

SUPPORTING
FAMILIES FOR
**NURTURING
CARE**

19

FIRST STEPS TO PRESCHOOL

DRAFT

Young Child Health, Development and Wellbeing



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INTRODUCTION

This module presents key information on what you can do as a service provider to help parents understand the importance of quality early childhood education and care (ECEC).

The information and guidance presented in this module is most applicable to parents and teachers of ECEC-aged children, and particularly those aged between 3-6 years. The specific form of ECEC we discuss throughout this module is preschool education. In this module we use the phrase 'preschool' and 'early childhood education programmes' interchangeably. However, it is worth noting that there are also early childhood education programmes for children younger than 3 years, however those kinds of programmes (such as nursery and childcare) are not covered in this module.

The aim of this module is to enhance and update your knowledge regarding the value and importance of young children attending high-quality, inclusive preschool programmes and how you can support parents in this matter. While acknowledging that parents are a child's first educators and that early learning is an integral part of early childhood development which begins even before birth, this module specifically addresses how young children's participation in early education programmes can make a positive difference in children's lives, including wellbeing and the lifelong academic and social achievements.

By completing this module, you will be able to:

- Advise and address parents' questions on which early childhood programmes exist in your country and why they should enroll their children in early education programmes. Help families identify preschool programmes that are responsive to children's and families' needs
- Make parents feel more motivated and comfortable with enrolling their children in early education programmes, dealing with transitions from home to early education, communicating effectively with early childhood educators, and becoming more proactive and involved in preschool programmes.
- Motivate parents of vulnerable children to involve their children in preschool and assist them in overcoming barriers to participation in preschool programmes.
- Explain to parents which characteristics high-quality preschool programmes have, namely: accreditation, skilled staff, learning through play, inclusivity and parental involvement. Motivate parents to advocate for quality preschool programmes.

You as a service provider with knowledge of the child, family and other services in the local community need to address the parents' concerns. You can do this on your own or together with a colleague from a local preschool.

You will see several icons within the text throughout this module. These icons are there to notify you of special activities that will help you understand the content more thoroughly.



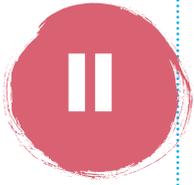
Reflection and discussion | This icon indicates a reflection exercise.



Parent support | This icon indicates an activity you can teach to or use with parents.



Lesson activity | This icon indicates a lesson activity.



WHAT IS ECEC?

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) refers to any regulated arrangement that provides education and care for children from birth to compulsory primary school age, which varies across countries.

ECEC programmes are organized, funded and delivered in a variety of ways in both the public and private sectors. They may be publicly funded and delivered, publicly funded and privately delivered, or include other combinations. They may be free, delivered through the public education sector, or they may charge income-related fees. In almost all of Europe they are heavily subsidized by the government.

The parents or caregivers of the young child decide whether their child participates in ECEC or if they take care of their child at home. Take up in ECEC programmes is high where the programmes are free.

Several countries in the Europe and Central Asia (ECA) region have introduced an obligatory one year of pre-primary education for 5-6-year-olds. Coverage of pre-primary is the highest compared to services for children under-5 years.

ECEC programmes can be categorized as regular (occurring daily) or occasional (occurring periodically) depending on the needs of the local community. The duration can be full day, half-day and short (only few hours per day or only for a few hours on a few days of the week).

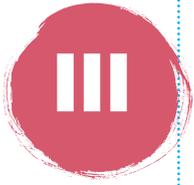
Several types of programmes are offered to parents and children in different countries. You as a service provider should know the situation in your country/region and local community, and how existing programme provisions can meet the needs of children and parents. For working parents full-day programmes are likely the best solution. For non-working parents, half-day programmes especially for children 3 years and above, might be more suitable.



Reflection and discussion

- What is ECEC?
- Who funds and delivers ECEC programmes in your country?
- What is the cost of attending different ECEC programme in your country?
- At what age does ECEC start in your country? Is it compulsory to attend ECEC in your country from a certain age?
- What is the duration of different programmes?

You can share the answers to these questions when you introduce ECEC to the parents.



THE IMPORTANCE OF ECEC



There is good evidence that the foundations for learning are largely built in the early years of life, prior to primary school. The newest research shows that ECEC plays an important role in children's neurological development and creating sustainable outcomes for all children.¹

The concept of nurturing care makes up all the key ingredients crucial for healthy early childhood development, for a child to thrive, to grow physically, mentally and socially. The concept includes good health, adequate nutrition, security and safety, responsive caregiving and opportunities for early learning.

We now understand that the period from pregnancy to age 3 is the most critical, when the brain grows faster than at any other time in our lives; 80% of a baby's brain is formed by this age. For healthy brain development in these years, children need a safe, secure and loving environment, with the right nutrition and stimulation from their parents or caregivers.² Refer to Module 1 of this training course 'The Early Childhood Years' here for more information.

