Guidelines for the Promotion of Family Care and Upbringing Capacity
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"In providing appropriate assistance to parents in the performance of their child rearing responsibilities (art. 18.2), States parties should take all appropriate measures to enhance parents' understanding of their role in their children's early education, encourage child rearing practices which are child centred, encourage respect for the child's dignity and provide opportunities for developing understanding, self-esteem and self-confidence"

General Comment Nº 7
Implementing child rights in early childhood" (2006)
Committee on the Rights of the Child

Introduction

America is a young continent. The proportion of children in the total population fluctuates between 30% and 55%, and that of children of between 0 and 6 years of age oscillates from 9% to 21% of the total population (Unicef, 2008).

These facts are related to what is known as the infantilization of poverty. Whatever criteria are used to establish the poverty line, the population below it tends to have a greater number of children than the general population. Similarly, a perverse correlation emerges in all of the countries: the lower the age, the greater the poverty.

In addition to limiting access to goods and services, which particularly affects the child population, poverty is the linchpin of micro and mesosystems characterized by the precarious nature of their bonds, the multiplicity of insecurities and interpersonal relationship models and environments that do not provide children with the minimum conditions they require in order to deploy their potential. This strongly conditions their future possibilities and underscores the need for a greater and enhanced State presence in the early years of life, in order to ensure the existence of opportunities for full development, in comprehensive terms. A weak or fragmentary State presence goes hand-in-hand with a high level of dependence on

their environment of the children in this age group (families, adult reference points, community), if they are to achieve appropriate levels of development.

In addition, viewing children with a rights-based approach has a variety of significant implications, among them, in visions of child development, particularly in the case of early childhood.

In recent years, scientific evidence has confirmed the significance of this stage in a person's ultimate development. This has led to political and ethical demands on the States that have motivated them to make significant technical, political and financial efforts to implement public policies for the comprehensive protection of early childhood; policies which will make it possible to ensure that all children enjoy the minimum conditions necessary for their development.

One of the greatest challenges faced by these policies is that they should achieve a favourable impact on children's immediate environment.

A question arises at this point, which should precede and guide all action. What experiences should children undergo in their development if they are to fully enjoy their rights? What events should be guaranteed in a policy for the comprehensive protection of rights?

Background

In this context, as from 2010, the IIN, in consultation with the States on its Directing Council, began to focus on working with early childhood as a priority.

Technical assistance was provided in Guatemala and Colombia. In Guatemala, support was provided in the design of early childhood public policy, which was institutionalized by means of a Governmental Act by President Álvaro Colom.

In Colombia, technical assistance provided by IIN-OAS included support for the consolidation of the *De Cero a Siempre* [From Zero to Forever] strategy, in areas involving the family, in order to ensure the full development of children, with an emphasis on early childhood, in the context of a rights-based conception. The purpose was to contribute to building comprehensive and inclusive strengthening models, promoting joint responsibility and autonomy. This process was based on existing experiences in the country and in the region, compiled through a study of experiences carried out in Chile, Brazil, Mexico, Uruguay and Colombia, which served to underpin the following papers: *Análisis de las experiencias más significativas desarrolladas y orientadas al fortalecimiento familiar para el desarrollo pleno de niños, niñas y adolescentes* [Analysis of the most significant experiences developed and aimed at strengthening families to enable the full development of children] " (Isaza, Midaglia, & Rodríguez, 2011); and *Lineamientos para la formación y acompañamiento a familias de niños y niñas de la Primera Infancia* [Guidelines for training and support for early childhood families] (Nocua, 2012), both of which had been used as background for the *De Cero a Siempre* [From Zero to Forever] strategy implemented by the State of Colombia.

During the 86th Meeting of the Directing Council (Montevideo 2011), Action Plan 2011-2015 was adopted that includes Early Childhood as one of its priority lines. A working group was formed with the technical liaison officers of the States of: Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Suriname, United States and Uruguay. The group devoted itself to producing a paper based on the experiences in the region to contribute guidelines for the implementation and management of comprehensive protection public policies targeting early childhood. Work ended in late 2012, with the validation and dissemination of the paper.

At the beginning of this year, the working group evaluated past actions and designed their working agenda for 2013.

As a result, the delegation from Colombia proposed that the subject of early childhood should be addressed at the 88th Meeting of the Directing Council and that the focus should be working with families.

A joint working group was then formed with technical experts from the IIN and the *Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar* (Colombian Institute of Family Welfare - ICBF), in order to produce a paper containing guidelines on the promotion of family caregiving and upbringing capabilities.

In keeping with the methodology used, drafts were submitted to the consideration of the WG, for feedback and validation.

Why work with families?

Concern about the continuity and quality of work involving children's immediate surroundings emerges as an offshoot of the accumulation of experiences and lessons learned from them.

For the purposes of this paper, we shall adopt the criteria of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, according to which, "family" refers to a variety of structures that can take charge of caring for and overseeing the development of young children. The term includes nuclear families, extended families and other traditional and modern forms based on the community, so long as they abide by the rights and best interest of the child (Committee 2005).

