

Nurturing Together

Supporting caregivers during their children's early years



PHOTO: SHAFIQL ALAM KIRANA | SESAME WORKSHOP

Caregivers play a crucial role in children's healthy development

The nurturing relationships that parents and other caregivers form with young children are [crucial](#) to a child's development, laying a solid foundation for long-term physical and mental health. These bonds are especially important for helping children in crisis-affected settings build resilience in the face of adversity. [Evidence shows](#) that a caring, nurturing relationship with an adult can be an important protective factor for these children.

Programs designed specifically for parents and other caregivers can support them in playing this critical role—providing information and guidance on how to interact and play in healthy and stimulating ways. [Evidence shows](#) that these programs have an effect, improving children's cognitive, motor, language, and socioemotional development. Programs that support caregivers in forming nurturing relationships with their children can also [mitigate](#) some of the negative effects of stress and trauma early in life. And [benefits](#) extend beyond children: [research shows](#) that early childhood development programs aimed at supporting caregivers can [improve](#) caregivers' own mental health as well, and caregivers often [report](#) that playing with their children is an important factor in their own happiness.

Sesame's support for caregivers around the world

Sesame Workshop has always known that supporting children means engaging the whole family. From some of the earliest [research](#) on the *Sesame Street* television show to some of the most recent [research](#) on our work around the world, we have consistently seen positive impacts of co-viewing: caregivers watching the show along with children and discussing themes that come up during the show.

Our work directly supports caregivers in improving their capacity to build relationships with their children. Around the world, we have created and distributed caregiver-facing multimedia content; integrated this content into ongoing caregiver-facing direct programming; developed and delivered additional capacity-building programming for caregivers; and conducted research and advocacy around the importance of supporting caregivers.

Ultimately, our aim with this work is to help strengthen the caregiver-child bonds that form the foundation for resilience and healthy early childhood development. This includes supporting caregivers to develop:

- Increased confidence and joy in the role of caregiving
- Improved knowledge of, attitude toward, and capacity to practice responsive caregiving
- Increased knowledge of and positive attitudinal shift toward positive caregiving practices
- Improved ability to manage stress and overall well-being
- Increased opportunities for early learning and play for children

Mexico: Play-Based Learning Support for Caregivers

Play Every Day integrated play into daily routine by encouraging ECD professionals and caregivers to offer learning through play opportunities to children in their care (ages 0-6). Among other components, the program supported caregivers to develop skills to play with their children through Family Play Workshops. During the workshops, teachers facilitated play activities to model how caregivers could play with their child. Teachers also used WhatsApp to share ideas to integrate play into daily routines. The program reached 1,700 ECD centers and pre-schools, more than 124,000 children, 86,000 caregivers, and more than 10,000 ECD professionals in partnership with the Mexican Ministry of Education.

Colombia: Early Learning Videos to Support Caregiver-Child Relationships

Sesame Workshop partnered with the Universidad de Los Andes' Semillas de Apego program to integrate video content into an ongoing caregiver-facing psychotherapy intervention. The program reached caregivers of children ages 0-4 in communities affected by armed conflict or forced displacement. Caregivers watched social-emotional learning videos with facilitators, then watched the videos at home with their children. Research by Semillas de Apego found that watching the videos significantly improved caregiver-child relationships, and caregivers reported that children formed emotional connections with the characters, using the video content as a reference point to identify, navigate, and express their own emotions and those of others.

Ukraine: Social-Emotional Learning Training and Resources for Caregivers

A component of Sesame Workshop's response to the war in Ukraine was creating resources and trainings for caregivers aimed at encouraging knowledge about self-care, psychosocial support, early learning, and social cohesion among children ages 3-8. The resources taught caregivers to model identification and regulation of emotions, respond with empathy to children, promote playful early learning, encourage children to demonstrate curiosity over bias toward newcomers, and help children feel confident in the face of big changes. "Caregiver corners" in community centers disseminated content for caregivers to use with their children at home, in-person caregiving sessions taught skills related to the above goals, and online modules reinforced lessons learned during sessions.

Lebanon: Remote Early Learning Program Delivered by Caregivers

Teachers (supported by the International Rescue Committee) used WhatsApp to call groups of caregivers of children ages 5-6 three times a week over 11 weeks. The sessions equipped parents or other caregivers with playful educational activities to do with their child to support emergent literacy, numeracy, social-emotional skills, and motor skills. Teachers provided links to educational media resources created by Sesame Workshop such as videos, storybooks, and songs. Research by NYU Global TIES for Children found that the program had substantial impacts on children—gains in literacy and numeracy were comparable to those seen from a year of in-person preschool. Importantly, positive impacts from this program did not differ by caregivers' educational background or literacy level.

Nigeria: Caregiver-Facing Resources Mirroring In-Class Learning

Sesame Workshop worked in northeast Nigeria to support families affected by complex emergencies—including through caregiver-facing resources and trainings. Resources included caregiver-facing videos, radio segments and child-facing take-home materials (activity booklets, flashcards, play mats, etc.). Teachers were trained in using the content, and then teachers conducted training sessions with caregivers, ensuring that the topics mirrored what children were learning in the classroom. This created a strong bond between caregivers and their children's teacher that was then maintained through active WhatsApp groups. Post-program evaluations found that caregivers were able to learn ways to help their children learn, and students in the program improved their English and math scores.

Bangladesh: Father Engagement Program

Although caregiver-facing programming is typically open to all, these programs are generally attended by female caregivers. To increase the engagement of fathers, Sesame Workshop partnered with BRAC to co-design a father engagement program in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, for fathers of children ages 0-3. Each father received weekly support, including three individual home-visit sessions and one group session per month, for six months. The program focused on promoting fathers' well-being, enhancing fathers' relationships with their spouses and children, and fostering responsive caregiving practices. An impact evaluation conducted by NYU Global TIES for Children found that the program improved fathers' engagement with their child and their wives: both fathers and mothers reported improvements in fathers' responsiveness to children's needs, fathers' warmth during play with their children, and fathers' support to their wives.

Examples of our work around the world

Whenever we create programming for a new geography, we tailor our approach to the cultural context and our goals for that program. Past examples can provide starting points for future models, which can be tailored in collaboration with partners. Read about examples of Sesame Workshop's caregiver-facing programming around the world.



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Lessons learned about the impacts of caregiver engagement

- Caregivers from diverse backgrounds can meaningfully support learning for their young children.** Examples from research on our programming demonstrate that positive impacts from caregiver-facing programming do not necessarily differ by caregivers' educational background or literacy level—parents and caregivers of all educational backgrounds can successfully teach their children.
- ECD programming can successfully incorporate elements designed to improve caregiver mental health and wellbeing.** In several examples, research has demonstrated that ECD programs that included well-being check-ins with caregivers or other caregiving support aspects were able to reduce depression or anxiety symptoms in caregivers. In these examples, not only do caregivers directly benefit, but because caregiver well-being is closely tied to healthy child development, children benefit from these caregiver mental health improvements as well.
- Direct engagement of fathers through caregiver-facing programs can positively impact the whole family.** Although caregiving programs are often targeted at mothers, encouraging fathers to be actively engaged in their child's development is an important step toward improving household dynamics and can positively impact the whole family. But to effectively engage fathers, it is important to design programs specifically for them, rather than replicating existing mother-facing programming.
- Providing caregivers with support can help them engage more positively with their children.** Research from our programming in several locations demonstrated that caregiving support programs reduced the use of physical discipline with children and helped parents and other caregivers manage anger and be less violent in the home.



To learn more about Sesame Workshop's programming reaching caregivers around the world, please contact: ISIOperations@sesame.org.

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