Nurturing care for early childhood development: an overview

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The evidence for nurturing care

- The foundation for life-long health, productivity and wellbeing is being built in the early years, starting from pregnancy
- At least 250 million children < 5 years of age (43%) are at risk of not achieving their developmental potential
- Nurturing care is what young children need to develop physically, mentally and socially
- Investing in early childhood development reduces inequities
- The health sector has an important role to play
Cell division and migration

The importance of the early years

Human Brain Development
Synapse formation dependent on early experiences

-8 -7 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19
Conception to Birth | Age in Months | Age in Years

Sensory Pathways (vision & hearing)
Language

Higher Cognitive Functions

Cell division and migration
Nature and nurture

Genetic endowment
- Variations in Genetic Sequence
- Epigenetic Modification

Environment

Adult Health and Wellbeing
- Cardiovascular disease
- Obesity/diabetes
- Mental health
- Cognitive function
- Behaviour/social functioning
Environments across the life-course

- Parent’s Health/Wellbeing
- Pre-pregnancy Environment
- Environment in Infancy/Childhood

Quality and timing of early environments shape a child’s future potential
A life course approach

- Improved health
- Improved nutritional status
- Higher education achievements
- Greater productivity in adulthood
- Protection from selected noncommunicable diseases
- Improved social cohesion
- Contribution to peace
The Nurturing Care Framework
launched at the time of the 71st World Health Assembly in 2018

A road map that outlines:

• Why efforts must begin in the earliest years, from pregnancy to age 3

• How nurturing care protects children from the worst effects of adversity

• What caregivers need in order to provide nurturing care
Two interrelated action areas

What the child’s brain and body expects and needs

Enabling environments for nurturing care
Existing interventions to support nurturing care

**Health and nutrition**
- Maternal nutrition
- Family planning
- Prevention of substance abuse
- Antenatal care
- Childbirth care
- Essential newborn care
- Breastfeeding
- Complementary feeding
- Immunization
- Management of childhood illness
- Care for maternal mental health
- Care for children with developmental difficulties

**Security and safety**
- Birth registration
- Safe water and sanitation
- Good hygiene
- Clean environments
- Clean air
- Safe places for recreation
- Prevention of violence
- Cash transfers
- Social care

**Responsive caregiving and early learning**
- Skin-to-skin contact after birth
- Kangaroo mother care for small babies
- Responsive feeding
- Play and communication
- Home made toys
- Book sharing
- Father’s involvement in childcare
- Quality childcare
- Using local language
- Indigenous practices
Enabling policies to provide caregivers with time and resources

- Maternity protection
- Parental leave
- Protection from marketing of breastmilk substitutes
- Breastfeeding breaks at work
- Clean air
- Smoke-free environments
- National minimum wage
- Health insurance
- Child and family social protection
- Affordable childcare
- Free pre-primary education
- Places for play and recreation
- Cash transfers
The importance of attachment

Children become attached to loving caregivers, who they emulate.

They get distressed when separated.

And turn to loved ones for reassurance when scared or unsure.
1. **Responsive Caregiving**
   All infants and children should receive responsive care during the first 3 years of life; parents and other caregivers should be supported to provide responsive care.
   Strength of recommendation: Strong
   Quality of evidence: Moderate (for responsive care)

2. **Promote Early Learning**
   All infants and children should have early learning activities with their parents and other caregivers during the first 3 years of life; parents and other caregivers should be supported to engage in early learning with their infants and children.
   Strength of recommendation: Strong
   Quality of evidence: Moderate (for early learning)

3. **Integrate Caregiving and Nutrition Interventions**
   Support for responsive care and early learning should be included as part of interventions for optimal nutrition of infants and young children.
   Strength of recommendation: Strong
   Quality of evidence: Moderate

4. **Support Maternal Mental Health**
   Psychosocial interventions to support maternal mental health should be integrated into early childhood health and development services.
   Strength of recommendation: Strong
   Quality of evidence: Moderate
Why this agenda now?
Primary Health Care

A key platform for implementation

- Essential interventions for nurturing care embedded in basic benefit packages for Universal Health Coverage
- Investment in health services addressing three levels of care
- Multisector engagement and coordinated actions
- Community empowerment and leadership
A universal progressive approach for meeting all children’s needs
Covid-19 has caused a crisis

- Higher levels of caregiver stress and worsening mental health
- Economic and food insecurity in households
- Reduced physical activity and outdoor play and more sedentary behavior
- Curtailed opportunities for early childhood education
- Reductions in care-seeking and decline in referrals of potential child maltreatment

Children are not the face of this pandemic. But they risk being among its biggest victims.

UN Secretary General
Nurturing care in the broader agenda for child health and wellbeing

To ensure that every child and adolescent 0-19-years old is optimally healthy;

is being raised in a safe and secure environment;

appropriately prepared physically, mentally, socially and emotionally;

to accomplish age-appropriate developmental tasks and contribute socially and economically to their society.

https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/investing-in-our-future
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<th>The five strategic actions</th>
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## Taking the agenda forward

| **Lead and invest** | Governance and coordination  
|                     | Planning  
|                     | Financing  
| **Focus on families and their communities** | Community engagement  
|                     | Social accountability  
|                     | Use of mass media  
| **Strengthen services** | System strengthening  
|                     | Building workforce capacities  
|                     | Strengthening services  
| **Monitor progress** | Monitoring individual children  
|                     | Monitoring programme implementation  
|                     | Measuring coverage at population-level  
| **Use data and innovate** | Towards scale  
|                     | Private sector  
|                     | Digital solutions  

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*Image of books with various topics related to the agenda.*
Building on what exists

Remember

Strengthen

Add
Thank you

For more information:
nurturing-care.org
ecdan.org

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