

15 Ways to Support Young Children and their Families in the COVID-19 Response

As the global COVID-19 pandemic continues to unfold, young children will be especially vulnerable. World Bank teams can work with client countries to support early childhood development (ECD) by leveraging a range of interventions and mechanisms that will be part of the COVID-19 response in every country.

THREE KEY MESSAGES:

1. The early years are a critical period to build human capital.

The brain matures faster and is the most malleable it will ever be in a child’s first five years. Severe, lifelong impacts can result from deprivations in care, nutrition, health and stimulation and learning during the early years. Strategic investments in ECD need to be prioritized within the COVID-19 response to protect this generation of young children and are a proven way to minimize preventable child deaths and drive economic recovery and productivity in the longer term.

2. Young children are disproportionately at risk and must be prioritized in COVID-19 responses.

Young children are disproportionately represented in the most vulnerable families and highly vulnerable in times of shock because services to support young children are often outside of formal systems and end up overlooked. Already scarce resources will likely be diverted to the pandemic response. Food insecurity will be a profound challenge for young children and their families, which is particularly problematic for children’s development in first 1000 days. We also know from the Ebola crisis, that young children are more likely to experience violence, abuse and neglect as families struggle to cope. The recovery phase from the COVID-19 crisis is likely to be protracted and families will face extended economic challenges.

3. We will reach young children by supporting parents and caregivers.

The unique nature of the pandemic places parents as first-line responders for children’s survival, care and learning. This places a burden on all families, and especially the most vulnerable. Efforts to reach young children need to begin by reaching parents with income and mental health support, encouragement and practical ideas. Even in low-resource settings, in extreme deprivation, there are actions parents can take to protect and promote their children’s development.

15 ways to support young children and families in the COVID-19 response

1. Emergency food delivery, including micronutrient and ready-to-use therapeutic food supplements for pregnant women and young children
2. Provide pregnant women/new mothers counselling on health/breastfeeding/care during COVID-19
3. Use health and nutrition platforms to deliver messages on coping, parenting and early stimulation
4. Promote family handwashing and hygiene, particularly in low-resource environments
5. Targeted childcare and psychosocial support for essential workers on the frontline of the crisis
6. Distribute books, learning and play materials to homes or through community resource drops
7. Integrate early childhood education (ECE) into basic education distance learning programs
8. Educational entertainment for young children delivered through radio/TV/internet/social media
9. As schools re-open: Ensure ECE is included in mass re-enrollment campaigns, implement accelerated learning programs for young children, introduce hygiene protocols that include young children
10. Expand cash transfers, child grants and social safety nets to deliver information and resources to promote ECD
11. Support parents with coping, stress management and parenting strategies delivered via phones/radio/TV/internet/social media
12. Train/provide information to frontline workers to identify/respond to child protection and mental health issues.
13. Set up support services for women and children experiencing domestic violence and abuse
14. Ensure information campaigns integrate key messages to promote ECD and nurturing care, related to nutrition, health, stimulation and learning, violence prevention and psychosocial support.
15. Agriculture extension programs offer opportunities to reach young children and families with services and information

How to leverage platforms within the COVID-19 response to support young children and their families

Too often, ECD falls through the cracks in emergency responses – but there are many ways that ECD can be supported within emergency responses. On the first page, we highlighted 15 ways to support young children and families during the COVID-19 pandemic. On the next two pages, we provide more details on platforms that can be used and examples of specific interventions and approaches. These approaches can be integrated into World Bank operations and used in combination.

