



Early Childhood Development

Global Program Guidelines

May 2020

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Acronyms

CHW	Community Health Worker
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECE	Early Childhood Education
ECDC	Early Childhood Development Centre
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SHG	Self-Help Group
TOC	Theory of Change
UNICEF	United Nations Childrens Fund
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WHO	World Health Organization

Introduction

Help a Child is dedicated to support vulnerable children and their families to have a loving and dignified life and a promising future. Help a Child has as its main goal to improve the wellbeing of children through supportive communities.

To contribute towards holistic child wellbeing the organization has defined four pathways of change, as can be seen in our Theory of Change:



Figure 1 Visualization of Help a Child's Theory of Change

- A. Children are able to overcome barriers to participate successfully in life;
- B. Parents are able to take care of themselves and their children;
- C. Youth are self-reliant and ready for work;
- D. Communities are able to link to and make use of economic opportunities and services and gradually take full ownership of their development.

Three core strategies are defined that contribute to this:

- Transfer of knowledge and skills,
- Working in groups,
- Cooperation with external actors and systems.

This document focuses specifically on the pathway related to early childhood development (part of pathway A). As said the goal of Help a Child is to ensure children have a fruitful future, where they can develop to their potential, with the help of their parents/guardians, older siblings, teachers and the community. To reach this a good start is crucial for the development of all children. Therefore, Early Childhood Development (ECD) is one of the core expertise areas within the programs of Help a Child.

Definition of ECD

Help a Child defines ECD as 'an integrated approach for children in the age of conception up to primary school entry to develop to their full potential'. Development of children have to include all elements: physical development, cognitive development, social & emotional development and spiritual & moral development.



Objectives of the ECD Global Program Guidelines

These ECD Global Program Guidelines have been developed for country offices and partner organizations.

It has three core objectives:

- It serves as minimum requirements and standards for quality ECD projects
- It is a reference and training guide for Help a Child offices and partners in how to implement ECD planning and programming.
- It aims to standardize the type, and scope and ensure the quality of ECD activities, yet leaving enough space for the context of the programs.
- It explains the Help a Child's choices in ECD and the "ECD packages".

Every country has its specific context, curriculum, and in most cases a National Policy on ECD. Thus contextualization of these global guidelines is necessary on country-level. But choices should always be made within the framework of these global guidelines.

It is expected that by implementing these guidelines, the quality and impact of the ECD program will increase.

Content of the guidelines

The guidelines will start with a general overview of ECD: what is the global trend? The internationally accepted Nurturing Care framework will be explained. In the second chapter, the approach of Help a Child will be explained. What is our goal and what are the objectives? In the third chapter the minimum requirements and the 2 main elements of ECD programming in Help a Child will be described.

The last chapter is about other elements of ECD programming, which are very important too, although not directly in our scope. But what can be done to ensure these aspects are taken care of?



Chapter 1 General

Overview of ECD

When asking people if the first few years of a child are important, everybody will say: Yes of course! Yet only very small parts of government budgets are used for this Early Childhood Development. Here are some shocking facts.

- Globally, at least 1 in 3 children under 5 is not growing well due to malnutrition in its more visible forms: stunting, wasting, and overweight.¹
- The number of stunted children has declined in all continents, except in Africa.
- The number of overweight children has increased in all continents, including in Africa.
- Millions of children are eating too little of what they need, and millions are eating too much of what they don't need: poor diets are now the main risk factor for the global burden of disease.²
- Risks associated with poverty – such as undernutrition and poor sanitation – can lead to developmental delays and a lack of progress in school.
- Violent discipline is widespread in many countries, and nearly 70 percent of children between two and four were yelled or screamed at in the past month.
- 300 million children younger than five have been exposed to societal violence.
- For a child in a low- or middle-income country, poor early development could mean they earn around one-quarter less in income, as an adult.
- And over 43 % of children under the age of 5 are at risk of not fulfilling their full developmental potential,³ due to risks of poverty, poor nutrition and a lack of access to basic services and early enriching opportunities.



¹ Bullet point 1-3: 'Children, Food and Nutrition. State of the World's Children 2019 UNICEF.'

² Bullet point 4-7: <https://www.unicef.org/early-childhood-development>.

³ The Lancet, 2016. These data have been estimated using globally comparable metrics in low- and middle-income countries.

