



Program No. [SY(T3)4]

Counseling is Complex: Approaches and Tools to Improve Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) Counseling Quality

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Conflict of Interest Disclosure

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Counseling is Complex: Approaches and Tools to Improve Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) Counseling Quality



Maxime Fossat, Batken, Kyrgyz Republic

Please share your thoughts, stories, or questions on counseling for infant and young child feeding (IYCF).

Instructions

- Please take a post-it.
- Select a topic(s) to write about.
- Place the post-it on the wall.

- Topics:
 - How has IYCF counseling affected your life?
 - What does IYCF counseling mean to you?
 - What is one thing that could improve IYCF counseling?
 - What is one thing you'd like to see changed about IYCF counseling?

AGENDA

1. Welcome (USAID/UNICEF)
2. Overview of nutrition counseling
3. Discussion tables
 - a. Table 1: Capacity strengthening for counselors beyond training
 - b. Table 2: Strengthening counseling through improved tools/materials
 - c. Table 3: Support to the enabling environment for caregivers
4. Debrief and wrap up



USAID and UNICEF's Approaches to Strengthening IYCF Counseling



Photo Credit: Maxime Fossat for USAID Advancing Nutrition.



SY(T3)4

Counseling is Complex:
Approaches and Tools to Improve IYCF Counseling Quality

Lindy Fenlason

Senior Nutrition and Capacity Strengthening Advisor, USAID



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Support for breastfeeding and complementary feeding is a shared, multi-sectoral responsibility.



Global Strategies and Evidence

Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding (2003)

“Community-based support...can effectively enable women to feed their children appropriately. **Most communities have self-help traditions** that could readily serve as a base for building or expanding suitable support systems to help families in this regard.”

WHO 2018 Revised BFHI Implementation Guidance

Step 10 on post-discharge care focuses on planning for discharge and making referrals, as well as to **coordinate with and work to enhance community support** for breastfeeding.

Lancet 2013 Maternal and Child Nutrition Series

“Innovative delivery strategies, especially **community-based delivery platforms, are promising for scaling up coverage of nutrition interventions** and have the potential to reach poor populations through demand creation and household service delivery.”

Lancet 2016 Breastfeeding Series

“Community-based interventions, including group counselling or education and social mobilisation, with or without mass media, **were effective, increasing timely breastfeeding initiation and exclusive breastfeeding.**”

Bhutta ZA, J.K. Das, A. Rizv, M.F. Gaffey, N. Walker, S. Horton, et al. 2013. “Evidence-Based Interventions for Improvement of Maternal and Child Nutrition: What Can be Done and at What Cost? *Lancet*.**382**: 452-477. doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(13)60996-4.

Rollins NC, Bhandari N, Hajeerhoy N, et al. “Why Invest, and What it Will Take to Improve Breastfeeding Practices?” *Lancet* 2016; 387: 491-504. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736\(15\)01044-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736(15)01044-2)

The Importance of Quality Nutrition Counseling

- As caregivers and members of a family with an infant, we don't automatically know what optimal infant feeding is, how it evolves over the the course of those first two years, and how needs may vary at time of illness
- As health providers, there are a number of barriers to providing quality nutrition services, including counseling
- Today we get to spend time together, acknowledging these barriers and exploring solutions.

Grainne Moloney, Senior Advisor, Early Childhood Nutrition UNICEF





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Counseling Overview



Photo Credit: Joyce Jembeidu, USAID Advancing Nutrition

What is Counseling?

- **Intent:** increase client knowledge/understanding and support them to change both attitudes and behaviors
- Several approaches exist to guide counseling—Greet, Ask, Tell, Help, Explain, and Reassure (GATHER), Greet, Ask, Listen, Identify, Discuss, Recommend, Agree, and Appoint (GALIDRAA), Triple A (Assessment, Analysis, Action), etc.
- All focus on core characteristics that encourage—
 - interactive discussion/conversation
 - engagement, empathy, listening and understanding
 - tailored assessment and problem solving
 - agreement on achievable next steps.
- Counseling is not simply educating a client and telling them what to do.

Counseling

“A way of working with people so that you understand their feelings and help them to develop confidence and decide what to do.”

(WHO and UNICEF 2020, viii)

Why is Quality IYCF Counseling Important?

- Quality counseling provides mothers and families:
 - information
 - skills
 - support
 - empathy and understanding.
- Skilled counseling coupled with supportive social environments and policies is one of the most effective approaches to improve breastfeeding rates.
- However, the Global Breastfeeding Scorecard indicates that globally, the coverage of skilled breastfeeding counseling is suboptimal.



Photo Credit: Maxime Fossat for USAID Advancing Nutrition.

