



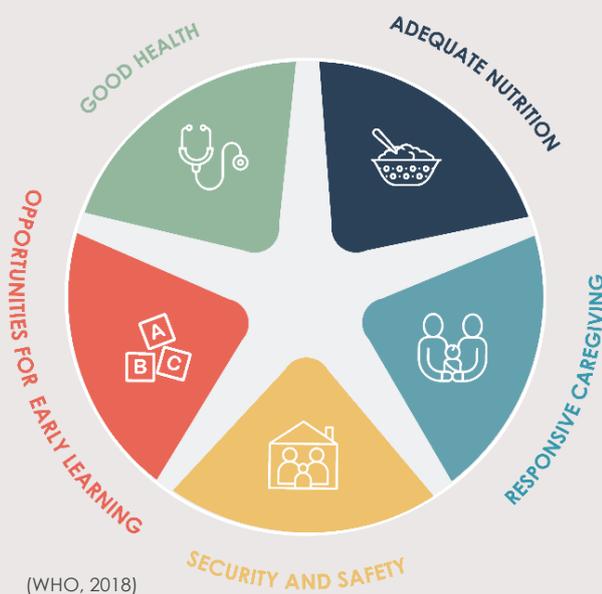
love and responsive caregiving

Nurturing Care Framework

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 Lunchtime Conversations hosted by Sikunye, aimed at equipping churches to understand the nurturing care framework.

Listen to audio recording [here](#)

Watch the video recording [here](#)



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 and 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?

Moms, dads, and caregivers need people around them that are supportive and caring, to ensure parents' positive wellbeing. All parents need encouragement, affirmation, and correct knowledge from a loving, supportive community.

- **Observe** how the caregiver comforts, responds, and shows love to the child, and guides their exploration.
- Use that information to **praise the caregiver**, build their confidence, get them to talk more to their child, and identify enjoyable activities that the caregiver and child can do together at home like using household objects and homemade toys, as well as talking, singing, and sharing books.
- Find ways to **increase the amount of time** parents spend with their children.
- **Model and encourage caregivers** to make eye contact, smile, cuddle, praise.
- **Help caregivers** to notice their child's cues and respond appropriately to child's needs (sensitivity and responsiveness)
- **Support caregivers** to identify and use everyday moments to communicate and play with their child. Everyday activities are things like talking during bath time, nappy changing and dressing to increase language.
- **Encourage** caregivers to develop safe and mutually rewarding relationships with their child.

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](#)

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.