Brain research has shown that what happens in the first three years of a child's life, impacts his/her future health, education, and economic outcomes.⁴ It further states that 80% of the brain of a person is formed before the age of three years! And also after that, the impact of good quality care on the development of children is very clear. Therefore, to ensure children receive the stimulation and care they need to reach their full potential, it is important to intervene in these early years. It is much easier and more cost-effective to influence changes during this time than to deal with the consequences later in life.

Why early childhood development is important

The first years in a child's life are a period of enhanced susceptibility to environmental influences, laying the foundation for health, wellbeing, learning, and productivity throughout the life course and into the next generation.

What threatens early childhood development

From pregnancy through the newborn period, infancy and toddlerhood, extreme poverty, insecurity, violence, environmental toxins, and parental ignorance or poor mental health detract from the capacity of families and caregivers to protect, support, and promote the development of young children.

What do children need to develop to their potential

Nurturing care comprises conditions that promote health, nutrition, safety and security, responsive caregiving, and opportunities for early learning.

What we mean with ECD programming

An integrated approach for children in the age of conception up to primary school entry to develop to their full potential.

The International Nurturing Care Framework

The new international Nurturing Care Framework developed by WHO and UNICEF (2018)⁵ describes the conditions required for children to develop to their potential as a set 5 inter-related and indivisible components: good health, good nutrition, safety and security, responsive caregiving and opportunities for early learning (see figure 2). For more info on the International Nurturing Care Framework: <https://nurturing-care.org/>.

Help a Child subscribes to the International Nurturing Care Framework, as it fits well with the holistic approach of Help a Child on Child Development. Help a Child also aims to work on

‘When you pay attention to the beginning of the story, you can change the whole story.

– Raffi Cavoukian, singer and founder of Canada's Centre for Child Honouring

⁴ <https://www.unicef.org/early-childhood-development>.

⁵ https://www.who.int/maternal_child_adolescent/child/nurturing-care-framework-rationale/en.

the holistic development of the child (Healthy and Strong, Educated for life, Socially and emotionally developed, With hope and dignity). In the following chapter more information can be found on the approach of Help a Child.

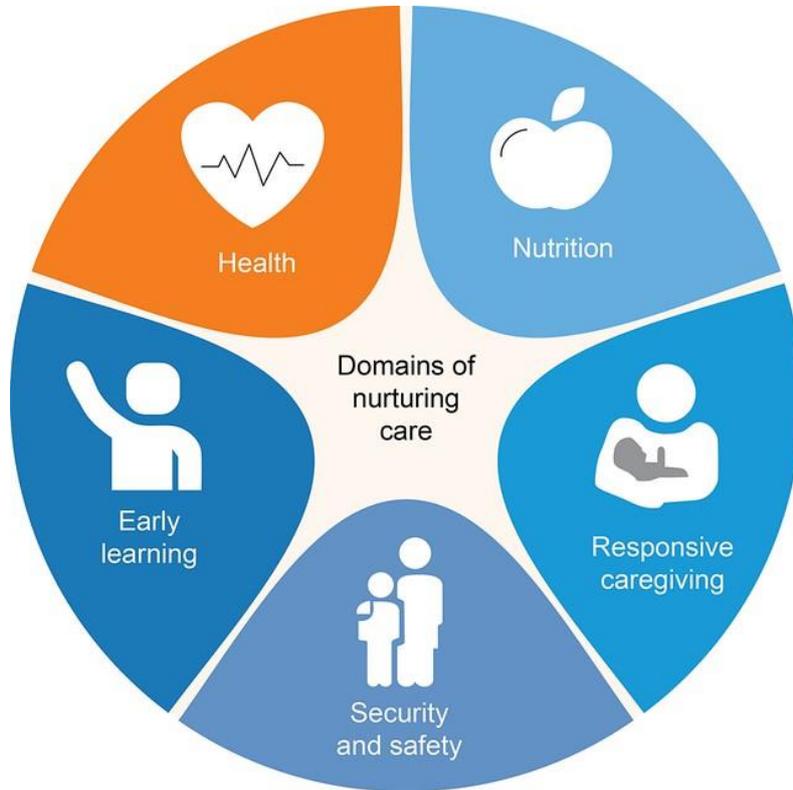


Figure 2 The International Nurturing Care Framework (WHO/UNICEF)

Chapter 2 Help a Child's ECD Approach

ECD is one component of the integrated community development program that Help a Child implements in order to provide a future for children in need, their families and their entire community by empowering vulnerable communities to change their own living conditions and opportunities in a sustainable way.

