

3.4. Sick-child care and follow-up: managing childhood illness responsively

When a child is sick, managing the child's illness is the priority for service providers. It is also the priority for caregivers, and they need skills to do it well. Caregivers need to notice how the child feels, recognize signs of illness, and respond quickly when the child requires medical attention. Being responsive enables the caregiver to seek timely medical care, give a child medicine, and comfort the child in pain and discomfort. However, time is limited to help families improve their caregiving practices when the child is sick. Strengthening caregiver practices must be accomplished within the priority of learning how to care for the sick child.

Managing the sick child: treating the child in the outpatient clinic and preparing for home care

A sick child seen in a clinic who is not referred to hospital may need a caregiver at home to give effective treatment, provide responsive and supportive care and nurture the child to health. For example, caregivers should learn how to prepare and feed a child who refuses to eat. They need to know how to give the child medicine, and to troubleshoot

common problems if the child spits it out. The WHO and UNICEF *Integrated management of childhood illness protocols* (46) for managing the sick child in a first-level health facility and in the community stress that the caregiver needs to practise preparing and giving medication correctly. This is an opportunity to help the caregiver learn how to be aware of and respond to the difficulties the child may have.

Children with cognitive, physical or behavioural difficulties may have particular complications with eating and receiving the medical care they need. They may be lethargic, withdraw and reject physical touch. The provider can demonstrate to a caregiver how to draw the child's interest, activate swallowing and prevent choking and other problems.

In a follow-up visit, if the child has improved, there is more time to strengthen other caregiver practices. Some practices, including responsive play, can help the child catch up if there has been a delay of growth and development during the illness.

Caregivers may face additional challenges and stress to care for a sick child while having to manage work, household chores and take care of other children. They might require support.

Table 3.4.1 gives suggestions for what providers can do to strengthen caregiver practices and support caregiver well-being during outpatient sick-child visits.

Table 3.4.1. Supporting caregivers during outpatient sick-child care


COMPONENT OF NURTURING CARE	CAREGIVER PRACTICES	EXAMPLES OF WHAT SERVICE PROVIDERS CAN DO
<p>Responsive caregiving</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Look closely at your child. □ Be aware of the child's signals (e.g. hunger, discomfort, attempts to communicate, joy and attention). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Discuss How did you know your child was sick? How is your child acting differently today? You did well to notice that your child was sick and to bring your child to see me. Let's see what we can do together to help your child get better. □ Discuss Your child needs to eat well, even when he is sick. What difficulties are you having? What can you prepare that he might be interested in? You might need to offer food more often, in smaller bits. Follow his signals that he is ready to take another bite. Give advice on how to ensure a sick child continues to drink and eat. □ Discuss Continue frequent feeding when the child gets better so he will catch up his growth. Follow his signals that show you he is ready to eat. How does your child signal to you he is ready to eat? □ Observe a breastfeed to see if the child is feeding well (as recommended in <i>Integrated management of newborn and childhood illness</i>). If needed, assist the mother to position the child well for effective feeding. Encourage the mother to look closely, gently touch and talk softly to the child, and respond to the child's attempts to reach and touch her.

Table 3.4.1. Continued

COMPONENT OF NURTURING CARE	CAREGIVER PRACTICES	EXAMPLES OF WHAT SERVICE PROVIDERS CAN DO
<p>Responsive caregiving</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Respond appropriately and in a timely way to the signals and the child’s needs, which differ when the child is well or sick, or has special needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Demonstrate Responsively engage and talk to the child as you approach to examine or treat her, e.g. when you give the child an injection. Explain what you are doing. Encourage the caregiver to assist in engaging the child in a similar way. □ Counsel Coach the caregiver to practise some of the tasks for home care: take the child’s temperature or feel for fever, identify fast breathing or other signs of severe illness, and give the child the first dose of medicine if required. □ Observe If the child is fussing, observe how the caregiver calms the child. How do you calm your child? □ Discuss Your child will find it easier to calm down if you are calm also. Take a few deep breaths. Then, try holding your child close to you with your hand, still and firmly, on your child’s back until your child is calm.
<p>Opportunities for early learning</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Talk with your child. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Demonstrate Talk to the child softly, explaining as you go through the steps of the visit. Engage the child, rather than force the child’s response. For example, hold your hand out and ask the child to give you her hand. Tell the child that you will take her temperature. □ Discuss Even though the child is sick, he will learn if you talk to him about what is around you, what he is doing, or try to articulate how he might be feeling.
<p>Safety and security</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Make a safe environment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Discuss How do you store your medicines at home? Discuss how to keep medicines dry and safe, and away from children. □ Discuss Who will care for the sick child if you are unable to? Identify an adult who will stay with your child.
SUPPORTING CAREGIVER WELL-BEING		EXAMPLES OF WHAT SERVICE PROVIDERS CAN DO
<p>Supporting caregiver well-being</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Build caregivers’ capacity to care for themselves. □ Problem-solve and organize support from family members. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Discuss Caring for a child who is sick can be difficult and tiring. What can you do to relax, even for 10 minutes at a time? □ Ask What extra help do you need from your family, so you can spend more time with your child and care for yourself? Who could you ask for help? □ Ask What difficulty might you have in returning for a follow-up visit?