Children who do not have the benefit of nurturing care in their earliest years, fall behind during this time and never catch up with their peers. They are more likely to encounter learning difficulties in school, higher drop-out rates leading to poorer job opportunities, and in turn, reducing their future earnings. This affects the wellbeing and prosperity of their families and societies.³

Structured early learning opportunities for all children from three years of age until their entry into primary education support the overall development of children and their readiness to succeed in school and beyond. This includes physical, social, emotional and cognitive development, approaches to learning and language development. Children who benefit from quality preschool have been found to perform better through their education career, have improved graduation rates and a higher quality of life compared to their peers who did not attend preschool.

Good preschool programmes for children aged 3-6 years can compensate for the deprivations in the home environment of disadvantaged children and help them to get ready for primary school. This can contribute to closing the educational achievement gap between children from low-income families and those from well-off families.

Yet despite the proven and lifelong benefits of pre-primary education, half of the pre-primary school-age children in the world today – at least 175 million children – are not enrolled in pre-primary education during these vital years. UNICEF is an advocate for quality ECEC around the world, as an important investment in children's futures. The foundations of learning are built early in children's lives: investing in early education is cost-effective, as it reduces the need for more costly remedial programmes later on, to address inequalities in learning and poor learning outcomes.



Learning Checkpoint

List 3 benefits of children attending preschool programmes. (Sample answers in Annex A):

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

You can share these answers with parents when talking about the importance of preschool programmes.

Enabling environment

An effective and equitable pre-primary subsector requires a strong and supportive environment. The enabling environment refers to a broad set of interrelated factors that deeply affect the development of an effective and robust pre-primary subsector, including the ability to achieve intended programme goals. The four key factors in relationship to the enabling environment are: ministerial leadership, policies and legislation, financing and public demand:

Ministerial leadership: Anchors ECE provision within a lead ministry and ensures political will, relevant expertise and coordination across levels of government.

Policies and legislation: Set the framework for the prioritization of pre-primary education in plans and budgets, as well as the enforcement of relevant standards for quality.

Financing: Ensures adequate investment in the subsector, leveraging a dynamic range of funds available from national, subnational and international resources.

Public demand: Generates public support for early learning services and improves the accountability of leaders for the delivery and quality of these services.

If the public (parents, educators, community members, service providers, etc.) are more aware of the importance of preschool, leaders will be more willing to make preschool education a priority and invest in the futures of all children. With your support, we can continue to successfully advocate for all children to exercise their right to access high-quality preschool education. This goal can become a reality for countless children throughout the ECA region and all over the world.

IV

TRANSITION FROM HOME TO A PRESCHOOL PROGRAMME

During your visits to a family, even when the child is very young, you can start the discussion with the parents about their plans for the child when maternity leave ends. Do this by listening to their needs and exploring opportunities which might be suitable for them. At around 3 to 4 years, children start to look for and benefit from the company of their peers. They enjoy exploring new situations and circumstances. You can explain what preschool is and why it is important (see above). You can use this opportunity to explain to parents that the needs of the child change in the early years and adds to early learning—cognitive competencies as well as foundational skills in literacy and mathematics through playful approaches and teacher-guided play.

Transition to a preschool programme is a big and important event for a child. While they might seem to be upset in the short term when being left by parents, they will quickly adjust and settle into their new routines and environments. Parents may be feeling unsettled about leaving their child so take time to chat to them about their concerns and work with them to provide ideas (as shown below) to ease this transition.



Which of the following things could a parent do to help a child who is having a difficult time being separated from their parent? (Sample answers in Annex B)

- Sneak off and the child will adjust.
- Let the child bring a special toy or object that comforts them to leave at the centre.
- Leave photographs of the parent(s) at the preschool for the child to look at.



Parent support

You can share the following checklist with the parents to help them to prepare their child for this transition.

	Item for parents	Complete
1	Tell your child about the new school, where it's located and some activities they might participate in.	
2	Visit the preschool beforehand with your child to establish a sense of comfort for both you and your child.	
3	Meet with your child's future early education teacher. Sometimes early educators also make a home visit prior to the child's entry into the programme. This enables the teacher to get to know your child and family individually, answer any questions you may have, and set the tone for positive communication. **	
4	Let the child bring a special toy or object from home that comforts them. Allow them to leave this object at their education centre. Leave photographs of your family at the preschool for your child to look at.	
5	Some programmes will invite you to stay with your child in the classroom for the first day (or even week) to help the child become familiar and feel safe in the new setting. Visits can be especially useful for children with the separation problems because this enables them to get to know the setting and allows the programme to remove any potential barriers prior to the child's entrance. ^{xii} Be sure to schedule this in advance with your child's teacher.	
6	Meet with the parents of children in their child's classroom to foster a relationship and build a support system for your child as well as for yourself. Your child's socioemotional growth can continue to develop outside of the classroom during playdates and get-togethers with their classmates and school friends.	