The ECD component directly impacts the lives of children by working with the children themselves, their parents, youth (as parents-to-be and as role models for the young children), and the community as a whole. These are the four key stakeholders within Help a Child's global Theory of Change (see figure 2).

By working directly with the children, Help a Child prepares children to deal with barriers and to prepare them for a successful life, where they can fully participate.

But children cannot do this alone. Their parents (the people taking care of them), need to support them. Help a Child in its programs will help parents to raise their children the best they can, while at the same time also paying attention to the support the parents need for themselves. And young children look up at their bigger brothers and sisters. Youth are role models for those small ones. Besides that, soon they will be getting children too, being young parents, in need of the right information to raise their young children.

Goal and Objectives

The main goal of the ECD Program is that all children receive the stimulation and care they need in the early years, from conception to primary school age (0-7) to develop to their full potential.

When looking at the Nurturing Care Framework, many elements are important in Early Childhood Development. Help a Child will not be able to focus on all but will work together, link with other stakeholders. Help a

Child is focusing on two key elements, based on the strength of our programs and partner organizations. The objectives are:





1. Responsive Care: Parents/caretakers are equipped with positive parenting skills and provide a safe, nourishing, and stimulating home environment.
2. Early Learning: Support children to go to Early Childhood Education centres (ECE) whereby communities take action to ensure children are able to access quality ECE in the community and thus stimulated in their early learning

Responsive Care: Parenting

Parents (biological and non-biological) are the most essential key players in providing children the right foundation for a good start in life. This sounds very logic, and parents have raised children as long as humanity exists. But how to do that best? What is a good way of parenting and what is not so helpful?

Many scientists, psychologists and pedagogues have been studying parenting over the last decades.. One of the most important theories is the Attachment Theory of Bowlby. It says that people come to this world to connect with others. In order to be able to establish

Parents are children's first and best teachers

relationships with others, a child needs to develop a relationship with at least one primary caregiver. Then the social and emotional development will be normal.⁶

There is general consensus that this attachment in the early years is important. And that is where parents or guardians come in. They need to make sure that this attachment for a child is positive. Since that is also what is known: secure attachment, so children who have attached well, and feel secure with an adult, “are the product of parents who provide support and comfort when their child is upset, and encouragement and understanding when they are engaging in play and exhibiting curiosity.” “The key difference between the parents of securely and insecurely attached children is the degree to which the parents are sensitive to their children’s needs.”⁷

Parents thus have a huge responsibility towards their children. Yet sometimes their own circumstances are not secure at all! And how do they learn this? In several cultures young parents learn from their own parents or from extended family how to raise children. However, because of factors like conflict, poverty and sickness, this form of intergenerational learning about parenting, is no longer sufficient.

There have been several types of interventions for parents. The WHO in 2006 already reviewed these interventions. To them it was clear: “Our results revealed that interventions are effective in enhancing maternal responsiveness, resulting in better child health and development, especially for the neediest populations. We conclude that there is a strong link between childcare, development and health, with more responsive caregiving associated with better outcomes.⁸ And UNICEF adds that “all children have the need for and the right to parenting. Parenting means providing the ongoing care and support a child needs in order to survive and thrive”.⁹

Parents are their children’s first and best teachers. They must be empowered with information and skills so that they can not only keep their child healthy but also stimulate their child’s development through loving and playful interactions. In this way a good and secure attachment will take place, providing the young kids with a good start in life.

Early Learning: ECD /ECE Centers

Early learning is important for children. It is known that if children who went to pre-school are better prepared for primary school, but it is very important that it is age appropriate. It is not helpful to teach children of 3 years to write, since their brain is not yet developed to comprehend that complicated task.

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Attachment_theory.

⁷ <http://psychlearningcurve.org/parental-sensitivity-and-responsiveness/>

⁸ https://www.who.int/maternal_child_adolescent/documents/84_992_999/en/

⁹ https://www.unicef.org/earlychildhood/index_40754.html

Children's way of learning is in fact through play. While playing they discover many new aspects, they practice new skills and learn social- and interpersonal skills.

Encouraging children to play and explore helps them learn and develop socially, emotionally, physically and intellectually. The importance of play in cognitive development cannot be overlooked. Play is central to children's learning, regardless of the actual content. The process of play is a powerful, multifaceted learning experience. Children's play involves exploration, language experimentation, cognition, and the development of social skills.

