Idea 4

PARENT COACHING BUNDLED WITH HEALTH SERVICES

Health services are a natural touch point for working with parents, since they reach the family during pregnancy and have regular contact during a child’s early years.

Healthcare workers are also typically trusted figures in the community and people from whom caregivers would find advice credible. Training healthcare workers to deliver new messages and use more effective coaching techniques can be a very cost-effective way to make a difference in children’s development and parental well-being.

At a glance...

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GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT
- Social Services
- Education
- Health
- Parks
- Planning
- Transport

MINIMUM SCALE
Neighbourhood

EXISTING IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL
Tested and implemented

Photo: Vanessa Touzard/Bernard van Leer Foundation
OUTCOME AREAS

- Attendance to at least four prenatal visits
- Exclusive breastfeeding in the first six months
- Healthy food preparation in infancy
- Increased frequency of storytelling, singing and reading
- Increased frequency of caregiver–infant play
- Reduced caregiver stress and isolation
- Increased caregiver-reported sense of self-efficacy
- Use of non-violent approaches to discipline
- Improved access to early childhood services

REAL WORLD EXAMPLES

- The Reach Out and Read programme promotes reading to children through healthcare workers. Health workers provide books and encourage reading to children during child visits before school age. Doctors even ‘prescribe’ reading. The programme services 4.7 million children in the USA. Evaluations have found that parents are 2.5 times more likely to read to children, and report improvements in the language development of 3–6 month olds.

- In Kenya and Mozambique, PATH trains community health workers to deliver the Care for Child Development package designed by the WHO and Unicef. It combines basic health messages with child development topics such as the importance of play. As a result, PATH has seen women come to clinics earlier in their pregnancy, higher rates of exclusive breastfeeding, and more caregiver–infant interaction.

- In Harare, Zimbabwe, lay health workers (employed by the city) are trained in problem-solving talk therapy. Clinics refer caregivers showing symptoms of depression to the ‘friendship bench’ – a bench where lay health workers (often grandmothers) are seated – to receive counselling. A randomised controlled trial found significant impacts on levels of maternal depression, which is closely linked to child health and nutrition.

- In Peru and Brazil, the government employed home visitors originally hired to address basic issues of health and hygiene, and trained them to incorporate topics such as nutrition and early learning. This approach showed positive effects on areas such as levels of anaemia and the frequency of storytelling and playing with infants and toddlers.

RELATED IDEAS

- Behavioural prompts
- Everything nearby
- Priority access to services for young families
- ICT-enabled coaching
- Integrated early childhood services
- Data dashboards

LEARN MORE

- Parents+ Starter Kit