

# Positive parenting approaches reduce violence against children

A suite of interventions for families to develop positive parenting approaches and help end violence against children in low- and middle-income countries

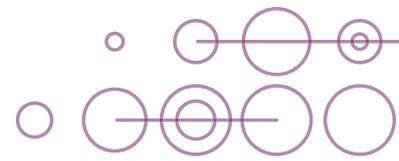


End Violence  
Against Children



THE UNIVERSITY  
*of* EDINBURGH





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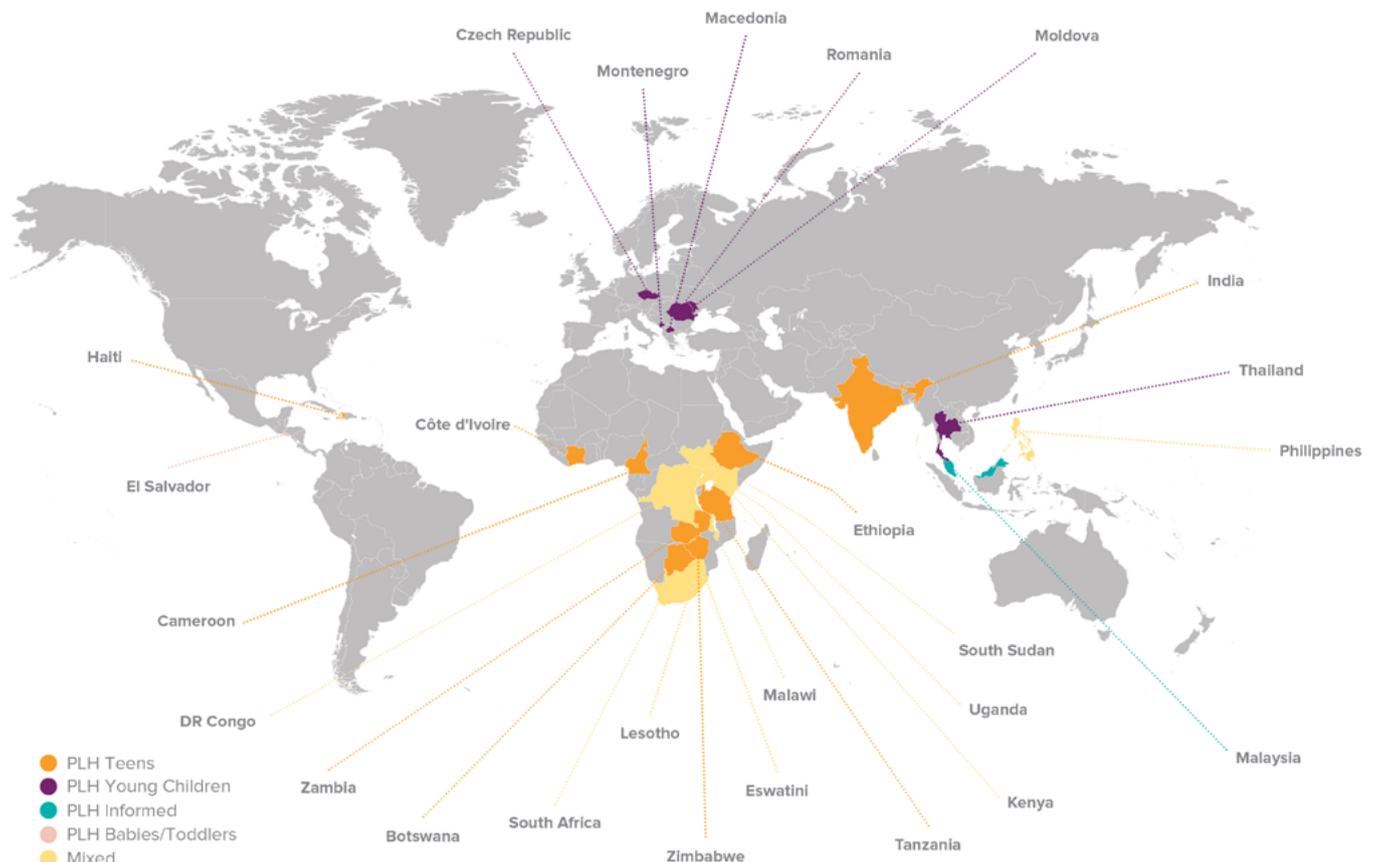
*A suite of interventions to families to develop positive parenting approaches and help end violence against children in low- and middle-income countries*

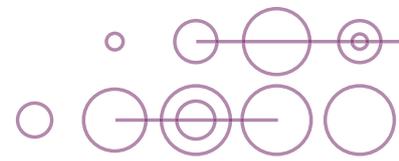
Though the vast majority of families want the best for their children, across the world, levels of violence against children are high. Many families simply don't have the strategies to cope with the stresses of poverty and family life, leading to violence and abuse of the most vulnerable within their unit. Parent and Caregiver Support is one of the seven different strategies to end violence against children within the [INSPIRE Handbook and Technical Package](#), and is key to helping practitioners and policymakers make sound investments in violence prevention.

