


In support of
**Global Initiative to
Support Parents**

PARENTING
FOR LIFELONG HEALTH

unicef 
for every child

A photograph of a man and a young girl sitting at a table. The man, on the left, is wearing a plaid shirt and is smiling as he feeds the girl with a spoon. The girl, on the right, is wearing a striped shirt and denim overalls, and is looking at the man. On the table, there is a white bowl and a jar of orange sauce. The background shows a kitchen counter with a pineapple and other items.

Global **Parenting Support** Framework

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This framework draws on the pioneering work led by UNICEF's Europe and Central Asia Regional Office (ECARO), to develop the UNICEF ECARO Parenting Support for the Early Years Framework, which laid the technical and conceptual foundations for this global framework. UNICEF also extends its sincere appreciation to all colleagues from Regional Offices and Headquarters who contributed to the adaptation, review and finalisation of this document.

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Introduction

When a child is born, a community of caregivers* is born too. Caregivers **are the primary, most significant, and consistent agents in a child's development and well-being.**¹ Their essential role extends beyond early childhood, continuing through middle childhood and adolescence, fundamentally shaping their present and futures, with effects across generations.

The time is right to accelerate efforts to support caregivers.



Increased family vulnerabilities:

Global events such as pandemics, conflicts, economic downturns, natural disasters, and forced migrations have heightened family stress and vulnerabilities, highlighting the urgent need for enhanced support systems.



Robust evidence: The effectiveness of parenting support interventions has been synthesised in several global reviews and guidelines. Strong evidence supports positive outcomes in early childhood development,^{2,3} caregiver and child mental health,⁴ and the prevention of particular forms of violence against children,^{5,6,7} including physical and emotional violence within the home.^{8,9} There is also promising evidence of effects on reducing intimate partner violence (IPV).^{10,11,12}



Growing global recognition: Many countries and international bodies are reinforcing their commitment to parenting support initiatives, creating a timely opportunity to strengthen and scale efforts at a global level.^{13,14}



Addressing fragmentation: While parenting support initiatives are expanding worldwide, there is a clear need for greater coherence, consistency, and coordination across sectors and systems.^{15,16}



Leveraging technological innovation:

Advances in digital technology and connectivity offer promising opportunities to scale parenting support interventions more rapidly and cost-effectively, ensuring broader and more equitable access.^{17,18}

What is a parenting intervention? A set of activities or services aimed at improving how parents and caregivers approach and execute their roles as parents or caregivers, specifically their parenting knowledge, attitudes, skills, behaviours, and practices.

*Aligned with the Global Initiative to Support Parent Vision, caregivers include mothers and fathers, siblings, grandparents, and other relatives, as well as non-biological caregivers such as stepparents, foster parents, or any other person responsible for a child's upbringing

The growing global momentum for parenting support aligns with the [Convention on the Rights of the Child \(CRC, 1989\)](#), Article 18, which states: “For the purpose of guaranteeing and promoting the rights set forth in the present Convention, States Parties shall render appropriate assistance to parents and legal guardians in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities.”



BOX 1. Parenting Support Around the World

Traditionally embedded within broader social policies, parenting support initiatives are increasingly recognised as a strategic investment contributing to human and social capital development. This recognition is prominently reflected in international frameworks like the United Nations’ [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#), and [INSPIRE](#) and [RESPECT](#) initiatives. Numerous countries have established strategies, legislation, and dedicated programmes designed to provide universal and progressive support to families.

Global partnerships, such as [Global Initiative to Support Parents \(GISP\)](#), and the [Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children](#), have been instrumental in elevating the parent support agenda and enhancing advocacy, innovation, and scalability. This mandate is further reinforced by the [WHO-UNICEF Policy Call to Action](#), which urges governments to provide and scale a minimum essential package of parenting support. In addition, the comprehensive [WHO Handbook & Guidelines](#) recommend that parenting interventions be made readily accessible to all parents and caregivers of children aged 2–17 years.

Despite this substantial progress, parent support initiatives still vary widely in scope, delivery modalities, organizational structures, and funding mechanisms across regions and countries. A key ongoing challenge is consolidating and harmonising these diverse global efforts into cohesive, adaptable, and sustainable frameworks to maximise their overall effectiveness and long-term impact.

PURPOSE AND AUDIENCE

The **Global Parenting Support Framework** is a conceptual guide providing a unified, multi-sectoral vision of high-quality parenting support that is adaptable to diverse cultural and contextual settings globally. Anchored in human rights and gender equality, and supported by robust scientific evidence, the Framework uses a systems-strengthening approach to enhance policy coherence and service delivery.

The primary **objective** of the Framework is to inform and support the development of adequate, comprehensive, and evidence-based parenting support policies, programs, and services.

The Framework sets out the key concepts that contribute to an enabling environment, strong systems, and the delivery of universal, progressive, and high-quality parenting support.

The intended **audience** includes global, regional, and national policymakers; ministries; intersectoral bodies; local authorities; and decision-makers across sectors such as health, education, child protection, social protection, finance, and women's issues. It also provides valuable guidance for international organizations, donors, and implementing partners seeking to align their strategies with a unified, multisectoral vision for parenting support. UNICEF stakeholders at global, regional, and country levels are a key audience for the Framework's application and integration across programming, policy, and advocacy.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Framework is grounded in [UNICEF's Social Ecological Model](#)¹⁹ and the [Nurturing Care Framework](#),²⁰ and is aligned with both UNICEF's [Vision for Elevating Parenting Support](#)²¹ and the [Policy Analysis and Benchmarking Tool for Universal Parenting Support](#).²² It provides a unified foundation for action guided by a set of universal principles that underpin all dimensions of parenting support.

The Framework adopts a family-centred, gender-equitable, and disability-inclusive approach, while being responsive to cultural, social, and local diversity. It recognises caregivers as active agents in shaping the support they receive, promotes shared caregiving roles and positive gender norms, and ensures the inclusion of families in diverse contexts, including those experiencing heightened vulnerabilities or specific needs.

The Framework is also informed by [UNICEF's Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action \(CCCs\)](#). It draws on the [Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action](#), reinforcing the centrality of children's rights and protection across all settings (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 Core Principles

Rights based	Guided by the rights of caregivers and children, with a specific focus on the most vulnerable, marginalised and at-risk communities.
Equity-focused	Ensures fair access to quality, contextualised, universal and progressive parenting support to all caregivers.
System-centred	Aims to strengthen the quality of services and the enabling environment, with efficient coordination mechanisms in place for integrated parenting support.
Evidence informed	Rooted in science, including social and behavioural sciences, best practices and evidence of cost-effectiveness.
Life-course oriented	Recognises the evolving needs of children and their caregivers through continuous, age, and developmentally appropriate, and responsive support.
Strength-based	Recognises, values and respects the caregiver’s capacities and strengths when providing the best for their children.

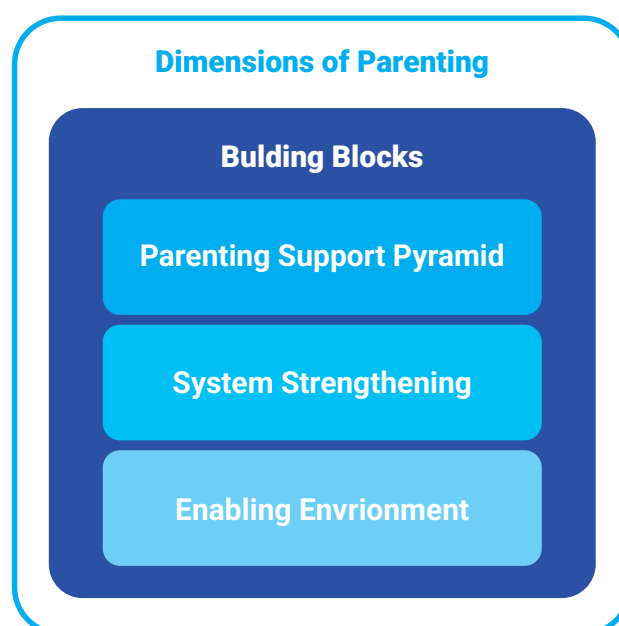
STRUCTURE

The Framework is organized in two interconnected layers.

The **dimensions of parenting** layer provide an understanding of the role of caregiving within families and communities, including how parenting unfolds across the life course, the behaviours that influence child and caregiver well-being, and the role of community support in shaping and sustaining parenting practices.

The main body of the Framework is structured around a set of **building blocks**. These are the core components needed to deliver effective, equitable, and sustainable parenting support. They include strategies linked to the provision of universal, targeted, and intensive parenting support, system strengthening, and an enabling environment.

Together, these components translate the guiding principles into actionable strategies that contribute to improved child development and well-being.



Dimensions of Parenting

Effective parenting support addresses evolving caregiver practices across developmental stages and acknowledges the vital role of communities in fostering shared responsibility, cultural identity, and informal support networks. It promotes an equitable distribution of caregiving responsibilities between men and women, tackling unequal household care burdens and supporting gender-responsive

family dynamics. It also recognises that caregiving is not limited to adults. Children, particularly adolescent girls, often take on significant unpaid care work, which can affect their education and life opportunities. This section explores dimensions of parenting within this integrated perspective, emphasising caregiving practices, well-being, and help-seeking behaviours within diverse community contexts.

BOX 2.

The power of parenting

Decades of research have demonstrated that parenting has a powerful impact during the early years of brain development and continues to shape children's learning, identity, and well-being throughout middle childhood and adolescence.²³ Parenting also affects caregivers, giving rise to new emotions, responsibilities, and challenges, underscoring the need to pay attention to caregiver well-being.^{24,25}

Responsive parenting across the life-course can protect against adverse experiences such as abuse and neglect, mental illness, substance abuse, conflicts with the law, and environmental threats.²⁶ Yet, families often need support to fulfil this role, particularly when facing individual, social, and structural risk factors, such as experiences of intergenerational trauma, exposure to crises and emergencies, limited access to services and education, and weak or non-existent family-friendly policies.

The report [Seeds of Success](#)²⁷ highlights the critical role of parents in nurturing young children and calls for comprehensive support systems that empower caregivers. It reviews global strategies and offers practical recommendations to strengthen policies, programs, and services.



LIFE-COURSE APPROACH

The life-course approach recognises parenting support as a multidimensional, dynamic, and evolving process that changes in response to children’s developmental stages and evolving needs (see Figure 2). In early childhood, parenting support primarily emphasises nurturing care, responsive caregiving, and early learning to support foundational growth and secure attachments. During middle childhood, the focus shifts

towards fostering socio-emotional skills, creating safe and supportive environments, and promoting positive discipline practices. In adolescence, parenting priorities evolve to emphasise mental health support, positive communication, the development of personal agency, and strategies for mitigating risks. Adopting a life-course approach ensures parenting support remains relevant, targeted, and effective across the diverse and evolving needs of children and caregivers.

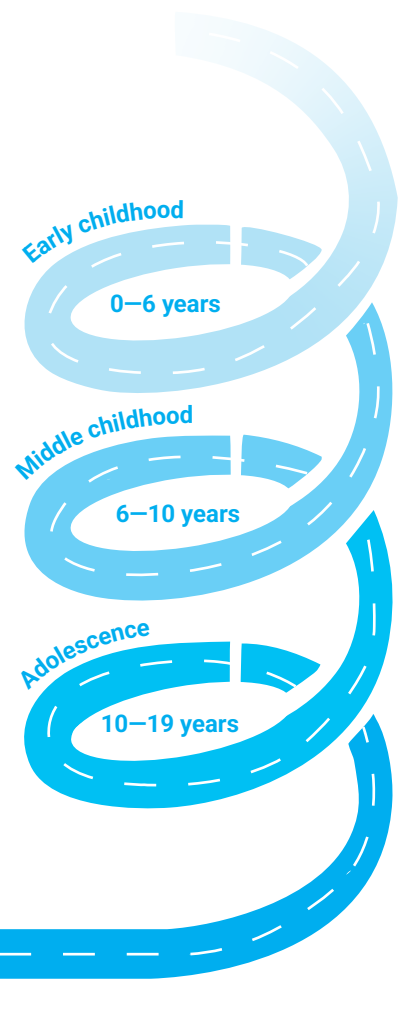
Figure 2 Examples of continuous parenting support programming approaches across the life-course²⁸

Desired outcomes

- All children have access to quality health, nutrition, and early learning services that promote their holistic development.
- Children and adolescents are protected from violence and harmful environments, develop socio-emotional and peer relationship skills, and grow within gender-equitable, inclusive and nurturing settings.
- Families maintain strong, communicative, and non-violent relationships, fostering trust and mutual respect.
- Adolescents demonstrate increased agency, autonomy, and participation, supported by improved mental and emotional well-being.

Examples of key actions

- Promote responsive caregiving and positive stimulation throughout early childhood.
- Ensure early identification and intervention for children with developmental delays or disabilities.
- Encourage gender-equitable caregiving roles and transform discriminatory norms.
- Support caregiver mental health and emotional well-being.
- Expand safe and inclusive spaces for learning, play, and social interaction.
- Reinforce emotional regulation, positive discipline and respectful communication within families.
- Build adolescent agency and participation in family and community decision-making.
- Strengthen adolescent-responsive health and mental health services and promote caregiver support.



