

# CARE FOR CHILD DEVELOPMENT

## Improving the Care of Young Children

Around 250 million children—or 43 percent—of all children under the age of five in low and middle income countries are at higher risk of not reaching their developmental potential. As a result, too many children are denied their right to be physically healthy, mentally alert, emotionally secure, socially competent and able to learn to the fullest, while their countries have an estimated 25 per cent loss in adult productivity. Health, early childhood development, education, and community workers have an important role in promoting the development of young children, by assisting parents and other caregivers.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Black MM, Walker SP, Fernald LCH, et al. Early childhood coming of age. Science through the life-course. Lancet 2016; published online Oct 4. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(16\)31389-7](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(16)31389-7)

**For every child | a good start | lasts a lifetime | builds our society**



© UNICEF/UNI139064/Markisz

## EVERY CHILD

What happens during the early years is of crucial importance for every child's development. It is a period of great opportunity, but also of vulnerability to negative influences.

Many children do not reach their full human potential because they live in very poor families in developing countries. They do not receive adequate nutrition, care and early opportunities to learn. Some will be born with a disabling health condition or impairment while others may experience a disability as a result of illness, injury or poor nutrition, and will face challenges from a variety of physical and social exclusions. Others live in situations of violence, conflict or natural disasters. These children and their families can be helped. It is their right to develop as well as to survive.

## GOOD START

Good nutrition and health, consistent loving care, encouragement to learn and a safe and stimulating environment in the early years of life help children develop and prepare for school, learn more, be healthier, have higher earnings and participate more fully in society. This is especially important for children in poverty.

## LASTS A LIFETIME

A good foundation in the early years makes a difference for learning, health, and well-being through adulthood, and even gives the next generation a better start.



## BUILDS OUR SOCIETY

Educated and healthy people participate in, and contribute to, the social and financial wealth of their societies.

The World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), together with a wide range of partners, have developed a package of materials entitled **Care for Child Development (CCD)** to support families in promoting the development of young children – through health and early child development (ECD) services, health and education workers, community providers and others working with families and young children.

Improving care for young children is fundamental to achieving **Education for All and Sustainable Development Goals**. A 2007 series on Early Child Development in the Lancet estimated that more than 200 million children in the developing world, over one third of all children, do not fulfill their potential. The major reasons for their disadvantage are poor nutrition and few early opportunities to learn, which occurs in families facing poverty. The WHO's **Commission on the Social Determinants of Health** recognizes the importance of early childhood development to equity, adult health, wellbeing and productivity. The **Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2007** advocates that better care in early childhood improves performance in primary school. The World Bank's poverty reduction strategies begin with early childhood development. The United Nations Secretary-General's **Study on Violence against Children** found that young children bear the brunt of parental violence. It identified the importance of improved care for young children in the overall reduction of violence. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) highlight how children with disabilities have the same rights as other children – to health care, nutrition, education, social inclusion and protection from violence.

There is consistent and strong evidence which shows that:

- Brain development is most rapid in the early years of life. When the quality of stimulation, support and nurturance is deficient, child development is seriously affected.
- The effects of early disadvantage on children can be reduced. Early interventions for disadvantaged children lead to improvements in children's survival, health, growth, and cognitive and social development.
- Children who receive assistance in their early years achieve more success at school. As adults they have higher employment and earnings, better health, and lower levels of welfare dependence and crime rates than those who don't have these early opportunities.
- Efforts to improve early child development are an investment, not a cost. Available cost-benefit ratios of early intervention indicate that for every dollar spent on improving early child development, returns can be on average 4 to 5 times the amount invested, and in some cases, much higher.



© UNICEF/UN034627/LeMoyné

## The health system has a unique opportunity

The importance of children's early years has been recognized for a long time. Many actors play an important part in improving the care of young children.

In most LAC countries, the health care system reaches more young children under three years of age and their families than other services. Health services often have home-visiting services. In addition, nutrition and good health are essential to children's development, along with the provision of early learning opportunities. Health services and community activities for health must use their unique opportunities – in coordination with other ECD services – to strengthen families' efforts to promote children's development.

The United Nation's **Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)** calls for all countries to enable children to develop their full human potential and to support families in the process. The CRC advocates for children's rights to development in addition to survival. Thus, health-care, education, rehabilitation, and child protection systems must all aim for better growth and development among all children.

## Care for Child Development

The Care for Development intervention is based on the best available evidence of child development. It incorporates the most recent evidence on the identification of critical caregiver skills affecting the child's healthy growth and development (sensitivity and responsiveness) and the research demonstrating that these important skills can be taught to mothers, fathers and other caregivers.

Caregivers and families are best placed to support children's growth and development by establishing a nurturing and trusting relationship, through daily activities and interactions. Families often need assistance to organize a safe and stimulating home environment and to focus on the most important activities for the development of young children – including play and communication. **Care for Child Development** can be used by a variety of health, ECD and community workers to provide age-appropriate guidance to caregivers of young children for stimulating physical (motor), cognitive, language and social-emotional development through play and communication.

This guidance material is designed to benefit those children and families who need it most. It has been shown to be effective in improving responsive care.

Implemented on a wide-scale, **Care for Child Development** will have significant public health, education and social benefits.

## The Care for Child Development package consists of:

- Simple recommendations health and other ECD workers can make to families to improve the development of children.
- Training materials for health workers, ECD staff, and community providers.
- Support for families to provide a safe and stimulating environment and solve common problems in providing good care for young children.
- Advocacy materials.
- A monitoring and evaluation framework.

Pan American Health Organization  
(PAHO/WHO)

Regional Office for the Americas of the  
World Health Organization  
525 Twenty-third Street, N.W.,  
Washington, D.C. 20037  
United States of America  
Tel.: +1 (202) 974-3000  
Fax: +1 (202) 974-3663

UNICEF  
Latin America and Caribbean Regional  
Office

Bldg. 102, Alberto Tejada St.  
City of Knowledge  
Panama, Republic of Panama  
P.O. Box: 0843-03045  
Tel : +507 301 7400

[www.unicef.org/lac](http://www.unicef.org/lac)  
Twitter: @uniceflac  
Facebook: /uniceflac