

Beyond blaming and shaming: parenting support as a key to a healthier society

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Zagreb, May 20, 2016

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- The importance of parenting support
- The availability of parenting support in Croatia
- UNICEF's engagement and activities
- Key considerations for improvement

THE IMPORTANCE OF PARENTING SUPPORT

- Particularly important **in the early years** of a child's life – the child's emotional, intellectual, social and psychological development as a person is primarily determined by the quality of the relationship with his/her parents/caregivers;
 - Quality support for parents helps facilitate the **realization of the child's developmental potential and life chances**;
 - Growing up in a stable family environment with a caring, consistent and responsible parental care and guidance
- vs.
- Lack of parental care or inappropriate care (abuse, neglect – 28% increase between 2012 and 2014) → possibility of criminal offenses as a result of a lack of parenting support

WHY IS PARENTING SUPPORT IMPORTANT?

*Statements by parents after participating in parenting support programmes
Growing Up Together and Growing Up Together Plus, UNICEF*

- *I got answers to the **questions that were bothering me** in connection with parenting*
- *A calmer approach to raising children, I no longer have **feelings of helplessness and loss of control.***
- *I have widened my horizons in regards to raising children, and **reduced some “methods” that did not make me, nor the children very happy.***
- *My communication with my child has improved, as well as the communication with my whole family. **I am sure of myself and my actions.***

SOCIAL NORMS AND BELIEFS ENCOURAGING VIOLENCE AND “NON-POSITIVE” PARENTING

- *Did a stick really come out of heaven? (and why didn't it stay there?)*
- *Parents as “owners” of their child's destiny?*

WHY IS PARENTING SUPPORT IMPORTANT?

THE PERSPECTIVE OF CHILDREN'S AND PARENTS' RIGHTS TO SUPPORT

○ **Convention on the Rights of the Child**

Article 18 Responsibility of parents for the wellbeing of their children and assistance given to parents by the state in realizing this role

1. States Parties shall use their best efforts to ensure recognition of the principle that both parents have common responsibilities for the upbringing and development of the child. **Parents or, as the case may be, legal guardians, have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child.** The best interests of the child will be their basic concern.

2. For the purpose of guaranteeing and promoting the rights set forth in the present Convention, **States Parties shall render appropriate assistance to parents and legal guardians in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities** and shall ensure the development of institutions, facilities and services for the care of children.

WHY IS PARENTING SUPPORT IMPORTANT?

THE PERSPECTIVE OF CHILDREN'S AND PARENTS' RIGHTS TO SUPPORT

- **Recommendation of the Council of Europe** Rec(2006.) 19 on the policy to support **positive parenting** – two fundamental principles

1. Equal focus on the strengths, resources, protection factors and risk factors, including approaches focusing on results, capacity building, creating opportunities and realizing realistic goals as well as approaches aiming to find and evaluate strengths in interpersonal relationships within a community.

2. Treating parents and children who are seeking help as active participants, individuals who cope with their life circumstances, who are 'experts by experience' and holders of social rights.

WHY IS PARENTING SUPPORT IMPORTANT?

- Recognized through priorities of the Republic of Croatia defined in the **National Strategy for the Rights of Children in the Republic of Croatia** from 2014 to 2020.
 - Develop a protective and supporting environment to build capacities for responsible parenting
 - Ensure the realization of the child's right to a non-violent family environment and parental leadership/guidance that respects the dignity of the child
 - Ensure the right of the child that appropriate and timely support by the state is provided to the parents in fulfilling their parental responsibilities and duties

WHY IS PARENTING SUPPORT IMPORTANT?

- Recognized by the **The Social Welfare Act** through the social services of counselling and assisting families
- Recognized by the new **Family Act** (in revision) through measures for the protection of personal rights and wellbeing of the child
- **Concluding observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (September 2014)**
 - Strengthen assistance and support services for families – particularly through services for parents and legal guardians in the performance of child-rearing responsibilities



THE AVAILABILITY OF PARENTING SUPPORT IN CROATIA

According to a research conducted by UNICEF in 2013 on parenting support for young children

- 22 % of parents state that there is **no service for parenting support** in their town/region
- **Great regional differences in the availability** of parenting support services
- 70 % of parents **with low socioeconomic status** did not use any parenting support service.
- Services are **least available and least used** by parents characterized by a **low level of education, young age** (younger than 25), **low socioeconomic status, life in a rural area.**

UNICEF's ROLE AND ENGAGEMENT

- **Advocating** for systematic parenting support in the best interests of the child
- **Informing, influencing social norms, attitudes and behaviours**
- **Research**
- **Developing models** of support programmes for parents of young children aimed at strengthening parental competencies (Growing Up Together)
 - Additional support programme for parents of children with disabilities (Growing Up Together +)
 - Future plans – develop a model of support for parents in contact with the social welfare system who are exposed to various social risks
 - Counselling and support services via phone or internet (Little phone)

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UNICEF's ROLE AND ENGAGEMENT

- **Developing a model** of a support programme for parents and preschool children belonging to **the most vulnerable groups in society** for including children in the education system – “**Ready Together**” – Sisak and Slavonski Brod
- *“No parent wants to come to school and be told: this is not right, that is not right, why didn't you do this or that...” – are we looking for someone to blame or are we trying to find a solution?*
- *“Many parents have learnt how to read and write with their children during the workshops”*



UNICEF's ROLE AND ENGAGEMENT

- **Technical support**

- Improving the measures for the protection of the rights and welfare of children under the jurisdiction of centres for social welfare
- Legal and strategic framework; child wellbeing indicators
- **Equipping prisons** – support for parents and children whose parents are in prison
- **In 2013 UNICEF donated toys, didactic equipment and furniture in the total value of 142.000,00 HRK to prisons and detention centres** in order to equip space for meetings between children and parents who are in custody or serving a prison sentence. In cooperation with the Ministry of Justice, 21 prisons and detention centres were equipped in Croatia.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- **Increase the availability and quality of services** for parenting support in the community at the level of the entire country and ensure their **sustainability** (it is the right of the child that his/her parent is adequately supported)
- Work in the area of promotion of **seeking professional help** and promote a positive attitude towards seeking help in upbringing and caring for children.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

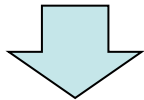
- **Train professionals** on contemporary findings and knowledge in the area of positive and responsible parenting
- **Pay special attention** to services for parenting support for parents of children **in particularly vulnerable situations.**
- **Include parents and children** in the processes of planning and designing of the programs and activities of parenting support
- **Conduct systematic monitoring** of the parenting support programmes

KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- Apply **the model of building on the capacities and resources**, competencies and strengths of parents, children and families, rather than a deficit model
- Strengthen **intersectoral cooperation and networking** as well as a multidisciplinary approach to parenting
- **Increase investment** in programmes and services aimed at supporting parenting and families, as this is investment into the wellbeing of children and future of the society.

IN CONCLUSION...

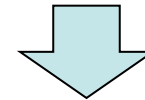
Parenting reduced to
**duties, obligations,
responsibilities**



Guilt for not fulfilling
obligations obligations
= “a vicious circle”

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Parenting including
the realization **of the
right to support**



A step towards a
solution = building
parents’ strengths and
capacities = a
healthier society