BOX 3.

Parenting adolescents and their role in care work

As children enter adolescence, parenting relationships evolve, and caregivers require new, developmentally appropriate skills and strategies to support adolescent autonomy, identity formation, emotional regulation, and decision-making.²⁹

Parenting interventions tailored to adolescence, such as those highlighted in [UNICEF's Parenting of Adolescents: Programming Guidance](#)³⁰ and the [Adolescent Mental Health Hub](#), help caregivers understand developmental shifts, foster respectful communication and non-violent discipline, and create safe environments.³¹ They also help adolescents navigate determinant topics including sexual and reproductive health, risks related to violence and mental health, and how to integrate adolescent caregiving responsibilities in ways that respect their rights.

Adolescents, especially girls, often take on significant unpaid care and domestic work, in some cases, more than some adults in their households. Out-of-school and low-income girls carry the heaviest loads, often spending double or triple the amount of time on care work compared to their peers, perpetuating gender inequalities across generations.³²

While caregiving can help adolescents build skills and a sense of responsibility, excessive or age-inappropriate workloads can limit education, rest, leisure, and full participation in society, and, in extreme cases, constitute child labour and a violation of their rights.

Heavy responsibilities also create emotional and physical strain for adolescent girls and can compromise the quality of care provided.³³

Parenting interventions should support caregivers to balance adolescents' roles in household care. Recognising the importance of inclusive and participatory approaches, successful interventions integrate adolescents' perspectives, address gender-specific challenges, and respond to diverse cultural and socioeconomic contexts.³⁴



CAREGIVER BEHAVIOURS

A wide range of parenting behaviours and practices shape a child's development throughout early childhood, middle childhood, and adolescence.^{35,36} These stem from

an interplay of multiple factors, including caregivers' own childhood experiences and individual circumstances, their beliefs and expectations, gender norms and gender

socialization, social support networks, parenting-related knowledge and self-efficacy, children's characteristics, and the availability of support, services, family-friendly policies, and other socio-economic considerations. Recognising that caregivers encompass a variety of family structures beyond biological parents, this Framework categorises three interrelated domains of caregiver behaviours (see Figure 3).

Figure 3 Caregiver behaviours



Caregiving behaviours

refers to nurturing, responsive, and supportive interactions provided by caregivers directly to children and adolescents. These behaviours include consistent responsiveness, effective communication, and emotional support. Caregiving behaviours improve as caregivers strengthen their skills, confidence, and knowledge, making caregiving more effective and attuned to children's evolving needs.



Self-Care

highlights the importance of caregivers' mental, emotional, and physical health. Supporting caregivers through access to mental health and psychosocial services or community models that share caregiving responsibilities strengthens their well-being and, in turn, improves caregiving practices and children's development



Help-seeking

emphasises caregivers' ability to identify and access formal and informal support. Informal networks such as peers, extended family, and community groups, often provide trusted, accessible sources of emotional and practical support. Culturally sensitive outreach ensures caregivers know available services and feel empowered to use and advocate for them, especially in underserved areas.

Information about child development, childcare, health, food and nutrition can be found on [UNICEF's Parenting Hub](#)

Table 1 presents examples of enablers that influence parenting behaviours across individual, community, and system levels, using a strength-based approach.³⁷ Broader structural determinants, such as poverty, gender inequality, or access to services, which are not

captured in this table, also play a critical role in shaping parenting practices. Context-specific behavioural research is encouraged to tailor parenting support to the diverse and evolving needs of families, including those affected by emergencies and crisis settings.

Table 1 Examples of key enablers of parenting behaviours

Behaviours	Enablers	Barriers
Caregiving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness and understanding of child development and responsive caregiving practices • Confidence and self-efficacy in caregiving abilities • Access to positive parenting models, guidance and tools • Supportive community and wider family • Gender equitable and inclusive norms, including male caregiver involvement • Family-friendly policies and accessible services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of experience and knowledge in nurturing and responsive parenting during childhood • Cultural norms and attitudes supporting violent discipline • Unsupportive gender norms (e.g., limiting expectations of fatherhood) • Violence experienced/witnessed during childhood • Limited access to nutritious food, safe housing and other resources
Self-care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of behaviours and strategies to support caregiver wellbeing • Access to affordable, quality, health and mental health services • Community and family support structures encouraging caregiver self-care • Gender-equitable sharing of caregiving responsibilities • Child benefits and workplace policies that support a balance between professional and family responsibilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stigma around mental health or psychosocial support services • Insufficient social, relational or financial support structures for caregivers • Negative social and gender norms restricting caregiver (especially maternal) self-care and help-seeking behaviours
Help-seeking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of and access to available support services and entitlements • Availability and accessibility of inclusive, family-centred services • Social norms that encourage help-seeking and service use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative perceptions or mistrust of services • Fear of stigma, discrimination, or punitive actions (particularly in marginalised groups) • Limited access due to financial constraints, logistical barriers or restrictive eligibility criteria

BOX 4.

Adolescent parents

Adolescent parents face unique challenges, navigating their own developmental transitions while simultaneously providing care for their children. These dual responsibilities can intensify existing vulnerabilities, including disruptions to education, limited economic opportunities and increased risks to mental health and social isolation.

Gender inequalities influence adolescent pregnancy. Limited bodily autonomy, coercion, sexual violence, unequal power dynamics and barriers to quality education, often due to household and caregiving demands,³⁸ increase the risk of early pregnancy and school dropout.³⁹ In low- and middle-income countries, pregnant adolescents face diverse and context-specific stressors that impact maternal care delivery and outcomes. These stressors include poor nutrition, higher infectious disease exposure (e.g., malaria, HIV and tuberculosis), higher rates of early marriage and financial stress. Overall, pregnant adolescents are at risk of poorer outcomes, which are worse at younger ages.⁴⁰ Later, women are more likely than men to work in insecure, informal jobs, shoulder a disproportionate share of unpaid care and experience greater interruptions and inequalities in paid employment, factors that compound the difficulties faced by adolescent mothers.⁴¹

Effective parenting support for adolescent parents requires tailored, age-sensitive, and gender-responsive approaches that address their developmental needs, reinforce positive caregiving practices and reduce stigma.⁴² Efforts should be taken to significantly reduce the incidence of adolescent pregnancy and child marriage. This includes legal frameworks that prohibit child marriage, alongside gender-equitable education policies, access to comprehensive sexuality education and economic empowerment opportunities, and interventions that challenge unequal power dynamics and harmful norms.

Comprehensive approaches for adolescent parenting support **encompass access to health and mental health services, educational reintegration opportunities, peer support networks and community-based resources.** Parenting interventions should acknowledge adolescent potential as caregivers and respond to their evolving needs, ultimately benefiting both their own development and that of their children. Safeguarding both sets of rights together is essential to break cycles of vulnerability and promote equitable futures for adolescent parents and their children alike.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND ENGAGEMENT

Parenting is deeply embedded within families' immediate social environments, where community support significantly influences caregiving practices. Communities play a fundamental role in shaping parenting behaviours, serving both as sources of direct support and as contexts within which caregivers develop their understanding of child-rearing.⁴³ Across diverse global settings, caregiving responsibilities are frequently shared among extended family members, neighbours, religious groups, indigenous communities and informal support networks, illustrating the communal nature of parenting beyond individual household boundaries. Community engagement surrounding adolescent pregnancy is particularly critical in addressing stigma and discrimination by fostering supportive and inclusive environments for young caregivers and their children.

Effective strategies to strengthen community-based parenting support:

- Support existing **community-based parenting groups and peer support networks** to foster engagement, social cohesion, and shared learning.
- **Leverage the influence of community and religious leaders** to promote positive parenting norms and challenge harmful practices.
- Implement **outreach models** that proactively connect caregivers, especially those in underserved areas, with essential services related to parenting.
- Involve communities in the ongoing processes of **co-designing, implementing, evaluating and improving parenting interventions to ensure cultural relevance, local ownership, engagement** and long-term sustainability.



Building Blocks

Parenting does not occur in a vacuum but rather within a network of people, structures, and systems. This visual illustrates how the key components of the Global Parenting Support Framework interact to build a coherent, scalable, and responsive system for parenting support across the life course.

At the centre lies the **Universal progressive parenting support pyramid**, which differentiates the universal parenting support available to all families from the progressively more specialised interventions for families experiencing specific or complex needs (see Figure 4).

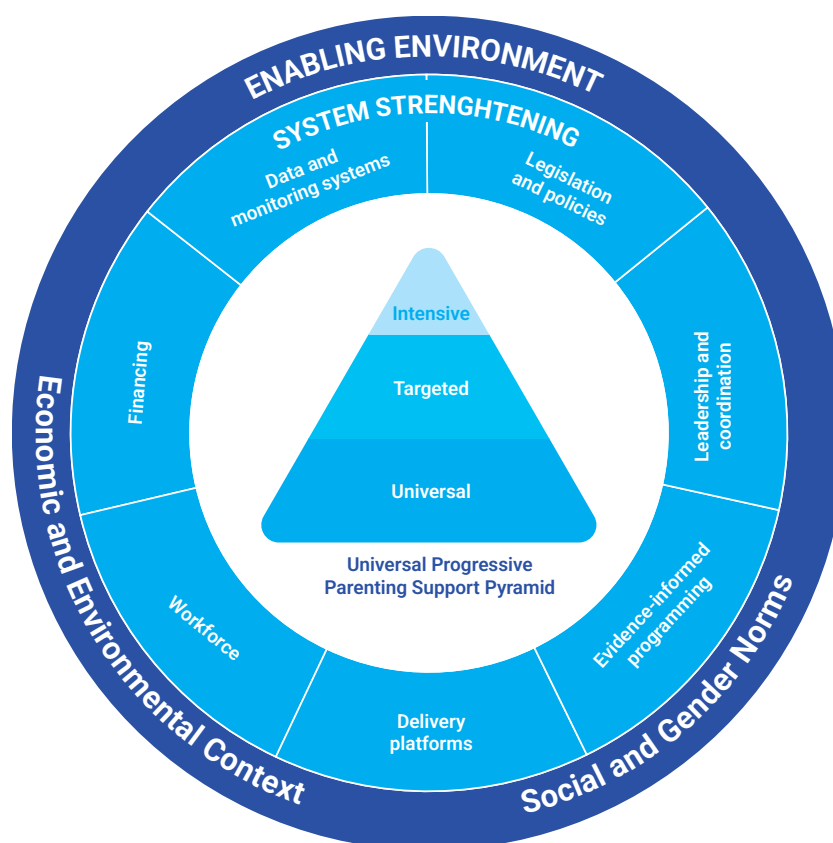
Surrounding the pyramid are the seven core building blocks of **system strengthening**,

which together create the infrastructure and institutional capacity needed to deliver parenting support at scale.

Encasing the system is the broader **enabling environment**, shaped by economic and environmental contexts and social and gender norms. These contextual layers are essential because they influence both parenting behaviours and access to services.

Taken together, this integrative framework promotes alignment across sectors and levels of support, enabling countries to develop coherent, equitable, and adaptable parenting support systems that respond to families' diverse and changing needs.