** If the parents are reluctant to have the teacher in their home, you as the service provider can help reassure them that the purpose of the visit is to get to know the child better, not as a way to judge the parent. You might also suggest meeting in a mutual space outside of the child's home (ex. park or community centre) where the teacher can meet and talk with the child and the parents.

Ask the parents if they have received any written materials and resources provided by the programme, and if they have any questions. If parents cannot read the materials provided, try to find ways to help them understand the text by reading the materials to them or finding appropriate audio or visual substitutions. Parent handbooks usually explain programme policies, expectations about communication between families and programme staff, requirements for a child enrolled in the programme and how the programme operates (e.g., what to expect during a typical day). All caregivers feel more comfortable when they understand information about their child's education and know what to expect. This helps parents to maintain a positive attitude around children and increases the likelihood of the child being excited about entering the programme. Parents also need to understand the confidentiality policies of the programme to be confident that privacy about their families and child will be respected and supported.



Parent support

Parents might also have other questions. It is important that you take time to answer these questions and get more information from the preschool if necessary:

At what age is my child ready to attend preschool?

Most children are ready to participate in early education programmes by age 3. Some indicators that child is ready for preschool include: the child wants to do things independently; likes to socialize with adults and children; does not cry or have problems staying with people outside of their immediate family (grandparents, neighbours etc.)

How can I communicate with the teacher?

Communication can take place by telephone, email, or handwritten notes. Encourage parents to inform the teacher about how to best communicate with them if there is a concern or issue with their child. Parents can find additional opportunities to communicate with the teacher, such as when they are dropping off or picking up the child from preschool.

Will my child get sick more often?

Parents should understand that very young children, especially those aged 0-3 years-old, who participate in day care programmes in creches/nurseries can be exposed to common infections. Research⁴ shows that young children in preschool programmes experience a higher incidence of respiratory and diarrheal and middle ear infections compared with their peers who are cared for at home.

Being in a group increases the risk of getting sick, but it also increases children's immunity and resilience against becoming sick with certain illnesses in the future. You as a service provider and/or health professional can explain to the parents that their children need to mix with their peers and sometimes get sick. You can also explain to them that in many countries, there is a health care provider in the kindergarten who helps maintain hygiene and informs parents when their children should not attend preschool etc.

V

ACCESS TO PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION

Providing access to preschool programmes for all potential beneficiaries without ensuring quality (see next topic) might not bring the desired benefits for children or their parents. Likewise, ensuring high-quality preschool programmes without securing enough places in a programme might not be an acceptable solution when the broader goal is to provide equitable and efficient education systems to all children.⁵

Who benefits the most from preschool programmes?

All children benefit greatly from preschool programmes, but children who are from vulnerable backgrounds or require additional support (i.e., children with disabilities, children from poor families, immigrant and refugee children, children from remote and rural places, Roma children) benefit the most from early years services. However, it is more difficult for these children to access preschool services than their peers. Additionally, when these children are enrolled in a preschool programme, they tend to receive lower-quality services.⁶

THE “KINDERGARTEN PARADOX”

National survey data⁷ suggests that in many countries within the ECA region, children from the wealthiest households are 7 times more likely to attend ECE/kindergarten than children from the poorest households. This creates a “kindergarten paradox”, meaning that these institutions, which have the greatest potential for promoting social inclusion and respect for diversity from the earliest ages, are contributing to the widening inequity gap between the wealthy and the poor.⁸

It has been found in multiple countries that children who live in poverty are at a higher risk of falling behind their peers developmentally – especially in the areas of language and social skills that affect their readiness for primary school. Approximately 40 per cent of children who live in poverty experience such delays^{9,10,11}. Pre-school participation is a cost-effective way to address the inequities that plague children of vulnerable backgrounds or experience other forms of disadvantage or discrimination.



Watch the video

[Kindergartens without Borders for the Best Start in Life](#)



Obstacles to participation and how to fix them: There are many obstacles for to increasing enrolment of young children, especially the most vulnerable ones¹. Complete the chart by thinking of obstacles children and their families might encounter when looking for high-quality ECE programmes for their child and think of a solution to that problem you as a service provider could provide to parents. (Sample answers in Annex C)

Element of high-quality ECE program	Issue parents might face	Solution to problem by service provider
Affordability		
Availability		
Accessibility		
Usefulness and desirability		
Cultural Responsiveness		

VI

QUALITY PRESCHOOL EDUCATION

1. ACCREDITATION

To protect children and families and guarantee quality, services for young children should be, and in many countries are, subject to national regulatory frameworks. All such services must follow a set of rules, comply to minimum standards and undergo accreditation procedures.

When deciding on a programme for their children, parents must be aware of the following:

- There is no guarantee that the private sector offers better programmes
- They must always check whether a programme has accreditation and/or approval by national authorities



Parent support

An example of a conversation with parents:

Service Provider: Your child is almost 3 years old, have you enrolled your child in an ECE program yet?

Parent: Yes, we found the best private program we could afford and enrolled our child right away.

