developing a 'Caring for the Caregiver' (CFC) training module.

The CFC module is intended to build strengths-based counselling skills of those working on the front line to increase caregivers' confidence and help them develop stress management, self-care and conflict-resolution skills in support of their emotional well-being. The prototype version of the module consists of three core manuals to guide the training and implementation process; it is currently being validated in eight countries through implementation research. A final version will be ready in 2021.

A new guide titled *Caring for the Caregiver during the COVID-19 Crisis* can be found [here](#). This resource offers evidence-based messages, practical guidance, case studies and resources that can be used to promote parents' and caregivers' mental health, with a focus on adolescent caregivers, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

ADOLESCENCE (from 10 to 18 years of age) is characterized by rapid physical growth and brain development. It is a critical period for individual identity formation and an opportunity for growth, exploration and creativity as adolescents are figuring out who they want to be in the world.¹⁴ Positive social relationships and environments can enhance adolescents' feelings of inclusion and belonging, facilitate access to opportunities and services, and lead to positive outcomes; while negative experiences can sow fear, increase self-doubt or social isolation, reduce access to services and opportunities, and lead to a cascade of negative outcomes.¹⁵ In addition, adolescence is a phase of intensifying gender identities; sexual identities are explored and established, and adolescents' begin not only to accept but also to perpetuate gender and sexual identities (with implications for peers and communities).¹⁶

Parents continue to play a profound role in adolescent development, even as adolescents increasingly engage with their peers and the

broader society.^{17, 18} The caregiving relationship between parents and children changes during adolescence and throughout the adolescent transition (as adolescents age from 10 to 18), but it remains vitally important. Other aspects of the parent-child relationships change in nature over time, including during transitions from early adolescence (10–14 years old) to late adolescence (15–19 years old). For example, parents spend less time monitoring their children in consideration of children's evolving capacities as they age through adolescence.¹⁹

As they continue to develop and grow, some adolescents may become parents themselves and/or be tasked with care responsibilities for siblings. Adolescent caregiving can have immediate and lasting consequences for the adolescent girl and her children, as well as for her male partner. There are worrying longer-term outcomes for adolescent caregivers (both girls and boys) linked to poverty, interrupted education, lack of support, isolation and other factors.

¹⁴ UNICEF, *UNICEF Programme Guidance for the Second Decade: Programming with and for adolescents*, UNICEF, New York, 2018, <https://www.unicef.org/media/57336/file>, accessed 26 March 2021.

¹⁵ UNICEF, *UNICEF Programme Guidance for the Second Decade: Programming with and for adolescents*, UNICEF, New York, 2018, <https://www.unicef.org/media/57336/file>, accessed 26 March 2021.

¹⁶ UNICEF, *A Summary Note on Promoting Positive Gender Norms and Socialization: Examples from Global Mapping Report*, UNICEF, New York, 2019, https://unicef.sharepoint.com/teams/PD-Gender-Hub2/Int/DL1/Summary%20Note%20on%20Promoting%20Positive%20Gender%20Norms%20%20&%20Socialization%20-%20Examples%20From%20Global%20Mapping_Final_Dec2019.pdf?csf=1&e=ULdrTJ&cid=96af91d3-8aff-4c6d-b5f6-aa5fc7a739bf, accessed 4 March 2021.

¹⁷ Johnson, J. G., Smiles, E., Cohen, P., Kasen, S., & Brook, J. S. Anti-social Parental Behaviour, Problematic Parenting and Aggressive Offspring Behaviour During Adulthood: A 25-Year Longitudinal Investigation. *British Journal of Criminology*. 2004. 44(6), 915–930. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azh041>

¹⁸ Moore G.F., Rothwell H., Segrott J. An exploratory study of the relationship between parental attitudes and behaviour and young people's consumption of alcohol. *Subst Abuse Treat Prev Policy*. 2010 Apr 22. 5(6). doi: 10.1186/1747-597X-5-6. PMID: 20412576; PMCID: PMC2865449.

¹⁹ UNICEF, *Programme Guidance for the Parenting of Adolescents*, 2021.

UNICEF programming guidance for parents of adolescents (2021)

Programmes for parents of adolescents share features with programmes for parents of younger children, and should consolidate and amplify positive benefits from investments in young child parenting programmes. Yet as children mature into adolescence the parenting relationship evolves, and parents require new, developmentally appropriate skills and strategies to meet their adolescent children's needs.

UNICEF's new guidance aims to strengthen programming for parenting of adolescents; it was developed in consideration of what both adolescents and their parents need, based on the available evidence.