Figure 4 The Building Blocks of the Global Parenting Support Framework



1 | Universal Progressive Parenting Support Pyramid



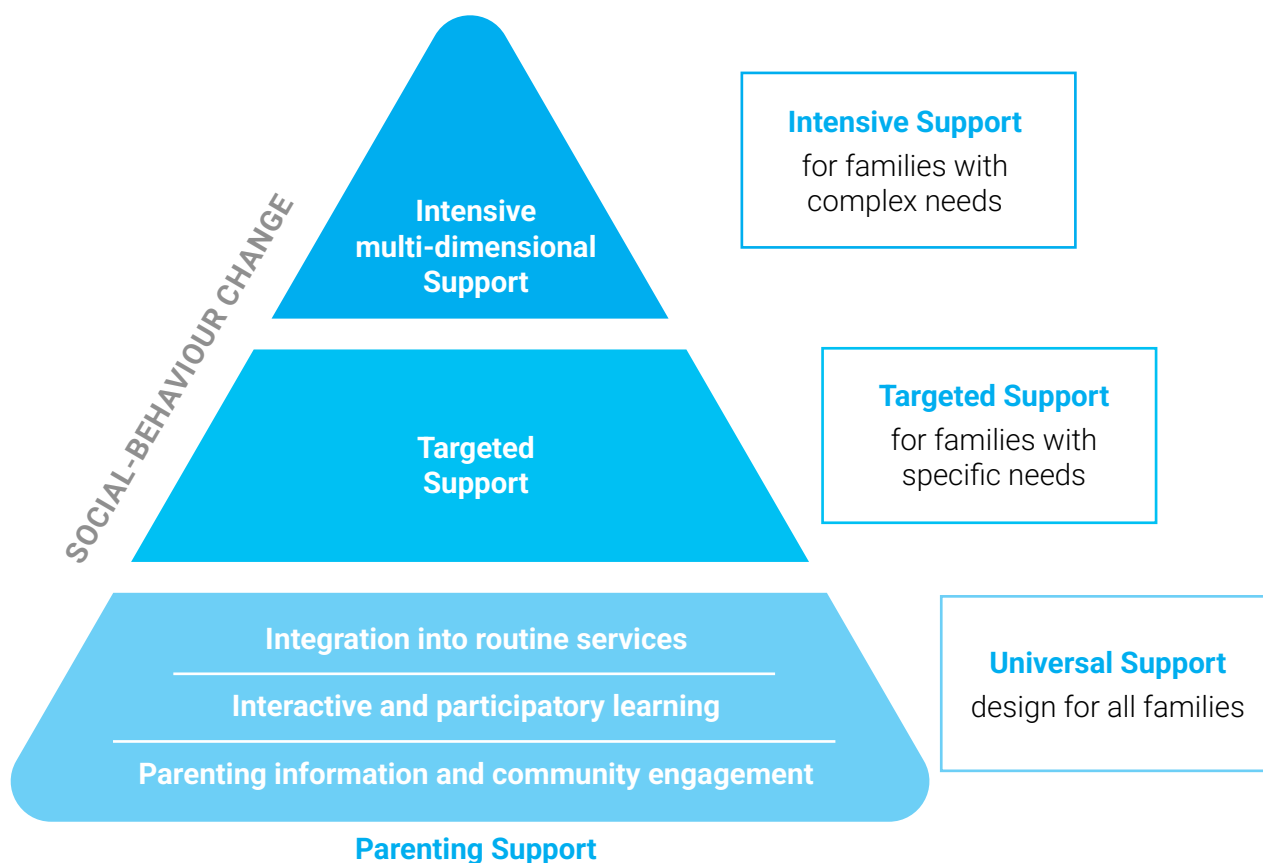
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Recognising that families' needs vary significantly, the Framework adopts a universal progressive approach, which combines broad, population-wide parenting support with progressively more intensive services based on family needs (see Figure 5). Represented by a pyramid with three levels, universal, targeted, and intensive, this approach **ensures that all caregivers have access to inclusive, non-stigmatising, and foundational support, while offering more specialised interventions to those facing additional or complex challenges.** Worldwide, most

countries invest in a combination of universal and more targeted or intensive programs to reach diverse populations and vulnerable groups. This approach acknowledges that families' needs evolve over time and that access to institutionalised support remains limited, particularly for those working in the informal sector.

Social and Behaviour Change (SBC) strategies play a central role across all levels, ensuring that interventions promote positive parenting practices, shift harmful norms, and foster demand for services.

Figure 5 Parenting Support Pyramid



1.1 | UNIVERSAL PARENTING SUPPORT

Universal parenting support includes broad, population-based prevention support accessible to every parent or caregiver. Support at this level is designed to be inclusive and non-stigmatising.

Universal parenting support aims to reach **all caregivers** to shift social norms, provide information and promote positive parenting practices. It can be delivered as a stand-alone parenting intervention or by integrating parenting support components (e.g., key messages, counselling or skills-building) into existing services. Universal parenting support is even stronger when it is coordinated to provide support across different sectors, ensuring

continuity of services, avoiding gaps, and addressing different parenting needs.

Universal support can be structured into three complementary approaches:

- 1. Parenting information and community engagement**, which raises awareness and fosters positive social norms through accessible communication strategies and participatory community-based initiatives.
- 2. Interactive and participatory learning** builds parenting knowledge and skills through structured group sessions, peer exchange or digital courses.
- 3. Integration into routine services** delivers parenting support through frontline workers by embedding key messages and practices into regular family interactions across sectors.

1.1.1 | PARENTING INFORMATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Parenting information and community engagement focuses on the widescale dissemination of parenting-related information to strengthen knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about parenting roles and responsibilities across different stages of child development, from pregnancy through adolescence, while promoting the three critical dimensions of caregiver behaviours, self-care behaviours and help-seeking behaviours. However, beyond information provision, effective parenting support also requires meaningful community engagement to build trust, enhance cultural relevance and increase the likelihood of sustained change in parenting practices.

Population-level awareness efforts include:

- › **Accessible and user-friendly** communication strategies adapted to diverse contexts, literacy levels, disabilities, languages, and digital access capabilities.
- › Use of **multiple dissemination platforms**, including mass media (television, radio, podcasts, village loudspeakers, billboards and advertising on products), digital

technologies (mobile apps, social media, text messaging, websites and online groups), school-based events, and traditional community channels (parenting hubs, community-based workshops and mobile outreach units).

- › **Contextualised and participatory messaging** to challenge harmful social norms and misconceptions, promote gender equality, and actively engage communities through dialogue, peer support structures and local co-designed initiatives.
- › Integration of advocacy efforts within **communication strategies** to influence policy dialogue and enhance awareness about the importance of supportive parenting.

Information provision alone may be insufficient to shift behaviours and social norms; population-based messaging should be combined with other levels and forms of support to enable sustained change. For example, an awareness-raising campaign on the importance of breastfeeding can be combined with home visits focusing on breastfeeding and baby-friendly initiatives in maternity hospitals.⁴⁴ Similarly, a campaign addressing misconceptions and harmful gender norms can complement other targeted interventions that focus on male engagement.



Table 2 Examples of population-based information provision by sector

<p>Public sectors – health, education, social welfare, and child protection</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness campaigns on topics like positive parenting, child development, caregiver mental health, and responsive care that promote help-seeking, reduce stigma around parenting education and challenge harmful gender and social norms. • Displaying child-friendly materials, parenting information, and key messages within services, facilities, public spaces, schools and community-based events. • Integrating gender-responsive components into social protection programs to end child marriage. • Activities that address parental mental health issues, fatigue, burn-out and other challenges. • Awareness raising activities on rights, entitlements, available services and sources of support, including how, when, and where to access them. • Leveraging tech-based approaches, such as mobile phone apps (e.g., Bebbo), chatbots, social media, television, radio, video, and online portals (e.g., Parenting Hub), to share key messages and information.
<p>Private sector</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dissemination of parenting-related messages through internal channels such as Human Resource policies, workplace wellness initiatives and digital communications. Display key messages in common areas (e.g., cafeterias, break rooms, digital bulletin boards or service locations). Highlight the importance of father involvement and shared caregiving through communication strategies. • Integration of parenting and family well-being messages into external branding and campaigns. • Awareness raising on entitlements and family-friendly policies via Human Resources, unions, management training, etc. • Organizing internal events (e.g., parenting seminars, peer groups, or information days) co-led with NGOs or government partners to promote parenting skills.
<p>Community-based organizations and networks</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing and leading parenting support interventions, including through faith-based networks, integrating parenting advice and dialogue around norms in existing projects and activities or joining and amplifying broader communication campaigns implemented by national or local authorities and stakeholders. • Promoting male involvement in parenting; leveraging local role models and opinion leaders to challenge widespread harmful beliefs, misconceptions and social expectations.

Table 2 Examples of population-based information provision by sector (cont.)

<p>Public broadcast/mass media</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media organizations such as television, radio and print can implement and/or amplify public awareness campaigns around fatherhood through public service announcements, commercials, podcasts, billboards, newspapers, etc. • Scheduling special sessions dedicated to caregivers and child development (e.g., morning parenting hour and TV series focused on parenting topics). • Providing parenting information through digital engagement platforms and social media using gamification. An example is the UNICEF Parenting WhatsApp Channel.
<p>Influencers and opinion leaders</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stimulation of dialogue to challenge and shift harmful social and gender norms and/or joining and amplifying existing parenting campaigns through faith leaders, edutainment and/or influencers on social media.

1.1.2 | PARENTING SUPPORT THROUGH INTERACTIVE AND PARTICIPATORY LEARNING

Interactive and participatory parenting support refers to structured, often group-based interventions or programs led by trained facilitators, designed to build parenting competencies through active engagement, interactive methods, and peer-to-peer learning. The course-based format serves as a common implementation strategy across all levels of parenting support (universal, targeted, and intensive), depending on the degree of adaptation and support provided. When **designed for broad and inclusive participation** without tailoring to specific groups, these programs are considered universal interventions that foster skill-building, reflection, discussion and mutual support across all stages of child development.

Interactive and participatory learning support includes:^{45,46}

- › **Structured parenting courses** covering all developmental stages (prenatal, early childhood, middle childhood, adolescence) that encourage skill building, home practice and discussion, delivered through workshops, group sessions, peer-support groups and community-led activities.
- › Participatory methods, such as **reflective discussion, role-playing, guided practice and demonstrations**, encourage home practice of new skills to actively build and reinforce positive parenting skills and attitudes.
- › Comprehensive strategies to address and transform harmful social and gender norms through **gender-equitable approaches**, engaging fathers and diverse male caregivers and promoting inclusive family dynamics.

- › **Facilitators who are trained, supported and supervised** to maintain the quality and fidelity of programme delivery, ensuring cultural relevance, adaptability and responsiveness to diverse needs.
- › Inclusion of **face-to-face, hybrid and digital learning** opportunities to optimise accessibility and flexibility, allowing for engagement across contexts, including humanitarian and fragile settings.
- › Consistent integration of **evidence-based frameworks**, including attachment theory, social learning theory and nurturing care principles, ensuring programs are grounded in proven methodologies to achieve meaningful and sustainable impacts.

BOX 5. Digital programmes

Digital platforms and mobile-based parenting programs are being used to expand the reach of evidence-based support, particularly in low-resource and hard-to-reach settings. **These interventions range from SMS- and chatbot-based parenting tips to interactive apps, digital safe spaces and virtual group sessions, offering scalable, low-cost solutions.** To ensure effectiveness and sustained engagement, digital delivery should be complemented by human-led support (either remotely or in person) to guide caregivers, reinforce learning, and respond to emerging needs.

Digital parenting programmes should be designed following global best practices, including the following [Digital Principles](#):

- Understand the existing ecosystem
- Share, reuse and improve
- Design with people
- Design for inclusion
- Build for sustainability
- Establish people-first data practices
- Create open and transparent practices
- Anticipate and mitigate harms
- Use evidence to improve outcomes

These principles help ensure that digital tools for parenting support are accessible, inclusive, safe and responsive to caregivers' needs and local contexts. **When designed with attention to equity, accessibility, connectivity, digital literacy, and safety concerns, digital programs can complement existing services, maximize impact, and help bridge gaps in parenting support**

ParentText is chatbot delivering parenting content via WhatsApp and SMS, and **ParentApp** is an app version of the Parenting for Lifelong Health programme for Parents and Teens.

Bebbo is a tool available in 15 languages that helps caregivers to support their young children's learning and development in fun, practical ways.

1.1.3 | UNIVERSAL PARENTING SUPPORT INTEGRATED INTO ROUTINE SERVICES

Integrating universal parenting support into routine services and systems involves embedding evidence-based caregiving guidance and counselling into existing multi-sectoral services that families regularly access, such as health care, nutrition, education, and social and child protection systems.

Service integration ensures consistent messaging and aligned guidance throughout different stages of parenting. Competent and sensitised service providers play a critical role in building trusting relationships with caregivers, modelling positive parenting skills, promoting mental health and wellbeing, addressing common misconceptions and harmful norms and facilitating connections to broader support networks.

Routine service integration includes:

- › Embedding **caregiving guidance and support within regular service touchpoints** across sectors (e.g., prenatal visits, well-child check-ups, daycare/nursery services, school-based services, social protection programs, cash-plus programmes).
- › **Training frontline service providers** to deliver consistent, evidence-based parenting messages and counselling, ensuring alignment and continuity across sectors.
- › Ensuring service providers **actively model positive caregiving skills**, promote parental self-care and help-seeking behaviours, and help address myths and harmful practices through informed interactions.
- › Using **diverse and accessible delivery approaches** (e.g., individual counselling, group sessions, home visits, family workshops) tailored to the varying needs, abilities and contexts of caregivers, with emphasis on inclusion and cultural relevance.
- › Offering **user-friendly, accessible printed and digital resources** aligned with local contexts, literacy levels and language diversity, enabling widespread and equitable access to parenting support.
- › Incorporating **Social and Behaviour Change (SBC)** strategies by applying human-centred design and behavioural insights frameworks such as the UNICEF & WHO [Early Adolescent Skills for Emotions \(EAST model\)](#) to improve service uptake, facilitate meaningful engagement, and enhance the likelihood of sustained behaviour change.