Inpatient paediatric care: maintaining the child's development in hospital

Children may spend long periods in hospital for treatment of severe illness, surgery and/or rehabilitation. Hospital practices are moving from policies for total rest to policies that encourage gentle activation of the child, appropriate to the child's condition. Movement and interaction contribute to a better appetite and healing, while their absence may contribute to delay in the child's development.

Stays in hospital are stressful for children and their caregivers, and hospitals should make every effort not to separate them. During hospitalization, the cognitive and social skills of children may deteriorate. When caregivers are present, they can address the decline by stretching limbs, talking to the child, and giving the child items to touch, grab, stack or bang; naming people, things, colours and feelings; and activating the child's response by rubbing the skin with different textures and temperatures. Furnishing a corner of the paediatric ward with books and toys encourages caregivers to interact with their children at an appropriate level as their condition improves. Colourful posters can provide ideas for what caregivers can do.



Photo credit: © UNICEF Perú/Tamayo E

Your child will enjoy the time with you. Ask a nurse where you can find books and toys to play with your child.



Photo credit: © UNICEF Perú/Hildebrandt C

Play with your child. It helps your child continue to learn while in hospital.

Involving caregivers in their child's care helps them learn to recognize when their child has pain, where it is located and what comforts the child. They can observe how medical staff complete routine procedures in a responsive manner and can better address the needs of their child during rehabilitation feeding.

Caregivers also need attention and support. Staying in the hospital, they need a clean place to sleep, food, access to clean toilets and a place to relax with other caregivers. They may experience disruptions in their families and worry about the family at home. They appreciate staff who show an interest and help them consider possible solutions to their worries.



Suggestions for what providers can do to strengthen caregiver practices and support caregiver well-being during inpatient paediatric care are in **Table 3.4.2**.



Table 3.4.2. Supporting caregivers during inpatient paediatric care

COMPONENT OF NURTURING CARE	CAREGIVER PRACTICES	EXAMPLES OF WHAT SERVICE PROVIDERS CAN DO
<p>Responsive caregiving</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Be aware of the child’s signals (e.g. hunger, discomfort, attempts to communicate, joy and attention). □ Respond appropriately and in a timely way to the signals of the child’s needs, which differ when the child is well or sick, or has special needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Discuss How did you know your child was sick? You did well to notice that your child was sick and to bring your child here. Let’s see what we can do together to help your child get better. □ Discuss How is your child today? Does he have any pain? How do you know? What comforts him? □ Counsel Coach the caregiver to assist by, for example, taking the child’s temperature, feeling for fever and identifying fast breathing or other signs. Help the caregiver recognize these signs of illness. □ Discuss Caregivers should be sensitive to the needs of the child during feeding for rehabilitation during and after illness. □ Demonstrate Children in hospital might be fearful of providers who give them injections and other treatments. Engage and speak to the child as you approach her. Encourage the caregiver to assist in engaging the child in a similar way, explaining what is happening and distracting the child, for example, with a song. □ Counsel If the child is fussing, say – Take a few deep breaths. Try holding your child close to you with your hand still and firmly on the child’s back until the child is calm. If the child cannot be held, then ask the caregiver to put a hand firmly on the child’s back or stomach. A calm approach is more effective than bouncing the child, especially when the child is sick.
<p>Opportunities for early learning</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Talk with your child. □ Play with your child. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Discuss Your child will have different levels of interest and energy for play. Follow what your child shows an interest in. Put clean items for play where he can reach them. □ Ask Do you talk to your child when she is sick? She is still able to learn from you. Talk to your child softly. Describe her body, the pain, and the happy things around her. □ Ask What do you have that he could play with while he is here? Do you have a cup for him to hold? How does he explore your hand? Could you use your scarf to play peek-a-boo with him? We have some books here. Would you like to show him a book? □ Ask (at discharge) What activity would you like to do at home? When can you do it? Your child needs to learn new skills, even while recovering.

Table 3.4.2. Supporting caregivers during inpatient paediatric care

COMPONENT OF NURTURING CARE	CAREGIVER PRACTICES	EXAMPLES OF WHAT SERVICE PROVIDERS CAN DO
<p>Safety and security</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Make a safe environment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Discuss Your child loves to put things in her mouth. With her mouth, she learns shapes, textures, temperatures. What items are safe for her to put in her mouth? Where can you wash the items she touches and puts in her mouth? <input type="checkbox"/> Ask How will you store the child's medicine at home? <input type="checkbox"/> Ask If you are not available, who can take care of your child? Will they be able to give the child medicine at the right time and dose?
<p>SUPPORTING CAREGIVER WELL-BEING</p>		<p>EXAMPLES OF WHAT SERVICE PROVIDERS CAN DO</p>
<p>Supporting caregiver well-being</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Build their capacity to care for themselves. <input type="checkbox"/> Problem solve and organize support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Ask How are you feeling? It must be difficult for you now. Is there anything I can do for you? Who can you talk to or ask for help at home? <input type="checkbox"/> Ask Do you know any of the other fathers or mothers here? It might help you to talk to some of them, you should try. <input type="checkbox"/> Discuss If you feel overwhelmed, would you like the social worker to visit? The social worker can be helpful. <input type="checkbox"/> Discuss (at discharge) Are you ready to take your child home? What are you concerned about?