A review of the evidence base highlights core content areas for programmes, including to:

- Promote loving, warm and affectionate relationships between parents and their adolescent children, using age-appropriate strategies, to promote adolescent well-being.
- Improve parents' knowledge of adolescent physiological, cognitive, social and emotional development.
- Develop parents' skills to communicate respectfully with adolescents in a manner that respects their evolving capacities.
- Support parents in employing positive, non-violent discipline techniques that rely on communicating expectations and setting parameters around adolescents' behaviour.
- Empower parents to create safe environments for adolescents.
- Support parents in providing for adolescents' basic needs.
- Protect and promote parental mental health and link parents with further care as required.

On average, children born to adolescent mothers are less likely to ever reach their full potential, with well-documented worse outcomes in health and schooling, and lower earnings in adulthood, than among children whose mothers are older.^{20, 21, 22, 23}

It is essential for those working with adolescent parents to understand what puts them and their children at risk, and identify entry points for programming and social, health and economic support services that may improve outcomes for both adolescent parents and their children.

UNICEF supports the following key actions to enhance parenting support for adolescents, including adolescent caregivers:

- Support meaningful and systematic participation of adolescent girls and boys at all levels of the environmental systems framework; adolescent
- participation is a key consideration for ensuring that programmes are acceptable for adolescent parents and responsive to their experiences, needs and concerns, especially in relation to differentiated approaches for younger parents (10–14 years old) as compared to older parents (15–19 years old) as well as adolescents who are tasked with caring for siblings or family members.
- Provide care for the caregiver, including interventions to reduce parental stress and support parents' well-being in diverse ways, with differentiated and adolescent-responsive support for adolescent caregivers.
- Uphold practices and behaviours that promote health, nutrition, responsive caregiving, safety and security, social-emotional well-being and learning.

²⁰ Branson N., Ardington C., Leibbrandt M. Health outcomes for children born to teen mothers in Cape Town, South Africa. *Econ Dev Cult Change*. 2015;63(3):589-616. doi:10.1086/679737.

²¹ Mollborn S., Dennis J.A. Explaining the Early Development and Health of Teen Mothers' Children. *Social Forum (Randolph N J)*. 2012;27(4):1010-1036. doi:10.1111/j.1573-7861.2012.01366; National Research Council (US) Panel on Adolescent Pregnancy and Childbearing.

²² Hofferth S.L., Hayes C.D., editors. *Risking the Future: Adolescent Sexuality, Pregnancy, and Childbearing, Volume II: Working Papers and Statistical Appendices*. Washington (DC): National Academies Press (US); 1987; CHAPTER 8, THE CHILDREN OF TEEN CHILDBEARERS, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK219236/>, accessed 21 March 2021.

²³ Wall-Wieler E., Lee J.B., Nickel N., Roos L.L. The multigenerational effects of adolescent motherhood on school readiness: A population-based retrospective cohort study. 2019; *PLoS ONE* 14(2): e0211284, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0211284>, accessed 21 March 2021.

Table 1. Accelerating results through parenting and family support to promote children’s development

Outcomes for children and families					
For children	Survive and thrive	Learning	Protection from violence and exploitation	Life in safe environments	Inclusive Social Protection
A key accelerator that can promote the achievement of results for children is the provision of quality parenting and family support.					
Recommended accelerator:	Every parent/caregiver is supported to enable the child’s growth and development	Every parent/caregiver is supported to engage and support their children’s learning from early childhood into adolescence	Every parent/caregiver is supported to practice positive and nurturing parenting behaviours and interactions, reduce harsh treatment of children, practice self-care and stress management, and improve their parenting self-efficacy	Every parent/caregiver is supported to provide the child with a safe environment	Every parent/caregiver is supported to provide the child with an equitable chance in life
Illustrative examples for strengthening parenting support into ongoing interventions within each goal area and throughout the life course					
Early childhood development²⁴ (age 0–8 years)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Promote stimulation and responsive care for young children by parents and caregivers through multi-sectoral integrated services. Promote caregivers’ mental health and socio-emotional well-being. Ensure support and empower parents in the provision of early intervention services to children with disabilities through multi-disciplinary, family-centred packages of support. Ensure gender-responsive parenting through explicit articulation of gender socialization in service provision. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Include and enhance parental engagement in and through inclusive community-based child care and pre-schools. Establish and resource a recognized early childhood education subsector with enhanced education systems and quality of early learning services. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Support parents in understanding children’s development. Promote the provision of nurturing care to end violence against children. Promote gender-responsive and positive parenting and playful interactions. Equip parents to support children with knowledge and skills that will help them protect themselves online and offline. Promote the mental health and socio-emotional well-being of caregivers. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Empower parents to promote improved hygiene practices and sanitation for young children in their homes. Scale up ECD programmes that promote social cohesion among parents of diverse communities. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Support parents in covering their needs and caring for their children through social protection platforms. Ensure the implementation of family-friendly policies. Strengthen financial literacy for parents, especially for women’s empowerment.