*Parenting for Lifelong Health* (PLH), a collaboration with WHO, UNICEF, Clowns Without Borders South Africa, the Mikhulu Trust, and the Universities of Oxford, Cape Town, Stellenbosch, and Bangor (initially also with the University of Reading), are helping families to develop, test, evaluate, and widely disseminate positive parenting programmes to prevent violence against children and improve wellbeing for young people around the world.

The programmes were originally designed in South Africa in response to requests for non-commercial, open-access programmes suitable for low-income families. Results from several randomised controlled trials, in different parts of the world, indicate that this approach is highly effective. The suite includes four separate programmes that cover parenting at different developmental stages: infancy (conception to 6 months post birth), toddlerhood (12 months to 60 months), early childhood (2-9 years; 1.5 to 5 years in Kenya) and adolescence (10-18 years).

### Parenting for Lifelong Health Projects Across the Globe





### PLH for Infants

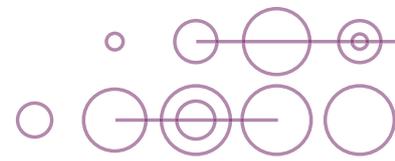
The **PLH for Infants Programme** was developed to improve maternal sensitivity and responsiveness and encourage secure attachment between mothers and their infants. This project works by encouraging an emotionally supportive relationship to mothers in late pregnancy and through the early postpartum weeks and months.



The programme was tested in a randomised controlled trial in South Africa and found that:

- Mothers who received the intervention were more sensitive and less intrusive in interaction with their infants; and
- Infants of mothers who received the intervention were more likely to be securely attached.





### PLH for Toddlers

The **PLH for Toddlers Programme** addresses the unique issues of toddler children. Research practitioners implemented two randomised controlled trials on the toddlers programme: the Mphatlalatsane (Lesotho) and Benefits of Early Book Sharing (BEBS) interventions (Khayelitsha, South Africa). In the Mphatlalatsane project caregivers receive training in sensitive book-sharing skills, combined with a participatory approach to addressing issues around health, HIV testing and nutrition education. Eight group-based sessions take place at the local preschool, followed by community wide health events. In South Africa, the BEBS study was an evaluation of a parenting intervention using dialogic book-sharing, delivered through eight group sessions, to prevent the development of aggression in children in Khayelitsha, one of the fastest growing townships in the Western Cape.

Both trials have manuscripts currently in submission and demonstrate positive benefits for toddlers across a range of developmental domains including child language, attention and health outcomes (forthcoming, Dowdall et al; Tomlinson et al).

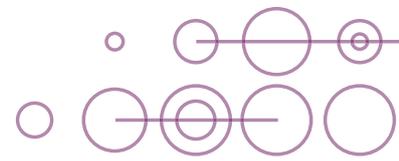


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### PLH for Young Children

The **PLH for Young Children** programme is a group-based programme that works with parents to help them manage difficult child behaviours by developing positive parenting, nonviolent discipline, and stress reduction skills. It was developed in collaboration with Clowns Without Borders South Africa, the Parent Centre, and Ikamva Labantu, civil society organisations based in Cape Town, South Africa. A [newly published study](#) using a randomised trial with 296 families in South Africa showed that a year after the end of the programme, parents





were using more positive parenting practices and children showed more positive behaviours than those who did not receive the programme (Ward, 2019). The same programme has also been tested in a randomised controlled trial in the Philippines with 120 low-income families who are recipients of a conditional cash transfer programme. The study found reduced child maltreatment at one-year follow-up for families who participated in the programme in comparison to those which received normal government services (forthcoming).



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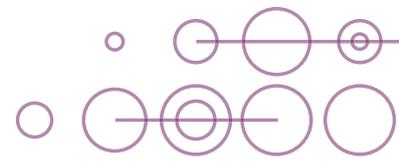
### PLH for Teens

The **PLH for Teens** programme is a 14-week course developed in collaboration with families, WHO, UNICEF, Clowns Without Borders South Africa, and South African government departments. It supports families to share solutions on building positive relationships and challenging difficult behaviours by providing alternatives to harsh punishment, keeping young people safe in the community, and encouraging effective budgeting on a low income.

