



United Nations

Department of
Economic and
Social Affairs

Concept Note

United Nations online Expert Group Meeting
16-18 June 2020
10:00 AM – 12:30 PM (NY time)

Assessing Progress, Challenges and Emerging Issues: Focus on Modalities for IYF+30, Parenting Education and the Impact of COVID-19

The Division for Inclusive Social Development (DISD) of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) is organizing an Expert Group Meeting on “Families in Development” to be held online 16-18 June 2020.

In accordance with relevant United Nations mandates, the Expert Group Meeting is to address the following issues:

- (1) Appropriate ways and means for the preparations and observance of the thirtieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family (IYF) and beyond (2020-2024)
- (2) Parenting education in the context of Sustainable Development Goal 16 and beyond ¹
- (3) The impact of COVID-19 pandemic on families and parenting

Concerning the appropriate ways and means to observe the thirtieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family (IYF+30), DISD proposes to focus on the major trends identified by the United Nations Secretariat, including the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and their impact on families. The major trends are:

- New technologies

¹ A/RES/74/124

- Climate change
- Urbanization & international migration
- Demographic change

Specific areas of research on family-oriented policies to effectively tackle those trends will be discussed. Further, a follow-up to the family-oriented policies for the achievement of selected SDGs will be reviewed. This may include the analysis of proposals of Member States, UN entities and other stakeholders (received in response to the Note Verbale sent by the Secretariat). Time permitting, the EGM may also highlight recent good practices in family policy making.

In terms of parenting and parenting education the meeting will focus on their relevance for the achievement of SDG16, i.e. for promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development and social cohesion. Parenting education for strong intergenerational interactions will include the concept and significance of positive parenting. Regional overviews of parenting education will be presented. Gender perspectives on care and parenting and the role of fathers as well as the importance of grandparents will also be addressed.

In addition, the meeting will focus on parenting education to prevent all forms of violence against children within families and beyond. Types of violence against children within families will be discussed. In particular, the negative consequences of corporal punishment will be addressed, as well as perceptions, cultural constraints, advocacy and awareness raising efforts. Further, the promotion of non-violent forms of discipline will be highlighted.

Parenting in the UN context

The importance of parenting, positive parenting and parenting education has been recognised at the international forum through relevant General Assembly resolutions. In particular, the investment in parenting education as a tool to enhance children's well-being and prevent all forms of violence against children, including through promoting non-violent forms of discipline has been emphasized.²

² A/RES/74/124

Member States also raised the importance of supporting and assisting families' and caregivers' capacities in regard to child development, including through comprehensive education and training, and the promotion of involved and positive parenting to enable them to provide children with care in a safe environment.³

Parents, positive parenting & parenting education

When referring to parenting education, by parents we mean primarily biological, adoptive or foster parents, but recognize that other relatives like grandparents or older siblings play a role in 'parenting' of children. Importantly 'parents' or 'caregivers' denote individuals whose presence impacts the health and well-being of children. Such individuals share a consistent relationship with a child and a keen interest in its well-being. Our main focus for this meeting is on parenting and parenting education of and for biological, adoptive or foster parents to improve their parenting skills and enhance child well-being.

Positive parenting

Over the years, research on parenting moved from looking at deficits or risk factors in parenting towards a positive focus and predictors of positive outcomes. Now widely used focus on positive parenting aims to promote parenting behaviors that are most essential for fostering positive youth development. Sometimes, a term 'involved parenting' is used indicating a high level of involvement in all aspects of children's lives. The term 'supportive parenting' is also used to denote the helping role of parents. In the context of this meeting 'positive parenting' denotes both involved and supportive elements.

For the purpose of this meeting, positive parenting will be defined as "*the continual relationship of a parent(s) and a child or children that includes caring, teaching, leading, communicating, and providing for the needs of a child consistently and unconditionally*".⁴ Other definitions mention elements of positive parenting such as "*... nurturing, empowering, nonviolent...*" and

³ A/RES/74/133

⁴ Seay, A., Freysteinson, W. M., & McFarlane, J. (2014). Positive parenting. *Nursing Forum*, 49(3), 200–208), p. 207

providing “*recognition and guidance which involves setting of boundaries to enable the full development of the child*”.⁵

Research on positive parenting indicates that it involves guiding, teaching, caring, empowering and nurturing. It is consistent and sensitive to the child’s needs. It is always non-violent, provides regular open communication, emotional security, warmth and unconditional warmth. Positive parenting rewards accomplishments and sets boundaries and supports the child’s best interests.

Importantly, positive parenting may mitigate the negative impact of familial risk factors, such as socioeconomic disadvantage, family stress, and single parenthood on children’s subsequent behavioral problems. Moreover, positive parenting is related to various aspects of healthy child development which continue beyond childhood.

Positive discipline

The term ‘discipline’ often has a negative connotation referring to perceived punitive measures, but its actual definition is “training that corrects, molds, or perfects the mental faculties or moral character”⁶ Importantly, positive discipline is not punitive, it is not violent, aggressive or critical.

The objective of positive parenting is to teach discipline in a way that builds a child’s self-esteem and supports a mutually respectful parent-child relationship without breaking the child’s spirit. Importantly, positive parenting is denoted as thoughtful and loving but not permissive.⁷

Corporal punishment, such as spanking, has numerous negative consequences for children with research indicating the four negative consequences (the 4 Rs): resentment, revenge, rebellion and retreat (resentment towards parents, thoughts/actions of revenge to get back at parents; rebellion through even worse behaviours; and retreat referring to becoming evasive and losing self-esteem).⁸

What’s more, corporal punishment is not only harmful, unnecessary but also counter-productive and does not result in long-term changing behaviours.