- Promote behaviours for caring for the adolescent child with love, warmth and affection.²⁵
- Enhance respectful communication skills and the ability to decipher information to protect children online and offline.

²⁴ UNICEF, *Early Childhood Development in the UNICEF Strategic Plan 2018–2021*, UNICEF, New York, 2018, [https://unicef.sharepoint.com/teams/PD/ECD/Document%20Library/Early%20Childhood%20Development%20in%20the%20UNICEF%20SP%20\(2018-2021\).pdf](https://unicef.sharepoint.com/teams/PD/ECD/Document%20Library/Early%20Childhood%20Development%20in%20the%20UNICEF%20SP%20(2018-2021).pdf), accessed 26 March 2021.

²⁵ Such behaviours are associated with a number of positive outcomes for adolescents, including higher levels of pro-social behaviour, positive adolescent mental health, good parent-child communication, fewer psychological and behaviour problems, academic competence, reduced risk of pregnancy, less alcohol use, higher social support and proactive, problem-focused coping styles.

Table 1. Accelerating results through parenting and family support to promote children's development (*continued*)

Outcomes for children and families					
For children	Survive and thrive	Learning	Protection from violence and exploitation	Life in safe environments	Inclusive Social Protection
Middle childhood (age 6–10)	1) Support parents in nurturing and stimulating their child's development by promoting self-esteem, social and emotional well-being, gender-equitable norms/identities, self-confidence and more independence as the child starts school.	1) Enhance parental engagement by improving education systems. 2) Build parents' skills to spend time with children through active play, games, talking together and sharing household tasks together.	1) Build parents' capacity to support children's learning to interact with other children. 2) Promote positive parenting and responsive caregiving, including playful interactions, talking about consequences of actions, encouraging fair play and building problem-solving skills.	1) Empower parents to promote improved hygiene practices and sanitation.	1) Promote positive social norms and legal and policy environments to support parents, improve their capacity and skills, and create platforms for children's participation. 2) Promote gender-responsive and disability-inclusive policies and plans to support parents.
Adolescence²⁶ (age 10–18 years)	1) Promote adolescent-responsive programmes for health, nurturing and mental health, including programmes for the prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS for adolescent girls and boys. 2) Provide targeted support to adolescent caregivers/parents that will promote their mental health and emotional well-being and increase their capacity to provide nurturing care to their young children.	1) Promote parenting skills for engaging and communicating with adolescents and improving their learning outcomes. 2) Increase access to education, build skills for learning, and support families with transferable skills for adolescent employability and the exercise of citizenship responsibilities.	1) Support parents in maintaining quality time; modelling respectful behaviours; talking about sensitive issues; applying non-judgemental, positive approaches; agreeing on age-appropriate boundaries; building skills for non-violent communication; and increasing their children's role in decision-making.	1) Promote improved sanitation and hygiene for adolescents, addressing social norms for dignified and accessible menstrual health and hygiene. 2) Empower parents to support their children's emotional and social well-being, including access to mental health services and self-harm prevention.	1) Build supportive social and gender norms and legal and policy environments, parents' capacity and skills, and platforms for adolescent participation.

- Support parents in using effective non-violent discipline and responsive caregiving strategies tailored to children's/adolescents' evolving capacity and based on an understanding of adolescents' ability to self-regulate; protect themselves from potential harm; enhance their cognitive, socio-emotional and executive functioning skills; and reinforce positive behavioural patterns.
- Enhance parental actions for protecting adolescents, including restricting access to alcohol, tobacco, illicit substances and firearms; monitoring screen time and engaging with

adolescents about their online safety; and respectfully monitoring adolescents' activities outside the household.

- Improve parental knowledge and awareness of services that will increase their families' access to basic needs, including material needs, such as shelter and food; and will facilitate access to a range of other essential requirements, such as continued education, access to health care, emotional supports, protection and children's right to freely express their views on all matters that affect them.

²⁶ UNICEF, *UNICEF Programme Guidance for the Second Decade: Programming with and for adolescents*, UNICEF, New York, 2018, <https://www.unicef.org/media/57336/file>, accessed 26 March 2021.