Key Considerations for Effective IYCF Counseling

- Combine counseling with approaches that support, encourage, and reinforce counseling behaviors.
- Provide counseling as part of antenatal, postnatal, newborn, and well child care.
- Frame it as an interactive discussion, in a private space, where listening and problem solving can occur.
- Tailor counseling to the audience, context and the situation.
- Utilize different approaches, contact points, and messages to reach different audiences.
- Clear expectations, knowledge and skills, appropriate tools/job aids, adequate time and space, and support (including supervision, feedback) help ensure counselors provide quality counseling.

Competencies Required to Provide Effective YCF Counseling:

- Respect and empathy
- Engenders trust and build rapport
- Non-verbal communication skills
- Demonstrates listening skills
- Ability to problem solve and address client's concerns
- Effectively communicates relevant and correct information
- Understands the subject matter
- Understands individual and community factors that influence the practice
- Recognize different expectations and beliefs on promoted behaviors
- Applies ethical standards (i.e. confidentiality)
- Hold bi-directional conversations
- Tailor counseling to fit needs
- Recognize good practices and praise/encourage client—builds confidence
- Give practical help
- Use simple language
- Check for understanding
- Use communication materials effectively
- Discuss and agree on actions to try— suggestions, not commands
- Make appropriate referrals

Barriers to Quality IYCF Counseling

Long-standing barriers negatively impact counseling quality. These include—

- Unclear understanding of counseling
- Lack of capacity (among both counselors and supervisors)
- Overburdened health workers/volunteers (limiting time to provide counseling)
- Lack of and/or inadequate materials
- Poor remuneration/incentives
- Inadequate supervision/support
- Inadequate monitoring
- Lack of prioritization/funding



Credit: USAID Advancing Nutrition



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Table Discussion Focus Areas

Strengthening Counseling through Capacity Strengthening

Capacity strengthening to improve quality of counseling can occur on an individual, organizational, and systems level

- Individual
 - Training (in-service and pre-service)
 - **Mentorship**
 - **Supportive supervision**
- Organizational
 - **Technical assistance**
 - **Quality improvement**
 - Governance
 - Infrastructure
- System
 - Policy development
 - Allocation of resources
 - Advocacy
 - Sustainability



Credit: USAID SPRING/Kyrgyz Republic

Strengthening Counseling through Capacity Strengthening

Individual:

- **Mentoring:** “a developmental partnership through which one person shares knowledge, skills, information, and perspective to foster the personal growth of someone else”
- **Supportive supervision:** a process designed to improve the quality of counseling through joint observation, discussion, direct problem-solving, and mentoring.

Organizational:

- **Technical assistance:** an effective method for building capacity by providing targeted support to an organization either externally or internally by experts who have managed the change process elsewhere
- **Quality improvement:** the combined and unceasing efforts of everyone to make the changes that will lead to better patient outcomes, better system performance, and better professional development



Credit: Karen Kasmauski/MCSP

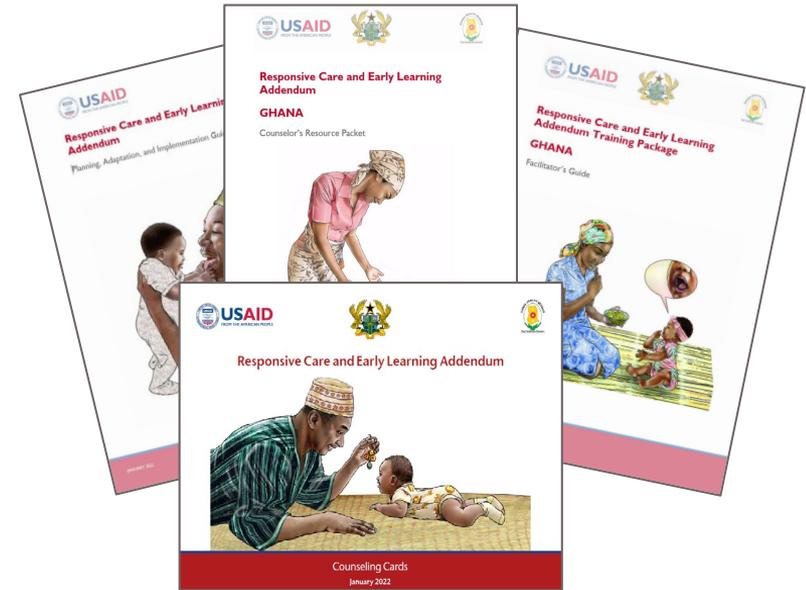
Strengthening Counseling through Improved Tools

