

GROWING THE VILLAGE

How Global Donors Can Support Parents to Help Young Children Reach Their Potential



To provide nurturing care, parents need support

It's well documented that helping children ages 0 to 3 to reach their full potential starts with ensuring they receive nurturing care from their parents and other primary caregivers.¹ **Nurturing care** extends beyond basic health and safety to include responsive, sensitive, and stimulating caregiver-child interactions.²

Supporting parents to provide nurturing care is a crucial strategy to improving health, nutrition, security, safety, and early learning opportunities for young children. Research shows that parenting programs that support caregivers to provide this type of care to young children can:

- Improve parenting knowledge and practices, caregiver-child interactions, and child welfare outcomes around development and behavior.³
- Improve the mental health and stress levels of parents.⁴
- Reduce child maltreatment.⁵

While parents and caregivers play a critical role, **nurturing care depends on much more than the practices of individual parents or caregivers.** To be able to optimally care for their children, parents must have enabling environments that include time, resources, and emotional support backed by policies, services, and communities.⁶

What makes a successful parenting program?

Stellenbosch University assessed key learnings from group-based parenting programs and synthesized global research and guidelines from experts to distill best-practice recommendations for effective, sustainable parenting programs. Through this research, we know that successful parenting programs are ones that:

- 1 Respond to parents' expressed needs and build on what they can already provide for their children.⁷
- 2 Build off existing social and cultural practices and sources of support in the community (e.g., cash transfers or child care).⁸
- 3 Prioritize program activities that actively address caregivers' well-being and support caregivers to enact responsive caregiving practices.⁹
- 4 Give caregivers opportunities to learn and practice new skills, problem-solve, build confidence, and access peer support—not just provide them with information.¹⁰
- 5 Invest in extensive training and supportive supervision for implementing staff across the life of a project.¹¹
- 6 Include intentional and robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) activities.¹²



How can global donors support parents to create better outcomes for young children?

Donors can make strategic, high-impact investments to plan, deliver, and measure evidence-based parenting programs and to create spaces for program implementers to learn from one another.

PLAN

Donors should intentionally plan adequate funds and time to co-design programs with and continuously engage parents and their communities:

- Require programs to be designed in collaboration with the community, NGOs, government leaders, and agencies.
- Fund formative research to find out what parents need and validate findings with key partners.

DELIVER

Throughout the life of the program, donors should support delivering parenting sessions according to proven best practices:

- Ensure that funds are allocated to support quality implementation, including staff training and supervision and how sessions are delivered.
- Work with grantees to determine where they might need more support, such as technical assistance and capacity building.

MEASURE

Throughout the life of the program and beyond, donors should invest in systematic use of M&E data for reflection, learning, program improvement, and community ownership.

- Increase attention to M&E processes and requirements at every stage of grantmaking and implementation.
- Support partners to rigorously implement M&E measures throughout the grant period.
- Plan for continuous assessment with community stakeholders and make adaptations based on learnings.
- Invest in longer-term follow-up evaluations to inform future programming.
- Fund local research infrastructure and leadership in the settings where programs are implemented and evaluated.

LEARN

Donors should fund opportunities for learning, networking, and collaboration between individuals and organizations engaged in similar efforts so they can share and reflect on their approaches, processes, and tools to identify areas for synergy and exchange.

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