From a critical review of the experiences of Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Uruguay and Colombia (Isaza, Midaglia, & Rodríguez, 2011), it emerges that the priority of these policies is the implementation of a network of care services focusing on children. Many of these programmes fail to contemplate systematic and sustained interventions that aim at enhancing parenting capabilities in order to support child development. While some of the programmes do include initiatives in this regard, they tend to fade away when an analysis of their outcomes within the population is carried out. Neither is there any evidence of clear methodological guidelines, or of standards that would make it possible to assess the quality of these interventions.

There are services that offer stimulation opportunities outside the family. Children, in their role as active agents, take home new forms of relationships and suggest and teach the adults games and ways of "doing" daily events. For their part, teachers provide information and activate the capabilities of mothers and fathers. However, if these effects are not worked upon systematically, with appropriately trained operators who are available to work in the field and with the families, they will not be sufficient to achieve any significant and lasting changes among the adults of the family setting.

This weakness leads to a "gap" between the service as a stimulating opportunity that protects full development and the family micro-environment with its diversity and possible failings, instabilities and threats. Even further, the lack of an "interface" between services and families fails to contribute to overcoming the cultural barriers of inaccessibility or to establishing partnerships between stakeholders, as appropriate for the protection of children.

It is evident that childhood protection public policies should act directly on children's immediate surroundings as a way to strengthen and enhance the indirect effects of actions carried out in broader social areas.

Within the framework of comprehensive policies for the protection and promotion of child rights in early childhood, this paper intends to contribute to work being performed upon the immediate surroundings of children, with the purpose of promoting bonds and attitudes that benefit full development from the beginning of life.

1. Strengthening caregiving and upbringing capacity

From the beginning of their lives, children participate in a culture in which they actively interact through different means and mediators. From this perspective, the factors that benefit or affect their development should also be understood within the context of this culture.

Child development is influenced by the different environments that children inhabit. These environments can be depicted as concentric circles, the smallest of which is known as a "microsystem" and is composed of the child and his or her most immediate connections. The second circle – the mesosystem – includes services, the community, the intermediate structures between the family and the wider social setting (macrosystem) (Bronfrembrenner, 1987).

These systems are in a permanent relationship with each other; transformations in one can affect the others and, furthermore, as children are active agents in their own development, they can also affect these systems themselves, from their own immediate surroundings (Bronfrembrenner, 1987).

During the early years of life, the family environment has a more direct effect on child development, but it is also itself affected by the broader systems – the meso and macrosystems.

Conversely, strengthening caregiving and child-rearing capabilities in adults has an effect on the actions of services, either because it enhances working partnerships between institutions and families, or because strengthening parental roles leads to increased demand and quality control of the services offered.

In addition, human development becomes increasingly complex as it moves towards the construction of progressive autonomy. This process is achieved according to the individual features of each child, and it can therefore be stated that each has his or her own different rhythms and styles of development. To children's individual features are added those pertaining to the culture they belong to, those that are shared among peers, but that differ from one cultural group to another (Isaza, Midaglia, & Rodríguez, 2011).

The process of building the structure of a social subject takes place in the exchanges that children engage in with other individuals and with their cultural world. Of great significance in this process are the interactions that children establish with their social and cultural environment. Interactions that also have an impact on biological and psychological aspects, taking into account emotional and behavioural aspects, in which beliefs, values and norms are transmitted by familial education through childhood rearing practices.

For Vygotsky (1987), child development is dependent on the use of the "toolkit" that is inherent to each culture, mediated by adults in their daily interactions with the child. Together with adults, children achieve targets that they would probably not be able to reach on their own, although they will be able to do so at a later stage. Thus they develop their capacity to handle situations, and interpsychic phenomena become intrapsychic.

For their part, researchers who have worked on the "attachment theory" indicate that interactions from the start of life occur in a continuous flow of exchanges and become fundamental in establishing attachment behaviour and affective bonds (Sameroff, 1989; Bolwby, 1981; and Stern, 1990; cited in Pedreira Mass, 2008). Child development requires the presence of "significant interactions" between children and their caregivers.

Meaningful interaction will depend on the frequency, intensity, opportunity, relevance and stability of the bond. As a result of the type of interaction, attachments will be secure, anxious or disorganized (Bowlby, 1995). Attachment patterns are among the determining factors in the ways that children are later able to explore the world (knowledge) and address interaction patterns and ways of facing conflict.

When we speak of care and caregivers, we refer to specific people who adopt this role on the basis of a network of bonds which, at the same time, provides support

and assistance. Although the figure of the caregiver plays an essential role in these interactions, it should be noted that patterns also include the characteristics of the child, of the caregiver (usually the mother) and of other subsidiary figures (the father and other close caregivers). At the same time, the social and affective support available to people who take on the role of caregivers will depend on other bonding patterns that they take part in and that influence the quality of their interaction with the child.

While in our cultures it is generally the mother who is the primary caregiver, we should underscore the fact that we are referring to a role as related to the child, and not to blood kinship. In this respect, beyond any difference in conception and in integration or structure that we may observe from one culture to another and within them, families constitute the scenario and "collective agent" of caregiving. It is within them that children must find appropriate environments and interactions; they constitute the setting in which they must begin to enjoy their rights.