Service Provider: It's great you've enrolled your child in a program, but there are no guarantees that the education and care they'll receive in a private program is better than a public or local program.

Parent: We thought that private programmes were always of higher quality than public programmes.

Service Provider: It's true in some cases but not always. To make sure the program you've chosen is high-quality, don't just look at the price or if its private. Check to see if the program has accreditation or approval by national authorities. You can even ask the program provider if they've been audited or received a grade or ranking.

Parent: I had no idea there were so many ways we could see if a program was good or not, thank you for this information!



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2. SKILLED STAFF

Early education professionals have a significant role in determining children's experiences and their learning outcomes, and staff competencies are key to high quality early education.¹² As such, it is crucial that parents understand and recognize the qualities of a good early education teacher or educator. You as a service professional can support parents as they select a preschool programme by asking them how they feel when interacting with their child's educator or when they visit their child's learning environment. If parents are not comfortable or happy with the preschool educator or learning environment, it is unlikely that their children will feel comfortable or happy in the program either.



Parent support

When giving parents guidance on how to find quality preschool programmes, walk them through the following checklist. Do they feel the staff and the learning environment fulfil these requirements? Teachers and support staff can find a more detailed version of this chart in Annex D.

Qualities of a good early education teacher or educator

	A good educator:	Result for children:
1. Interactions with children	Has warm and loving relationships with the children.	Generate a sense of self and belonging in children, as well as stimulate and promote learning.
2. Family and Community	Respects and considers the child's parents, family and community.	Improved children's performance and emotional wellbeing.
3. Inclusion, Diversity and Democratic Values	Respects every child, regardless of their culture, socioeconomic status or abilities.	Children are more sensitive to the needs of others and accept differences.
4. Planning and Assessment	Makes lessons and activity plans based on the child's realities and incorporates diverse activities. Integrates assessments with the teaching process, allowing for real time monitoring of learning and progress.	Children recognize their own reality and interests in the lessons. Continuous assessment gives children a constant stream of opportunities to prove their mastery of material and sends the message that everyone can succeed if given enough time and practice.
5. Teaching Strategies	Utilizes a range of strategies and skills to respond to the diverse needs of the children. Uses lots of play activities.	Child-centred activities make children interested, happy, and give a high sense of wellbeing. Children learn and develop effectively through play.
6. Learning Environment	Ensures a stimulating, warm and welcoming environment, which is safe, clean and hygienic.	Generate a sense of belonging and community for children and their parents.
7. Professional Development	Invests in ongoing professional development and broadening of skills.	Children learn more when teachers are aware of the newest strategies and skills.



Watch the videos

Watch the following videos then consider the following: What do you notice in these videos that would describe a quality, inclusive early learning and care programme? What information did you learn from these videos that you can introduce to parents?

- Importance of preschool programmes:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Syejbt0Y>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=INBUIUwsa6Q>
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NNgp1_B-6c8
- Importance of learning environment:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bIDMnUVbm8g>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BILFZbRx1F8>
- Partnership with Family and Family involvement:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SgoRN4n0GGs>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qDptJB3aT-l>

3. LEARNING THROUGH PLAY

Parents may have the concern: “Is preschool useful for my child? Is s/he learning something?”

Families may not understand how much children learn from everyday activities such as conversation and play. They may have little appreciation for play-based instruction and prefer what is familiar from their own learning experiences – blackboard recitation and copying.

You can explain to parents that if the teaching method is rote teaching (simply reciting letters or naming shapes from flash cards), children will learn less effectively and their engagement in learning is likely to be undermined. If they want their child to be happy and involved, and make lots of progress in their development, then learning through play is the perfect teaching method.

To help families understand the value of play-based learning, you can encourage teachers to hold discussion groups with families to demonstrate how children learn through play. This can help families see the value of play as a learning tool in the preschool setting and at home. Sessions might include: how children learn through play & the guiding role of the teacher/parent in intentional play; providing time, materials and a safe place to play; how to promote math and literacy through everyday conversation and play-based activities (e.g., ideas for games); and keeping children safe at play. Families can also use everyday activities and routines at home, such as preparing food, washing clothes and going to the market, as learning opportunities.

Parents can check if the teacher makes enough time for play and if the preschool setting has enough play-based learning materials available for the children, including an outdoor play area.



Reflection and discussion

Reflection questions: When watching the following videos, consider the following: what skills were children learning when participating in certain activities? (Ex. Fine motor skills when playing with building blocks). Learning Through Play:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Cp5vlzyq7E>
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C3No2_ObHLY

4. INCLUSIVE PRESCHOOL

Several international organizations¹³ recognize attendance in inclusive, high-quality early education programmes as a right for every child. This includes ensuring that programmes and curricula are developed with the understanding that the child is an active participant in their own learning, that their development must be holistic, and the provision of healthy, safe environments that are free from discrimination, inequality, or social exclusion of any kind are essential to a child's overall wellbeing.