Table 3 Strengthening parenting support through routine services⁴⁷

Sector & Description	Examples of parenting support	
<p>Health and nutrition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family-centred health care services guide caregivers to provide nurturing care while supporting their own physical and mental well-being, where services are sufficiently enabled. • Health professionals are trusted allies to caregivers. • Services can be delivered in health clinics, community centres, adolescent-friendly spaces, and home visits by health workers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Parental health and well-being counselling, including stress management and nutrition</i> • <i>Birth preparation and breastfeeding support and follow-up</i> • <i>Child development milestones monitoring</i> • <i>Early stimulation, play, positive discipline, life skills and risk prevention for adolescents</i> • <i>Male involvement in caregiving and adolescent development</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Child-friendly spaces in health facilities, including adolescent-friendly services (e.g., SRH counselling, mental health and psychosocial support [MHPSS])</i> • <i>Community-based services, including mother-baby, parenting peer groups and home visits by health workers</i> • <i>Targeted support for adolescent parents (mentoring, peer support, counselling)</i>
<p>Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education services, including schools and community spaces, encourage caregivers to create enriching developmental experiences for children. • Teacher training often incorporates standards for family and community engagement. • Caregivers are encouraged to participate as volunteers, advocates, and decision-makers, with parenting support provided through educational channels. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Dissemination of positive parenting information and resources</i> • <i>Parent volunteering in formal and informal education facilities</i> • <i>Governance and decision-making roles for caregivers (parent councils, school boards and associations)</i> • <i>Workshops on home learning environments and supporting school transitions (middle childhood)</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Peer support groups and parenting clubs</i> • <i>Online platforms for knowledge-sharing and networking</i> • <i>Child-friendly spaces in humanitarian settings</i>

Table 3 Strengthening parenting support through routine services⁴⁷ (cont.)

Sector & Description	Examples of parenting support	
<p>Social protection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social protection systems integrate parenting support through cash transfer schemes, home visits and welfare services. • Various partners, such as governments, NGOs and cooperation agencies, can deliver parenting support. • Parenting support is an entry point to broader care reform, including gatekeeping, case management and coordination mechanisms. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Information and goods and services support on parenting and safe home environments</i> • <i>Family benefits: cash transfers, child benefits and paid parental leave.</i> • <i>'Cash plus' models combining transfers with parenting support</i> • <i>Group meetings at different kinds of facilities (e.g., prisons, shelters for family victims of violence, displaced/refugee settlements, juvenile detention centres)</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Peer and social networks among caregivers (e.g., single-parent groups, adolescent parent networks)</i> • <i>Incentives for accessing parenting interventions</i> • <i>Child-friendly spaces in social welfare facilities for parenting sessions</i>

1.2 | TARGETED PARENTING SUPPORT

Universal interventions will not be enough to address the needs of some families adequately.

Targeted parenting support complements universal services by addressing specific risks and challenges.

Families facing multiple risks, such as poverty, displacement or living in **contexts of fragility, conflict and violence (FCV)**, often experience higher stress and reduced access to resources. To prevent stigmatisation, access to targeted interventions should be embedded within broader universal programming.

Trained professionals or supervised community workers typically deliver targeted support through trusted community-based platforms, such as local centres, faith-based groups, or support groups. Home visits can be intensified

and linked to social and child protection services when necessary.

Targeted programs would be suitable to address child marriage, adolescent pregnancy and adolescent parenthood through **adolescent-focused programs**. **Adaptation and co-design** are especially important to increase relevance and impact and ensure responsiveness to diverse family needs in targeted and intensive interventions.

Practical barriers, including those related to transport, childcare, inflexible scheduling, sociocultural contexts or access to information, should be reduced through enabling measures like offering services in local languages, providing **incentives** (e.g., meals, hygiene kits, learning materials), or using alternative formats (printed materials, radio, SMS) in areas of low connectivity.

Targeted support typically forms part of secondary prevention strategies and **aims to respond to a person's stage of development and the circumstances that might affect their caregiving capacity. This includes those experiencing ongoing health conditions, economic hardship, food insecurity or barriers related to infant feeding, access to education, legal status, caregiver mental health, social exclusion or barriers to seeking services.**

Families in these situations often experience heightened stress, emotional exhaustion, inconsistent routines, disrupted communication and feelings of guilt and helplessness. In-line with [UNICEF's Caring for the Caregiver Guidance](#),¹⁸ integrating **MHPSS** is essential to reduce caregiver stress and promote emotional well-being.

Audience

Caregivers with specific needs, including but not limited to those living in poverty, exposed to high levels of community violence, exposed to discrimination, with disabilities or caring for children with disabilities, at risk of separation, adolescent parents, refugees and migrants, single parents, and families in humanitarian disaster or high-risk settings.



Table 4 Examples of targeted parenting support^{48,49,50,51,52}

Need or risk	Illustrative examples
Poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growing Up Together – Count Us In: Online programme for families in social services (Croatia) • Sugira Muryango: Parenting support integrated with cash transfers and nutrition (Rwanda) • Familias Fuertes: Hybrid, parenting skills, adolescent resilience (multiple countries in LAC)
Social exclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AMEN Social programme: Cash transfer programme with a package of social services (Tunisia) • Malezi Bora na Maisha Mazuri: Supports street-connected young mothers (Kenya) • Strengthening Protection and Reintegration of Children (SPARC): Supports reintegration of children and adolescents formerly associated with armed forces or armed groups (multiple countries)
Nutrition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • m2m Mentor Mother Program: Peer-led support for maternal nutrition, child development and HIV prevention and treatment (Uganda, Kenya)
Violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sinovuyo Teens: Parenting programme for at-risk families with adolescents (South Africa) • Positive Parenting Program (Triple-P): Multi-level support to prevent behavioural problems and reduce child maltreatment (multiple countries) • Miles de Manos: Community-based parenting programme to prevent youth violence (Honduras) • Generation Parent Management Training Oregon (GenPMTO): Targeted intervention to strengthen parenting practices in high-risk families (multiple countries)
Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paternal - Programa P: Promotes father engagement and social inclusion through gender-responsive parenting (Colombia) • Parenting for Respectability (PFR): A father-focused digital delivery programme to address both violence against children (VAC) and intimate partner violence (IPV) (Uganda) • Bandeberaho: Gender-transformative group-based programme engaging men to promote equitable caregiving (Rwanda)
Developmental delays or disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family-oriented early intervention for healthy child development (Montenegro) • Parent-mediated intervention for autism spectrum disorders (India, Pakistan)

Table 4 Examples of targeted parenting support^{48, 49, 50, 52, 52} (cont.)

Need or risk	Illustrative examples
<p>Well-being (physical and mental)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caring for the Caregiver: Hybrid programme focused on MHPSS (multiple countries) • Nobody's Perfect Parenting Programme: Programme covering topics such as self-care, stress reduction, depression and social support (Vietnam) • Parenting Shops in Belgium and Family Centres in Germany offer stress reduction/management activities and psychotherapy for parents • Strengthening Families Programme (SFP): focused on substance use prevention.
<p>Humanitarian settings</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong Families Programme : Family skills prevention programme for families living in stressful and challenged settings (multiple countries) • The Empowered Futures Parenting Programme. Hybrid support for adolescent mothers in vulnerable contexts (Jamaica)



BOX 6.

Twin-track approach to disability inclusion

Parenting support should adopt a twin-track approach that combines universal and targeted interventions to support children with disabilities, caregivers with disabilities and families with diverse support needs.⁵³

Disability-Inclusive Design *(Universal/Mainstream Approach)*

- Ensures parenting interventions are accessible to **all families**, including those with children or caregivers with disabilities.
- Uses inclusive language and respectful facilitation.
- Adapts materials, environments and delivery methods to meet varied access needs.
- Promotes a **non-stigmatising and empowering environment** that welcomes all families.
- **Essential for universal parenting support programs.**

Disability-Specific Design *(Targeted Approach)*

- Offers **specialised interventions** for families of children with developmental delays or disabilities, or for **caregivers with disabilities**.⁵⁴
- Addresses specific challenges, builds tailored skills and provides emotional and social support.
- Delivered by trained professionals or peer-led networks.

Together, these approaches help ensure that all families, regardless of disability status, are not only included, but actively supported in their parenting journey.

Parenting support should acknowledge the disproportionate share of unpaid care, domestic, and support work undertaken by women and adolescent girls and address the unequal gender dynamics that extend beyond parenthood but are often reinforced within it. These inequalities are even more pronounced for parents of children with disabilities, who frequently face additional caregiving demands and barriers to support.



1.3 | INTENSIVE PARENTING SUPPORT

Some caregivers need comprehensive, individualised and intensive support, typically involving multiple professionals or services across sectors, to meet their children's needs over a longer term.

This level of parenting support is distinct from targeted support because it responds to persistent and complex challenges that significantly impact a family's ability to provide nurturing care, often requiring a coordinated, multi-agency response.^{55,56} Intensive support is often highly individualised and may require a family-systems approach, recognising that working with one caregiver is rarely sufficient. It is tailored to the unique needs and understanding of a family's life and context, including their strengths and opportunities.⁵⁷

- Support may be triggered by statutory child protection services, with parenting programs linked to care reform services such as family reunification, kinship care support and family-strengthening programs to prevent unnecessary institutionalisation.
- Intensive support may be prescribed as part of legal or administrative decisions, aiming to prevent family separation or support reunification, for example through the Family Safeguarding Model, which integrates parenting support, substance misuse treatment, domestic abuse specialists and social workers into one coordinated team.
- Many parents with intensive support needs fall outside legal or statutory frameworks

and therefore have limited or no access to specialised services. This highlights the importance of proactive outreach and inclusive service models for those with high levels of vulnerability.

[Family Safeguarding Model \(UK\)](#) is an example of an integrated, co-located programme offering parenting support, substance misuse treatment, and domestic abuse services to families involved with child protection

Audience

This approach is designed for families experiencing multiple, compounding challenges that significantly impair caregiving capacity, such as **intergenerational trauma, chronic adversity, structural exclusion or extreme forms of marginalisation**.

It also includes caregivers with **mental or physical health conditions and other complex needs**, such as substance use, survivors of domestic or gender-based violence, families engaged in child protection proceedings due to violence against children and those navigating alternative care arrangements (e.g., foster care, kinship care or reintegration from institutional care).

2| System Strengthening



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System strengthening creates the conditions for parenting support to thrive by ensuring that caregivers have access to quality services, supportive policies and coordinated systems. Strong systems empower caregivers to overcome barriers and access the support they need at individual, community, service and policy levels.

This section addresses seven core elements:

- 1. Legislation and policies** that define parenting support as a public good and establish rights, standards and protection.
- 2. Leadership and coordination** mechanisms that ensure clear roles, intersectoral collaboration and accountability.
- 3. Evidence-informed programming** that draws on proven models while integrating contextual insights to ensure interventions are relevant, effective and scalable.
- 4. Delivery platforms and modalities** that are accessible, adaptable, and tailored to families' needs and preferences and ensure continuity of care across settings.
- 5.** A skilled, adequately resourced, and culturally sensitive **workforce** capable of delivering high-quality parenting support.
- 6. Financing** that secures adequate and predictable funding for parenting interventions.
- 7. Data and monitoring systems** that inform planning, guide implementation, and track progress.

Together, these elements shape the institutional, policy and services-delivery landscapes necessary for parenting support to be accessible, inclusive, and sustainable across diverse contexts.

2.1 | LEGISLATION AND POLICIES

Legislation, public policies, regulations and protocols shape the conditions under which caregivers can care for their children, access services and participate in society.⁵⁸

When grounded in equity, inclusion, and evidence, they can reduce structural barriers, promote positive parenting behaviours, and improve child and family well-being.⁵⁹ Under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), governments have an obligation to provide parenting support, which, in

practice, means ensuring access to quality services, allocating adequate resources, and embedding parenting support across sectors as part of national systems.⁶⁰

Policies should address both the direct provision of parenting services and the broader structural conditions that impact families.⁶¹

They should also follow the **socio-ecological framework**, which means integrating parenting support within systems and policies that operate at individual, family, community, service and societal levels.

BOX 7.

Care Systems and Care Reform

Many countries already invest in policies and services to strengthen families, reduce reliance on residential care, and promote safe, family-based alternative care. Care systems comprise the legal and policy frameworks, services, workforces, and financial resources that enable families to care for their children, prevent unnecessary separation and provide appropriate alternative care when needed.

‘Care reform’ refers to changes in the care systems to:

- Strengthen families’ capacity to care for their children and prevent family separation.
- Reduce reliance on institutional or residential care and promote safe family reunification and reintegration.
- Ensure quality, family-based, alternative care options (e.g., foster care, kinship care).

Care reform principles include prevention, family strengthening, gatekeeping, and the transition to family-based care. These are an integral part of parenting support policies because they help ensure that families are supported early and comprehensively to provide nurturing care for all children.

Figure 6 Parenting and family-friendly policies



Parenting policies and legal frameworks

Specific policies are essential to formally recognize parenting support within legal and institutional systems, providing a foundation for coordination, financing, and scale-up. These frameworks usually include:

- Definitions of parenting and parenting support in legislation
- National parenting strategies or plans
- Legal prohibitions of corporal punishment and child maltreatment in all settings, including the home
- Assignment of institutional responsibilities across sectors
- Regulations, protocols, and standards for service provision and mechanisms for clear public accountabilities



Family-friendly policies supporting parenting

A core package of inclusive family-friendly policies can reduce family stress and enable caregivers to fulfill their roles throughout the life course by:

- Ensuring adequate and gender-balanced parental leave
- Improving access to affordable, accessible, and high-quality childcare
- Supporting breastfeeding through legislation
- Providing child benefits, including conditional cash transfers and vouchers



Cross-sectoral integration and equity

Parenting support should be integrated across sectors through inclusive, rights-based policies that ensure financing, quality standards, and equitable access for all families. Legal and policy frameworks must also promote equity by:

- Considering the intersections of all forms of violence against children and women
- Promoting equal caregiving roles for fathers and mothers
- Ensuring disability inclusion and support
- Preventing unnecessary and unlawful family separation, including child placement in institutional care

Practical tools and implementation strategies are available through [UNICEF's Global social protection programme framework](#), and [UNICEF's Family-Friendly Policies Toolkit](#)

[UNICEF's Policy Analysis and Benchmarking Tool for Universal Parenting Support](#) guides countries in understanding their progress and identifying priority actions to strengthen systems and scale up support.

