



OHCHR

Ensuring Quality Education for peace and tolerance for every child

Response to the call for input

Etymologically, education means “to bring up”, “to bring forth”. Education begins at home during the early years of the child.

When we educate children for peace, we are guiding their development to enable them to grow up and join the world outside their home, armed with a healthy capacity to relate, a pro-social behaviour and responsible citizenship, all of which results in tighter communities and more socially cohesive and peaceful societies. Policy support for at-home parents, however, is practically non-existent in most countries around the world.

Early childhood education programs are equally important and complementary to at-home environments that enable positive relational health, education and skills. Yet, one child in four below the age of 5 has never had access to any form of pre-primary education.¹ This statistic is worrying since one of the sustainable development goals (SDG 4.2) seeks to guarantee every boy and girl access to pre-primary education.

Early childhood is a key period for the development of the child

Early Childhood Development (ECD) designates the crucial time frame during which the child develops physically, mentally, spiritually, and morally. It starts with the prenatal period and extends until the child reaches 8 years of age. During this key time, the plasticity of the brain develops. Through psychosocial stimulation, adequate prenatal and postnatal nutrition, a safe physical environment, and a healthy mother, the child can develop to its fullest potential.

A suboptimal environment in those formative years can have lasting consequences. When a child is exposed to malnutrition or toxic stress because of violence or neglect, the impact is felt on its psychological well-being, its learning capacity, and its interpersonal relations.² Research has shown that a child exposed to toxic stress is more likely to have an impaired stress and emotion regulation system, to present psychiatric symptoms such as depression or anxiety, to use substances or to behave violently in the future.³ Education has the potential to infuse empathy and develop one’s social and emotional skills which are essential to building sustainable peace. Education for peace at home sets foundations

¹ *Tachkent +1 : Célébrer les progrès et réaffirmer les engagements envers l'éducation et la protection de la petite enfance* | UNESCO. <https://www.unesco.org/fr/articles/tachkent-1-celebrer-les-progres-et-reaffirmer-les-engagements-envers-leducation-et-la-protection-de>.

² Early Childhood Peace Consortium. (2017). *Contributions of Early Childhood Development Services to Preventing Violent Conflict and Sustaining Peace*. <https://ecdpeace.org/sites/default/files/files/ecpc-brief-eng-2017.pdf>

³ *Ibid.*

for life-long healthy relationships at the individual level and accumulates at the society level. More peaceful, cohesive and nurturing societies are founded on peaceful, cohesive and nurturing relationships between parents and children. A safe and healthy environment also includes decent living conditions with access notably to home sanitation. Access to water is an essential prerequisite to development both in nutritious and hygienic terms.

It has to be stressed that within the large 8-year period, the first 1,000 days of the child are especially important for psychosocial, emotional, cognitive, and physical health development. During this period, specific attention needs to be paid to the mother because her well-being is closely tied to that of her baby. Maternal depression constitutes a significant risk factor for poor child development. In environments where the mother faces a lack of social support or is a victim of intimate partner violence, the consequences can be devastating.⁴

To accompany the child and parents in this crucial period, childhood services are key.

The call to invest in early childhood services for peace and tolerance

Childhood education and services can help create peaceful societies. Education decreases the propensity to use violence. It provides places where children can develop to their full potential regardless of their familial background. Those spaces of development ought to be safe and healthy where they have one equal access to education, but also food and water. Education gives the skills and knowledge for the adults of tomorrow to act responsibly. By acquiring literacy and basic scientific knowledge and skills, they are more prone to recognise symptoms of illnesses or follow medical advice for instance. It is vital to give the adults of tomorrow the tools to understand and develop to their full potential thereby reducing their risk of poverty and inequalities.

Access to early childhood education services has lasting consequences on children's educational attainments. This ability to succeed at school later influences their productivity and economic efficiency in the workplace.⁵ By endorsing all children with human capital, we can reduce inequalities.⁶ By breaking the cycle of poverty, we can foster a culture of peace. Giving opportunity through social mobility and economic productivity to all starts with equal access to quality education from the earliest stage. This support through education is particularly important for more vulnerable families such as single-parent families who are more likely to experience poverty. As a result of the marginalization of their parents, children living in poor families are more likely to be marginalized as well. This vicious cycle of exclusion can further prevent the child from developing nurturing relationships and find a way out of poverty.

Early childhood education allows children to talk and play and therefore develop through psychosocial stimulation. Those pro-social behaviours that are established thanks to education are essential for social

⁴ Black, Robert E; Laxminarayan,Ramanan; Temmerman, Marleen; Walker,Pat Neff; Bustreo,Flavia; Jamison,Dean T.; Nugent, Rachel; Gelband, Hellen; Horton,Susan E.; Jha,Prabhat K.; Mock, Charles N.. *Reproductive, maternal, newborn, and child health (English)*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/848181468195567572/Reproductive-maternal-newborn-and-child-health>

⁵ Alegre de la Rosa, O. M., Villar Angulo, L. M., & Giambone, C. (2021). *Education in childhood*. https://mts.intechopen.com/storage/books/9535/authors_book/authors_book.pdf

⁶ Early Childhood Peace Consortium. (2017). *Contributions of Early Childhood Development Services to Preventing Violent Conflict and Sustaining Peace*. <https://ecdpeace.org/sites/default/files/files/ecpc-brief-eng-2017.pdf>

cohesion. By encouraging respect for the self and others and by learning to appreciate diversity, we lay the groundwork for promoting trust in social interactions at all levels.

Good practices

Several programs worldwide have shown the benefits of early childhood services in fostering peace and tolerance.