This leads to the need to include the families and their capacity to provide care and upbringing as the intervention venue of public policies, in coordination with the entire protective network.

2. The differential approach in strengthening fathers, mothers and caregivers

The process of strengthening the capacity for caregiving and upbringing in fathers, mothers and caregivers, as regards children in early childhood is greatly affected by cultural, geographic and social differences between families and communities. Similarly, it is essential that any parenting-capacity strengthening process should understand the life history of these families and the special features of their children.

This section sheds light on the importance of adopting a differential approach in all family-training processes. To this end, first we describe the significance of adopting this approach in public policies that strive to achieve more inclusive and egalitarian societies. Then we shall focus on changes in society and their effect on cultural patterns, family relationships and caregiving and child-rearing. Finally, we shall analyse the differential approach in light of the specific characteristics of children.

Acknowledging the ethnic, physical, financial and social features of families in the design of inclusive policies is a challenge in the context of a region as rich in diversity as Latin America and the Caribbean; a region which contains numerous indigenous communities, communities of African decadency and rural communities that have experienced situations of disaster, internal armed conflict, among other challenging situations, and which merit an individual analysis.

Social deployment and the increasingly pressing need to develop proposals that will lead to a more equitable society, leas to ask for the characteristics of a differential approach in the design and implementation of training for the families in the region.

Thus it should be understood that this approach recognizes and values the potential, ability, capacity and customs of all of the groups within the relevant population due to their way of life, ethnic group, gender, and stage of life, capacity or affectation and that it also recognizes that the diversities have motivated discrimination, generated exclusions and great social breaks between different community groups in many countries, in turn motivates a reflection on working to overcome these situations of social exclusion that persist in the Americas.

(Ministerio de la Protección Social - ACNUR, 2011). Acknowledges the potential, skills and abilities of population groups that seek to highlight certain positive practices – different though they may be – whose objective is to attain social inclusion.

The differential approach seeks to ensure that States and societies provide specific and unique answers in order to safeguard the rights of particular persons and population groups. Similarly, it should be borne in mind that diversity has given rise to discrimination, and generated exclusion and broad social gaps among different community groups in many countries in the region. The great challenge is to achieve equitable integration without ignoring or penalizing the differences for which strengthening of families policies constitute a medullar aspect.

In this regard, it has been observed that in recent decades, cultural and economic transformations have caused families to modify certain social and cultural patterns that appeared to be stable. The precarious economic situation of societies and households during times of recession or economic crisis led to a reduction of the States' social investment and, as a result, forced families to come up with other means to obtain resources for survival and internal cohesion.

One of these changes involved making women a more active part of the productive structures of the labour force. Initially, this occurred informally and inequitably.

Later, women's social, cultural and political movements began to promote gender equity, providing support for women's incursion into the productive area, as well as their active and participatory entry into political and social scenarios in search of equal conditions and respect for their own vision of social issues.

In this context, the role played by women for so many years in exclusively caring for and bringing up children began to change, inasmuch as they were now forced to adopt a double responsibility as caregivers and as financial providers. This also led to rethinking the role of the male, as men also began to take on the tasks of caregiving and child-rearing, which meant reviewing the conception of masculinity received from earlier generations, as well as bolstering their skills in practices traditionally restricted to women.

These changes modified the composition of households and the distribution of roles within them, placed women in a more active role in countries' economic

scenarios and brought men closer to the position of caregivers and promoters of the comprehensive development of children.

For this reason, it is very important to include men in training activities intended to guarantee the comprehensive development of children. A pressing task in the region is to ensure that these activities broaden the spectrum of caregiving and upbringing beyond the role played by women and promote the active and participatory inclusion of men.

A further significant challenge in the region is to assess the impact of violence in all of its forms – intrafamily, social, criminal, caused by armed conflict and others – as a trigger of family breakdown and in the cultural sequels it provokes in caregiving and child-rearing in families and communities affected by this kind of phenomena. This analysis needs to bear in mind the sequels and social damage undergone by children, families and communities and how to repair them, ensuring that caregiving and upbringing is based on children's requirements regarding their comprehensive development and not on the interests of certain groups that attempt to keep alive the cycle of violence. That is, it is essential to overcome the circumstances that lock them into the victim or perpetrator dilemma (ACNUR - COLBO, 2005).

Another social phenomenon to keep in mind is domestic or international migration of families, as well as the abandonment or loss of one or more members of the family, normally the male figure, who are the first to migrate or die debilitating it in facing difficult situations.

As mentioned above, designing and implementing policies, plans and programmes with a differential approach should be based on the specific needs and capabilities of those who have sometimes not been sufficiently heard. This is the case of children with disabilities and their families, a population which has often been segregated from certain scenarios owing to ignorance, myths or fears.

Over time, adults and children with disabilities have been able to achieve a significant political and social position, and the inclusion of policies that cater to their needs and capacity is becoming a reality. However, progress must be made in coordinating work between institutions, with a view to improving living conditions, training caregivers, providing access to services and training for the community, so that understanding can increase regarding what disabilities consist of and how interaction in families, the surrounding community and society in general can enhance the efforts of individuals to overcome their circumstances and not only make them able to function within their own environments, but also improve their quality of life and promote their own development (Isaza, 2013). Ultimately, the aim is to discard discriminatory ideas and acknowledge that persons with disabilities are full holders of rights.