BOX 8.

Policy Analysis and Benchmarking Tool for Universal Parenting Support

[UNICEF's Policy Analysis and Benchmarking Tool for Universal Parenting Support](#) is the first evidence-based resource designed to support governments in analysing their current parenting support landscape and planning for scale-up.

This tool complements the Global Parenting Support Framework by offering a structured, participatory and reflective process which stakeholders, including government agencies, civil society, researchers, donors and caregivers, can use to assess the readiness and quality of parenting-related policies in their country. **It supports strategic prioritisation, coordination and progress tracking over time, enabling countries to develop a clear roadmap for institutionalisation and scale-up.**

The tool is adaptable to different political and governance systems and is not intended for cross-country comparison, but rather to strengthen national systems by promoting alignment with global standards and local needs. It also contributes to advocacy and planning by generating policy-relevant insights across diverse implementation contexts.

Developed by UNICEF, it provides ten policy domains with corresponding benchmarks and indicators that help identify strengths, gaps and opportunities for scaling up universal parenting support:

1. Legislation and policies
2. Leadership and coordination
3. Evidence-informed programs
4. Tiered approach to parenting support
5. Scale and sustainability
6. Use of delivery platforms for scale-up
7. Parenting workforce
8. Public financing
9. Data and monitoring
10. Social norms



Table 5 Examples of parenting-related policies by socio-ecological level

Level	Policy focus	Examples of relevant policies and legal instruments
Individual	Supporting parental well-being and capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to MHPSS for caregivers • Policies promoting parental self-care and stress reduction • Inclusion of parenting support in health insurance schemes
Family	Enabling caregiving roles and conditions at home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paid and gender-equitable parental leave • Cash-transfer grants providing financial assistance to extended family members assuming primary caregiving functions • Legal protections for breastfeeding (e.g., breastfeeding breaks at work) • Child benefits (e.g., universal or targeted cash transfers) • Family mediation and support services to prevent family separation • Early Childhood Care Services for children of mothers working in informal sectors
Community	Facilitating access and community support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public funding for community-based parenting programmes • Legal recognition of community centres, such as schools and health clinics, as service delivery hubs • Local protocols enabling peer support groups and home visiting services
Institutional / Service	Strengthening systems and service quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legislation mandating integration of parenting support into health, education, justice and social protection systems • Standards for parenting programmes (e.g., minimum content, duration, provider qualifications) and care services • Intersectoral coordination mechanisms defined by law • Systems for accrediting training programs and licensing practitioners
Societal	Shaping norms, rights, and social protections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National strategies on parenting support • Legal prohibitions of corporal punishment and child maltreatment in all settings, including the home • Laws promoting gender equality in caregiving • Disability-inclusive and adolescent parent-inclusive policies that ensure access to parenting services

2.2 | LEADERSHIP AND COORDINATION

Strong and inclusive leadership, supported by robust inter- and intra-sectoral coordination mechanisms that include government and non-government stakeholders, is essential

to embed and sustainably scale-up parenting support through national systems. Effective coordination ensures that interventions are aligned with broader health, education, social protection, justice, labour and child protection systems, and that parenting is recognised as a cross-cutting strategy to improve outcomes across sectors.

Coordination must operate both vertically (across levels of government, non-government, and service delivery) and horizontally (across ministries, non-government stakeholders, and sectors). In many contexts, fragmented efforts and lack of a unified strategy reduce efficiency, duplicate resources, and hinder equitable access to parenting support. A cohesive cross-sectoral strategy allows programs to harness synergies, align objectives and optimise implementation and scale-up opportunities.

To achieve this, countries should establish national coordination mechanisms such as cross-sectoral technical working groups or interministerial committees with the authority and capacity to:

- Define clear roles, responsibilities, and accountability structures.
- Facilitate collaboration between ministries, institutions, NGOs, the private sector and parent associations.
- Align parenting support with national family, social protection, education, justices and labour policies (e.g., linking to cash transfers, parental leave schemes or employment services).
- Promote evidence-informed and behaviourally responsive strategies, using real-time data and lived experience to adapt and improve interventions.

In many countries, multiple ministries hold partial mandates related to parenting – such as social ministries leading care reforms, health systems leading on early childhood development, education ministries managing school-based parenting programs and child protection systems implementing violence prevention interventions with parenting components – yet these efforts often operate in silos, without coordination. Coordination structures should be housed within a government institution with a strong mandate

to convene stakeholders, drive integration, and mobilise resources.

The process of conducting a comprehensive mapping of existing parenting-related initiatives across sectors is essential to identify overlaps, gaps and opportunities for integration, and to establish or strengthen coordination mechanisms where they do not yet exist. Leadership is also critical at subnational levels, where many parenting services are implemented and adapted to local realities.

There are diverse models of national coordination for parenting support, including formal strategies led by a single ministry ([Chile](#), [Romania](#)), inter-ministerial working groups ([Kyrgyzstan](#)), integration into existing programs such as conditional cash transfers ([Philippines](#), [Egypt](#)), and multisectoral collaborations with implementing partners ([Zambia](#)). These mechanisms demonstrate how parenting support can be effectively embedded across systems and adapted to local governance structures, ensuring alignment, coherence, and scalability



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2.3 | EVIDENCE-INFORMED PROGRAMMING

Delivering impactful parenting support services requires a solid foundation in evidence. This approach ensures that relevant data, scientific research, and social and behavioural insights guide the design, delivery, and improvement of interventions.

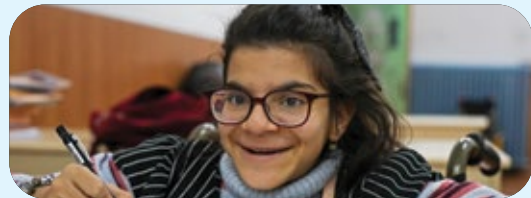
Effective parenting support builds are rooted in proven intervention models and an understanding of parenting behaviours, enablers, and barriers in diverse contexts as outlined in [UNICEF's Designing Parenting Programs for Violence Prevention](#).

While evidence-based interventions provide a strong foundation for scaling, evidence-informed approaches are also needed for innovation, adaptation and implementation in diverse and under-researched settings.



Evidence-based programming

Refers to interventions that have been rigorously tested, typically through randomised controlled trials or high-quality quasi-experimental studies, and have demonstrated statistically significant, positive impacts on parenting practices and related outcomes (e.g., child behavior, mental health).



Evidence-informed programming

Uses the best available evidence, including social and behavioural science, monitoring data, expert consensus, and practitioner and caregiver experience, to design or adapt interventions in ways that are contextually relevant and responsive, even if those interventions have not yet undergone formal impact evaluation.

To ensure relevance, equity, and long-term impact, parenting programs should be continuously informed by monitoring, participatory research, and local contextual data, especially in underrepresented regions

where evidence remains limited. Building an evidence base is essential to scale quality services and adapt interventions to new cultural and social contexts without compromising fidelity.

BOX 9.

Using evidence to adapt parenting programs for family violence reduction and gender equality

Emerging evidence demonstrates that **parenting programs can reduce both violence against children (VAC) and violence against women (VAW)**,⁶² especially when they are intentionally designed with gender-transformative principles as outlined in the [UNICEF's Brief Series](#).⁶³

These programs not only strengthen parenting practices and child outcomes but also promote caregivers' mental health, equitable family dynamics and nonviolent relationships. This is particularly relevant given the high prevalence of violence occurring within the home, making the household a critical setting for prevention and response.

Grounded in rights- and strength-based approaches, gender-transformative parenting interventions challenge harmful gender norms and unequal power dynamics, including those related to the gender-based division of labour, the disproportionate unpaid care work that falls to women and girls, and the social expectations associated with motherhood and fatherhood. They work with both men and women to promote shared caregiving roles, respectful communication and joint decision-making

Key Features of Gender-Transformative Parenting based on [UNICEF's Resource Package](#)

- **Grounded in gender equality and rights:** Promote equitable power dynamics, shared decision-making, and respect for women's and children's rights.
- **Engage both men and women:** Actively involve fathers, grandfathers, and other male caregivers, including adolescent parents, in building nurturing relationships, while addressing barriers to their participation.
- **Promote critical reflection:** Encourage participants to examine their own gender norms, parenting practices, and relationship dynamics through participatory approaches.
- **Build key relationships and parenting skills:** Strengthen communication, emotional regulation, nonviolent discipline, co-parenting, and conflict resolution.
- **Support mental health and stress reduction:** Integrate caregiver well-being and self-care as part of parenting support.
- **Address safety and mitigate risks:** Include safeguarding protocols, monitor for unintended consequences, and offer referral pathways for additional support.
- **Adapt to local contexts:** Involve communities in programme design and implementation to ensure cultural relevance, continuous improvement and increased ownership.
- **Foster sustainability and peer support:** Build family, community, and institutional support to sustain behaviour change and promote scalability.

BOX 10.

Contextual Adaptation and Fidelity

Effective parenting support should be contextually relevant and culturally responsive to ensure families can meaningfully engage with, trust, and benefit from interventions^{64,65} This requires tailoring programmes to meet age-specific needs, local cultural practices, social norms, and community realities, while maintaining fidelity to the evidence base, ensuring that core proven components are preserved.⁶⁶

Programme adaptations can range from surface-level changes, such as translating materials or updating visuals, to more substantive modifications, for example, when they are tailored to the service delivery system in which they will be embedded. While contextual needs may drive some risky adaptations, programmes require careful consideration and the collection of data to ensure they remain effective and safe. It is essential to **distinguish between adaptations that preserve the intervention's theory of change and effectiveness and those that pose risks to its quality, safety or intended impact**⁶⁷ Table 6 provides examples of acceptable and risky adaptations.

Table 6 Examples of acceptable and risky adaptations⁶⁸

Acceptable adaptations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Translating materials into local languages- Changing names, photos, or illustrations to reflect local culture- Adjusting examples or scenarios to fit the local context and demographics- Reordering non-sequential activities to improve flow.
Risky adaptations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Omitting core components- Changing delivery format from group-based sessions to individual home visits- Significantly shortening programme duration

To support meaningful engagement, caregivers and frontline service providers should be actively involved in the design, adaptation, implementation and evaluation of parenting programmes.

Participatory approaches, such as **human-centred design and co-creation**, improve programme acceptability and effectiveness, while increasing caregiver motivation and sense of ownership, especially among people with disabilities and **vulnerable and marginalised groups**.

Barriers to programme engagement and retention, whether structural or those at the service, community or household levels, should be identified and addressed through inclusive communication, culturally sensitive design and flexible delivery models that respect caregivers' time and realities.

Guidance for involving communities in co-designing culturally sensitive parenting interventions

- 1. Start with community engagement, not consultation:** Involve caregivers from the earliest stages of programme design. Move beyond one-off consultations to sustained, meaningful collaboration.
- 2. Use participatory and human-centred design approaches:** Apply tools such as design thinking, community mapping, and testing and refining loops to understand parenting needs, barriers and aspirations within specific cultural contexts.
- 3. Involve caregivers, children, frontline service providers, decision makers, facilitators, and volunteers:** Recognise the value of different actors by inviting them to contribute to content development and shape delivery modalities.
- 4. Build on existing community structures:** Partner with parent associations, informal networks, faith-based groups, and local service providers to expand reach and legitimacy. These platforms are essential for tailoring support to social norms and community dynamics.
- 5. Create inclusive and accessible spaces:** Ensure materials, meetings, and decision-making processes are linguistically, culturally and physically accessible, particularly for those with low literacy levels, caregivers with disabilities or from minority backgrounds.
- 6. Monitor and respond to feedback:** Establish community-based feedback and complaint mechanisms and ensure the results are used to adapt and improve interventions continuously.
- 7. Prioritise equity in programme design and delivery:** Identify and address barriers to participation, including gender norms, household responsibilities or mobility constraints, by designing flexible, respectful and responsive interventions.



2.4 | DELIVERY PLATFORMS

Parenting support can be delivered through a diverse range of platforms that are accessible and responsive to the needs, preferences and circumstances of families across different contexts (see Table 7). Effective delivery requires embedding parenting support into

existing systems and policies, including health, education, social protection, and work-care policies, so that parenting is treated as part of a comprehensive, **well-coordinated system of care**. Quality service delivery must be **grounded in evidence-informed standards, protocols and guidelines, to enable consistent implementation, coordination, monitoring and improvement**.