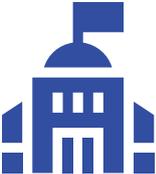
- Develop knowledge of adolescent development (as this affects how parents perceive their adolescent children and guides their interactions with them to be supportive of their development).
- Support parental involvement in their children's emotional and social well-being and parental knowledge of where to seek help and support for any emerging mental health needs, particularly around self-harm prevention.
- Enhance parents' and children's involvement in the development and implementation of policies and plans.
- Equip parents/caregivers with parental education and holistic, inclusive, accurate and practical information on gender and sexual identities, as well as sexual and reproductive health, while protecting their children's agency and promoting positive gender portrayals and behaviours.



4. THE 'HOW': KEY APPROACHES AND ENTRY POINTS TO REACH PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

To achieve results for children and adolescents, UNICEF efforts are conducted at multiple levels of influence and linked with high-quality programmes delivered at scale. They are based in evidence and make use of innovation; they are implemented in partnership with governments, other United Nations organizations, civil society, the private sector, academia, communities and children.

Given UNICEF's comparative advantages and the identified needs of parents and children, UNICEF focuses on the key approaches described below. These approaches are complementary; more than one approach may need to be adopted simultaneously, depending on the context. It is critical to promote a variety of parenting interventions that combine **universal** and **more targeted programmes** to meet the needs of diverse populations and specific vulnerable groups.

Main approaches	Key components	Illustrative examples of entry points and actions
<p>Approach 1 Strengthening enabling environments</p> 	<p>Social, political, budgetary, normative and institutional determinants necessary to achieve results.</p> <p>It is critical to understand evolving cultural contexts, including the economic drivers and socio-political contextual factors that influence parenting uptake and delivery at scale (e.g., access to food, shelter and safety). Providing parents with essential time, financial resources, emotional supports and services to care for their children is also critical.</p> <p>Relevant laws and policies benefiting parents and children should address their needs throughout the life course (e.g., allowing for the payment of universal child benefits that extend to adolescent years; supporting gender equality; targeted social protection interventions for families of children with disabilities; supporting the right to health; affordable, accessible, quality child care; protecting adolescents from child marriage; and outlining mental health service provisions for adolescent mothers during the perinatal period, in response to needs identified by them.</p> <p>Additionally, programmes are enhanced through the use of strong data, research and evidence. For example: (1) new evidence is generated in emerging areas (e.g., parenting of adolescents, during global emergencies etc.); (2) existing evidence is consolidated from multiple sectors to provide a coherent base and ‘build back better’ after an emergency; (3) ongoing interventions are evaluated to highlight lessons and gaps.</p>	<p>Government: Evaluations of existing parenting services are commissioned, and evaluation results are utilized for scale-up with the support of relevant ministries.</p> <p>Cross-sectoral data dashboards on parenting are developed with National Statistical Commissions.</p> <p>Family-friendly policies are implemented, engaging multiple sectors around parental needs throughout the life course.</p> <p>Financing for parenting programmes is included in national and subnational budgets.</p> <p>Government plans include explicit support for parenting.</p> <p>Business/government collaborations: Parenting support and a package of family-friendly policies for the workplace are in place through high-level advocacy to governments and the private sector.</p> <p>Community: Parents are included as key stakeholders in national situation analyses.</p>
<p>Approach 2 Supporting strengthened workforce capacities and integrated services</p> 	<p>Building skills of front-line health, nutrition, education, social services workers and child-care providers to support parents and strengthen systems. Front-line workers include informal workers, para-professionals and those working in government and businesses. Skills building can also be achieved through certification systems and the development of training packages.</p>	<p>Government: Parenting support is prioritized and included in the implementation of new and ‘reimagined’ learning opportunities, from early childhood to adolescence.</p> <p>Support for parents of children with disabilities is prioritized in front-line worker training and capacity building.</p> <p>Parenting support is included in systems strengthening across implementation plans and budgets of relevant sectors.</p> <p>Parent education is recognized, resourced and accredited; professional career pathways in ECD and parenting support are prioritized; adolescent caregivers have opportunities to stay in school or return to school, and these opportunities are assured and prioritized.</p> <p>Pre-service and in-service capacity building of health, nutrition, education and social service workers explicitly includes content on parenting.</p> <p>Business/government collaborations: Informal workers, para-professionals and administrative staff are mentored and skilled in parenting support.</p> <p>School management committees include parents of children from pre-school through adolescence.</p> <p>Workforce in key sectors is trained to identify needs and provide integrated parenting support.</p> <p>Effective referral systems across sectors are established.</p> <p>Community: Peer-to-peer parenting networks are enhanced through relevant ministries and civil society organizations.</p>