Preschool programmes cannot be considered high-quality unless they promote inclusion of children with diverse needs. This includes children with disabilities, children from marginalised or vulnerable backgrounds, refugee and migrant children and any other children with special social or learning needs.

Parents with children with developmental difficulties or disabilities may doubt if their child would benefit from preschool attendance. If so, then you can assure them: Research demonstrates that children with developmental difficulties or disabilities greatly benefit and the long-term benefits lie in the social-emotional development, because:

- They do not experience the harmful effects of a separate, segregated education.
- They observe role models that allow them to learn new adaptive skills and to learn when and how to use their skills through imitation.
- They learn new social and communicative skills and develop meaningful friendships.
- They are provided with realistic life experiences that prepare them to be an active participant in their communities.¹⁴



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Other parents may think that the quality of their child's education will decrease if children with developmental difficulties, special needs, or disabilities attend the same setting. You can then explain that typically, children also benefit from learning and playing with children with developmental difficulties and disabilities. They develop positive attitudes towards those who are different from themselves, learn altruistic behaviours and when and how to use such behaviours.

Programmes must be adaptable to suit all children, regardless of their ability. This generally requires teachers to undergo additional training or certification. Teachers in inclusive early education programmes must partner and work with other specialists (including speech/language therapists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, psychologists, special education teachers, early learning intervention specialists) to

provide an individualized, comfortable and caring environment for every child in their classroom.

Many communities do not have inclusive programmes for children with disabilities or children that come from different ethnic or language groups; others may have programmes but do not offer children quality early childhood experiences, and others may not have programmes at all. Service providers, as well as early childhood educators/teachers and families then need to approach community leaders to either open inclusive programmes or improve programmes that already exist.

What can you do:

Help programmes to offer higher quality experiences for all children

Having tools, such as the advocacy leaflets introduced in the previous section, help preschool stakeholders understand that investing in the professional development of preschool practitioners helps programmes offer higher quality experiences for children. Teaching young children is very different from teaching at the primary or secondary level. Parents, communities and the staff in preschool programmes need help understanding that preschool age children learn through play and interactions with peers and not through directly teaching them academic skills.

Help programmes become more inclusive of children with disabilities

Many children who have received help from a service provider may have already been identified as qualifying for early intervention services. Special educators, speech and language therapists or physiotherapists are often members of early childhood intervention teams and can provide information to the preschool teachers and parents.¹⁵

You could arrange for the parent, the preschool programme and the early intervention specialist to jointly develop strategies that the preschool setting can use in collaboration with the parent.



Watch the video

Kindergartens without Borders – Parents in action
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HYjYSdFz_rM



Reflection and discussion

What can you do to promote inclusivity in preschool environments within your community?

5. PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Learning experiences and development of specific skills prior to entering preschool are varied. In some countries, many children do not attend preschool full time and overall learning environment differ in terms of family readiness.

As a first step, you must make sure that parents understand which preschool programmes exist, why early education is important for their children, how they can overcome barriers to participate in preschool and how they can identify and advocate for quality preschool (see above).

Preschool providers must remember that a child's family is the central influence in their lives throughout the early years. It is important, therefore, to link steps in children's education to earlier experiences at home, and to involve parents in school activities. You can encourage Preschool providers to make these provisions and stimulate parents to be involved:

Partnerships between parents/families are more easily formed when there are multiple ways to be involved in the programme. High-quality programmes encourage parent participation as visitors and volunteers in the centre, attending parent meetings, attending workshops, and attending parent-teacher conferences. Whenever possible parents should attend social events at the preschool, socialize with other parents at the

centre. *Parents' concerns are also more likely to be addressed if they work closely with their child's early education programme.*

Parents as visitors and partners in the child's learning

If parents can stay for an hour or more in the classroom, they can learn a lot about their child and child development in general by watching how teachers interact with their students. Inviting families and community members into the pre-primary setting to interact with the children and experience first-hand the process of learning through play is a powerful eyeopener to the benefits of play. When families and communities feel valued and included as partners, they are more open to play-based learning. Seeing active learning in action can help convince families that playful experiences can build critical skills in ways that didactic methods and rote learning cannot. They can also learn new ways to enhance their child's home learning environment by observing what children do in the centre and engage their child at home with different activities and games.

Parents as decision-makers

It is important that parents view their involvement in their child's education programme as more than just attending certain events or volunteering in classrooms. They must also be involved in shared decision-making regarding their child's learning, social life and learning environment. Families and communities can also be encouraged to contribute to the curriculum, focusing on play activities.

Parents as volunteers

Families and communities can also participate by contributing resources and materials to facilitate play experiences (for example, a community sports centre can offer its space for children to explore physical play; families can provide cultural artefacts; etc.). Tapping into these partnerships helps maximize the mobilization of support and resources across the systems and levels of the sub-sector.