Table 7 Examples of delivery platforms by level of parenting support⁶⁹

Level	Main delivery platforms and mechanisms	Key considerations
Universal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health services across the life course: prenatal, postnatal, early childhood check-ups, school health and adolescent health services. • Education settings: early childhood education and care (ECEC), primary and secondary schools, and parent-teacher associations. • Community platforms: parenting groups, cultural and religious institutions, traditional forums and peer networks. • Mass communication and digital tools: TV, village loudspeakers, SMS, radio, posters, parenting apps, websites, chatbots and social media adapted for different developmental stages. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure universal messages are culturally acceptable and accessible • Use multiple channels to ensure accessibility across contexts • Prioritise low-cost, low-bandwidth options in underserved areas • Leverage trusted local institutions and leaders
Targeted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government services (health, education, social protection, justice), non-government services (NGOs, CBOs), and informal supports (peer-led groups). • Settings: homes, clinics, schools, youth centres, shelters, refugee camps. • Delivery: in-person, tele-counselling, mobile outreach and app/SMS-based support. • Age-specific adaptations: e.g., adolescent parents. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure intervention adaptation reflects the specific needs and risks faced by families in need of targeted support • Match platforms to family profiles and age-specific needs • Combine individual and group-based formats • Coordinate across referral networks and frontline providers • Strengthen digital delivery with human-led support

Table 7 Examples of delivery platforms by level of parenting support⁶⁹

Level	Main delivery platforms and mechanisms	Key considerations
Intensive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health centres, social welfare facilities, home-based services, community centres and institutional care facilities (e.g., shelters, prisons, detention centres). • May include therapeutic, parenting coaching and multi-family support services. • Case-managed multisectoral interventions. • Delivery: face-to-face, virtual and hybrid 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure intervention adaptation reflects the specific needs of families • Ensure case management is coordinated • Provide therapeutic, individualised support • Ensure contextual relevance, especially in low-resource settings (e.g., community-based in LICs, integrated systems in HICs)

BOX 11.

Scale and sustainability

- **Scaling parenting support means deliberately expanding and embedding effective interventions to benefit more families over time while ensuring long-term sustainability.**^{70,71}

This process involves both horizontal scale-up, expanding programs to new regions or populations, and vertical scale-up, integrating them into national policies, budgets and institutional systems such as health, education and social protection.⁷²

Embedding parenting support into existing infrastructures, rather than creating standalone interventions, enhances accessibility, cost-efficiency and sustainability. Evidence-based planning, participatory design, and systems alignment are critical, as outlined in the [Global Initiative to Support Parents eight strategies for scaling](#),⁷³ which emphasise government leadership, data-driven advocacy, financing integration and inclusivity of marginalised groups.

Key considerations for scaling parenting support^{74,75,76}

- 1. Build on proven interventions** Scale interventions with a solid evidence base and demonstrated impact on parenting practices, violence reduction and child development outcomes
- 2. Embed within existing systems** Integrate parenting support into national health, education and social protection systems and private sectors rather than create parallel delivery mechanisms, thus ensuring intra- and inter-coordination.
- 3. Ensure government ownership and public financing** Engage governments from the outset to facilitate integration into policies, strategic planning, budget cycles, service delivery systems and information management systems. Develop joint scale-up and financing plans.

BOX 11. **Scale and sustainability (cont.)**

4. Monitoring, research, and costing Generate data on cost-benefit analyses, cost-effectiveness, return on investment, and implementation outcomes to inform scale-up planning, service improvement and advocacy efforts

5. Co-design with communities Engage parents, caregivers, and local actors, especially those from marginalised groups, in the design, adaptation, monitoring, delivery and evaluation of scaled interventions.

6. Strengthen capacity Build the competencies and infrastructure of national and subnational governments, service providers, NGOs, community based organizations, and implementing partners.

7. Use context-appropriate technology Leverage existing, low-cost tech platforms (e.g., SMS, WhatsApp, community radio) where relevant, while considering access, digital literacy and the gender digital divide.

8. Promote equity and inclusion Ensure that scaling strategies actively include underserved populations, such as caregivers of children with disabilities, adolescent parents, migrants, refugees and rural communities.



BOX 12.

Notes on parenting support in humanitarian settings

In humanitarian contexts, parenting becomes even more complex, particularly for those with high or specialised support needs.

Emergencies such as armed conflict, displacement, and natural disasters, can intensify existing vulnerabilities, like family separation, and disrupt formal and informal support systems.

Caregivers may face heightened levels of stress, psychological distress, insecurity, and limited access to basic services, while also navigating linguistic, cultural, or legal barriers to support.

Delivering parenting support in these settings requires flexible, adaptive, and integrated approaches.^{77,78} **Intensive parenting support may include MHPSS, child protection interventions and coordinated referrals to essential services such as education, legal aid, shelter, livelihoods and healthcare.** Continuing parenting support programs is critical, not only to promote young children's healthy development but also to strengthen caregiver mental health and resilience.

Special attention must be given to ensuring cultural and linguistic accessibility, and providing safe, inclusive spaces for caregivers to receive support, even when public systems are disrupted or reprioritised due to emergency responses.

2.5 | WORKFORCE

A competent, motivated, appropriately compensated, and responsive workforce is essential to delivering high-quality parenting support. Regardless of their background, service providers across all levels and sectors involved in parenting support, including formal professionals such as health workers, social workers, educators and paraprofessionals (like community health workers and trained volunteers), should share a core set of technical knowledge, interpersonal skills, competencies and attitudes, enabling them to assess family needs, provide tailored guidance, build trust, and connect families to appropriate services.⁷⁹

Workforce capacity should be strengthened through the presence of **pre- and in-service training, supportive supervision, continuous professional development, development policies, regulations, protocols, standards, licensing requirements and adequate working conditions**, in line with efforts to strengthen the care system workforce.

Investing in the workforce not only improves service quality and consistency but also ensures that parenting support is delivered with **empathy, professionalism, and equity** across all contexts and layers of an intervention (see *Figure 7*).

Figure 7 Strategies to strengthen service providers' capacity for parenting support



Mapping and assessing service provider capacities

Workforce assessments should be conducted against the core knowledge and competencies required for different types of service providers and aligned with the level of parenting support they deliver.

To understand capacity gaps, assessments should explore enablers and barriers affecting service provision, including **accountabilities, motivation, pre-and in-service training, working conditions, supervision and the presence of clear protocols and standards.**

Integrating **behavioral research** can help uncover biases, negative attitudes, or social norms that may affect the quality and accuracy of provider-caregiver interactions. Identifying these gaps supports the design of **targeted cross-sectoral capacity-building strategies.**



Capacity development plan

Collaborative planning with service providers, academia, training institutions (e.g. ministries of labour and education), licensing and accreditation bodies and professional associations plays a key role in shaping pre- and in-service training curricula, as well as identifying the tools and resources needed to address capacity gaps.

Training should also **address stigma and discrimination, gender bias and other harmful beliefs and negative social norms**, which may impact the quality of interaction and service offered to parents.

Strengthening supportive **supervision, coaching, mentoring and peer support mechanisms** can help service providers effectively acquire and apply new knowledge and skills, while fostering their ongoing professional growth.



Adequate working conditions

Protocols and standards need to clearly outline parenting support roles and responsibilities. **Job descriptions** and service delivery regulations, protocols and standards should be shaped accordingly.

Based on the workforce capacity assessment, adjustments to service providers job descriptions may be required to ensure they have the right accountabilities and adequate resources. It is also important to ensure they operate in a supportive environment with clear career trajectories and are formally empowered to provide relevant support to parents.

Workforce efforts must be recognised through **licensing, fair remuneration, comprehensive social protection and other non-financial incentives**, which can motivate the workforce to perform the parenting support function to a high standard.

Useful workforce support tools include the [Parent Support Workforce Needs Assessment Tool](#)⁸⁰ and the [European Competency Framework for Early Childhood Intervention Practitioners](#).⁸¹

Table 8 Examples of functions and competencies of service providers to strengthen caregiving behaviours⁸²

Function	Health & Nutrition	Education	Social Protection	Child Protection
<p>Understand</p> <p>Assess and identify each family's needs and strengths through open, respectful and empathetic dialogue.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build trust with caregivers. • Assess needs via observation and communication. • Promote self-efficacy and tailored support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observe daily family dynamics. • Guide on responsive care and early learning. • Build culturally sensitive relationships. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage families on cash transfers or welfare. • Identify economic barriers. • Understand caregiving challenges linked to poverty. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify risks of neglect, abuse, or exploitation. • Assess caregiver capacity and safety concerns. • Build trust for disclosure and safety planning.
<p>Share</p> <p>Provide relevant, clear, and tailored information, advice, and guidance.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide advice on antenatal and prenatal care, breastfeeding, development, health, nutrition and caregiver well-being • Use simple language and visual materials. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guide on play-based learning, positive discipline and home learning. • Offer group activities and digital platforms for caregiver interaction. • Promote inclusion and shared parenting roles. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide information about social benefits and services. • Explain how to access civil registration, legal services, and social welfare programs. • Encourage peer and community support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share safe parenting strategies. • Provide information about child protection rights and services. • Provide contacts for emergency help and reporting.

Table 8 Examples of functions and competencies of service providers to strengthen caregiving behaviours⁸² (cont.)

Function	Health & Nutrition	Education	Social Protection	Child Protection
<p>Connect and refer</p> <p>Identify when additional or specialised support is needed and refer families to appropriate services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify and refer families for specialised health or social services. Develop individualised plans with caregivers and multidisciplinary teams. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Link families to local education or community support services. Connect to additional learning resources. Use digital tools for ongoing communication. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Help families access cash transfers and welfare programs. Link to employment, housing, nutrition or livelihood support. Connect to local services, peer support networks and other community resources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refer to child protection case management and psychosocial support. Support family reunification or alternative care.
<p>Document</p> <p>Keep accurate and up-to-date records of services delivered and families supported.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Track services and caregiver progress through records. Use digital tools for follow-up. Share data for system-level planning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitor child development and caregiver participation. Use data to inform referrals and guide education support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Record benefit eligibility, payments, and household follow-ups. Track trends in programme access. Use data to improve outreach. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain confidential case files and risk assessments. Record actions and outcomes. Use aggregated data to inform child protection strategies.

2.6 | FINANCING

Sustainable and quality parenting support depends on adequate, predictable, and strategic financing.

Key arguments

Investing in parenting support benefits children, families, and societies at large. **Investing in parenting is not only a social imperative, but also a high-return investment in human development with proven benefits for children, families, communities, and economies.**^{83,84,85}

Parenting support contributes to **community well-being and social cohesion**, while it improves **resource efficiency, reduces intergenerational cycles of violence, and enhances human and social capital.**^{86,87}

Parenting programmes offer **high value for money**; they leverage existing systems to deliver measurable improvements in child and family well-being while minimising long-term social costs. The **social profitability** of investing in parenting support aligns with SDG targets related to education, health, gender equality, and violence prevention, reinforcing its strategic importance within development agendas.

Globally, evidence has demonstrated that parenting interventions, particularly during early and middle childhood, significantly **improve caregiver knowledge, practices, mental health, parent-child interactions, and child mental health and behaviour problems.** These interventions have also demonstrated preventive effects on both violence against children (VAC) and **violence against women (VAW)**, highlighting their potential to work at

the intersection of VAC and VAW.

Financing is effective and equitable when it

- is integrated into sectoral budgets across health, education, social protection, and labour.
- is based on evidence and needs assessments, considering costs at each level of the Parenting Support Pyramid (universal, targeted, intensive).
- supports not only service delivery, but also monitoring and evaluation, outreach, workforce capacity-building, supervision and evidence generation.
- includes funding for community engagement, participatory programme design, and behavioural research on parenting practices and access barriers.
- leverages existing infrastructure and delivery platforms to maximise fiscal efficiency.

Exploring **innovative financing models**, such as results-based financing, development impact bonds, diaspora bonds, human development credits, and public-private partnerships, can enhance sustainability, unlock new resources, and support integrated scale-up. Partnerships between governments, multilateral funders, philanthropic actors and the private sector are key to achieving long-term impact.

Mapping **delivery costs, financing sources and return on investment** as part of national programme planning enables smarter budget allocation, minimises duplication and identifies opportunities for integration and scale-up.

Investing in parenting support is a rights-based, cost-effective, and transformative strategy to strengthen families and accelerate progress toward equitable, inclusive and resilient societies.

BOX 13.

Advocacy strategies for financing parenting support

1. Use the social profitability argument

Highlight how investments in parenting support reduces long-term social costs such as those related to violence, mental illness, school dropout, and health and justice expenditures, while improving children's development and caregiver well-being.

2. Link to broader policy agendas

Position parenting support to achieve national development priorities and achieve SDG targets, particularly health (SDG 3), education (SDG 4), gender equality (SDG 5), decent work (SDG 8), and violence prevention (SDG 16).

3. Highlight the evidence

Share good practices and rigorous data from systematic reviews to demonstrate the broad impact of parenting programs in child development, caregiver well-being, family relationships, educational outcomes, and reduction in VAC and VAW ([see Introduction](#)).

