

Module 6 – Alternative Care for Children

Session 1: Introduction to Alternative Care

Duration: 6:38 Minutes

Some highlights of the UN Alternative Care Guidelines are such as:

- Best Interest of the Child: Alternative care should be in the best interest of the child
- Principles of ‘Necessity’ and ‘Appropriateness’: Alternative care should be chosen only when it is necessary, appropriate options of alternative care should be considered given a child’s individual needs and situation
- Equity and Care: In all alternative care services children should not be discriminated and adequately cared for
- Gatekeeping: Measures to regulate flow of children in institutions
- Prevention and Family Preservation: Effort should be to prevent institutionalisation of children through family strengthening and preservation
- De-institutionalisation and Reintegration: Children who are in institutions through appropriate efforts should be de-institutionalised and reintegrated into society
- Approach based on Learning from Action: Learnings should be drawn from positive results achieved through by ensuring care and protection of children during their transition from institutional to non-institutional care
- Child Participation: While deciding on a course of action for children’s care protection, their views must be heard and respected

Let us discuss some of these principles for Family Strengthening and Non-Institutional Alternative Care in detail.

Look at the figure shown on the screen.

Q-1: Is care genuinely needed?

The Necessity Principles reduce the perceived need, for formal after native care and discourage recourse to alternative care.

Q-2: Is the care appropriate for the child?

The Suitability Principles, ensure formal alternative care settings meet minimum standards and ensure that the care setting meets the needs of the child.

Let us discuss in detail alternative care and some of the above principles

Alternative care refers to the spectrum of services available to children whose parents are no longer able to provide adequate care.

Children outside parental care often live with their extended families in kinship care arrangements or in other types of alternative care, such as adoption and foster care and many other variations of family and community based care.

There are growing concerns about the situation of children outside parental care and the provision of suitable alternatives that are preventive, community oriented and family based.

Inadequate care environment can impair a child's emotional and social development, and leave children extremely vulnerable. They are at high risk of violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect and their well-being is often insufficiently monitored.

Kinship care is the spontaneous arrangement of care for a child within his or her extended family, and it represents the primary response to children outside parental care.

Kinship care often protects child's identity through the preservation of family relationships, cultural norms and social networks.

However, living with relatives a child could remain unsupervised and provides no guarantee of a child's protection while in care.

The move away from residential forms of care has, to a large degree been prompted by a growing awareness of the Potentially damaging effect on children, especially young children due to some of the characteristic features of institutions.

It has also been motivated by financial consideration, based on a cost benefit analysis, which show that rehabilitation of a child in a family environment is far more effective and is in the best interest of the child.

Gatekeeping and prevention of family separation

Gatekeeping is about having policies, procedures and services to restrict the flow of children into institutions and contribute to their onward progression back to families or substitute families.

Articles 9, 18 & 19 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), articulates four components to gatekeeping:

- An agency responsible for coordinating the assessment of the child's situation
- A range of family support services in the community, including foster care and adoption that are alternatives to care in an institution
- Decision-making based on assessment of the child's needs and circumstances
- Information systems to monitor and review decisions and their outcomes.

Governments are under a UNCRC obligation to support parents to care for their children and to ensure that children are only removed from their parents when it is in the best interests of the child and the decision is subject to regular review.

Gatekeeping is more a matter of attitude and philosophy rather than availability of resources.

It is a recognised and systematic process to ensure that alternative care for children is used only when necessary and that children receive the most suitable support to meet their individual needs.

If undertaken effectively, gatekeeping can result in:

- Preventing separation of children from families
- Political commitment and accountability in Alternative Care for Children
- Assessment and documentation of the child and family situation in a multi-sectoral context
- Engagement with and empowerment of family members and community
- Regular review and complaint mechanism, reunification with family, wherever possible
- High quality, accessible, and affordable services for all, targeted and specialised for those in need
- Child budgeting, measuring the costs and social return of well-being of children
- Supporting transition of children successfully
- Placing children in alternative care in the best way possible and monitoring all children in alternative care.
- Gatekeeping by CWCs to prevent unnecessary institutionalisation of children.