Main approaches	Key components	Illustrative examples of entry points and actions
<p>Approach 3 Raising levels of awareness</p> 	<p>Bolstering innovative outreach and social media through targeted campaigns and special events.</p> <p>Community engagement platforms such as UNICEF's Parenting Hub can serve as repositories of resources, tools and tips. A 'go-to' location for parenting, the UNICEF hub offers curated, evidence-based contents, gathered from credible experts and sources and put through a rigorous process of validation, and presents them in ways that can be easily understood by its intended audience of front-line workers and parents. This site is fast-emerging as the world's leading, most authoritative parenting site.</p> <p>Aligning and integrating learnings from low-resource platforms will be essential in reaching all parents and their children. Such platforms include the Internet of Good Things (IoGT), innovative parenting applications for mobile phones, and radio and TV programmes.</p>	<p>Government: Government and relevant ministries support the scale-up of evidence-based messages to protect and support the health and well-being of parents and their children and to ensure that they can access resources and services.</p> <p>Business/government collaborations: Existing parenting portals (e.g., on early childhood and adolescent development) are enhanced to address parenting throughout the life course, engage parents through the use of interactive platforms and provide experiential knowledge and resources for parents.</p> <p>The IoGT is expanded and enhanced. Currently it provides easily accessible material in multiple languages and is used especially in low-resource settings.</p> <p>Parenting messages are shared via radio and TV modalities in low-resource and remote contexts where digital access may be limited; messages are adapted and made 'adolescent-friendly' when targeting adolescent caregivers.</p> <p>RapidPro, an open-source, mobile-services product, is enhanced to reach parents and front-line workers with amplified programming. RapidPro currently provides countries with an accessible platform for real-time monitoring of parenting programmes.</p> <p>Community: Community health workers and social service workers help disseminate information from credible sources to parents in the community. Hotlines and further resources, including adolescent-responsive resources, are provided for additional targeted support.</p>
<p>Approach 4 Promoting gender norms and socialization</p> 	<p>Supporting parents and caregivers, front-line workers and girls and boys throughout the life course with resources and opportunities to address discriminatory gender dynamics within households and to create positive, nurturing households that are gender responsive. Such support includes building awareness and skills of parents and caregivers and training of front-line workers.</p> <p>Encouraging male caregiving through community engagement and C4D strategies; and ending gender-based violence and physical discipline to create nurturing household environments.</p> <p>Strengthening engagement with governments and the private sector to influence parental policies, social protection programmes, service delivery systems, positive gender norms, and workplace policies that are gender responsive and family friendly.</p>	<p>Government: National parenting programmes include specific content developed with the ministry of gender or women; programmes are inclusive of adolescent caregivers.</p> <p>Business/government collaborations: Parenting interventions incorporate resources on male caregiving and considerations for all genders and diverse family configurations.</p> <p>Parenting programmes and policies promote shared caregiving.</p> <p>Front-line worker training modules on Gender Socialization and Gender Dynamics in Families and Engaging Fathers are systematically utilized in programmes.</p> <p>Community: Community engagement and C4D strategies support behaviour change towards ending gender-based violence and physical discipline, in turn creating nurturing household environments as a social norm.</p>

Main approaches	Key components	Illustrative examples of entry points and actions
<p>Approach 5 Empowering children, parents and communities and encouraging participation</p> 	<p>Promoting the safe and meaningful participation of children and adolescents within their families and communities, according to their evolving capacities; enhancing agency and social and behavioural change through parent engagement and disability-inclusive and gender-transformative approaches.</p> <p>Building stronger relations between parents/caregivers and parenting networks and key youth networks, peer-to-peer parent networks, school clubs and other platforms and organizations to promote conversation, messaging, knowledge exchange and collaboration around positive parenting of children and adolescents.</p> <p>Engaging parents and making them aware of available parenting support interventions, which will help shift social and cultural norms that can influence individual and collective behaviours related to parents' uptake of interventions and continued engagement (e.g., 'caring for caregivers' through support for their own physical, emotional and mental health and well-being; promoting gender equality in child protection, mental health, social cohesion, caregiving, etc.)</p>	<p>Government: National parenting programmes that ensure support for caregivers' mental health and well-being are promoted through community platforms, health platforms and referrals to support services.</p> <p>Guidance is developed from a well-being perspective, including guidance on the parenting of adolescents and guidance to enhance the well-being of caregivers of young children.</p> <p>Business/government collaborations: Participatory methods are encouraged in creating and implementing parenting programmes and policies to ensure the well-being of staff and their children.</p> <p>Community: Parents are empowered to support their children's mental health and well-being and know when to seek help.</p>

5. BUILDING PARENTING PROGRAMMES TO REACH PARENTS

A NINE-STEP GUIDE TO DESIGNING AND IMPLEMENTING A PARENTING SUPPORT PROGRAMME

Parenting support needs to be elevated through health, nutrition, child protection and education platforms and systems. The following nine steps should be implemented through strategic, multi-sectoral engagements with governments. (These steps do not necessarily need to be acted upon sequentially; at times they may need to be managed simultaneously.)