Exchanging exclusion for inclusion also implies that countries should be capable of strengthening the capacity of families whose children exhibit exceptional

capabilities, which is equally a specific condition that should be borne in mind and not ignored or undervalued.

However, a differential approach should not only cater to the social needs of families and communities that have been excluded over time because of their singular features, or whose cultures have been devalued. The region's cultural diversity also contributes its ethnic wealth to the development of different and propositional caregiving and child-rearing practices, which seek to maintain cultural legacies and should be taken into account when designing inclusive public policies.

In attempting to close gaps through social inclusion, the States take a significant step in recognizing that families (whatever their composition) are necessary and relevant social stakeholders in this process. In this respect, if families are considered to be dynamic systems in constant interaction with other systems that influence them, but which they also affect, the context and circumstances in which different families live should be reviewed in order to impact their surroundings as well as their internal dynamics. Thus, public policy should target the external conditions that impoverish families socially, culturally, economically and affectively, as well as their internal interactions, in order to empower the family group as an agent of change that can demand the enjoyment of rights for all of its members.

In conclusion, the differential approach should be mainstreamed at all focal points in the design and implementation of policies to strengthen family caregiving and upbringing capacity. For this reason, it should be borne in mind that it is important to develop means to consult, research and identify the needs, capacity and strengths of the population groups we have referred to. Every country should ask itself how to generate family-training processes that seek inclusion and equity in communities, while providing support for cultural and social legacies. In addition, how to modify patterns and provide innovative caregiving and child-rearing practices when appropriate and so long as they foster the comprehensive development of children, with a focus on their ethnic group, gender, specific capacity and experience in relation to violence, among other factors.

3. Aspects of caregiving and child-rearing that must be strengthened

Caregiving and upbringing practices should contribute in different ways to the comprehensive development of children. Thus, fathers, mothers, primary caregivers and their families play a leading role in the development and implementation of training strategies, plans, programmes and projects that seek the comprehensive development of children. With this purpose, the State and society should be capable of generating active means of participation and facilities for the implementation of these programmes, in order to strengthen the capacity of families to perform appropriate and sustainable caregiving and child-rearing functions, according to their surroundings and specific features. Communities should also be strengthened so that they can offer families the necessary support and cooperate in caring for children.

As part of the strengthening required to guarantee comprehensive development, it is the task of the States to consolidate clear and specific policies with effective and sustainable methodologies, in keeping with the socio-demographic characteristics of their populations. Thus they can shed light on the difficulties they face and the capacity and resources available to families when attempting to safeguard the rights of children while going about their daily caregiving and child-rearing tasks.

It is suggested that the following three elements be borne in mind when strengthening the capacity of families and communities with regard to caregiving and child-rearing practices that seek comprehensive development.

3.1. A rights-based approach to children and families

Recognizing children as rights-holders as stipulated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child constituted an important historical landmark and entailed significant changes in conceptions of children and how society relates to and interacts with them from their earliest years (Estrategia de Cero a Siempre, 2013). In addition to recognizing that children are holders of rights and their capacity as active and capable agents, a rights-based approach identifies the persons who should safeguard these rights, together with their obligations and responsibilities.

It is in early childhood that fathers, mothers, primary caregivers and families in general play a fundamental role in the process of recognizing children as rights-holders, inasmuch as they constitute children's first social contact with the world. This recognition implies no longer viewing children as small adults, or incomplete beings who await the action of their elders in order to develop and are, in consequence, "invisible" as they do not exist in their own right, but in terms of decisions that adults make for them (Estrategia de Cero a Siempre, 2013).

Identifying children as beings who function in social life on the basis of their interaction with the persons who surround them, in the search for increasing autonomy (progressive autonomy), entails the existence of adults who allow and facilitate comprehensive human development in keeping with children's stage of life and according to their own characteristics and capabilities. According to this perspective, fathers, mothers or primary caregivers play the role of facilitating agents and mediators in the development of children. Therefore, it is essential to strengthen their skills and capacity to provide care and upbringing, on the basis of an analysis of their present knowledge.

Considering the four areas of rights, the following aspects should be borne in mind when strengthening caregiving and upbringing practices for children in early childhood.

    a. Rights to existence

Starting out with the fundamental right to life; that is, to existence and survival, implies the mediation of adult caregivers and the action of the State in providing

quality healthcare. As a result, family training should bear in mind aspects such as how to gain access to health services, family planning the signs and symptoms that warrant consultation, basic sanitation and the acquisition of healthy practices and habits. Adequate food and nutrition for children should also be considered, bearing in mind territory, culture and the possibility of gaining access to certain food groups. (iii ¨The Committee believes that they should double the efforts to educate the families, instilling a greater conciseness of the equal responsibilities of the parents and spread knowledge of the modern methods for family planning so as to also decrease the number of abortions.¨Application Manual of the Convention on Children´s Rights, pg. 90. UNICEF HOUSE; 2001).