Teachers in the ECE centers, or caregivers, are important. They need to receive at least basic training, understanding the basics of child development. Age appropriate teaching is important, otherwise there will be no effect (and even harm might be done). There is quite something at stake at this important phase of children.



Chapter 3 Minimum Requirements

With many interventions it matters what you do, but also how you do it. The method matters and the intensity. For instance, a life-skills training of two hours for two hundred students by one teacher cannot be compared with a life-skills training of sixteen sessions for groups of 30 students. The same counts for the interventions to promote ECD. A 1 time off meeting with all parents from the community whereby the facilitator explains to parents what is good and wrong, will have less impact than a ten weeks program for groups of parents whereby the parents participate through exercises. In the last example the chance is higher you will reach sustainable change in parents.

In order to ensure quality and lasting results, Help a Child developed minimum requirements for the two key interventions in the ECD program.

Minimum requirements for parenting programs

Help a Child has set minimum requirements for parenting. These are summarized below:

- Working in groups.
- Preferably Mothers and Fathers in the same group. This encourages understanding and respecting each other's roles in the household. Within the sessions group-work can be done in uni-sex groups if required.
- Method should be based on sharing, thinking and doing by the parents, with only where needed information sharing from the facilitators. So lot of exercises, group-work, none or limited lectures.
- Method should take the specific context and culture into account.
- Facilitators need to facilitate, not teach.
- Facilitators need to be trained well in the use of the method.
- Minimum of 10 hours, so at least 5 sessions of around 2 hours.
- Needs to reach out to all parents, so inclusive programming.
- Use a designed manual, preferably The Parenting Challenge of Help a Child or another similar method.

To consider: Do you put young parents in same group as the more experienced parents? In some communities the young parents like to have their own group. At the other hand the young parents can learn from the experience from the older parents. And older parents or

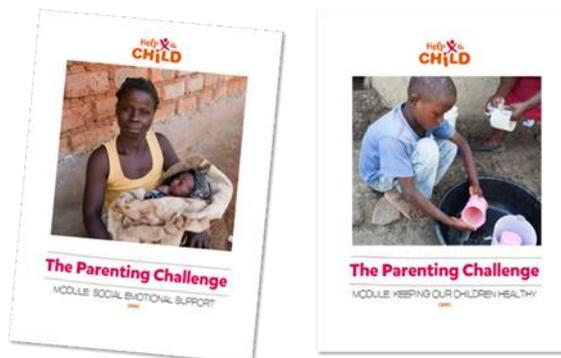


even grandparents taking care of their grandchildren, can feel supported by the young ones. Bringing generations together is very important in communities.

The Parenting Challenge

Based on needs in the field, Help a Child designed a method called 'The Parenting Challenge'. It is a method to improve the knowledge, attitude and skills of parents. The goal of the Parenting Challenge is to improve the parenting skills of mothers, fathers and other caretakers, so that they can provide adequate and relevant support to their children. It is a group-based method,

whereby the parents are actively involved in discussions, exercises and group-work and are sharing their thoughts and ideas. The role of the facilitator is to lead the discussion, instead of teaching. The Parenting Challenge is involving mothers and fathers, which makes the sessions more effective. Fathers do have an important role in raising children, maybe a bit different than mothers, but it is important to do involve them. The group-based approach helps parents to strengthen their social network. Besides this the method is participatory, which promotes internalization, and this bottom-up structure increases the sustainability of the effects of this method. The training can take place at the ECD center, or at any place which is convenient for the group. There are several modules:



Mandatory for all groups:

- The Basics (roles & responsibilities, Child-development, Culture, problem, strength and needs analysis)

Optional choices depending on needs of group:

- Feeding our children
- Keeping children healthy
- Protecting children
- Social Emotional Support
- Supporting children in education
- Importance of play
- Handling critical family issues
- Sexual education
- Positive Disciplining
- Communication in the family
- Moral and spiritual development

You can find the Parenting Challenge modules at <https://howto.helpachild.org/themes-and-tools/parenting>. Note that through the modules, attention is given to the other elements of the Nurturing Care Framework: Health, Nutrition and Security & Safety.

There might be other parenting training manuals available in your country, in a suitable language that might also be helpful to facilitate the parenting groups. Make sure you have checked that these manuals are in line with the minimum requirements.