Reflection and discussion

How would participation or involvement in the early learning and care programme benefit parents, the child, and the preschool? (Sample answers in Annex D)

LEARNING CHECKPOINT

What do you know about quality ECE: TRUE or FALSE Self-assessment (Answers in Annex E)

1. The best preschool programmes are those that are most similar to primary school and focus on the acquisition of academic skills and knowledge.
2. The most important thing in providing a quality preschool programme is that teachers/educators are trained in methods to teach children.
3. Children learn best when teachers/educators initiate activities that teach children.
4. Quality programmes provide children with a variety of materials and activities.
5. Quality programmes focus on teaching children the cognitive skills they need for success in primary school.
6. Quality programmes teach children through giving the class information on such things as the names of shapes, colours, numbers, etc.
7. Quality programmes provide learning through play.
8. Quality programmes do not allow children to become frustrated.
9. Quality programmes use knowledge of children's home environment and communities as learning experiences.
10. Quality programmes do not mix children of different backgrounds and varying levels of ability.

You can advise teachers to play a game with parents during a parent meeting, using the above statements. The teacher reads a statement and the parents then move to one side of the room if they believe the statement is TRUE and to the other side of the room if they believe the statement is FALSE. After each parent has taken their position, the teacher can ask why the parent choose a certain position.



Reflection and discussion

- How can you take action to improve outcomes for parents and children within your community?
- Can you as a service provider, a professional in the heart of the community, mobilize parents and colleagues from different institutions to start or support a quality preschool programme?

VII

SCHOOL READINESS FOR PRIMARY EDUCATION

The definition of “school readiness” is a broad term that involves preparing preschool, parents, communities, and the early environment in which children live and learn to be able to participate in and make the most of early learning services.

The three dimensions of school readiness are:

1. Ready children, focusing on children’s learning and development: a child who is ready has the basic minimum skills and knowledge in a variety of domains to be successful in preschool
2. Ready families, focusing on parental and caregiver attitudes and involvement in their children’s early learning and development and transition to school.
3. Ready schools, focusing on the school environment along with practices that foster and support a smooth transition for children into primary school and advance and promote the learning of all children. 16

Children’s readiness for school must be matched with families’ readiness to support children’s early learning and transition to school and schools’ readiness to support young children’s entry and learning in primary schools. By taking parents through this module, as well as Module 1 of this training course ‘The Early Childhood Years’ which can be found here, you are helping families and their children to understand the importance of ECEC, choose good services for their children and support their school readiness.



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COURSE SUMMARY

1. Parents are a child's first educators and early learning is an integral part of early childhood development which begins even before the birth and continues in the home when the child is born. By creating a stimulating home learning environment, parents/caregivers support child's curiosity and willingness to learn.
2. Young children's participation in early education programmes can make a positive difference in children's lives, including wellbeing and the lifelong academic and social success. Quality early education sets the foundation for effective lifelong learning, future educational achievements and overall well-being. It can result in wide-ranging social and economic benefits for individuals and for society.
3. All children benefit from high quality, inclusive early education programmes and the most vulnerable children, including those from low-income families or growing up in poverty, dysfunctional families or non-stimulating contexts benefit the most.
4. Skilled staff/practitioners, the use of learning through play, inclusivity, and parental involvement are key to providing high quality early education.
5. Your role as a service provider, respected professional close to the family is of great importance when it comes to enrollment of children in early education and it is in harmony with your core professional values:
 - Service providers are meant to support the health, development, and wellbeing of children:
 - By focusing on all children and families and by supporting the most vulnerable of them to overcome barriers to enrollment you are seeking greater social equality; in doing so you can improve the life prospects of all children
 - Service providers demonstrate a positive regard for others:
 - You build on parents' strengths and can promote the benefits of early education for children, families, practitioners and local community.
 - By promoting the importance of early education programmes and early learning you can demonstrate your openness to new ideas and willingness to work for changing outdated beliefs and attitudes
 - You can advocate for high quality and inclusive early education for all children, you can bring new ideas, and you can utilise your position in the local community to connect families with different services.
 - Service providers are sensitive to the concerns of parents:
 - You treat all parental concerns with respect and provide them with answers to their questions.

By providing the support outlined in this module, you will contribute towards creating a generation of more school-ready children, families, educators and schools.

IX

ANNEXES

ANNEX A

Benefits of ECEC programmes for children



- Opportunities to interact with and develop relationships with other adults and children besides those in their immediate family, help children's social and emotional development.
- Improved development of language skills.
- Development of executive function and self-regulation skills.
- Learning to take care of themselves, others and the environment.
- Learning to function in a structured environment that helps them make friends and play well with others.
- Children's curiosity is boosted through exploration and problem solving as a result of activities in which they engage
- Development of reading and math skills through group activities such as listening to and talking about books together, playing games that involve counting or comparing, and singing together.
- Preparation for schooling
- Identification of additional or specific needs that child could have.

ANNEX B

Which of the following things could a parent do to help a child who is having a difficult time being separated from their parent?

