



# Learnings: Positive Parenting and Care Reform in Kenya

## CHANGING THE WAY WE CARE

Changing the Way We Care is a global care reform initiative that promotes safe, nurturing family care for children reunifying from institutions or at risk of family separation.

CTWWC has three strategic objectives: governments promote family care; children stay in or return to their families; and key stakeholder groups make commitments towards family care.

Global evidence shows that family strengthening programs increase parent and caregiver knowledge, self-confidence, and competencies around parenting, resulting in improvements for children and family.

CTWWC Kenya is supporting families who are at risk of separation and those who have been reunited with their children, by helping parents or primary caregivers access a package of family strengthening support, directly and through referral to existing sources of support. Positive parenting programs are an important part of this package and are provided together with training in household finance, access to household economic strengthening opportunities, and referrals to other critical services such as child protection and disability support and helping families under stress feel supported and part of their local community.

CTWWC Kenya's positive parenting programming reflects national commitments on promoting positive parenting, including the National Prevention and Response Plan on Violence Against Children 2019-2023, and the draft National Policy on Family Promotion and Protection.

CTWWC reviewed existing parenting programs either designed for reintegrating families or programs which were already being delivered in Kenya, among them was the Investing in Children and their Societies' (ICS) evidence-based parenting program, Skillful Parenting.

## CHANGING THE WAY WE CARE KENYA

Changing the Way We Care (CTWWC) is working to catalyze a global movement that puts family care first and reduces the number of children placed in residential care. It believes that children thrive best in safe and nurturing families.

CTWWC has been working in Kenya since 2018 with the government, civil society, and other non-governmental organizations to strengthen family care, decrease family separation, and promote alternative family-based options for children.

## BRINGING FAMILIES TOGETHER

*"I am supporting a woman who left because of marital issues, and she has now come back to support her children."*

Families  
Together  
facilitator

CTWWC and ICS agreed to work together to adapt Skillful Parenting to meet the needs of families at risk of separation and those in the process of reintegration. Families Together was chosen as the new name to reflect CTWWC's ethos and Skillful Parenting's core message.

The positive parenting skills and techniques included in Skillful Parenting are important for all parents and caregivers, including families at risk of separation and those who have already been separated but are in the process of reintegration. However, some slight adaptations were required to make the Families Together curriculum meet the unique needs of these two groups of families.

CTWWC Kenya talked to individuals and organizations working in care reform, including The Kenyan Society of Care Leavers (KESCA), a group of young adults with lived experience in the care system, to identify key areas for adaptation. Several recommendations were provided. One was to give additional focus to the issue of attachment – the bond that a child develops with their caregiver. Another was to recognize that disability is a significant factor in family separation (see Box 2: Disability-Inclusive Parenting). A third suggestion was to add case studies that represent separated families and acknowledge the challenges faced by families experiencing such adversities. Families Together includes reflection questions on issues such as family separation, family violence, and the impact of separation and reintegration on all family members, including siblings.

### BOX 1: THE FAMILIES TOGETHER CURRICULUM

The group program includes the following sessions:

1. Family Relationships
2. Child Development and Meeting Children's Needs
3. Looking After Ourselves
4. Values and Discipline
5. Communication
6. Building Strong and Secure Attachments
7. Communicating with Your Children About Safety
8. Helping Our Children Feel Safe, Secure and Loved

Each group sessions take 2.5 hours and include additional introduction and graduation sessions. The home visit sessions take 45 minutes, with Session 7 delivered over two visits.

Families Together is delivered through a series of group sessions, as is the original Skillful Parenting, but it is also available in a home visit version, that is shorter and adapted to more individual, family-level discussions, for use with families – especially families going through the reintegration process – who are too far from available group sessions, or where the caregivers cannot easily travel due to disability or another barrier.

Community-level workers supported by the partners in Kilifi, Kisumu, Nyamira and Siaya Counties were trained to deliver the parenting in group sessions. Case workers, already providing home visits, were trained to deliver the home visit sessions. Monitoring and evaluation tools to measure delivery were developed and used as part of CTWWC's ongoing monitoring approach. As of October 2022, 2,215 caregivers had attended positive parenting sessions. In September 2021, a household survey conducted found that more than three quarters of respondents – mostly families who had been through a reintegration process – found the parenting support useful.

## LESSONS WE ARE LEARNING

*"A grandmother agreed to get her grandchild back from a CCI because she was convinced to speak to the grandchild after attending the parenting class. She spoke to the grandchild, and she said she wants to come home. Others are now copying."*  
Positive Parenting Facilitator.  
The grandmother has since enrolled her grandchild in the local school and wheels her to school every day.

The Families Together training in August 2021 and subsequent implementation has provided many successes and lessons learned. A summary of this learning is highlighted below.

Parents and caregivers are using what they have learned at home with their families. Parents and caregivers have talked of how the program has given them the confidence and, for some, new information that helps in their parenting.

Parenting facilitators and home visitors observe positive changes for families at risk of or already separated, suggesting that the risk of separation is reduced, and, for some, the parenting program has been the stimulus for reintegration.

In Kenya children experience high levels of verbal and emotional violence within the family,[1] and it is hoped that improved communication and reduced caregiver stress reduces the overall level of violence. For example, the program provides home-based activities where people can discuss together as a family about making decisions together or practice listening to their children. CTWWC Kenya will continue to measure whether this leads to a reduction in children running away, or placement in CCIs.

