

## New UNICEF resource: Programming guidance for parenting of adolescents

Skeen, S, Levy, M, Haj-Ahmad, J (2021) *Programming Guidance for Parenting of Adolescents*. UNICEF. Available:

<https://www.unicef.org/reports/parenting-adolescents>.

Parents play an essential role in influencing how adolescents interact with the complex, interlinked factors that shape their development. Not only do positive parental relationships enhance developmental outcomes for adolescents but effective parenting can also alleviate the impact of negative external factors. The influence of parenting practices can also extend across generations. Building on parents' existing strengths and equipping them to provide support to their adolescent children through a parenting programming has the potential to have a profound positive influence on adolescent development.

UNICEF's Programming Guidance for Parenting of Adolescents (2021) aims to guide global efforts to strengthen evidence-based, holistic programming for the parenting of adolescents. The guidance is targeted at practitioners and stakeholders working on responses to support the parenting and caregiving of adolescents across sectors. It presents a series of recommended considerations and core content areas for parenting of adolescent programmes as informed by a comprehensive review of the existing evidence base.

In terms of key considerations, parenting programmes of adolescents should:

- Use a strengths-based approach that recognises parents' existing skills and experience and in turn supports them to nurture the strengths of their adolescents
- Promote gender-equitable norms and reduce exposure to gender-specific risks
- Promote adolescents' safe and meaningful participation within their families and communities according to their evolving capacities
- Be inclusive of all parents including the most marginalised
- Rely on the sizeable existing knowledge base on the parenting of adolescents.

Depending on the aims and the target audience, programmes for the parenting of adolescents would ideally contain core content to:

- Promote loving, warm and affectionate relationships between parents and their adolescent children using age-appropriate strategies to promote adolescent wellbeing
- Improve parents' knowledge of adolescent physiological, cognitive, social and emotional development to enable them to meet their adolescent children's needs more effectively
- Develop parents' skills to communicate respectfully with adolescents in a manner that respects their evolving capacities
- Support parents to employ positive, non-violent discipline techniques that communicate expectations and set parameters around adolescents' behaviour
- Empower parents to create safe environments by reducing exposure to risks and to assist their adolescent children to access support services
- Support parents to provide for adolescents' basic needs, such as through the inclusion of parenting programmes in social protection schemes that support families living in poverty, while taking account of adolescents' growing decision-making roles in the household
- Protect and promote parental mental health and link them with further care as required

The guidance further outlines how to plan for scale-up and sustainability from the initial stages of development to ensure the extended reach and lasting impact of the parenting of adolescents programming. It describes how to develop strong monitoring and evaluation systems that are essential to support and inform programme implementation. Finally, the resource offers a nine-step process to set out the specific activities required to design, deliver and evaluate parenting programmes of adolescents and to plan for future scale-up.

UNICEF is currently developing detailed messaging and implementation resources, based on the key considerations and core content outlined in the guidance, for implementing holistic parenting of adolescents' resources (expected early 2022). The guidance is currently available in English and Spanish.

## UNICEF programming guidance: Nutrition in middle childhood and adolescence

UNICEF (2021). *UNICEF programming guidance: Nutrition in middle childhood and adolescence*. Available from:

<https://www.unicef.org/media/106406/file>

Middle childhood and adolescence are critical life stages when malnutrition has long-term implications on physical, social and mental growth and development. Undernutrition and chronic infections affect enrolment, attendance and performance at school, influencing children's ability to become productive adults. On the other hand, childhood overweight and obesity increase the risk of developing noncommunicable diseases such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease in later life.

In 2016, approximately 8% (75 million) of girls and 12% (117 million) of boys 5-19 years of age globally were classified as thin. For girls 15-19 years of age, the prevalence of anaemia ranged between 16% in the Middle East and North Africa and 54% in South Asia. In some low- and middle-income countries, ultra-processed foods comprise 18-35% of overall food consumption, contributing to the global rise in obesity that affected a staggering 125 million children 5-19 years of age in 2016. In many countries, these different forms of malnutrition coexist, highlighting the need for policies and programmes that address all forms of malnutrition through coordinated efforts across five key systems: education, food, health, water and sanitation and social protection.

UNICEF's recently published guidance aims to inform programming efforts to "protect and promote diets, services and practices that support optimal nutrition, growth and development in middle childhood and adolescence". The overarching framework is aligned with UNICEF's Nutrition Strategy 2020-2030<sup>1</sup> and articulates programme priorities as follows: (1) nutritious foods in schools and beyond; (2) healthy food environments in schools and beyond; (3) micronutrient supplementation and deworming; (4) nutrition education in school curricula; and (5) healthy dietary practices for school-age children and adolescents. Technical and operational guidance is provided for the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programmes, all of which should be evidence-driven and respond to the nutrition situation, resources and other contextual factors specific to the target country. In addition, the meaningful engagement and participation of children and adolescents is needed to ensure that these groups are provided with appropriate platforms and means to produce knowledge, influence decision-making and drive progress. Finally, programming should be guided by key principles to ensure that implementation across priority areas is rights-based, equity-focused and gender-responsive.

Through its systems-based approach, UNICEF recognises the central role of the education system for reaching children with essential nutrition interventions, including providing nutrition education, school meals, micronutrient supplementation and deworming prophylaxis, as well as promoting and supporting opportunities to be physically active. The food system also plays a central role in shaping healthy food environments both in- and out-of-school while the health, water and sanitation and social protection systems should ensure access to diets, services and practices that support adequate nutrition, growth and development among children and adolescents. Integration across these systems, and their related delivery platforms, is critical to the effective design and delivery of evidence-based interventions and programmes that include robust reporting and monitoring frameworks to track progress towards the key priorities. The guidance also highlights the importance of including school-aged children and adolescents in humanitarian response as well as strategic partnerships with governments, academia, bilateral agencies, youth leaders, the private sector and other organisations as crucial to achieving results.

<sup>1</sup> Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/reports/nutrition-strategy-2020-2030>