- Sneak off and the child will adjust.
- Let the child bring a special toy or object that comforts them to leave at the centre.
- Leave photographs of the parent(s) at the preschool for the child to look at.

b and c are the correct answers!

A parent (or the person dropping the child off at the centre should always say good-bye to the child and tell the child when they will return. When children know the daily routine, they will also better understand how many things are left in the day until the parent returns

ANNEX C

Obstacles to participation and how to fix them:

There are many obstacles for to increasing enrollment of young children, especially the most vulnerable ones.¹⁷ Complete the chart by thinking of obstacles children and their families might encounter when looking for high-quality ECE programmes for their child and think of a solution to that problem you as a service provider could provide to parents.

Element of high-quality ECE program	Issue parents might face	Solution to problem by service provider
Affordability	The cost of the early education services can be a big challenge for vulnerable families, because in many cases they cannot afford to pay.	For you as a service provider is important to know what possibilities vulnerable families have, whether there are some subsidies, vouchers or similar financial tools which can help families enroll their children and support with material requirements. You can also help parents to do the administrative work (fill application forms etc.) or connect them with your colleagues in early education who can help them.
Availability	In many countries limited public funding results in insufficient places in preschool programmes. Since most of the parents from vulnerable groups are unemployed or work in the grey economy, it is very difficult for them to find a place in early education for their children.	You as a service provider with professional connections with different sectors and institutions in the local community can help families to find a place and preferably start this process early.
Accessibility	Some families, especially those living in poverty, might live far away from a preschool, or might not have an ECE centre that is in proximity or within walking distance to their home. Additionally, families might not have the resources to transport their children to school (unable to afford daily transit fare, do not own a car)	For you as a service provider is important to get information about preschools close to the places where the families live or check if subsidies for transport are available.
Usefulness and desirability	To attract children and families, early education needs to be useful and meaningful. This includes different practical issues such as working hours and flexibility of daily schedules as well as meeting parents' and children's expectations and feelings about preschool programmes (i.e., Do they feel welcome, respected and valued?)	You as a service provider and respected friend and supporter of the family can explain to parents what the benefits of early education are and why they should enroll their children and how their children and they themselves will benefit. On the other hand, you can share information with early education colleagues and inform them about parents' expectations (e.g., opening hours, how to welcome them, feel respected and valued).
Cultural Responsiveness	To enroll children in early education, parents need to be sure that their culture, family values and traditions as well as understanding of child rearing and education are going to be respected and considered by teachers and education professionals. They also need to be sure that their child and they are not going to be discriminated against or segregated, but respectfully included in preschool programmes.	You as a service provider can help parents articulate their values and expectations. You can also help them locate and choose accessible, high-quality early education in where they are going to be respected.

ANNEX D

Qualities of a good early education teacher or educator

<p>1. Interactions with children</p> <p>Warm and loving relationships between young children and adults generate a sense of self and belonging in children, as well as stimulates and promotes learning.</p>	<p>A quality educator:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • greets every child by his/her name, with joy, love and respect • respects what children know and are interested in, actively listens to them and offers activities related to the interests • encourages children to freely interact with each other, enabling them to learn from each other • talks about feelings with children and teach them how to express their feelings without hurting others
<p>2. Family and Community</p> <p>Children’s performance and emotional wellbeing are better when they feel that their parents, family and community are respected and considered.</p>	<p>A quality educator:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • respects parents and their opinion and is open to listening, regardless of their gender, age, education, culture and/or social status • is interested in understanding parents’ vision for their child and expectations for her/his learning • helps parents to understand the importance of preschool • is willing to explore how parents would like to be engaged, instead of telling them what to do. • reaches out to the most vulnerable and disadvantages families
<p>3. Inclusion, Diversity and Democratic Values</p> <p>Children are more sensitive to the needs of others and accept differences when they are respected, regardless of their culture, socioeconomic status or abilities.</p>	<p>A quality educator:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • treats every child with respect • encourages children to treat other children with respect, regardless of their background, social status, ability and level of knowledge • takes care to avoid labelling and bullying of any children • encourages boys and girls to play together and with a variety of toys
<p>4. Planning and Assessment</p> <p>Planning should be based on the child’s realities and must incorporate diverse activities to encourage confidence in each child. Assessments need to be integrated with the teaching process, allowing for real time monitoring of learning and progress.</p>	<p>A quality educator:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • puts adequate time and effort in preparing meaningful lessons with clear activities and timeframe • uses assessment strategies that help children to succeed • systematically documents children’s progress and use it for planning next steps • assesses the child holistically (social, emotional, physical, communication, cognitive development) • fosters and supports a smooth transition to primary school • asks for parents’ participation during the planning and assessment processes

