

## INTRODUCTION

# Child Development



## Introduction

Ensuring that children are loved known and protected is at the heart for Tearfund's work in Child development. Despite the injustice we witness, we refuse to accept that poverty is an inevitable part of our broken and hurting world. Rather than seeing it as something that's too complex, or insurmountable, we focus on tackling it one child at a time.

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Our model of linking one child with one sponsor is a reflection of this approach and how we seek to release children from poverty in Jesus' name. In partnership with Compassion International, thousands of people worldwide sponsor children. While there is no quick fix to global poverty, by changing the life of one child we can create a ripple effect in their family, community and nation.

### Children in poverty

An estimated 386 million children live in extreme poverty around the world (living on less than \$1.90 a day)<sup>1</sup>. The Covid-19 global pandemic will add an estimated 44-46 million more. Poverty causes children to struggle with frequent illness, chronic malnutrition and impaired physical and mental development. It denies children access to basic health care and education, weakens their protective environment and leaves them vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

Children are very vulnerable to the effects of poverty. Poverty robs children of opportunities and choices; however, studies show that positive outcomes can be achieved by intervening in the lives of children experiencing poverty conditions<sup>2</sup>. UNICEF reports that at least half of all children under five suffer from hidden hunger: a lack of essential nutrients that often goes unnoticed until it's too late.

1. UN Policy Brief: The Impact of Covid-19 on Children.

2. Santrock, John. Child Development: An Introduction (p. 490). McGraw-Hill Education. Kindle Edition.



Photo: Compassion



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One in three children is not growing well because of malnutrition<sup>3</sup>.

In 1989 world leaders made a historic commitment to the world's children. The world made a promise to every child to protect and fulfil their rights! This would be done in a legal framework—the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

This inspired governments to change laws and policies and make investments so that more children could finally get the health care and nutrition they need to survive and develop. There would be stronger safeguards put in place to protect children from violence and exploitation. While this commitment certainly marked progress, it is yet to be fully realised.

Today there are still millions of children who don't have adequate health care, nutrition, education and protection from violence. Children are forced to leave school, work, get married or fight in wars. Childhoods are still being cut short and today's children face even more threats to their rights.

### **Child Development**

**'Development' is the pattern of change that starts at the conception of a child and continues right through that person's life. Child development is crucial for the future of families, communities and the world.<sup>4</sup>**

Healthy child development means that children of all abilities, including those with special needs, can grow up where their physical, social, emotional, spiritual and educational needs are met.

Every child develops at an individual pace, however, research from the fields of health, nutrition, psychology, child development

3. UNICEF: The Changing Face of Malnutrition <https://features.unicef.org/state-of-the-worlds-children-2019-nutrition/>

4. Santrock, John. Child Development: An Introduction (p. 6). McGraw-Hill Education



Photo: Compassion

and anthropology, among others, confirm that all aspects of child development are interconnected. For instance, a child can be bright but live with neglect or abuse. A child can be well cared for physically but do not feel loved or a child can be loved, but their physical or emotional needs are not met.

Children need to feel loved, protected and self-confident so that they can thrive cognitively and physically. Children that do not have these basic needs met have greater difficulty surviving as well as thriving. Children who are treated with dignity, are encouraged and taught to think critically are better prepared to make healthy choices and actively engage in their communities.

## A biblical perspective

Loving and caring for children was central to Jesus' teaching. Jesus welcomed children (Mark 9:35-37) and he blessed them (Mark 10:13-16). He also warned of severe judgement to anyone who would harm or mistreat children (Matt 18:1-7). This seems like a very sensible or even obvious attitude for Jesus to have but it was, like much of Jesus' teaching, revolutionary for the time.

In the ancient world, no law defended or protected children. Their circumstances depended entirely on the will of adults, either their parents or their masters if they were slaves. Generally, children maintained a very low social status, comparative with that of a slave.

The early Christians took Jesus example seriously and began to treat children differently. Their communities viewed children as valued members of the Christian community who were to be treated with justice and fairness. This began the revolution of understanding that children were gifts from God (Ps 127:3) that were to be cherished and valued.

This has significant implications for Christians today and how we treat children. As we've read, around the world children face situations of immense poverty, suffering and neglect. The early Christian practice of treating children as valued members of the

community should stand as an example and also a challenge to those who follow Jesus. We must defend the rights of children and do everything we can to welcome and include them, so that they may flourish as they are meant to.

## Our Approach

**Our sponsorship programme approach puts the child's rights and development at the centre. We want children to thrive.**

In partnership with Compassion International, we focus on interventions that enable children to reach their full potential, in a caring environment so that they can have a future where they become self-supporting adults who can influence generational change in their communities.

We aim to reach those who are most vulnerable. That is why we partner with Compassion International which works through local churches that are embedded in the local community and can identify the children who are in need. These children enter the sponsorship programme regardless of their backgrounds or beliefs. A caring team (project director, pastor, social workers and tutors) come alongside children and their families to provide the support that will best enable them to thrive. Lives are changed as children are equipped to:

- Maintain their health and well-being
- Live self-sufficiently as they mature into adulthood
- Be leaders who serve their families and communities
- Grow in their walk of faith



## Your Response

Reading about children suffering in poverty is distressing. The good news is that we can work together to change this—one child at a time!

### Learn

Check out our website to find more resources about Tearfund's Child Development work including, *Digging Deeper—Child Development* and *Digging Deeper—Children and the Early Church*

### Pray

You can pray for the children of this world, not just the ones in poverty, as they are all our future. Pray for Compassion International and the local church in countries who work to give children the resources and environment required for them to flourish. Pray for children here in New Zealand who are suffering in unsafe homes or situations.

### Act

The biggest difference you can make is to sponsor a child!

- Consider participating in a Tearfund fundraising event or organising your own. Your efforts can help fund Tearfund's partners working in Child Development.
- Join Tearfund's advocate network to keep up to date with activities, information and stories from Tearfund's partners. Share your learning with friends, family and networks.



Photo: Compassion