



PARENT AND CAREGIVER SUPPORT STRATEGY

Practical application of the INSPIRE framework for effective prevention of violence against children



SUMMARY

Traditionally, it was believed that ‘sparing the rod, spoils the child’ as an affirmation to beat or assault children in order to discipline or correct them. This reader explores a more effective approach to influencing a child’s behaviour by providing evidence-based approaches that build positive parent-child and caregiver relationships as described in the INSPIRE Handbook. The approaches are part of the INSPIRE framework of seven strategies that global child rights actors are using to reduce violence against children.

Keywords: INSPIRE, corporal punishment, positive parenting, nurturing parenting, positive discipline

An overview of the INSPIRE parent and caregiver support strategy

“If you want your children to turn out well, spend twice as much time with them, and half as much money.” *Abigail Van Buren*

In many schools and homes throughout East Africa, corporal punishment is still the primary form of discipline even though it has proven to be only mildly effective in changing a child’s behaviour, and conversely been shown to escalate behavioural problems in the child and aggressive tendencies as an adult.

“People get frustrated and hit their kids. Maybe they don’t see there are other options”ⁱ, says Sandra Graham-Bermann, a psychology professor and principal investigator for the Child Violence and Trauma Laboratory at the University of Michigan adding that: “Physical punishment doesn’t work to get kids to comply, so parents think they have to keep escalating it. That is why it is so dangerous.” Researchers have observed that in a moment of anger, parents, caregivers and teachers often do not know when to stop and can therefore escalate their punishment to the point of aggravated physical harm to the child.

In Uganda, a 2018 video raised public outrage when it showed a parent viciously beating a four year old at his nursery school for getting lost on his way to school. This is in spite of Article 106 (a) of the Children Act, as amended in 2016, which prohibits corporal punishment in schools.

In Kenya in 2016, a teacher at ACK Thika Memorial Church School, viciously beat a child, clawed him with her nails causing serious bruising and bleeding. The child later began to wet his bed, suffered from anxiety and became sickly.

A 2017 study published in *Child Abuse and Neglect*ⁱⁱ revealed the cross-generational effects of violence in homes where physical punishment was used –the children were more like to hit their peers and siblings to resolve conflict and continue the practice with their own children.

Box 1: Did you know?

- ▶ The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child issued a directive in 2006 calling physical punishment “legalized violence against children”.
- ▶ 30 countries have banned physical punishment of children, including in the home. However, the U.S. is not one of them.
- ▶ Frequently beaten children become more rebellious to all forms of authority, have poor relationships with their parents and are more likely to hit their spouse.
- ▶ Rewarding desirable behaviour in children is more effective than punishing undesirable behaviour.

Helping parents to protect children

Many parents attest to the fact that they simply emulate their own parents when it comes to raising their children –they were beaten constantly to toe the line and they in turn do the same. The strategy of Parent and Caregiver Support therefore focuses on developing cost-effective programmes that support parents and caregivers to focus on alternative positive parenting methods rather than the traditional physical punishment.

Benefits of parenting programmes

- Positive relationships between parents and children minimize conflict
- Improves early child development outcomes by encouraging visits to health facilities, nutrition and overall maternal health
- Interrupt the cycle of violence across generations
- Creates more stable families
- Promotes positive social norms in the community

Key tenets of the Parent and Caregiver Support strategy

- Understanding a child's development journey
- Improving parent-child communication techniques
- Emotions management
- Problem solving skills which involve children in the solution
- Building parents' and children's social skills
- Parent and child play
- Positive and direct commands
- Praise and rewards
- Applying non-violent rewards for misbehavior including ignoring, timeout, natural and logical consequences

Research shows that the costs of prevention are lower than the costs of dealing with the effects of violence, thus emphasizing the importance of prioritizing prevention. As a positive tie in, supporting parents and caregivers improves the implementation of the other INSPIRE strategies, for example, conflict-free home environments fortify the Income and Economic Strengthening strategy as parents can agree on beneficial income generating projects that improve the well-being of the home and consequently of the child; social norms can also change by promoting positive discipline over physical punishment in the community; and parents trained in positive discipline can support the enforcement of laws and respond to community cases of violence against children.