Working on actions to promote health and prevent disease among children, whatever their surroundings, involves not only health services that provide timely care, but also the design of strategies to improve the quality of life of children. This makes it necessary to abandon the concept of health as the absence of disease and broaden its meaning to encompass the promotion of activities that improve the health of children and their families, such as hand-washing habits, how to handle rubbish, the use of water or the treatment of human waste, which help reduce the risk of infectious and contagious diseases in the population.

Health conditions among the poorest populations in the region are a determining factor not only as regards mortality rates, which continue to be alarming in many areas, but also in the poor quality of health and nutrition among children. This situation is related to social conditions that make it impossible to achieve the best health and food environments and to families' scant knowledge of basic preventive strategies (which can sometimes be adapted to extreme poverty contexts) to safeguard the health of children.

Health and nutrition education through families is one of the most effective strategies when it comes to preventing diseases. The challenge is to get families to assimilate small processes within their close family circle, in order to eventually broaden these processes within the community. A clear example of this is observed in the appropriate handling of household waste and garbage, which leads to improvements in the quality of life of children and, therefore, projects the idea into the surrounding community.

As a complement to educational activities involving health promotion and prevention, institutional stakeholders responsible for providing the necessary services to safeguard the lives of children continue to be relevant, significant and necessary. Families also play a significant role in demanding the health-related rights that are due to children in their countries.

b. Rights to development

Comprehensive development in early childhood implies ensuring the existence of a number of effective interactions to provide safe attachment bonds and trusting relationships with people who can show children that they can be counted on at a

time of exploration and curiosity; when they experience stress or difficulties (Isaza and Orozco, 2012, cited in *Estrategia de Cero a Siempre*, 2013).

The mediating role played by adults should aim at promoting the development of children as affective, thinking, social individuals with their own identity. This implies having the capacity to recognize their own special features and reflect upon the quality of their care in order to strengthen the practices that promote development (Isaza and Orozco, 2012, cited in *Estrategia de Cero a Siempre*, 2013). This process of reflection and change should be leveraged through training activities that assist family caregivers to gain awareness of their role in this course of action.

In this regard, it is essential for caregivers and people in their surroundings to understand children's needs and possibilities at each step of their development, without failing to recognize their capabilities or, conversely, demanding behaviour that exceeds their capacity. This implies putting into daily practice the principle of progressive autonomy established in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

A further aspect of caregivers' role as mediators is to provide children with a healthy and safe environment, help them regulate their emotions and behaviour, encourage them to explore and learn about their environment and interactions with others, offer them opportunities for linguistic, sensory and mobile exchange, as well as make them feel protected in the face of stressful situations. All of this takes place in daily life, as part of the family's routine activities, without formalizing interactions between adults and children or burdening caregivers with excessive obligations. Thus, the essence of family interactions is maintained and distinctions are established between them and the more formal practices of institutions, such as early education or healthcare centres. It should be clear that the relationship between parents and children is different to the relationship established with specialists.

Complementarily, families should be made aware of the role of State and non-State institutions in supporting them, so that they can genuinely enhance interactions with children. Through their policies, the States should ensure that families, particularly those with young children, have access to cultural services, labour policies or policies in support of families that can reduce stress and advance financial stability. All of this would help foster environments with greater opportunities for enhanced interactions.

At the same time, institutions and persons responsible for caring for children should promote partnerships with families so that they can take preventive and attention actions in a way to function and provide other types of support, contributing guidance in stressful situations and promoting behaviour that is in keeping with children's requirements at this stage of their development.

It is necessary that civil servants as well as institutions maintain a clear global perspective that covers the totality of the Convention on the Rights of the Child to achieve the maximum development of children, including the physical, mental, spiritual, moral, psychological and social development, in a way that is consistent

with human dignity in particular a perspective that includes health, an adequate standard of living, education, leisure time and play time; and especially the prevention of short and long term events that can include forms of violence such as abuse and sexual exploitation.

c. Rights to comprehensive protection

This section covers protection rights specifically: physical, emotional and social security, which imply the presence of affective bonds to promote safe attachments, non-violent environments, appropriate forms of conflict-resolution and protected and adequate physical settings to prevent accidents and promote health (Isaza, Midaglia, & Rodríguez, 2011). To this should be added stability over time, which, as opposed to immobility, seeks to avoid sudden changes or the breakdown of bonds without paying due attention to the means with which children process any transformations in their surroundings.

This requires the jointly responsible action of families, communities and States in order to ensure that children have access to safe and protected environments.

The principal threats to these rights are: violence in all of its forms, natural disasters, socio-economic instability that leads to migration and environmental changes that fail to consider the situation of children; adult diseases, including the abuse of drugs.

Adults should understand what sudden changes in their surroundings can mean to children, as well as the implications of violent or conflict-ridden environments. This understanding can allow adults to incorporate elements to help them develop sensitive interactions with a strong focus on expressions of affection, gentle treatment, and timely and relevant responses to children's requests for help, in addition to sheltering and containing behaviour in difficult situations that children must face.

