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Programming Guidance

Parenting of Adolescents

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Acknowledgements

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Executive Summary

Parents play an essential role in influencing how adolescents interact with the complex, interlinked factors that shape their development. Not only do positive parental relationships enhance developmental outcomes for adolescents, effective parenting can also alleviate the impact of negative external factors. In addition, the influence of parenting practices can extend across generations. Building on parents' existing strengths and equipping them to provide support to their adolescent children through parenting programming has the potential to have a profound positive influence on adolescent development.

The aim of this document is to guide efforts to strengthen evidence-based programming for parenting of adolescents, in support of UNICEF's mandate to maximise adolescents' developmental potential. It is targeted at practitioners and stakeholders working on responses to support parenting and caregiving of adolescents.

Parenting programmes of adolescents share features with parenting programmes of younger children, and should consolidate and magnify positive benefits from earlier investments. As children mature into adolescence, the parenting relationship evolves, and parents require new developmentally-appropriate skills and strategies to meet their children's needs. Parenting programmes of adolescents are designed to respond to these needs, and the specific priorities and preferences of adolescents and their parents.

A **comprehensive review of the existing evidence base** underpins the **recommended key considerations** and **core content areas** for programmes described in this document. In terms of key considerations, parenting programmes of adolescents should:

- ▶ Use a strengths-based approach that recognises parents' existing skills and experience, and in turn supports them to nurture the strengths of their adolescents
- ▶ Promote gender-equitable norms and reduce exposure to gender-specific risks
- ▶ Promote the safe and meaningful participation of adolescents within their families and communities, according to their evolving capacities
- ▶ Be inclusive of all parents, including the most marginalised, to meet the needs of their adolescent children
- ▶ Rely on the sizeable existing knowledge base on parenting of adolescents

Evidence-based programmes for the parenting of adolescents also share a number of **core content areas**, depending on programme aims and target audience. These include content 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, to enable them to meet their adolescent children's needs more effectively
- ▶ Develop parents' skills to communicate respectfully with adolescents in a manner that respects their evolving capacities
- ▶ Support parents to employ positive, non-violent discipline techniques that rely on communicating expectations and setting parameters around adolescents' behaviour
- ▶ Empower parents to create safe environments, by reducing exposure to risks, and to assisting their adolescent children to access support services
- ▶ Support parents to provide for adolescents' basic needs, such as through the inclusion of parenting programmes in social protection schemes supporting families living in poverty, whilst taking account of adolescents' growing decision-making roles in the household
- ▶ Protect and promote parental mental health and link them with further care as required

This guidance also outlines how to plan for **scale-up and sustainability**, from the initial stages of development to ensure extended reach and lasting impact. It describes how to develop **strong monitoring and evaluation systems**, which are essential to support and inform programme implementation. Finally, **additional resources to support programmers** are provided in Annex 1, which sets out specific activities required to design, deliver and evaluate parenting programmes of adolescents and plan for future scale up, following a nine-step process.

Introduction



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Adolescence (10-19 years of age) is a significant stage marking the transition from childhood to adulthood, which offers a critical second window of opportunity, after infancy, to promote positive development.⁴ During this period, positive environments and relationships can enhance developmental outcomes, while the impact of negative experiences can be intensified and have long-lasting influence into adult life.⁴

There is growing recognition of the critical role of engaging parents and caregivers as key partners to nurture and support healthy adolescent development, including in contexts where families face challenges and adversity.⁵ As adolescents mature, their relationships with their parents shift and adapt to meet their age-specific needs. Throughout these changes, even as adolescents' independence increases and their capacities evolve, parents retain important influence over critical aspects of development, such as identity, emotional well-being, and interpersonal relationships.⁶ This is of particular relevance in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, where adolescents may not be able to access the usual places they study, work and socialize, and may be spending more time with parents than in usual circumstances.

UNICEF is committed to ensuring that adolescents can meet their full developmental potential, contribute positively to their societies, and safely and healthily transition to adulthood.⁴ Specifically, there are four key areas of UNICEF's response to support adolescents' development:

- i. Maximizing physical mental and social well-being
- ii. Supporting adolescent learning and acquiring skills for learning, citizenship, employability and personal empowerment
- iii. Ensuring adolescents feel safe and supported
- iv. Providing opportunities to civically engage in their communities

An individual's relationship with their parent/s is one of the most important relationships that they have. Developing parenting programme responses that support parents to recognise and nurture both their own and their adolescent children's strengths provides a powerful and underutilised opportunity to influence adolescent development.

What is the aim of this document?

The aim of this document is to guide efforts to strengthen evidence-based programming for parenting of adolescents, in support of UNICEF's mandate to maximise adolescents' developmental potential.

It consists of three sections:

- ▶ A description of the **role of parents in promoting healthy adolescent development**
- ▶ An evidence-based overview of **key considerations and core content for parenting** of adolescents programmes

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