1. Conduct a needs assessment.

Needs assessments identify the need for the parenting intervention or programme, the population for whom the intervention is needed, and gaps the intervention can be designed to address. Needs assessments can involve a desk review, a mapping of existing sectoral interventions that directly or indirectly support parenting interventions, and formative research on the factors that shape parenting practices. In conducting a needs assessment, it is essential to explore the social and gender norms that underly parenting practices. Findings should be presented and validated with key partners.

Proposed sources of data and reporting

Government: Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS)

Business/government collaborations: Ministry of labour, chambers of commerce, employers

Community: Shadow reports, community consultation reports, etc., developed with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs)

2. Identify the programme's target population(s).

The starting point for any parenting programme is identifying its target population, which can be defined based on the age of children parented, the subpopulation of parents in need of a targeted intervention, the sectors involved in reaching parents, etc. Key partners representing a diverse set of actors, including parenting groups, should be engaged as stakeholders in agreeing on the target population and main features of the parenting programme. Within the UNICEF country office, teams should agree upon a framework and a distribution of responsibilities and accountabilities for results within the programme cycle.

3. Build coalitions that will join in advocacy for an enabling environment.

The goal of advocacy is to ensure a policy and regulatory environment that enables nurturing parenting practices. It entails coordination with key partners and stakeholders to secure adequate financing and ensure systematic implementation; integration with appropriate, broad-based, national services to facilitate sustained programme delivery at scale; and legal and policy provisions that define parenting support as a priority area, state specific goals and provide strategic plans for action.

4. Agree on delivery platforms.

Agreement is informed by the initial needs assessment; the identified target population; programme frequency, intensity and duration; and expected programme outcomes focused on parents and children. Programme outcomes are underpinned by a strong theory of change. Key partners agreeing on delivery platforms will take into consideration a number of other factors, including organizational and national/subnational/local commitments, the capacity of the delivery platform to 'absorb' the parenting intervention, workforce capacity and workload, and political will and leadership.

5. Identify the 'parenting workforce'

Entails determining who will deliver the parenting intervention, provide supervision and coaching support, and ensure that workforce members have positive attitudes towards gender equity and violence prevention.

6. Enhance demand generation,

So that parents/caregivers know that services exist and where and how to access them; and they have the capacity, ability and motivation to access the services.

7. Pilot, adapt and implement,

Ensuring that the selected intervention has strong evidence for effectiveness and is piloted. The final implementation strategy should consider the programme staffing model (staff roles and responsibilities, including responsibility for training; facilitator recruitment; facilitator-to-participant ratio), ongoing training, programme quality assurance, and demand generation.

8. Ensure monitoring and evaluation

As part of the programme 'culture'; systematically use data for reflection, learning and programme improvement through continuous quality control and performance management.

Proposed sources of data and reporting

Strategic monitoring questions (SMQs), rapid assessment module (RAM), country programme documents (CPDs), country office annual reports, situation analyses, etc.

9. Develop detailed plans for taking parenting programmes to scale.

'Scale' can mean universal coverage in the context of mass information, or the programme can be targeted to a specific group of parents selected on the basis of demographic and/or economic need. Taking programmes to scale involves consideration of the coalitions or partnerships that can ensure that policy, programme and resources are in place. It can take sustainable leadership, human and financial resources to enable ongoing capacity development of the workforce, and will require monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, including mechanisms for monitoring changes in social norms that may occur when the programme is taken to scale.

6. THROUGH WHAT PLATFORMS?

Integrating parenting interventions into existing service delivery platforms offers advantages for scalability and sustainability by building on pre-existing networks and staff capacities. Those involved in programme design should consider pre-existing capacities so that service providers do not become overburdened when interventions are scaled up.

Delivery platforms are the channels and modes by which services can be delivered to the population through priority interventions.²⁷ Services are commonly provided at such facilities as clinics, health posts, health centres, hospitals, schools, places of worship, town halls, etc., but services can also be provided by outlets for goods (such as pharmacies, informal drug outlets and mobile drug peddlers) and other entities (such as mobile teams, community health workers, volunteers and vaccination campaign teams), or by target populations themselves. These various delivery platforms can strengthen the systems they are part of and further engage communities by fostering dialogue; and they can support processes for social transformation by helping to shape values and norms within communities.

Delivery platforms can aid in the delivery of information, as well as services, so region and country teams must assess the communication context and identify the relevant existing and potential communication platforms that can be leveraged to influence and facilitate change, taking into account any barriers. For adolescent caregivers, it is important to ensure that delivery platforms are responsive to adolescents and appropriate for them, because their needs are different than those of older caregivers.