It is important for adults to recognize children's capacity to understand and be willing to provide clear and concise information in appropriate language regarding events occurring in their environment. Families should also provide the necessary support and assistance in order to minimize any damage caused by stressful or violent experiences in the environment.

Training should also consider issues related to safe physical environments, which mainly depends on the sensitivity of adults to structure a setting where children can live without risking accidents or disease. Clearly, any measures taken must be adapted to the family's socio-economic possibilities. However, there are simple preventative measures that can be taken to facilitate the organization of an environment in which falls, burns, choking and poisoning can be prevented. Awareness of these strategies can be raised through a training process targeted at understanding a child's perspective of the world.

d. Rights to citizenship

Viewing children as full holders of rights demands recognizing and guaranteeing all their rights without discrimination of any kind, including rights related to participation from the beginning of life.

Understanding how children in early childhood can enjoy their citizenship through participation means perceiving them as valid interlocutors, with the capacity to express and produce a sense of their own lives, with their own specific ways of relating to their peers, adults, their families and other settings in their lives. From this perspective, it is acknowledged that they are capable of making decisions on matters that affect them, as well as of expressing their feelings according to their age and stage of development.

For adults to be able to understand this, they should see clearly that participation in early childhood is different to adult participation or even participation among adolescents or older children, who can use the spoken language as their principal form of communication. Inasmuch as children up to the age of six are "a part of", their participation is specifically linked to a sense of belonging, to the possibility of being heard and of expressing their ideas, opinions and feelings, and to opportunities to participate in decisions that affect their lives (Isaza, Midaglia, & Rodríguez, 2011).

Intergenerational discussion from the beginning of life is essential in order to make the consideration of children as persons a reality. Adults should accept that children have thoughts and feelings that must be expressed and received respectfully by them. This is the cornerstone of a coexistence model based on respect even in the face of differences and beyond any asymmetries.

This perspective has consequences in the training of family caregivers. It is frequently thought that children in early childhood have no capacity to participate, as they are not sufficiently developed or because allowing them to give opinions and make decisions would restrict their childhood or empower them falsely by allowing them to impose their views on adults (Isaza, Midaglia, & Rodríguez, 2011). The fact that citizenship-building participation implies discussion with others in order to share views and seek the best decisions jointly is ignored. Training for caregivers thus requires changes in how children are perceived and a form of child participation that fosters the progressive autonomy of children in early childhood.

The real purpose of referring to children as citizens is to recognize, value and respect the dignity of human beings from the moment they are born, in the awareness that safeguarding their rights depends on ensuring the necessary affective, social and material conditions for their comprehensive development.

3.2. Children, families and communities

From the moment they are born, children become part of a family with certain specific cultural and social characteristics, family that, in turn, is part of an even broader social system – operating in communities – which will influence how they develop and their beliefs regarding the world (Estrategia de Cero a Siempre, 2013).

They are also part of other social settings, such as neighbourhoods, educational institutions or healthcare centres, parks and recreational and cultural venues, among others. In these, it is usually adults who function as spokespeople defending their rights, assuming the role of mediators in demanding that they be respected and of agents of change in small community groups and environments in which they are developed.

One of the ways in which adults can generate changes to benefit the comprehensive development of children and improve their resources in facing adverse situations is by identifying and/or setting up support networks, both within the family and within the community.

Networks are metaphors that refer to a tissue of bonds that strengthen the capacity to face adverse situations or support the development process of individuals at different stages of life. They are, by definition, intergenerational venues and constitute privileged settings in which to put into practice and transmit the values of solidarity and working for the common good. They also provide support and containment in critical situations (illness, unemployment, loss) or as a "collective agent" for self-help in the face of natural or social hazards, contributing to maintaining a sense of security.

Family networks seek to connect family members as effective agents to support caregiving and child-rearing, as well as provide protection and security to children as required. The idea is to recover the "extended family" tradition that links different "cores" and increases resources and protection and support possibilities for children during their development, as well as providing support for and at times complementing the task of caregivers, particularly in difficult situations. This organization of bonds is particularly important in developing a sense of belonging and identity in children.

Community networks are to be found at another level. Referring to setting up community networks implies understanding that, as in the case of children and adolescents, children in early childhood receive information about the world through their communities, so their relationship with them can determine their perceptions of their surroundings and, therefore, affect their physical, social and cognitive development (Siddiqi, Irwin, & Hertzman, 2007).

Communities influence the promotion of caregiving and child-rearing practices that tend to encourage the comprehensive development of children and their importance resides not only in promoting such practices, but in the sustainability of processes that foster them. Community leaders or educational agents in the communities make the efforts of State and non-State institutions sustainable when families are provided with training.

The emotional, social and material support that these networks can offer determines, to a large extent, the role of children in early childhood within a community. The significance assigned to establishing secure environments, the way in which participation opportunities are promoted for children and their

families, the means of empowering processes that lead to inclusion, are just some of the examples of the mechanisms that communities and families can use to generate effective interactions with children in early childhood.