In Kyrgyzstan, *The Magic Journey* is a program aiming at improving the attitude of young children but also parents towards more inclusion. Involving parents and families is crucial to encourage them to promote peaceful parenting at home. After having completed the *Magic Journey* program, children showed more empathy and were less prone to express a preference to play with only a child of their gender.⁷ This example suggests that early childhood development programs can enhance tolerance. In the same vein, the Early Years Media Initiative (MFIC) is a program dedicated to 3–4-year-old children in Ireland and Northern Ireland. The success of the program in promoting intergroup differences can be explained by the acquisition of socio-emotional skills among children.⁸ Social-emotional learning has to be considered as part of the curricula to develop models for positive, healthy, responsive and nurturing relationships.

In the context of war, the Youth Readiness Intervention in Sierra Leone provides training for children with depressive, anxiety, or PTSD symptoms. Results have shown that these children showcase greater physical health but also acquired emotion regulation skills and could perform better at school.⁹ Similarly, teachers' well-being induces healthier relationship. Focusing on educators' mental health is also crucial to deliver peace education. Mental health and psychosocial support should not be considered only in times of conflict but also in peace contexts to increase resilience and promote mutual understanding.

To ensure the appropriateness of preschool education, one needs to properly train the teachers. The "Quality Preschool for Ghana" Project provided teachers with a one-year training. The training covered developing a child-friendly environment, classroom management, incorporating child-centered and activity-based approaches to teaching math and literacy.¹⁰ Play-based learning supports positive relationships, improves skills and reduces stressors. Teachers who participated in the program were found to provide more emotional support to their students and were also less likely to report burnout.¹¹ This finding suggests that with adequate support, teachers can play a significant role in the development of pre-primary children.

⁷ Hein, S. (2023). *Overview of the Early Childhood Peace Consortium's Early Childhood and Peacebuilding Research and Practice*. https://ecdpeace.org/sites/default/files/files/EvidenceReview_ECPC_Research_24SEP_FINAL_no-appendix.pdf

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Wolf, S., Aber, J. L., Behrman, J. R., & Tsinigo, E. (2019). Experimental impacts of the "quality preschool for ghana" interventions on teacher professional well-being, classroom quality, and children's school readiness. *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness*, 12(1), 10-37. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19345747.2018.1517199>

¹¹ Hein, S. (2023). *Overview of the Early Childhood Peace Consortium's Early Childhood and Peacebuilding Research and Practice*. https://ecdpeace.org/sites/default/files/files/EvidenceReview_ECPC_Research_24SEP_FINAL_no-appendix.pdf

Education also starts at home with parents. The Triple P Positive Parenting Programme is a parent training programme developed in Australia and also exported in the UK.¹² It seeks to prevent violence, promote pro-social behaviours and consequently well-being by improving the child's family environment. The effectiveness of the program has been acknowledged with a significant reduction of child behaviours problem.

Recommendations

Several documents have already acknowledged the need to understand education for peace in a broader sense. The Council of the European Union issued a recommendation in May 2019 on high-quality early childhood education and care systems.¹³ UNESCO also endorsed this priority in 2022 with the Tashkent Declaration and the Commitment to Action for Transforming Early Childhood Care and Education.¹⁴ Building on these first initiatives and adding to them, we call on:

Investing in high-quality, accessible, child-centered early education services through dedicated public expenditures and appropriate partnerships with the private sector;

Ensuring equitable and inclusive access to quality ECD services for all children while prioritising the most vulnerable;

Adopting a context-specific and conflict-sensitive approach to ensure proper and effective ECD services during crises;

Ensuring that educative infrastructures are adequately equipped to promote healthy development, accessible, and affordable, which entails proper access to sanitation and outdoor play as well as the provision of healthy meals and snacks;

Supporting parents, particularly mothers, and early childhood professionals by strengthening their training including social-emotional, relational and parenting skills;

Enhancing delivery of early childhood services through the use of evidence-based strategies, proper remuneration and working conditions, capacity-building and measurement and reporting of outcomes for analysis and improvement;

Ensuring that non-state early childhood services are of sufficient quality through proper regulation, monitoring, measurement and accountability, prioritising quality from a child-centered lens;

Supporting parents and caregivers through policies that support early relationships, improve skills and reduce stressors, such as adequate parental leave, family support programs, mental

¹² Wolf, S., Aber, J. L., Behrman, J. R., & Tsinigo, E. (2019). Experimental impacts of the "quality preschool for ghana" interventions on teacher professional well-being, classroom quality, and children's school readiness. *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness*, 12(1), 10-37.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/19345747.2018.1517199>

¹³ Alegre de la Rosa, O. M., Villar Angulo, L. M., & Giambone, C. (2021). *Education in childhood*. https://mts.intechopen.com/storage/books/9535/authors_book/authors_book.pdf

¹⁴ *Tashkent Declaration and Commitments to Action for Transforming Early Childhood Care and Education*. (2022). <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000384045>

health services, economic assistance and flexible work arrangements to excel in their role as first educators;

Enhancing the current legal framework through the recognition of pre-primary education as an integral part of the right to education with an obligation for states to ensure one year of free pre-primary education for all in support of SDG 4.2.

Early childhood is a key period for the development of the child. We at Make Mothers Matter therefore call on the Human Rights Commissioner for Human Rights **to address this critical issue by investing in parents, especially mothers as they represent the majority of primary caregivers in the world, and early childhood services for peace and tolerance.** It is the one clear way forward to ensure the sustainability of our future generations.