<p>5. Teaching Strategies</p> <p>Play is the most effective strategy for enabling children to learn and develop. Children learn best when they are interested, happy, and have a high sense of wellbeing.</p>	<p>A quality educator:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • builds on what the child knows, rather than on what he/she may not know • connects new learning with the child’s prior knowledge and experiences • makes learning concrete by linking it with everyday life • encourages age-appropriate, play-based activities that allow children’s abilities to continuously evolve e.g., play with increasingly complex toys, higher levels of problem solving in everyday activities, asking questions requiring different possible answers.
<p>6. Learning Environment</p> <p>The environment should be safe, clean and follow sanitary protocols. It must also be stimulating and generate a sense of belonging and community.</p>	<p>A quality educator creates an environment that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is warm, welcoming, personalized and homelike • supplies a variety of toys and materials to motivate children at all stages of ability to play, explore, create and learn • meets children’s need for mobility, safety and emotional security • provides opportunities to develop warm and caring relationships with educators and each other
<p>7. Professional Development</p> <p>Children learn more when educators bring a range of strategies and skills to respond to the diverse needs of the children, through ongoing professional development and broadening of skills.</p>	<p>A quality educator:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • engages in continuous professional self-development • incorporates new knowledge and skills into her/his daily practice • shares with parents and children an enthusiasm for lifelong learning, as well as personal and professional development • consults parents for ideas on professional development and share new knowledge and information with them
<p>8. Family-friendly</p> <p>Do you get a warm and comforting feeling when you enter the building? Do you believe your child will feel at-home, listened to and respected here?</p>	<p>A quality educator:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • goes out of their way to greet you, introduce you to the classroom and other parents • Answers your questions honestly and freely • Has a kind and positive attitude and aims to make you and your child comfortable while in the classroom

ANNEX E

How would participation or involvement in the early learning and care programme benefit parents, the child, and the preschool?

Preschool staff...	Parents...	Children...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the children and families better in their cultural and environmental context • Use information learned from children and parents to make learning more enjoyable and rewarding • Can help children develop a sense of identity and belonging in the setting by actively engaging with and finding out about family values, practices, traditions and beliefs, and building on these where appropriate • Benefit from parent's skills and expertise • Provide a more emotionally secure environment for children when they understand and appreciate that child's background and cultural identity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feel valued and respected by teaching staff and service providers • Are more involved in their children's learning and development • Can share information about their children • Feel their family's values, practices, traditions, and beliefs are understood and considered by teaching staff and service providers • Feel comfortable visiting the setting, talking to, and planning with practitioners • Know more about their children's experiences outside the home and use this information to support the learning and development more effectively • Understand why early childhood education is important • Have increased confidence in their own parenting skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feel more secure and benefit more from the educational opportunities given to them • Move from one setting to another with greater confidence • See learning as more enjoyable when their home life is "visible" in the education setting • Enjoy hearing and seeing their home language in the setting when their home language is not the dominant language of the country • Experience more connections with the different services that support them

ANNEX F

Answers to 'What makes a high-quality preschool programme?' self-assessment

1. **False.** The best preschool programmes are those that focus on the development of the whole child. Early education programmes, while focusing on the education or learning aspect of a child's development, are not considered quality or even appropriate for young children if they only focus on the child's cognitive development or the acquisition of certain academic skills such as reading, writing and arithmetic. Preschool programmes as well as day care and crèche programmes, should also address the other domains of development as all areas of development are interconnected (social, emotional, language, physical and cognitive development).
2. **False.** Quality preschool programmes have teachers who are trained in how young children learn and develop, rather than just in teaching methods and curricula. Teachers understand that all areas of development are important and that children learn and develop in a sequential pattern and at their own individual rates. Teachers understand the critical importance of relationships to development and that early experiences have lasting impact.
3. **False.** Quality preschool programmes have a good proportion of child-initiated activity in comparison to teacher-initiated activity. This is sometimes called child-centred programming.
4. **True.** They have a variety of materials with which children can engage and that help children to generalize the concepts they are learning to everyday life.
5. **False.** They address the integration of multiple domains of young children's development such as cognition, socio-emotional, language (receptive and expressive), and physical (i.e., gross and fine motor) skills.
6. **False.** They have a good balance of individual and small-group activities rather than just large-group activities. They teach through promoting children's thinking by asking questions and actively listening to children rather than simply giving information. They have teachers who challenge children, encourage them to stretch their abilities, and appreciate children's individual interests, strengths and motivation.
7. **True.** They have much active learning and are play-based, as this is the primary way young children learn. They do not promote rote memorization and recitation of facts, but help children to come up with new strategies, solve problems and acquire information.
8. **False.** They encourage children to persist, model positive attitudes in the face of frustration and demonstrate strategies to overcome difficulties. 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23
9. **True.** Children need to see themselves, their families, and their community reflected in the learning resources in the classroom to develop positive self and group images. This happens when children, families, and community members bring in resources such as stories, art and crafts, music, games, dances, etc. and teachers use them to deliver or expand learning activities.
10. **False.** Quality programmes encourage children from different backgrounds and ability levels to play and learn together. This benefits all of them.

ANNEX G | ENDNOTES

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