4. Frame parenting support as a public good

Emphasise that all children have the right to be raised in nurturing environments, and that governments have a responsibility to fulfil their obligations to support families through accessible, quality services, across all socio-economic groups.

5. Integrate into existing budgets

Advocate for parenting support to be included in core sectoral financing plans – not as an add-on – and promote cross-sectoral resource pooling and co-financing mechanisms.

6. Engage champions and strategic allies

Identify influential policymakers, parliamentarians, economists, academics, practitioners, influencers, civil society leaders and caregivers who can advocate for investment in parenting as a foundational strategy for social progress.

7. Communicate returns clearly

Develop accessible briefs, infographics, and investment cases tailored to ministries/departments of finance and planning, showcasing the return on investment in both fiscal efficiency and societal well-being.



Table 9 Examples of financing models for parenting support^{88,89}

Country	Type of integration	Funding Source	Key characteristics
Chile	Parenting programs embedded in Chile Crece Contigo (ChCC), a national ECD system	National public budget across social development, health and education ministries	Institutionalised through law; integrated within existing services; sustained reach and efficiency through cross-sectoral coordination
Philippines	Parenting sessions linked to the conditional cash transfer programme (4Ps)	National and local government funding through the social welfare sector	High coverage and sustainability; standardised content delivery; linked to child protection and education outcomes
Jamaica	Stand-alone parenting programmes integrated into ECD and poverty reduction strategies (Reach Up and Learn)	Public sector (Ministry of Health), international donors and cost-sharing models	Long-term studies of Reach Up and Learn show strong Return On Investment (ROI) in school readiness and economic mobility
Romania	Parenting support included in the national child protection strategy and EU-funded programmes (Child Guarantee)	National social protection budget and EU structural funds	Resources allocated for training, delivery and M&E; increased institutional ownership and multisectoral collaboration.

2.7 | DATA AND MONITORING SYSTEMS

Robust data and monitoring systems are essential to ensure that parenting support services are responsive, effective, and equitable. High-quality data and research allow decision-makers to understand caregivers' needs, assess programme performance, identify service gaps, and inform the design, implementation, adaptation, and scale-up of interventions across sectors. Strong monitoring systems also support evidence-based resource allocation, drive service quality improvements, and reinforce accountability at national and subnational levels.

To be effective, monitoring systems should be:

- Inclusive, capturing the voices and experiences of different families.

- Participatory, engaging caregivers, communities, adolescents, children and frontline workers in data collection and use, and ensuring safeguarding measures are in place.
- Aligned in national systems, avoiding duplication by integrating data into existing government administrative and reporting tools.
- Embedded within national surveys (e.g., Demographic and Health Surveys) or as standalone surveys for a specific purpose (e.g., evaluation of a national policy).
- Consider disaggregating parenting support data to include children in alternative care or at risk of separation, aligning with care reform monitoring practices.

Monitoring should cover the availability, accessibility, affordability, quality, and use of services, and track both outputs (e.g., service delivery) and outcomes (e.g., parenting behaviours, child and caregiver well-being, child development).^{90,91}

All data collection and analysis should maintain a strong equity lens, identifying both universal challenges and group-specific barriers, to ensure parenting support reaches all families according to their evolving needs and contexts.



Short-, medium-, and long-term assessment approaches can be used to evaluate changes in caregiver knowledge, attitudes, behaviours; child behaviours; parent-child relationships; and service quality. These may include:

- Pre- and post-training assessments
- Self-assessments and supervision tools
- Competency evaluations and real-time application reviews
- Feedback loops and caregiver satisfaction surveys
- Fidelity checks
- Randomised controlled trials
- Contribution analysis
- Impact evaluation

To maximise learning and adaptation, data should be triangulated from diverse sources, including:

- Routine administrative records
- Household and population surveys
- Behavioural research and social media listening
- Participatory action research and situational analyses

BOX 14.

Theory of Change

A Theory of Change (ToC) defines how and why a programme is expected to achieve its intended results. Developing a clear and context-specific ToC is a critical first step in the design, implementation and evaluation of parenting support programs. **It maps out causal pathways, key assumptions, and preconditions for change**, providing a shared framework for planning, coordinating, monitoring, and adapting, and serves as the foundation for evaluation by identifying key outcomes. A strong ToC also helps define indicators, clarify roles, and strengthen alignment across sectors and stakeholders.

In parenting support, a ToC should reflect the interconnected outcomes for caregivers, children and systems across the life course. It should integrate dimensions such as child development, caregiver well-being, violence prevention, gender equity, and social and behaviour change. Critically, it must also be grounded in a deep understanding of context, ensuring that programme goals are realistic and measurable.

How parenting interventions work

The [Inter-Agency Global Initiative to Support Parents \(GISP\)](#) has developed an illustrative global [Theory of Change](#)⁹² for parenting support, which demonstrates how coordinated action at policy, system, and programme levels can lead to sustained improvements in parenting behaviours and child outcomes. This example can guide countries and partners in designing locally adapted theories of change that build on national priorities, data, and delivery systems.



BOX 15

Sample Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Questions for Parenting Support Programmes⁹³

Child Outcomes: Children are safe from violence in family settings and show improved socio-emotional, cognitive, and behavioural development.

- Has exposure to harsh physical or verbal punishment decreased?
- Has emotional, social, and behavioural well-being improved?
- Are prosocial behaviours increasing?
- Do children of different backgrounds (e.g., gender, age, socio-economic status, refugee status) show comparable positive changes?

Caregiver Outcomes: Caregivers practice positive and nurturing parenting behaviours, reduce harsh treatment, and improve self-efficacy.

- Has use of harsh physical or verbal punishment decreased?
- Have positive and nurturing parenting behaviours increased?
- Has parenting self-efficacy improved?
- Do caregivers of different backgrounds (e.g., gender, age, socio-economic status, refugee status) experience comparable positive changes?
- What processes, as perceived by caregivers, are driving these changes?

Outputs: Caregivers increase knowledge and skills in positive parenting, non-violent discipline and stress management through consistent participation.

- Has the caregiver's knowledge and skill changed?
- Are female and male caregivers attending consistently?
- Are participants satisfied with the program?
- Which elements (facilitator skill, home practice, peer support, session content) are most valued?

Implementation Monitoring (Quality of inputs)

- Are facilitators delivering content as designed (programme fidelity and quality)?
- Is gender parity achieved among participants?
- Is quality consistent across partners, regions, and contexts (e.g., host communities, refugee camps)?
- Is the programme reaching scale (predetermined population coverage)?
- What is the cost per participant?

3 | Enabling Environment



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Parenting does not occur in isolation; it is shaped by the economic and environmental context in which families live. An enabling environment for parenting refers to the broader structural conditions that allow caregivers to provide nurturing, safe, and responsive care. These include income security, equitable access to social services, housing, infrastructure, and protection from environmental hazards, as well as social and gender norms that influence caregiving roles, expectations, and the distribution of unpaid care work within households and communities.

3.1 | ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXT

Financial insecurity, unemployment, and limited access to social protection and justice systems can undermine caregiver mental health, increase stress, and reduce the

capacity to engage in responsive caregiving.⁹⁴

Conversely, income security, employment opportunities, and family-friendly policies are proven enablers of positive parenting and improved child outcomes.^{95,96}

Environmental factors also shape caregiving experiences. **Overcrowded living conditions, exposure to environmental hazards, and limited access to safe, clean, and stimulating spaces can constrain caregivers' ability to interact positively with their children.**⁹⁷

These challenges are especially pronounced for low-income families, individuals lacking legal status, and those in humanitarian or climate-affected settings.

Examples of key actions to improve the enabling environment for parenting include:

- Expand [gender-responsive social protection systems](#)⁹⁸ and implement family-friendly work policies that reduce household stress and support caregiving.

- Increase access to safe, inclusive, and child-friendly public spaces that promote play, mobility, and parent-child interaction.
- Invest in climate-resilient infrastructure and caregiving services to address service gaps and reduce environmental stressors.
- Integrate parenting support into national plans for disaster preparedness, climate adaptation, migration, and humanitarian relief.

Creating an enabling environment requires coordinated action across economic, urban, health, justice, and environmental sectors. Policies that improve housing, access to green spaces, and community infrastructure are critical to strengthening caregiver well-being and family resilience.^{99,100}

3.2 | SOCIAL AND GENDER NORMS

Social expectations, cultural values, and gender norms shape how parenting is practised, how caregiving responsibilities are distributed, and how parents seek and access support. Norms around masculinity and femininity, stigma, and community pressures often influence parenting behaviours in ways that may reinforce inequity, isolation, or harmful practices.¹⁰¹

Parenting programs should address these dynamics by adopting gender-equity approaches that promote shared caregiving roles, reduce stigma, promote positive gender socialization, and actively engage fathers and other male caregivers. Content should include reflections on gender roles and stereotypes, sex-gender diversity, and their impact on parenting, family dynamics and access to services. Evidence shows that when designed with these elements, parenting programs can reduce both violence against children (VAC) and intimate partner violence (IPV), even when not explicitly focused on violence prevention.¹⁰²



BOX 16

Gender-Equity Approaches in Caregiving

When parenting programs incorporate content on gender roles, stereotypes, and shared caregiving responsibilities, they can challenge harmful norms, transform unequal caregiving responsibilities, and support more caring, inclusive family dynamics ([Advancing positive gender norms and socialization through UNICEF programmes](#)).¹⁰³ They can also play a significant role in reducing violence against children and women.¹⁰⁴

Key elements of a gender-equity approach include:

- Encouraging male engagement through flexible models (e.g., workplace sessions, peer groups, home visits for fathers and digital delivery modalities)¹⁰⁵
- Addressing gender-based barriers to caregiving and service access
- Promoting co-responsibility in parenting and domestic tasks
- Reflecting sex-gender diversity and inclusive family structures
- Emphasising child-centred benefits of gender-equitable parenting (e.g., emotional security, reduced exposure to violence)

By fostering nonviolent, caring relationships and critical reflection, these approaches not only improve family well-being but also contribute to violence prevention, mental health promotion, and early childhood development.

Relevant resources include the [UNICEF Gender-Responsive Parenting Technical Note](#), the [Innocenti Briefs on VAC-VAW intersections](#),¹⁰⁶ and the [Training Modules for Promoting Gender-Transformative Parenting](#).¹⁰⁷

Programmes should work to understand prevailing and dominant social norms using community-based, participatory research and collaborate with community leaders, role models and local networks to promote supportive, inclusive attitudes and narratives around parenting. Social and Behaviour

Change (SBC) strategies, including evidence-based communication and community engagement, are essential tools for this work. UNICEF has developed several resources to guide positive gender socialization and transform harmful gender norms, including [Advancing Positive Gender Norms and Socialization through UNICEF Programmes](#)

and the [Technical Note on Gender Norms](#), as well as evidence resources like [Gender Norms and Unpaid Work](#) and [Gender Socialization during Adolescence in LMICs](#). Together, these resources offer practical guidance, evidence, and strategic direction for integrating gender norm transformation into parenting and child development initiatives.

When caregivers are surrounded by supportive, equitable, and engaged communities, they are better able to adopt and maintain nurturing parenting practices. Leveraging these community structures strengthens caregivers' sense of belonging and resilience, and creates safer, more inclusive environments for children.

BOX 17

Social and behaviour change

Social and Behaviour Change (SBC) strategies are essential for influencing parenting behaviours, transforming harmful social norms and creating supportive environments for caregivers.¹⁰⁸

An effective SBC for parenting support includes:

- **Evidence-based communication** campaigns that promote positive parenting practices and non-violent discipline
- **Community engagement** through trusted leaders, peer networks, and parent groups
- **Participatory approaches** that reflect diverse local voices and cultural realities
- **Behavioural insights** to design user-friendly services, improve service uptake, and strengthen caregiver self-efficacy
- **Stigma reduction** efforts targeting caregivers of children with disabilities, adolescent caregivers and ethnic groups, as well as those with refugee, migrant, or lacking legal status.

SBC also supports system-level change by addressing social expectations that discourage help-seeking or reinforce punitive parenting norms. When combined with quality service provision, SBC can help shift mindsets, normalise positive parenting and help-seeking behaviours, and promote long-term community support structures.¹⁰⁹

Key references include [UNICEF's SBC Programming Guidance, Gender-Transformative Approaches in Parenting](#), and behavioural research applied in the [Vision for Elevating Parenting](#).



Bringing It All Together: The Framework In Action

The **Global Parenting Support Framework** brings together key principles, evidence and building blocks into a coherent, actionable model that can be adapted to diverse national and local contexts. Its strength lies in its integration across levels of parenting support, sectors and systems and stages of a child's life.