3.3. Children, families and communities immersed in institutionality and policy

As mentioned above, safeguarding the rights of children is the joint responsibility of the State, through its institutions, and of communities and families. This implies that every stakeholder, in his or her own level of action, can and must develop the means to guarantee comprehensive child development.

Clearly, the wide variety of community social systems implies that methods to design and implement strategies, plans and programmes to promote appropriate caregiving and upbringing practices should be equally diverse. Beyond these differences, we cannot think that families are able to implement isolated mechanisms without the support of communities and institutions.

Effective coordination between these social levels, children, families, communities and State institutions will support the design of specific mechanisms that go beyond the provision of the basic needs of this population and attempt to promote participation, identify key stakeholders in policy implementation, generate effective institutional management and care procedures and establish strategies for optimizing resources with the same social objective of promoting the comprehensive development of children in early childhood.

4. Methodological guidelines for carrying out work with families

4.1. Methodological work with parents and caregivers to strengthen caregiving and upbringing practices

Applying the rights-based approach and the differential approach implies recognizing the capacity of families, as well as their knowledge, beliefs, experience and values. A consequence of this is that long-term actions should be considered that go beyond merely informative lectures and adopt methodologies involving reflexive and constructive discussion of knowledge, bearing in mind the characteristics of each of the families and groups of families that take part in the training process.

This means that strengthening families should be based on the exchange processes share with other families or with the agent carrying out the intervention. New reflections and new perspectives regarding caregiving and child-rearing practices arise from these exchanges and lead to the formulation of different alternatives or the strengthening of good practices.

In addition, in using these methodologies it is recognized that the processes of change that families must undergo take time, inasmuch as they constitute complex relationship systems and are affected by a variety of factors, both internal and external. In this respect, merely informative, short-term actions are not sufficient; they require the incorporation of active, participatory, reflexive, game-based and

constructive methodologies. This means that the purpose of this work is not to inform or impart knowledge, but to promote analysis of the practices and facilitate attitude changes; that is, new ways of doing things that will prove to be more beneficial to child development.

Work with families can take place in different ways, by incorporating different methodologies – these should not be the same for all training groups. Some examples could be:

- Participatory workshops in groups of between four and thirty persons. Larger groups are not recommended if the objectives described above are to be pursued.

- Personalized intervention or support for a single family. This kind of work is frequently carried out in the family home, but can also take place elsewhere. The advantage of working in the home is that the whole family can be involved, not just the primary caregiver. In this type of intervention, the principal technique is usually a purposeful conversation with a significant use of questions, paradoxes and the modelling of some kind of interaction with children by the agent carrying out the intervention.

- The integration of methodologies that use information and communications technologies, such as radio, television and the Internet, together with participatory workshops. Forums, campaigns, travelling notebooks can constitute further strategies calling for and complementing more formal activities.

- Working only with adults or joint work with children and adults. The first should be viewed as adult education and the second should focus on working with children, where the family caregiver carries out activities with them, under the guidance of an external agent. It is also important to include children and carry out joint activities when support is home-based.

- Games and recreational activities that involve whole families – art, literature and celebrations as a pretext to develop in families the capacity to relate to their children in ways that engender confidence and security.

One objective of these interventions is to stimulate men's sense of responsibility in caring for their children. Therefore, all training or support actions, be they in groups or individual, should be designed to include both men and women, so that all of the stakeholders, according to their level of action, can develop the mechanisms they need in order to guarantee comprehensive child development. This implies designing attractive activities for men and recognizing the work they do in caring for and bringing up children. Game-based activities may prove to be more attractive to men and may constitute a starting-point when beginning to work with them, in which they practice social values of living together and the pleasure of doing things inside the home that serve as a model for children.

As mentioned above, transforming family interaction dynamics and patterns that include caregiving and child-rearing practices entails a certain amount of time to mobilize reflection, open up to new possibilities, and construct new practices and

sustain them. Because of this, training methodologies should be underpinned by a follow-up process to ensure that changes are lasting.

The regularity of interventions may vary according to circumstances and objectives: intensive sessions could be provided, complemented by subsequent follow-up events, or sessions could be offered every week, fortnight or month, and more infrequently once transformations are ensured.

4.2. Trainers and their qualifications

Educational agents or trainers are a key part of training and support for families; both their attitudes and knowledge will have a significant impact on the transformations that take place.

From their attitudes will depend in much that the process is oriented to a strengthening of their care, upbringing and social skills capacities

In order to put the methodologies described into practice and achieve a genuine transformation in families, with a rights-based approach and a differential perspective, trainers should act in light of the following elements:

- Firstly, they should show an appreciative attitude regarding families, their practices and situations, and that they understand that their vulnerable condition as aspects that can be processed and overcome with support and display with their own recourses. An appreciative attitude implies understanding that families act distinctly in response to different factors and that on occasion they make mistakes because they believe that it is like that and have not had the opportunity to act appropriately.

- Secondly, they should keep an open mind regarding cultures, the knowledge, beliefs and experiences of families, in order to implement a genuine discussion of knowledge and trigger reflexive and constructive processes, as a result of which trainers also learn and are enriched.

