



HOW TO...

encourage mom & dad to love & respond to baby

Sikunye seeks to equip and support churches to care for families in the First Thousand Days (FTD). This reflection is part of a range of workshops hosted by Sikunye, aimed at equipping churches to understand the nurturing care framework.

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what is nurturing care?

Nurturing care is what all children need to thrive. Nurturing care is defined as a stable environment that is sensitive to children's health and nutritional needs, and that provides protection from harm, opportunities for early learning, and interactions that are responsive, emotionally supportive, and developmentally stimulating. These environments offer acceptance and a sense of belonging and connection demonstrated through an active and constant relationship with the child or adolescent (Berry & Malek, p52. 2017).



what is responsive caregiving?

Responsive caregiving is one of the components of the nurturing care framework. It includes observing & responding to children's movements, sounds & gestures & verbal requests. It is the basis for all the other components like:

- Protecting children against injury & the negative effects of adversity (**security & safety**)
- Recognizing & responding to illness (**good health**)
- Enriched learning (**opportunities for early learning**)
- Building trust & social relationships
- Responsive feeding, especially for low-weight or ill infants (**adequate nutrition**).

Before young children learn to speak, the engagement between them and their caregivers is expressed through cuddling, eye contact, smiles, vocalizations, and gestures. These mutually enjoyable interactions create an emotional bond, which helps young children to understand the world around them and to learn about people, relationships, and language. These social interactions also stimulate connections in the brain (WHO, p17. 2018).

Responsive caregiving is marked by:

- The child having secure emotional relations with caregivers,
- Caregivers being sensitive and responsive to the child's cues,
- Caregiver-child interactions being enjoyable and stimulating,
- Communication being two-directional.



love and responsive giving

Babies and young children need love to grow. This loving bond is vitally important for the healthy development of the child. Children are completely dependent on their parents to recognise and respond to their needs. These needs are not only for nutrition and safety, but also for social engagements, cognitive stimulation, emotional regulation and soothing.

“The most important ingredient in a child’s life is the people.”

Effective caregivers observe their child's cues, interpret what the child wants and needs, and respond consistently and appropriately. Caregivers provide the foundation for early learning when they make eye contact with their young child, follow their child's gaze, and talk to the child, taking turns. When caregivers are sensitive, responsive, predictable, and loving, they facilitate the child's early social and emotional development, promote secure emotional attachment between the infant and parent, and help their child to learn. It is in this relationship that the child feels loved, safe and secure.

1 Corinthians 13: 4-7

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.”

how can we encourage or promote responsive caregiving?

As a church, you can encourage responsive caregiving or a loving bond. Moms, dads, and caregivers need people around them that are supportive and caring, to ensure parents' positive wellbeing, to help reduce their stress and to have a someone to listen to them. All parents need encouragement, affirmation, and the correct knowledge from a loving, and supportive community.

“A big way you can support is by offering relationship, friendship, companionship, emotional support, acknowledgement.”

- **Offer emotional and practical support** to mother, fathers, and caregivers
- **Start a Home Visiting ministry** in your church. The home-visiting ministry is a powerful way to build relationships with mom, her baby and the family – and to journey with mom and baby ensuring that mom gets the support she needs to the parent well
- Find ways to **reduce stress and create calm, safe spaces** in your church
- **Help caregivers to be curious and notice their child's cues** and respond appropriately to child's needs (sensitivity and responsiveness)
- **Observe how the caregiver** comforts, responds, and shows love to the child, and guides their exploration. Model and encourage caregivers to make eye contact, to smile, cuddle, and praise their baby
- **Affirm and encourage** moms and dads when you see them noticing and responding to their baby. Highlight what they did well and encourage them to keep responding to babies' cues. “Well done mom! I love seeing you making eye contact and talking with your baby. You are doing such a great job!” – **use this to praise the caregiver**, build their confidence, get them to talk more to their child
- **Support caregivers to identify enjoyable everyday activities** that they can do together at home like using household objects and homemade toys, as well as talking, singing, sharing books, talking during bath time, nappy changing and dressing to increase language
- Find ways to **increase the amount of time parents spend with their children**

useful resources

- Video: [What do children need to thrive? All children need nurturing care.](#)
- Video: [Why does responsiveness matter?](#)
- Video: [Why a mother's love is paramount](#)
- Website: [Nurturing Care: for early childhood development](#)



Video: **The greatest of these is love.**

The Sikunye Gathering

Watch the recording of this inspiring event



Video: **Why does responsiveness matter?**

The Beginning of Life

Bernard van Leer Foundation

references:

- World Health Organization, United Nations Children's Fund, World Bank Group (2018) *Nurturing care for early childhood development: a framework for helping children survive and thrive to transform health and human potential*. Geneva: World Health Organisation. Retrieved from: [9789241514064-eng.pdf \(who.int\)](#)
- Berry L & Malek E (2017) Caring for children: Relationships matter. In: Jamieson L, Berry L & Lake L (eds) *South African Child Gauge 2017*. Cape Town, Children's Institute, University of Cape Town.