Box 2: Alternatives to corporal punishment

Positive parenting

This involves setting a pleasant atmosphere where children feel safe and receive affection and praise; spend quality time with their parents, and learn to communicate their needs effectively.

Nurturing parenting

The focus is on social and emotional behaviour, impartation of life skills, and problem solving as modeled by parents.

Positive discipline

A non-violent approach is employed with alternatives like taking away privileges, giving apologies, quiet corners and good behaviour is rewarded and reinforced.

Developing community-based parenting programmes

Implementers work to identify the most vulnerable or most-at-risk families within the community using specific criteria. They include those exposed to violence, and other risk factors like severe economic vulnerability, without stigmatizing participating families. A mixed method approach (layered) is recommended, with more time spent on the approach that meets the family needs, for example majorly home visits where there are infants, and community group parenting for families with older children and adolescents. Programme delivery can be done by health workers, and



parasocial workers, supported with continuous training and support supervision.

Retaining parental participation in parenting programmes

Implementers need to plan early to address known problems that limit participation in programmes including transportation, male-female power dynamics, economic activities, culture and tradition and child care.

Respecting participant's privacy and dignity, avoiding judgmental behaviour, and emphasizing strengths rather than weaknesses can motivate parents to complete the programme and encourage others to join.

Reflection on the design of parenting programmes

1. What outcomes are you most interested in affecting?
2. What are possible mechanisms for delivering parent and caregiver support, for example community or faith-based organizations, health systems or health care workers, social service system or social service workers, schools?
3. Based on your reflections, what is your goal for strengthening the parent and caregiver support strategy in your setting?

In Practice: Promising evidence from case studies

Philani Mentor Mother Programme

Mentor mothers promote maternal and child health through home visits to pregnant women where they pass on information to them about child nutrition, HIV and TB prevention. This programme focuses on relationship building to win the trust of the 'client'. By continuous presence, listening, affirmation and knowledge, health outcomes are improved through education, referral services and early childhood stimulation.

The programme has been implemented in South Africa, Ethiopia and eSwatini (Swaziland).

Safe Environment for Every Kid (SEEK)

Focusing on psychosocial support, the programme trains primary health care workers to assess mental issues among parents and caregivers that may lead to child mistreatment. It is administered through a short self-test questionnaire. A mental specialist reviews the questionnaire and recommends follow up services within the community for the parents. A trained health service provider can also respond and refer in the absence of a specialist.

This programme is effective in detecting risk factors for violence against children.

www.seekwellbeing.com

REAL Fathers

A 12-session mentoring programme, the Responsible, Engaged, and Loving (REAL) Fathers supports young fathers (16-25 years) in Northern Uganda, in positive parenting. It is based on social cognitive theory in order to reduce intimate partner violence and child abuse through alternative conflict resolution methods and self-reflection.

Mentees met with mentors twice a month for six months in individual and group sessions with notable reductions in IPV and child physical punishment.

<http://irh.org/projects/real-fathers-initiative/>

Positive Action

Through this educational programme, students are taught systematically, how to cooperate and avoid violent incidents. Delivered through the school setting, the programme focuses on positive actions at school.

Two kits are provided –the Family Kit for parents which provides 42 lessons for reinforcing positive actions in the home

<https://www.positiveaction.net/planning/grant-writing/program-descriptions>

Endnotes

ⁱ <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2012/04/spanking>

ⁱⁱ Child Abuse & Neglect, Volume 71, September 2017, Pages 24-31
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0145213417300145>

Further Reading

Spanking and adult mental health impairment: The case for the designation of spanking as an adverse childhood experience
<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/what-science-says-and-doesn-t-about-spanking/>

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Positive parenting: IPSCAN Global resource guide. IPSCAN; 2016 (https://www.ispcan.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Positive_Parenting_Report_Fi.pdf, accessed 27 April 2018).

Provides a summary of high-level clinical and policy advice from international experts on child protection.
Positive parenting: IPSCAN global resource guide. International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect. Aurora, Colorado: 2016. (https://www.ispcan.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Positive_Parenting_Report_Fi.pdf, accessed 25 October 2017).

Lackman J, Hutchings J. Sinovuyo caring families programme for young children facilitator manual. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2016 (http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/child/PLH-for-Young-Children-Facilitator-manual-English.pdf, accessed 25 October 2017).

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