	<p>Health platforms</p> <p>As we support health platforms, there are many ways to integrate support for ECD.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuity in basic health - Prioritize delivery of preventive health (including routine immunizations) and nutrition services • Counseling for pregnant women, new mothers and their families on health, breastfeeding, domestic violence, stimulation and responsive care during COVID-19 • Child Protection - Get information to frontline workers to be able to identify child protection and mental health issues • Information for parents –Coping and stress management strategies, ideas to engage in early stimulation and learning at home, help parent recognize signs of illness, promote hygiene and ensure the safety of children 	<p>Example: Mexico online platform for sharing information on COVID-19</p>
	<p>Nutrition platforms</p> <p>Food insecurity will be a profound challenge for young children and their families.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritize food security -Emergency food delivery, including micronutrient and ready-to-use therapeutic food supplements for pregnant women and young children, as well as enhanced forecasting of critical nutrition supplies • Adapt school feeding programs to deliver food directly to communities/households • Information for parents - Information on nutrition, coping strategies, hygiene, ideas to early stimulation, learning and play and how to recognize signs of illness 	<p>Examples: Ecuador texting for nutrition</p>
	<p>Childcare and psychosocial support for frontline workers</p> <p>Frontline workers, such as health professionals, food producers, vendors and shopkeepers, may lose their childcare options when schools and childcare centers close.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting up emergency childcare or employer-supported childcare and/or providing childcare subsidies and tax credits for parents who are still working, particularly frontline workers, will be critical to ensure people can work and children are in safe and stimulating environments • Psychosocial support for frontline workers to cope with stress and fatigue • Childcare workers should be recognized as frontline workers themselves requiring healthcare and protection to reduce their exposure to Covid-19 • Recognize childcares as small businesses that will be impacted in the crisis and in need of support to enable people to return to work post-crisis 	<p>Example: Mobile creches in Burkina Faso</p>
	<p>Distributing books and learning and play materials to parents</p> <p>Exposing children to books and literacy can provide a lifeline to early learning and literacy development at this time.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information for parents - Engaging parents to tell children stories and to read (if able) with children can be done through TV, radio, apps, information campaigns or specific outreach to groups or individuals • Distribute books, learning and play materials- Materials can be shared through existing distribution networks such as cash transfer programs, food distribution or community resource drops, with accompanying materials for parents 	<p>Example: Kenya engaging parents in early literacy</p>
	<p>School re-opening and re-enrollment campaigns</p> <p>ECE needs to be included within school re-opening efforts, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-enrollment campaigns – Ensure ECE is included in re-enrollment campaigns • Accelerated learning programs to promote school readiness (prior/at start Grade 1) • Hygiene - Introducing hygiene practices in schools that include young children 	<p>Example: Preschool Health and Nutrition Guidance (Save the Children)</p>

	<p>Cash transfer programs and social safety nets and agriculture extension programs Household income can mitigate the loss of livelihoods; expanding the coverage and/or increasing amounts of cash transfers will be a critical way to reach young children and families with vital income support and can be used as a platform for other interventions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information for parents can be shared, including on nutrition, coping strategies, hygiene, early learning and play and how to recognize signs of illness • The distribution of food, soap, books and early learning kits can be arranged via cash transfer or agriculture extension programs 	<p>Example: Madagascar cash transfer program with parenting support</p>
	<p>Distance education platforms This crisis presents an opportunity to scale access to ECE at low-cost if integrated into efforts to scale-up remote learning platforms in basic education (see this note on using zero rating and other ideas to ensure free or low-cost access).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preschool programming can be included in remote learning platforms that are being developed for basic education • Support and learning materials for parents and children can be delivered via video, radio, social media, apps, USB sticks and SD platforms in areas with low connectivity 	<p>Examples: Costa Rica online education platform</p>
	<p>Radio and Interactive Audio Instruction Radio coverage is high in most countries (good alternative if internet connectivity is low).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities for children- Interactive audio instruction or radio programs can reach parents and children with entertainment and learning activities to promote early learning, particularly where internet connectivity is low • Information for parents and families- Radio can be used to share key messaging around nutrition, health, parenting, coping, hygiene, early learning and play, as part of national and local communications campaigns 	<p>Example: Interactive Audio Instruction in the DRC</p>
	<p>Social Media Social media, especially Facebook and WhatsApp, have high penetration in low and middle-income countries and can be used to amplify messaging and create support networks (see this note on ideas to ensure free or low-cost access).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keys messages for parents on parenting, coping, health, nutrition, sanitation and early learning as part of national and local communications campaigns • Support networks – social media platforms, particularly WhatsApp, can be used to create parent support communities around coping and parenting 	<p>Example: Instagram resources on parenting in the United Arab Emirates COVID19 Parenting resources through Facebook (Internet of Good Things)</p>
	<p>Television Penetration of TV is high and a good option, especially when internet connectivity is low.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entertainment and learning for children- Television can deliver entertainment and serve as an early learning platform • Information for parents- Television can share messages around parenting, hygiene, children’s early learning and development and coping mechanisms 	<p>Example: Sesame Street Caring for Each Other Akili and Me radio and TV (9 countries)</p>
	<p>Mobile phones Texting and call centers have been successfully used to support parents; establishing toll-free numbers or distributing airtime may be needed to ensure access.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Texting can be used to share key messages on parenting, nutrition, health, early stimulation and strategies to reduce the rate of infection • Call centers can support parents with coping techniques and ideas to promote ECD • Teachers can use phones to reach parents and share early learning ideas • Hotlines can support women and children experiencing domestic violence 	<p>Example: Colombia Contacto Sin Contagio (Contact without Infection) Nicaragua texts to caregivers on parenting</p>
	<p>National communication campaigns</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information for parents -Messaging around WASH for children, early stimulation, nutrition, health and child protection can be integrated into communications campaigns which are part of the COVID-19 response 	<p>Example: Kenya ECD toolkit</p>