Evidence of impact was seen within one year. A cluster randomised controlled trial in 40 villages and urban areas in South Africa (Cluver 2018) showed the programme was having a positive impact, including:

- A 48% reduction in physical and emotional abuse by caregivers;
- Significant reductions in the use of alcohol by caregivers and adolescents;
- Lower levels of stress and depression amongst caregivers;
- Families reporting that they were less likely to run out of food, electricity and basic necessities by the end of the month; and
- Families reporting reduced borrowing and increased savings





Parents and children have also reported positive changes in their lives around the world. Ally Bakary Kangana and his 10-year-old son, Abdallazak, took part in the PLH for Teens parenting programme run by [Pact in Tanzania](#) and feel that it has made a real difference. Abdallazak says: “We spend quality time talking about different things like HIV, unsafe sex and the use of drugs. My father is friendlier to us and permits us to be part of family decision making. Since we joined the programme, all is well within our family.”

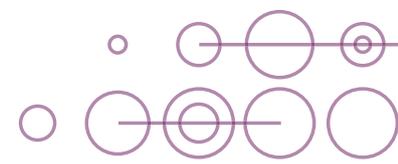
The PLH suite has been endorsed and adopted by numerous national and international agencies, including USAID-PEPFAR, UNICEF, WHO, Catholic Relief Services and Pact, enabling rapid global scale-up. PLH programmes are now being delivered in 26 low- and middle-income countries and by 2021 will reach an estimated 400,000 children in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Caribbean and Latin America. The PLH manuals are available for free download via the [WHO website](#). They have been translated into 18 languages and adapted to different cultural contexts, including versions for children working in Tanzanian mines, reunifying with families where children had been on the streets or otherwise separated from their families.

Parenting for Lifelong Health are also developing ‘PLH Digital’ - a free app which will allow more families in low-income settings to participate. Professor Lucie Cluver, Department of Social Policy and Intervention at Oxford University, co-led the team that developed PLH, comments: “The massive scale-up of Parenting for Lifelong Health shows the enthusiasm for parenting support globally. An app, in partnership with the UKRI Global Challenges Research Fund, UNICEF and WHO, will enable PLH to reach millions more families.”



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## Cost and Value

Cost estimates of PLH for Teens at scale are approximately **US\$266 per family**, with a cost-effectiveness analysis showing that the intervention had a US\$720 cost per case of abuse prevented, and a total of cost savings of US\$2,625 per case of abuse (excluding potential costs for foster care, court, and prolonged child protection management). Cost estimates of PLH for Young Children are approximately US\$184 per family. Researchers from Oxford are also conducting a similar cost-effectiveness analysis on the 8-session version of PLH for Young Children in Thailand as part of a recent randomised controlled trial testing its effectiveness when delivered within the local public health promotion system.



## Hurdles

Across the world, partners and families have had success with the PLH Programmes. At the same time, there are some important challenges in terms of programme transferability and sustainability that should be noted. With the exception of efforts in South Africa, the Philippines, and Thailand, the programmes have yet to be integrated into existing government service delivery systems that could potentially sustain their implementation on a long-term basis – and these exceptions have required considerable time to establish strong partnerships with government and civil society. There is also limited capacity to train and support the rapid scale-up of PLH programmes on a global level. Much of the technical capacity building expertise for the dissemination of PLH programmes is provided by Clowns Without Borders South Africa and other non-governmental organisations; however, there is still a lack of an international framework that can increase access while monitoring and maintaining quality delivery at scale.

## For further information see:

WHO PLH: [www.who.int/violence\\_injury\\_prevention/violence/child/plh/en/](http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/child/plh/en/)

WHO PLH Facebook: [www.facebook.com/WHOPLH/](https://www.facebook.com/WHOPLH/)

UNICEF PLH research toolkit: [www.unicef-irc.org/research-family-and-parenting/](http://www.unicef-irc.org/research-family-and-parenting/)

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/PLH-Parenting-for-Lifelong-Health](https://www.facebook.com/PLH-Parenting-for-Lifelong-Health)

Twitter: [@parentinglh](https://twitter.com/parentinglh)

Instagram: [@parentinglh](https://www.instagram.com/parentinglh)

For more information, please contact the PLH team at [parentinglh@gmail.com](mailto:parentinglh@gmail.com).





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