⁵ Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (2006) in Rodrigo et al., 2012, p. 4.

⁶ Merriam-Webster dictionary, 2019

⁷ <https://positiveparenting.com>

⁸ <https://positivediscipline.com>

Despite numerous efforts to raise awareness of the negative consequences of corporal punishment, the practise remains a widespread form of violence against children.

There are several risk factors increasing the likelihood of violence against children within their families, such as family poverty, parental unemployment and low levels of parental education. Importantly, parenting education programmes can reduce some of those risks. Specific programmes, such as ages and stages approach in parenting education informs parents of typical and appropriate behaviours of new-borns, toddlers, pre-schoolers and school-age children, as well as appropriate caregiver responses.

The positive forms of discipline require both kindness and firmness. They must promote child's sense of belonging and importance; should work long-time; teach value and social and life skills, such as problem-solving and self-soothing ad help children develop a sense of competence.⁹ Other aspects of positive discipline include non-violence, respect, teaching children self-respect and empathy and promoting a positive relationship between parent and child.¹⁰

Parenting and gender

No country has achieved equality in unpaid care work. Globally, women spend up to ten times as much time on unpaid care and domestic work (including parenting) as men. What's more even in western countries where men tend to take up more caregiving and domestic work, twice as many fathers say they rely on their spouse for knowledge and information on parenting as compared to mothers. Achieving equality in unpaid care and domestic work is a matter of justice and gender equality. Involved fathers contribute to gender equality and women's health.¹¹

According to the State of the World's Fathers 2019 report, 85 per cent of fathers say they would do anything to be very involved in caring for their new child but are still taking on far less than mothers. What seems to be holding them back are: (1) the lack of adequate, paid paternity leave, and low take-up of leave when available; (2) restrictive gender norms stipulating that care is women's responsibility and the view that women are more competent

⁹ Nelsen, Tamborski & Ainge (2016) "Positive discipline parenting tools"

¹⁰ Durrant "Positive Discipline", 2016

¹¹ State of the World's Fathers, 2019

caregivers than men; (3) lack of economic security and government support for all parents and caregivers.¹²

Parenting education programmes

There is a variety of parenting education programmes. They mainly aim to enhance the quality of parenting. Most focus on helping parents in early years of children's lives. A wide range of programmes aim to invest in children in early years in all regions of the world. Evaluations of such programmes, especially those carried out in Europe, United States, Canada as well as Latin America report positive effects associated with such interventions.

Some reviews of parenting support services conclude that they should avoid stigmatization of those in need, recognize parents as proactive agents rather than passive beneficiaries and involve both parents.¹³

Parenting and COVID-19 pandemic

Considering recent developments, the impact of COVID-19 on families will be explored and good practices shared. Detailed family-oriented policies to counter negative effects of the pandemic will be analysed illustrated by the case of Canada. The unpaid care work in times of the COVID-19 crisis will also be addressed.

Purpose of the meeting

The primary objective of the Meeting is to bring together experts and civil society representatives to discuss and explore the issues noted above. The conclusions and recommendations of this meeting will provide Member States and other stakeholders with expert analysis regarding a number of issues impacting recent family policy developments in the context of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and relevant General Assembly resolutions. Inputs provided by experts will be used for the drafting of the report of the Secretary-General to be issued in 2020.

¹² <https://men-care.org/2019/06/05/state-of-the-worlds-fathers-2019-report-launch/>

Based on a new research across seven countries (Argentina, Brasil, Canada, Japan, Netherland, UK and US)

¹³ A/70/61-E/2015/3

Methodology

Experts are asked to provide a paper; make a short presentation; participate in group discussions and give their expert opinion and policy recommendations on family policy development, monitoring and implementation in the areas mentioned above. The experts are also expected to provide specific examples of good practices on topics under discussion and offer detailed recommendations on further development of policies, programmes and strategies supporting families in the areas noted above.

Outcomes

Background papers (5-7 pages, single-spaced, excluding references and statistical tables) prepared by each expert on issues in the annotated agenda and including policy recommendations. Report of the meeting containing the summary of discussion and policy recommendations prepared by DISD/DESA.

Papers by experts will cover issues identified in the agenda, explain their relevance, provide quantitative and qualitative evidence, analyse the roles of social institutions, give examples of good practices, offer conclusions and recommendations. The report and experts' papers will be posted on the website of the DISD/DESA.

Organizational matters

Owing to the closure of UN Headquarters in New York, due to COVID-19 pandemic, the expert group meeting will be convened online from 16 to 18 June 2020, from 10 am to 12:30 pm (NY time).

A minimum of ten experts will participate in the Expert Group Meeting. Experts will include academics from the fields of family policy, globalization, parenting, parenting education, child well-being and other related issues. Experts will be representing various regions and will participate in the meeting in their personal capacities. Each expert is required to provide a short presentation based on his/her written paper (not exceeding 10 minutes). The presenters should submit their papers to the UN Secretariat by **31 May 2020**.

The participants will meet in several working sessions.

- Each session will have brief introductory remarks or presentation/s (power point is encouraged but not required) by expert/s which will introduce the topic and provide context for ensuing discussion.
- A moderator for each session will lead the group discussion and will be responsible for a brief summary and compiling the recommendations from each session.
- Discussions and brainstorming will be the preferred method of work and no formal conference style presentations are envisioned.
- The working language of the meeting will be English. There will be no interpretation provided. All submissions should be made available to the Secretariat in English.

Other arrangements

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