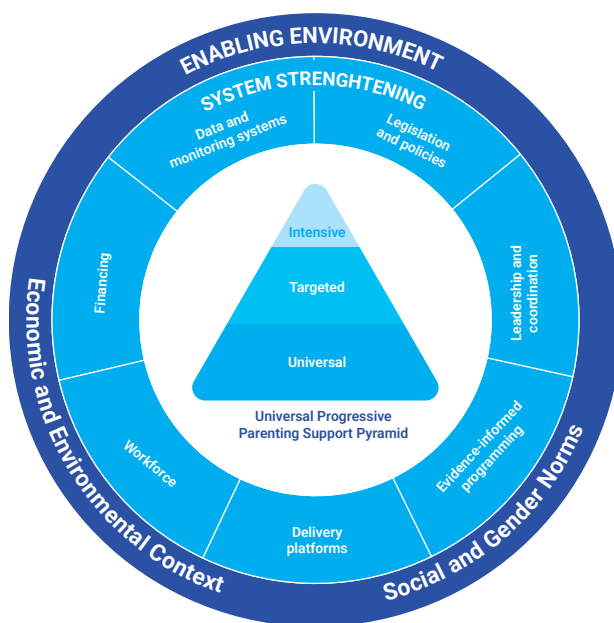
At the core is a **universal-progressive model** that ensures all caregivers receive foundational support, while more targeted or intensive services are available for families with additional or complex needs. This approach allows for stepped care pathways, with clear referral systems and flexible entry points that respond to families' evolving circumstances. Surrounding this model are the seven **system-strengthening** pillars, which define the essential capacities needed to deliver and sustain quality parenting support at scale, ensuring equity for all. The Framework situates parenting within a broader **enabling environment**, acknowledging that economic stability, gender-equitable norms, social protection and safe, supportive environments have an important influence on effective caregiving and child well-being.

In implementing the Framework, **countries are encouraged to:**

- Adapt the Framework to their national priorities, policies and delivery systems.
- Develop or refine theories of change that reflect their context and goals.

- Build multisectoral coordination mechanisms that connect actors across health, education, protection and social policy.
- Strengthen data systems to monitor progress, learn and course correct.
- Ensure meaningful engagement of caregivers and communities throughout design, delivery, and evaluation.

By bringing these elements together, the Framework moves beyond a set of disconnected interventions to support a comprehensive, equitable and life-course approach to parenting, one that invests in families as a cornerstone of human development.



Glossary*

Adolescent: Individuals between 10 to 19 years of age. Younger adolescents are between 10 to 14 years of age, and older adolescents are between 15 to 19 years of age. However, it is noted that in different contexts, definitions of adolescence differ vastly, and in some cases, children are considered to transition directly from childhood to adulthood.

Caregiver: A person who is very closely attached to the child and is responsible for their daily care and support. Primary caregivers may include biological, adoptive or foster parents, family members such as grandparents, legal guardians or other people who are directly responsible for the child at home.

Caregiver behaviours: The behaviours and practices that form the foundation underpinning parenting. Core components of parenting behaviours comprise caregiving, help-seeking and self-care behaviours.

Children and adults with disabilities: Includes individuals who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, without adequate supports, could hinder their equal, full and effective participation in society.

Community: A network of people who share similar interests, values, goals, culture, religion and/or history, as well as a feeling of cohesion among its members.

Community engagement or participation: The process by which individuals, families or communities assume responsibility for

their own welfare and develop the capacity to contribute to their development. Community participation refers to an active process whereby the beneficiaries influence the direction and execution of projects rather than merely receiving a share of the benefits.

Developmental difficulty: Any condition that puts a child at risk of suboptimal development or causes a child to have a developmental deviance, delay, disorder or disability. This term encompasses all children with limitations in functioning and developing to their full potential. It includes those living with hunger or social deprivation, those who had a low birth weight, and those with persistent behavioural problems, sensory problems, cognitive impairments or physical disabilities.

Disability: A long-term mental, physical, intellectual or sensory impairment that, in interaction with the environment, limits activity and restricts participation in society on an equal basis with others.

Early childhood development: The period of 0 to 8 years of age is characterised by rapid physical, cognitive, linguistic and social-emotional development.

Evidence-informed key features: In general, effective parenting programmes and interventions share common content related to (1) the promotion of knowledge of children's and adolescents' development, behaviour, and needs, (2) responsive caregiving, (3) quality time together, (4) nonviolent discipline

* The definitions provided in this glossary are intended as guiding references. Countries are encouraged to adapt them based on their national contexts, using locally established definitions of childhood, caregiver, family and household vulnerability.

(including positive reinforcement, rule setting, and appropriate consequences), (5) stress management and self-care, (6) communication and self-regulation skills, (7) and promoting gender transformative norms, among others. Parenting programs are more likely to have positive impacts when they use strength-based approaches that build from caregivers' skills and lived experiences and when they implement the core content in ways that promote learning, for example, through demonstrations and modelling, practice and rehearsal and positive feedback. These approaches are equally effective in home and group delivery.

Family: A social construct that may include children who live with one or both biological parents or are cared for in diverse arrangements, including living with extended family members, siblings, or in foster care or alternative care arrangements.

Family-friendly policies: Policies that provide parents and caregivers with the care, time and resources to help balance and benefit both work and family life and promote quality childcare, including maternal and paternal paid leave, breastfeeding support, and quality childcare support in formal and informal settings, and child benefits and related social protection systems.

Family-centred approach: Involves working in partnership with families to understand their circumstances better and to decide on strategies that will suit them and their children. It ensures all children have access to essential services and opportunities, regardless of disability, marginalisation, vulnerability, or belonging to specific indigenous or ethnic groups or hard-to-reach groups.

Frontline workers: Workers who are in direct contact with young children and their caregivers to provide information, counselling and other services. They include primary health care providers, early childhood education providers

and professionals, including educators, assistants and principals/leaders, as well as social service workers, community workers, and others supporting caregivers' and children's health, development and well-being.

Gender norms: Implicit or explicit rules within a society or group about acceptable, appropriate, and expected attributes and behaviours for females and males. Gender norms within society shape and reinforce the different roles and behaviours expected of children and adults based on their perceived or assigned gender.

Gender-based violence: Any act that is perpetrated against a person's will and is based on gender norms and unequal power relationships. It encompasses threats of violence and coercion. It can be physical, emotional, psychological, or sexual in nature, and can take the form of a denial of resources or access to services.

Gender-transformative parenting programs: Intentionally seek to address the root causes of gender-based inequalities and to challenge or transform harmful gender roles, norms and power imbalances between women and men and girls and boys. They work with both female and male parents and caregivers to promote caring, equitable relationships and nonviolent interactions for the whole family.

Indicated parenting support: Refers to intensive and individualised parenting interventions designed for families experiencing complex challenges that significantly affect their capacity to provide nurturing care. This includes situations involving ongoing violence, severe stress, mental health concerns, substance use, developmental risks, or social isolation. These interventions often involve multidisciplinary support, therapeutic services and close follow-up, and are typically delivered by specialised professionals or trained paraprofessionals within child protection, health, or social service systems.

Levels of parenting support: Parenting programmes can be classified into three tiers: universal, targeted, and intensive. Universal programmes are delivered to all parents regardless of risk levels (i.e., no screening or selection criteria are used). Targeted programs are aimed at caregivers who have specific needs. Intensive interventions are aimed at families presenting with complex needs and challenges related to high-risk behaviours.

Life-course approach: A life-course approach to parenting support recognises that caregiving needs and priorities evolve across a child's developmental stages, from early childhood through middle childhood and adolescence. It emphasises continuous, age-appropriate, and responsive support to caregivers at each stage, addressing their changing roles and challenges while promoting long-term well-being, equity and resilience for both children and families.

Male engagement: Fathers and other male caregivers are engaged when they are emotionally involved and responsive caregivers, who take an active role in protecting, supporting and promoting the health, development and well-being of their children. If they are in a relationship with their child's other caregiver(s), engagement also means sharing responsibilities for care work and household decision-making, and fostering a healthy, respectful, nonviolent, caring, and equitable relationship.

Multi-sectoral approach: Involves the coordinated engagement of multiple sectors, such as health, education, social protection, social welfare, child protection, and justice, to address the complex and interrelated needs of children, caregivers, and families. In the context of parenting support.

Nurturing care: An environment created by caregivers that ensures children's good health and nutrition, protects them from threats, and gives them opportunities for early learning,

through interactions that are emotionally supportive and responsive.

Paraprofessional: Someone who would typically work next to or support the work of a professional in the same field. A para-professional worker is trained to perform certain functions, but not always legally certified or licensed to practice as a full professional, which in some fields requires college or university degrees or specialised training.

Parent: In the scope of this document, 'parent' refers to the child's primary caregiver and is not limited to biological or legal parents. This breadth of meaning is important given that significant numbers of children are reared by people other than their biological or legal parents, such as adoptive or foster parents, siblings, grandparents and other relatives. The term 'parent' or 'parenting' extends to any guardian or primary caregiver who provides the child with consistent care.

Parenting: The interactions, behaviours, emotions, knowledge, beliefs, attitudes and practices associated with the provision of nurturing care. Positive parenting involves providing nurturing care in a stable environment that is sensitive to children's needs, protects them from threats, and provides opportunities for learning through interactions that are responsive and playful, emotionally supportive and developmentally stimulating.

Parenting programmes and interventions: A set of activities or services aimed at improving how parents and caregivers approach and execute their role as parents or caregivers, specifically their parenting knowledge, attitudes, skills, behaviours and practices.

Parenting support: A broad set of services, programmes, activities, resources and information available to caregivers to help them in their parenting role, increasing child-rearing

knowledge, skills and social support, enhancing parenting competencies, and promoting the well-being of caregivers and children.

Parenting workforce: Includes a wide range of professionals, paraprofessionals and volunteers, who are in both paid and unpaid, governmental and nongovernmental roles. As part of the broader social service workforce, they play an important role in designing, delivering and monitoring parenting support.

Professional: Typically denotes membership in a profession that is well recognised, often for the specific degree or level of education that it requires, a particular ethical or moral code of conduct, and/or licensing or certification to practice. Among social service workers, it refers to those workers with at least a bachelor's degree in a field directly related to social services, such as social work.

Responsive caregiving: The ability of caregivers to notice, understand and respond to their child's signals in a timely and appropriate manner. It is considered the foundational component of nurturing care because responsive caregivers are better able to support the other four components. It includes both sensitivity and responsiveness. Sensitivity is awareness of a child and of the child's acts and vocalisations as communicative signals to indicate needs and wants. Responsiveness is the capacity of caregivers to respond in a timely and appropriate way to a child's signals.

Results-based budgeting: A budget process in which budget allocation revolves around a set of predefined objectives and observed results based on performance indicators.

Scaling up: The process whereby governments, agencies and organizations expand, adapt and sustain successful policies, programs and services in geographic space and over time to strengthen the effectiveness and impact of the system.

Social and behaviour change: A set of approaches that promote positive and measurable changes toward the fulfilment of children's rights. It aims to empower individuals and communities and lower structural barriers that hinder people from adopting positive practices and societies from becoming more equitable, inclusive, cohesive and peaceful. SBC brings together perspectives and insights from multiple disciplines (including sociology, psychology, anthropology, economics, communication, among others) and blends social and behavioural sciences with community insights to enable people and the communities to which they belong to expand their control over the decisions they make.

Social norms: Behavioural rules, expectations and perceptions about others that are largely shared by people within a group or society.

Social service workforce: A concept referring to a broad range of governmental and nongovernmental professionals and paraprofessionals who work with children, youth, adults, older persons, families and communities to ensure healthy development and well-being.

Standardised data collection: Implies collecting data using instruments that have already been tried and tested in real-life situations, have evidence on validity or reliability, and facilitate comparability between individuals and groups and across time.

System-strengthening: Actions to build and sustain capacity in policy, governance, financing, human resources, quality service delivery, data systems and community structures, at all levels, to ensure resilient, equitable, and effective sectoral systems.

Targeted (or selective) parenting support: Targeted parenting support refers to additional interventions provided to families experiencing specific risks or vulnerabilities that may

affect their caregiving capacity. This may include factors such as poverty, adolescent parenthood, mental health challenges, disability, social isolation, exposure to violence, or legal and migration status.

Theory of change: Explains how activities are understood to produce a series of results that contribute to achieving the final intended impacts. It can be developed for any level of intervention, including an event, a project, a program, a policy, a strategy or an organization.

Tiered programs: The balance of the intensity of a programme with the needs of individual families. These programmes can be universal, targeted/selective, or indicated.

Universal parenting support refers to foundational, population-wide interventions that are accessible to all caregivers, regardless of background or risk level. It aims to promote positive parenting behaviours, strengthen family well-being and prevent challenges before

they arise. Delivered through platforms such as healthcare, education, and community services, universal support is designed to be inclusive, non-stigmatising and culturally relevant and is often integrated into routine systems.

Universal progressive approach: The universal-progressive approach combines broad, population-wide parenting support with the progressive intensification of services based on family needs. It ensures that all caregivers have access to inclusive, non-stigmatising and foundational support while offering targeted and intensive interventions to those facing additional challenges.

Vulnerable children and families: Children and families facing multiple deprivations and challenges to their full potential, including families who have been marginalised or are living in extreme poverty and exposed to violence, discrimination, or forced displacement, among others. Note that vulnerability is contextual.

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