
SITE VISIT: Strengthening and Enhancing Parenting Skills

By Farida Akhtar, Coordinator, Early Childhood Development Unit (Bangladesh), 1998

Parenting programmes focussed on child rearing practices are very new in Bangladesh. There are programmes for parents focusing on the health and nutritional needs of children without putting emphasis on children's learning needs.

Although Bangladesh was one of the first 22 countries that signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and although implementation of the convention has been made compulsory for Bangladesh since September 2 1991, programmes for child development, other than schooling (formal and nonformal education), have not been considered seriously.

The parenting/caregiving programme run by "Early Childhood Development Unit" has given importance to "Child Rearing Practices" with special emphasis on:

- an active participatory way of learning for parents' sessions
- an experiential learning process, i.e., experience-reflection-analysis and application
- emphasis on positive traditional child rearing practices
- reliance on parents' existing strengths in rearing their children
- the use of a variety of participatory training methods
- making training sessions joyful

About the Unit

The Early Childhood Development (ECD) Unit is a joint project of four organizations, namely Save the Children (USA), Plan International, GSS, and Phulki. The Unit is not an implementing agency but is responsible for designing programmes, conducting training, developing manuals and other resource materials, preparing toys/learning materials, collecting materials (child development related) from other organizations, and raising awareness. The unit is offering its professional support to its four member organizations and also to the partner organizations of Save the Children (USA). Presently the unit is limiting its services to three areas namely:

- Parenting/Caregiving programme
- Day Care Centre programme

- Pre-school programme

Gradually the unit will go for other child development related programmes like Child-to-Child programme for drop-in centres, etc. The ECD unit is interested in offering its professional support to any organization which wants to make a real difference in young children's lives. The training on "child rearing practices" for parents/caregivers mainly emphasises:

- How to promote children's holistic development by providing stimulating learning environments.
- The need for a close, warm and trustworthy relationship between children and caregivers.
- How to work with children for promoting their self confidence, self esteem, self control, relationship skills, decision making abilities, problem solving abilities, crisis management skills, conflict resolution skills, morality and so on.
- How to make and collect toys/learning aids for children and how to keep them in good condition.
- How to teach children to be responsible.
- The importance of providing equal attention to both girl and boy children.

The ECD unit's guiding principles for programme development are:

- The objective of early childhood intervention is to establish a foundation for life-long learning.
- Children's two basic developmental needs are, on the one hand, love and acceptance, and on the other, exploration, activity and expression as independent beings.
- Every child should have the opportunity for participation in family and other social environments like pre-school, daycare centres, etc.
- Areas of development are intertwined, as they make up the whole child.
- Through play children practice skills they have acquired and learn new ones.
- Providing a stimulating environment is the key to learning and development.
- Interest, praise and encouragement from adults is very important to children.
- For young children, it is the process of creating that is important, not the product. In other words, process is more important than product.
- The basic needs of child development go beyond protection, food, and health care and include the need for affection, interaction, stimulation, security, and play, allowing for exploration and discovery.
- Every child is unique. Two children of the same age are not exactly alike, and every child has an individual learning style.

- It is essential to create equal opportunities for both girl and boy children for their maximum development.
- Cultural appropriateness is a major criteria for a successful child development programme.

A training module has been published for this programme highlighting all these issues. The training module contains fifteen sessions spread over nine units. The parents/caregivers are to have sessions in groups, with 20-22 members in a group.

In Nasirnagar (Save the Children/USA's impact area) the participants of these sessions are the members of a formed group called the Women's Saving Group. Twice a month these groups have sessions on "child rearing practices" with the Save's staff from that particular area acting as facilitators of these sessions. Save's partner organisations also implement this programme with their adult literacy group (the reflection circle). Plan International intends to offer this programme to the parents of children who are attending its preschool centres.

The participants' feelings, remarks, quality of participation, as well as the observations of the facilitators, programme supervisors, programme developers, programme evaluators, and others, have provided a very positive and exciting feedback about this programme. Among these are:

- Parents feel honoured and important when they realise that cultural practices are really valuable for children.
- Parents/caregivers enjoy themselves when they attend these sessions.
- Mothers feel the need to involve fathers in these sessions.
- Facilitators and other staff (those who received the training) seriously felt the importance of learning about "child rearing practices " as parenting skills are equally important to them.
- The use of a variety of participatory methods seems to be good for making the sessions attractive and joyful and also for pulling out ideas from the participants about adopting different ways. This means strengthening and enhancing parents' existing knowledge and skills about child rearing practices.

Very recently monitoring forms for facilitators and supervisors have been developed through the participation of facilitators, supervisors, ECD unit representatives, and others. The use of these forms will give more systematic information about the impact of this programme on parents' and caregivers' ways of child rearing and children's overall development.

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Early Childhood Counts: Programming Resources for Early Childhood Care and Development.
CD-ROM. The Consultative Group on ECCD. Washington D.C.: World Bank, 1999.