An unexpected benefit was reduced intimate partner emotional and physical violence. Even though this is not explicitly included in the program, it is incorporated into messages on non-violence.[2]

### BOX 2: DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE PARENTING

In Kenya, families with children with disabilities are at increased risk of separation and of placement in CCIs.

A team of disability experts reviewed the home visit guides and adapted the full curriculum to make it disability inclusive. Adaptations to the Families Together parenting program include:

- Using disability-inclusive words. For example, rather than 'talking' with your child, the program refers to 'communicating' with your child and always includes examples of non-verbal communication.
- Including information that is particular to people living with disabilities. For example, background information on a topic explains why this topic is important for children with disabilities, or families affected by disabilities. It refers to issues such as stigma and discrimination and how to address this topic.
- Providing disability-sensitive parenting techniques, for example by providing information on 'stimulation' suitable for children who are highly sensitive or less sensitive and providing information on developmental stages and milestones for children of different abilities.
- Including images of children and adults with disabilities within the program.

The content was piloted with groups of caregivers of children with disabilities before it was finalized. Both the home visit and group versions of Families Together use the disability-inclusive content.

[1] Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Kenya, Department of Children's Services. (2019). Violence against Children in Kenya: Findings from a National Survey.

[2] ICS's original Skillful Parenting program has been revised to include gender-transformative content, since the adaptation into Families Together.



## LESSONS WE ARE LEARNING

*"For me, my household has changed a lot, and coming to this class has greatly helped me to improve my relationship with my husband and the general hygiene of my house."*

*"Currently, my children feel nice being around me at home doing most things together"*  
Caregiver

*"I have seen couples confess that they understand each other more."*  
Positive Parenting facilitator

Families Together is seen as a valuable entry point for other family strengthening services and approaches. Regular home visits or attendance at a group session is also providing information to people about where to go for additional support. The multi-layered provision of positive parenting and household economic strengthening interventions has been found to enhance families' resilience.

Home visit sessions are being revised for more consistent delivery. Facilitators provide feedback in supervision sessions. They reported that the home visit sessions were too long, and guidance was complicated. In response, the home sessions have been reduced to 45 minutes and adapted to a more visual flipbook version. A brochure with the key messages and important referral guidance will be prepared in Swahili (see Figure 1).

Practical difficulties include logistics such as distance, weather, and other interruptions to delivery. Facilitators are provided with transport to groups; in some instances, smaller groups of less than ten caregivers are formed to reduce distance required to reach a group. Although facilitators' stipends have been increased, they are still not enough, especially given the rising cost of fuel.

Managing caregiver expectations. One of the biggest challenges noted was delivering services to families who are living in extreme poverty and under intense stress, especially when the parenting program is delivered alongside the cash support that some families receive. "Giving cash has reduced the willingness to attend groups." (Local Implementing Partner).

Figure 1: Families Together Brochure



## LESSONS WE ARE LEARNING

*"We can sit down as a family and talk on matters concerning our families. Now we can share ideas, and this brings peace and contentment within the family."*  
Caregiver

*"Many couples are now communicating better."*  
Families Together facilitator

In the future, all enrolled families will receive Families Together, a financial literacy group course,[3] and further optional and locally available group-based programs and household economic strengthening interventions, as the core family strengthening package. Families going through the process of reintegration, and those identified as at imminent risk of separation or experiencing other child protection violation (violence, exploitation, neglect) will be referred for more intensive support delivered through a case management process. Intensive support will include referral to services or in some cases short-term material support, such as education bursaries or other cash transfer.

The community-level workforce requires additional support and incentives to deliver a scaled-up program that reflects their skills. Delivering Families Together, in addition to other family strengthening support, places a high burden on the community-level workforce. Although CTWWC provides an enhanced payment of 4,000 Ksh per month (approximately \$40) it is not always considered sufficient for the provision of an important service. Community workers noted that payment needs to be timely and support such as notebooks and transport assistance should also be part of a standardized package provided to those delivering the program.

[3] Child-Optimized Financial Education (COFE) has also been adapted by CTTWC Kenya from an existing program to reflect the needs of families at risk of separation and going through the process of reintegration. The original CRS program is available here: [https://www.crs.org/sites/default/files/tools-research/cofe\\_booklet\\_1\\_final\\_03\\_aug\\_2021.pdf](https://www.crs.org/sites/default/files/tools-research/cofe_booklet_1_final_03_aug_2021.pdf)

Changing The Way We Care<sup>SM</sup> (CTWWC) is implemented by Catholic Relief Services and Maestral International, along with other global, national and local partners working together to change the way we care for children around the world. Our principal global partners are the Better Care Network, Lumos Foundation, and Faith to Action. CTWWC is funded in part by a Global Development Alliance of USAID, the MacArthur Foundation and the GHR Foundation.

Need to know more? Contact Changing the Way We Care at, [info@ctwwc.org](mailto:info@ctwwc.org) or visit [changingthewaywecare.org](http://changingthewaywecare.org).

© 2023 Catholic Relief Services. All Rights Reserved. This material may not be reproduced, displayed, modified or distributed without the express prior written permission of copyright holder. For permission, write to [info@ctwwc.org](mailto:info@ctwwc.org). The photographs in this publication are used for illustrative purposes only; they do not imply any particular health, orphanhood, or residential care status on the part of any person who appears in the photographs.



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



**MacArthur**  
Foundation