- Finally, they should exhibit confidence that every family will achieve their transformations following their own path and using the time they need in their situation. This implies recognizing that family changes are not always the same and that it may be necessary to provide more support to some families than to others.

Trainers are usually professionals from the field of social studies and the humanities, or the health field, as well as family experts, but they may also be non-professional community agents who have been coached to provide training and support.

Whatever their academic level and experience, it should be recognized that these agents have their own personal beliefs and knowledge in relation to families and

child-rearing, either as a result of their studies or arising from their own childhood experiences and from belonging to a family of their own. It is important to take continence of this for not imposing their points of view and experiences in the relation with other persons and to be able to differentiate the singularities of those experiences.

For this reason, it is advisable for family trainers to undergo a qualification process, both at the start of a programme and during its implementation. This qualification process should follow the same principles suggested for family training. That is, it should be active, participatory, game-based, etc., so that trainers learn these methodological features not only because they know of them, but because they experience them and understand their power.

The issues that can form the core of this training can include the following aspects, taken from the paper by Isaza, Midaglia, & Rodríguez (2011):

- Personal growth to strengthen educational agents' empathy and develop a friendly style of relating to family members.

- The capacity to reflect upon their own family processes in order to facilitate the act of distancing themselves from their own experiences.

- Issues related to family development and early child development.

- The methodologies required for training and supporting the families.

- The development of communication skills and the application of methodologies to permit the flow of communication in groups of two, three or more members of the family; so as to identify obstacles that impede the flow of assertive, respectful and liberal expression of opinion.

When training trainers, agencies frequently use a cascade format, in order to achieve several levels of multipliers. It is important for these cascades to contain only one level in order to avoid training distortion and, in addition, to carry out follow-up and support for agents who work directly with families, thus ensuring that the quality of their work remains adequate.

5. Working with families as part of early childhood comprehensive protection policies

Starting with the policies focusing on early childhood from the perspective of rights as an integral requirement; this requires multi-sectoral strategies based on clear agreements about the responsibilities that fit each institution; and the will to overcome the conflicts ¨In the best interest of the child¨ and based on the analyses of the proven experiences in the region that we propose, as a part of the policies,

plans and programs directed at early childhood the systematic work with the families.

It is necessary to design policies, guidelines or programmes and set up a coordinated institutional organizational strategy so that work with families with children in early childhood can move beyond specific short-term actions and follow common guidelines in order to join forces in search of the same aim and with similar methodologies. In addition, this enhances the coordination of training and support for families with other actions carried out for the benefit of early childhood.

The objective is that actions and services to put into practice comprehensive care policies for early childhood should include a local strategy with the families to eliminate the breaks between the services and the family environment. This requires systematic action with families with an agreed methodology and subject to appropriate evaluation and that includes a protocol for follow-up and monitoring, to measure the impacts and achieve constant improvement for programs of early childhood.

This requires qualified human resources following clear guidelines and answering to well-defined institutions.

Depending on how countries organize their early childhood care, different alternatives could be planned in order to integrate family training and support.

- **Included within early childhood or family policies:** When countries have early childhood policies, they should include families and strengthening them as an essential working point if comprehensive care is to be provided. Lines of action should be specified for this work and for its coordination with other lines of early childhood care. If a country has policies that target families, the subject of early childhood and providing training and support to families could be included in them.

- **As part of an early childhood or family plan, programme or care system:** Training and support for families could also be part of a plan, sub-system or programme within a general early childhood or family care system in the country. This format could also focus on a priority population or territory.

- **As a programme, plan or strategy:** It could be designed as a national strategy, programme or plan in which coordinated actions are organized in order to achieve the specific purpose of strengthening families.

Independently of the alternative chosen by each country, it is also important to determine institutional responsibilities regarding the leadership of training and family support activities. Here too there are several different alternatives: there could be one national agency that leads all actions with the support of other institutions; one sector in charge of organizing training activities in coordination with other sectors (education, health, social development, etc.); an interinstitutional

commission or agency that coordinates family training and support. In every case, the aim is that work with families should be a component of plans and programmes targeting early childhood and thus, prevented from becoming an autonomous operation unconnected with the services intended for children.

Whatever option the country chooses, it should be linked to other services targeting early childhood and other strategies in support of families. For example, strategies in support of family productivity should be based on actions to strengthen caregiving and child-rearing capacity and interactions between family members; or care provided for children in early education should be linked to family training and support.

It is also important to establish intersectoral forms of coordination at national, regional and territorial levels, so that in addition to strengthening the private environment within the household, family training actions can improve their capacity to gain access to services and to form community and institutional networks. Work with families should be contained within the framework of a proximity strategy; that is, of establishing a specific presence in the territory, so that contact between families and agents is not merely an exceptional event in the face of serious situations, but a resource which is close to hand and available. This implies the existence of institutional support that makes it possible to respond appropriately to the demands of families in relation to safeguarding their rights and those of their children, or to support community action for the benefit of early childhood.

Intersectoral coordination is also important in order to support those mainly responsible for providing training to families on specific subjects and specific support that may be required. Persons working with families can act as facilitators in gaining access to different services according to needs and available resources. In this way, they can contribute to making intersectorality a reality in the territory.

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