

MEETING REPORT

Operationalizing Nurturing Care

World Health Organization, Geneva, Switzerland
31 July – 2 August 2017



*"If we change the beginning of the story,
we change the whole story"*

Raffi Cavoukian, The Beginning of Life

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Acknowledgements

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Abbreviations

ADD	Attention Deficit Disorder
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
ASHA	Accredited Social Health Activist
CCD	Care for Child Development
CHW	Community Health Worker
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECDAN	Early Childhood Development Action Network
EWEC	Every Mother Every Child
H6	The Global Health Partnership H6 (includes UNAIDS, UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women, WHO and the World Bank)
ICDS	Integrated Child Development Services
IMCI	Integrated Management of Childhood Illness
LMIC	Low and Middle-Income Countries
MIC	Middle Income Countries
NDD	Neurodevelopmental Disorders
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
PMNCH	The Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health
PST	Parenting Skills Training
RCT	Randomized Control Trials
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WASH	Water Sanitation and Hygiene
WHA	World Health Assembly
WHO	World Health Organization

Glossary

Early childhood development: Early child development (ECD) refers to the cognitive, physical, language, temperament, socio-emotional, and motor development of children from conception to 8 years of age.¹

Early years: The preschool period from pregnancy to age 8 years, with 4 stages: i) pregnancy and perinatal period; ii) 0 to 3 years of age; iii) 3 to 5 years of age (preschool-age), and iv) 6 to 8 years of age (transition to formal education).²

First 1000 days: From conception to 2 years (270 days of pregnancy +365 days +365 days) or 3 years of age, depending on the trajectory of an individual child's development.

Nurturing care: Nurturing care refers to a stable environment that is sensitive to children's health and nutritional needs, with protection from threats, opportunities for early learning, and interactions that are responsive, emotionally supportive, and developmentally stimulating. Nurturing care thus comprises health, nutrition, security and safety, responsive caregiving and early learning, and the indivisible role of these five elements.³

Parenting: Positive parenting incorporates anticipatory guidance for safety, education, development, and the establishment of a caring and understanding relationship with one's child. 'Parenting' is not limited to biological parents, but extends to guardians or caregivers providing consistent care for the child.⁴

Responsive caregiving: Responsive caregiving encompasses both sensitivity and responsiveness. Sensitivity is awareness of a newborn, infant or young child, including awareness of their acts and vocalizations as communicative signals to indicate needs and wants. Responsiveness is the capacity of caregivers to respond contingently and appropriately to these signals.⁵

Attachment: Attachment is a close emotional and physical relationship with at least one primary caregiver. Attachment develops early in life and provides children with the stability and security necessary to explore, handle stress, and form additional relationships.⁶

Socialization: Socialization refers to the process by which a baby becomes a social being. It involves induction into the values and demands of society, including the internalization of moral norms, acquiring a concept of the self in broadening social experiences, and increasing autonomy. It is influenced by cultural and social expectations, and religious beliefs.⁷

Stimulation: Stimulation is sensory information that engages a young child's attention and provides information through interactions with people and environmental variability; examples include talking, smiling, pointing, enabling, and demonstrating, with or without objects.⁸

Structure: Structure refers to the regulation of a young child's emotions, behaviours, exploration and safety through organization and modulation of environmental demands and stimulation. It is expressed in discipline, supervision, and protection of the child from harm.⁸

Play: Play is defined as being for its own sake (without a specific goal), voluntary, a special activity (out of the ordinary), enjoyed by participants, governed by rules (implicit or explicit) and imaginative. It can be solitary or social, and with or without objects. Young children acquire and consolidate developmental skills through playful interactions with people and objects.⁹

Care for Child Development: Care for Child Development is an intervention developed by WHO and UNICEF to support caregivers to build stronger relationships with young children by encouraging responsive caregiving through age-appropriate play and communication.¹⁰

1. Introduction

Rationale for the meeting

There is a growing recognition that protecting, promoting and supporting early childhood development (ECD) is essential for the transformation that the world seeks to achieve in the next 15 years, guided by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Never before has the political commitment to investing in ECD been as strongly articulated as it currently is. The inclusion of a specific target 4.2 to 'ensure that all girls and boys have access to good-quality early childhood development' in the SDG framework, its relevance to many of the other SDGs and in the 'Survive, Thrive, and Transform' objectives of the Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health provides the impetus to governments and all concerned stakeholders to act, with purpose and intensity.

The Lancet series *Advancing Early Childhood Development: from Science to Scale* (2016) brought together state-of-the-art evidence that illustrated that the time is right to strengthen programming for ECD. Between 2000 and 2014, the number of countries with national multi-sectoral ECD policies increased more than 11-fold covering 68 countries, mostly in South America, Africa and Asia. During the same period, there was a general increase in ECD actors, a 7-fold increase in related scientific publications, and an increase in funding for ECD.¹¹

Importantly, the series emphasized the concept of 'nurturing care' as a foundation for child development. Nurturing care refers to an indivisible cluster of interventions related to health, nutrition, responsive caregiving, safety and security, and early

The global community is responding to this unique convergence between scientific evidence and political commitment. In 2017, the high level advisory group to the UN Secretary General for the Every Woman Every Child (EWEC) movement identified ECD as one of six priority areas for future attention. In the same vein, the H6 partnership of UN agencies articulated ECD as a priority area for joint work. Commitments to ECD are reflected in the UNICEF child health strategy and the 2018- 2023 program of work of the World Health Organization. The World Bank has also declared the early years a priority.

Nevertheless, challenges are formidable as illustrated by the mere magnitude of 250 million children who are at risk of suboptimal development in low and middle-income countries due to two risk factors of extreme poverty and stunting alone. Coverage of effective interventions is still low and national policies do not necessarily translate into services that are equitably provided. Therefore, the question is no longer 'why' to invest in early childhood development but rather 'how' to implement policies, interventions and services at a scale commensurate with the challenge.

Meeting objectives and participants

WHO convened the technical meeting with the aim to review scientific and programmatic evidence of effective approaches to reach caregivers and children with a core package of interventions that support nurturing care. The meeting was a first step towards the development of implementation guidance for policy makers and programme

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