Minimum requirements for Early Childhood Education

Pre-schools or Kindergartens are important, as was explained in the first 2 chapters. But also here it is important to take some standards into account in order to make the Early Childhood Education Center a safe and stimulating place for children.

Help a Child considers these points as minimum requirements for good quality ECE centres:

- ECE activities should be in line with the government regulations and ECD policy, if any.
- Local authorities need to be involved and where possible should actively support the ECE activities financially or in-kind (like providing the land or materials for construction).
- Community needs to be involved: for an ECE center to be sustainable with children attending regularly, it needs to be accepted by the community. In fact it should be the community to request for an ECE center. That means awareness raising is important, for instance through The Parenting Challenge.
- Training for ECE teachers /caregivers: in some communities there might be trained ECE teachers, but if there are no such qualified people, training needs to be conducted, of at least 2 weeks, with coaching afterwards.
- ECE teachers/caregivers should also get trained in basic childprotection and sign a Code of Conduct.
- ECE structure should be safe and child friendly: all kinds of structures may be used as classroom from an open shade till a fancy classroom of bricks and tiles. It does not have to be fancy, but it should be safe and secure. So no sharp items, weak structures with nails sticking out or places with animal droppings. And no teachers walking around with sticks to beat.
- Activities in the ECE should be age appropriate, with lot of play activities.
- Playground, latrine & handwashing facility: an outside area where children can run and physical activities can take place and a latrine where children can ease themselves and wash their hands are important. Also here: it doesn't have to be fancy but it should be functional.
- ECE centres should be inclusive, meaning that children with a disability are encouraged to join as much as possible and that teachers have basic knowledge about disability inclusion.



Preferably:

- Providing food for the children: it should be encouraged that children get something to eat, like porridge or another appropriate meal. Parents can contribute food or money, so every day the children get a nutritious meal in the ECE centre. This needs a small, hygienic kitchen.
- Improving the structures: when the community is active in the ECE, plans can be made by them to develop the ECE centre more. Help a Child can support this development with material support and capacity building, as long as the community contributes too.



Chapter 4 Other Elements of ECD

As made visible in the five domains of the Nurturing Care Framework, Early Childhood Development is a broad theme (and not only the educational element as often is thought). It implies the holistic development of the young child and the involvement of many different services and stakeholders.

As said before, Help a Child is focusing on Parenting and Early Childhood Education. However, we acknowledge all five domains are important for holistic development of children. This means for Help a Child programming:

- A. Create linkages with other service providers providing (part of) ECD services
- B. Incorporate topics of all the 5 domains in the parenting program and in ECE centers.

In the table below possible activities for integration of ECD services are mentioned:

Domain	At home	At ECE Center
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link with community health workers to ensure that pregnant and lactating mothers are visited for monitoring and counseling about their own and their baby's health. • Follow up with at-risk children to ensure they get supplemental feeding as offered by the government. • Promote the vaccination schedule in (young)parenting groups, SHGs and other forums. • Sensitize parents to purchase health insurance for their families if applicable. • Health promotional messages for risk preparedness. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have nurses from health centers come to the centre to measure the height and weight of children. • Organize learning events for parents at the centre where they come and get information on health issues (can have CHW or nurse as guest speaker). • Have WASH materials on site and promote healthy habits like hand-washing. • Remove any health or safety hazards from the compound.
Nutrition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow up with at-risk children to ensure they get supplemental feeding as offered by the government. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organize the community to provide a meal at school.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote breastfeeding in parenting groups , SHGs and other forums. • Educate community members on the importance of micro-nutrients (especially iron) for pregnant women. • Encourage families to have a kitchen garden at home. • Teach about balanced diet in parenting classes, SHGs and other forums. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain a kitchen garden at the school for demonstration. • Offer cooking demonstrations as learning events for parents, to teach them how to prepare a balanced diet.
Responsive care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home visits for parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train teachers in child friendly methodology and care. • Organize practical learning events for parents and the children, where they can learn about how to talk and play with their children.
Security and safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educate community members on the negative effects of violence and harsh treatment in the home. • Set up child-protection committees. • Stimulate parents to join SHGs to gain social and economic support. • Ensure physical safety in and around the house (open fire, sharp objects, rubbish etc). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervise children at all times. • Train teachers in positive discipline and strictly ban corporal punishment. • Organize learning events for parents where they can learn about positive discipline and child rights.