The choice of delivery platform will be informed by factors such as organizational commitment and capacity; the setting in which the intervention will be delivered (e.g., health centre, school, place of worship); how often this setting is visited by parents; and whether it caters to parents' needs (e.g., for privacy, flexibility around work schedules), among other factors.

However, the challenge in many countries is that parenting is not a 'sector'; entry points are not always clear. The table below summarizes some potential entry points and/or platforms/organizations with opportunities for engagement, through which the importance of parenting support can be elevated.

²⁷ Van Damme, W., et al., *How Can Disease Control Program Contribute to Health System Strengthening in Sub-Saharan Africa: A concept note for engaging in the global debates on health systems strengthening*, Health, Nutrition and Population (HNP) discussion paper, World Bank, Washington, D.C., 2010, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/13611>, accessed 26 March 2021.

Business platforms and aggregators	Government platforms	Digital/media-based platforms	Service-based platforms	Community-based platforms
Business associations, chambers of commerce, employee associations, trade unions, companies and their supply chains	Recognized unions, committees, subnational and local government groups, local government mechanisms	Mass media; social media; SMS tools; community media; remote delivery channels such as radio, television and hotlines	Home-visiting programmes, schools, health centres, youth centres, child-care centres, cash+ and emergency preparedness platforms	Community organizations and networks (e.g. faith-based organizations, women's groups, self-help groups, organizations of persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples' groups), community engagement mechanisms

7. UNICEF'S COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGES

UNICEF can leverage its comparative advantages in the parenting space. UNICEF's comparative advantages include its country presence, multi-sectoral approach, and child and human rights-based approach.

Country presence, partnerships and credibility. UNICEF has a presence in 190 countries and territories in both humanitarian and development contexts. UNICEF has partnerships with ministries of education, health and allied ministries, as well as cooperation agreements with dozens of NGOs and CSOs. UNICEF partners with donors, philanthropies, businesses and millions of individual supporters through its 33 national committees. Around the world, UNICEF has collaborations with youth networks that are already mobilizing large numbers of children and adolescents to support their peers and communities.

Multi-sectoral approach. UNICEF's multi-sectoral approach brings together programme sections to promote inter-agency and cross-sectoral collaboration, to ensure alignment of messaging, and to develop and disseminate practical tools and resources that will enhance programming and integrated services in the field.

Child and human rights-based approach. UNICEF takes a child and human rights-based approach in parenting support that is anchored in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)²⁸ and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Together, these instruments uphold the rights of every child to survive and thrive and help ensure that children are seen as human beings and individuals with their own rights.

²⁸ From the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: "States Parties shall ensure that children with disabilities have equal rights with respect to family life. With a view to realizing these rights, and to prevent concealment, abandonment, neglect and segregation of children with disabilities, States Parties shall undertake to provide early and comprehensive information, services and support to children with disabilities and their families" (article 23.3).

UNICEF's work is framed by article 5 of the CRC, which stipulates that States parties shall respect the responsibilities, rights and duties of parents or, where applicable, the members of the extended family or community; and article 18 of the CRC, which reaffirms that parents, as duty bearers, have a primary responsibility for the development and well-being of their children, and as rights holders, parents also have the right to receive support

from the state to help fulfill their child-rearing responsibilities. Parenting support programming is also based on international human rights standards and principles, and operationally is directed at promoting and protecting child and human rights. This in turn supports 'leave no one behind' and enables this principle to be realized when programmes reach the most marginalized children, parents and caregivers.

8 ■ CAPACITY AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

It is recommended that at country and regional levels across the organization, UNICEF staff from cross-sectoral areas of work form **matrix teams** to oversee parenting programmes. These teams will promote coordinated multi-sectoral strategies and facilitate the holistic development of all children through the first and second decades.

Programme Division will build upon and support community-based platforms to create spaces for cross-sectoral coordination and exchange of information on how to effectively implement and support global, regional and country parenting programmes. A global knowledge management communication site will feature and share resources, country examples of parenting programmes, and parenting measurements and metrics. Programmes can also support in leveraging inter-agency and cross-sectoral collaboration; aligning messaging for use in guidance, tools and strategies; establishing standards of measurement; and developing contents regarding parenting support that reflect the latest evidence. In support of this work, a roster of parenting specialists (including consultants, researchers, academics, etc.) can be developed at global and regional levels to elevate parenting support within existing UNICEF programmes.

Partnerships and engagement. UNICEF's inter-agency work through existing collaborations with United Nations and international organizations [e.g., the International Labour Organization (ILO), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), UN Women, the World Bank and World Health Organization (WHO)], civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations and academia; and through existing platforms [such as the Early Childhood Development Action Network (ECDAN); the Inter-Agency Standing Committee; the Moving Minds Alliance; the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health; UNICEF's annual conference with "Leading Minds" (experts) etc.] is critical to elevate, scale and jointly strengthen parenting support. Additionally, the Global Interfaith Initiative and UNICEF partnerships with inter-religious councils at national and subnational levels provide a strategic platform for parenting education and support through home visiting, group dialogue, faith media and the mobilization of women-of-faith networks.

UNICEF partners with governments in more than 190 countries and territories in both humanitarian and development contexts to address policies and budget gaps so that children can grow up protected, healthy and educated. The systematic inclusion of parenting within government policies, plans and budget allocations for monitoring and evaluation is key to ensuring that parenting support is truly embedded in sectoral actions. UNICEF partnerships with governments are critical in providing parents and families with the time, resources and services that they need to promote their children's optimal development. Family-friendly policies that create enabling environments for good parenting are important pathways to the acceleration of results for children and adolescents. Innovative, public financing to strengthen and support parents is a necessary backbone for programmes.

The private sector has much influence on children and families and can play an important role in achieving results for children. Enhanced collaboration with the private sector can address

the business impact of programmes and maximize the power, reach and influence of partnerships to support and strengthening parenting. Businesses can be engaged to uphold private-sector accountability for protecting and respecting human rights, including the human rights of children, through the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (and child rights and business principles).²⁹ Influencing business practices through policy advocacy, and engaging with businesses and business influencers such as trade associations, the financial sector and other private-sector institutions, can help strengthen the parenting agenda.

UNICEF should seek to integrate business engagement in its programming, whereby businesses serve as agents of change, influencers and champions of the parenting agenda. Businesses are duty-bearers providing time, resources and services for working parents, so a focus on family-friendly policies can help accelerate results for low-resource contexts and the informal sector.³⁰ Involving businesses in advocacy, collaboration with government and outreach, including through the engagement of UNICEF national committees, can lead to stronger government regulation and industry standards. That in turn can result in better policies and enabling environments in the workplace and supply chains, which are good for children, families, businesses and societies.

Communications, advocacy and engagement.

UNICEF has a strong global presence through its websites and social media; these are ideal platforms for parenting communication, advocacy and engagement strategies that adapt to digital evolutions and the needs of remote or isolated populations. Advocacy strategies can be implemented at global or local level (through national and subnational engagements). The intention is to combat disinformation; bolster parents' knowledge with sound, evidence-based information; and share experiences, thus winning the support of parents and engaging them as partners in their children's development.

²⁹ United Nations and United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights*, United Nations, Geneva, 2011, www.ohchr.org/documents/publications/guidingprinciplesbusinessshr_en.pdf, accessed 26 March 2021.

³⁰ UNICEF defines family-friendly policies as those that "positively impact (a) workers' abilities to reconcile work and family responsibilities; as well as advance (b) the well-being and development of their children". See United Nations Children's Fund, *Family-Friendly Policies: Redesigning the workplace of the future*, Policy brief, UNICEF, New York, 2019, www.unicef.org/documents/family-friendly-policies-redesigning-workplace-future, accessed 26 March 2021.

For example, UNICEF has developed assets for an online **Parenting Hub** (unicef.org/parenting) that has been activated by 144 countries. Increasingly during the COVID-19 pandemic, parents have turned to this hub for reliable and timely parenting advice. From April 2019 to June 2020, traffic to UNICEF global web platforms – including the parent hub – increased by 167 per cent. According to Google search data, the parent hub is one of the top search results for the term ‘parent and COVID-19’.

UNICEF can respond to parenting needs across the life course for a range of topics to build parents’ awareness and provide access to shared experiences, tools and resources and up-to-date facts and information, including the latest information on the coronavirus.

Particular attention should to be given to parents and families who are isolated and may not seek

support, may lack digital connectivity, don’t trust in digital sources or may be digitally illiterate. These communities can be engaged through trusted community members and actors offering parenting advice (e.g., community outreach workers, community health workers, community leaders, peer-to-peer parent mentors) and with the support of hybrid modalities, including radio/television and in-person communication, when possible. Such modalities will help ensure the dissemination of critical information and messages and facilitate access to parenting platforms as part of an equity-driven approach for every parent. The Internet of Good Things (IoGT), which offers internet connectivity via mobile phones without data charges, provides a platform for bridging the digital divide. This global good can increase access to information for parents in low-resource contexts. Through such channels, UNICEF can increase the reach and number of parents involved in participatory parenting actions.





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