Barrier	Examples of Tool-Based Solutions
Limited skills of service providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Job aids to simplify processes and make necessary information or protocols quickly accessible● Job aids to encourage problem-solving based on the client's needs● Competency checklists to inform capacity strengthening approaches
Task shifting resulting in service providers having many technical responsibilities	
Power differentials between clients and service providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Illustrated cards, posters, videos, or other materials to present accessible information for clients● Job aids to provide structured approaches for counseling to encourage asking questions and listening● Tools to encourage client engagement in a conversation
Tendency to disseminate messages or educate versus listening and problem solving	
Simplified workflow to maximize limited time of service providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Digital tools aid in the correct implementation of processes, including systematic approaches for asking questions using automated prompts/reminders● Algorithms to provide guidance on questions to ask and ways forward based on answers

Strengthening Counseling through Improved Tools

Challenges:

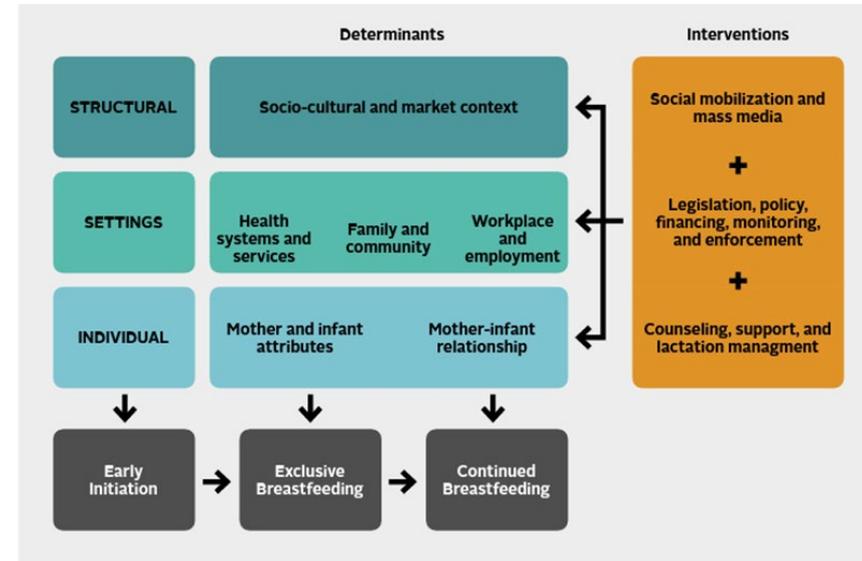
- Tools, alone, are often insufficient
- Often require extensive adaptation when used in different contexts, which may or may not be done before use
- Tool fatigue—too many tools, too little time
- Service providers may focus on the tool, and pull focus away from engaging with the client
- Limited evidence on effectiveness of various tools



Caregivers Need a Supportive Enabling Environment to Act on Counseling

- Caregivers need support at multiple levels to act on the IYCF counseling they receive.
 - A women rarely makes the decision to breastfeed alone
- Factors, often outside the caregivers control, influence their ability to practice optimal IYCF behaviors:
 - **Structural level:** policies, workplace regulations, and social norms
 - **Settings level:** family and community roles and expectations, workplace and employment conditions, access to quality health services
 - **Individual level:** knowledge, skills, time, resources, beliefs, autonomy

Conceptual Model on the Components of a Supportive Enabling Environment for IYCF



Adapted from Rollins et al. 2016, figure 1

How to Provide a Supportive Enabling Environment for IYCF Counseling

- Caregivers need time, knowledge, autonomy, and resources to act on quality counseling.
- Counseling is most effective when coupled with additional interventions that support and reinforce the counseling. Interventions to create a supportive enabling environment include:
 - Supportive policies and workplaces (i.e., paid parental leave, paid lactation breaks)
 - Supportive health systems (i.e., access to health services, including BFHI hospitals, supportive systems for health workers to provide quality care)
 - **Mass and social media campaigns** to influence social norms and beliefs
 - **Community mobilization activities** to influence community and household roles and norms and reach and engage household influencers
 - **Family support activities** to support caregivers to provide optimal IYCF practices—addressing autonomy, workload, and self-care needs
- Use distinct approaches, contact points, and messages to reach different target audiences whose schemas, social norms, and roles within a household all impact their receptivity and ability to change behaviors.



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Discussion Tables

Discussion Format

- Three tables—participants will join two discussions
 - Table 1: Capacity strengthening for counselors beyond training
 - Table 2: Strengthening counseling through improved tools/materials
 - Table 3: Support to the enabling environment for caregivers
- Select one to start
- We will announce when it is time to switch
- End with key takeaways and gallery walk



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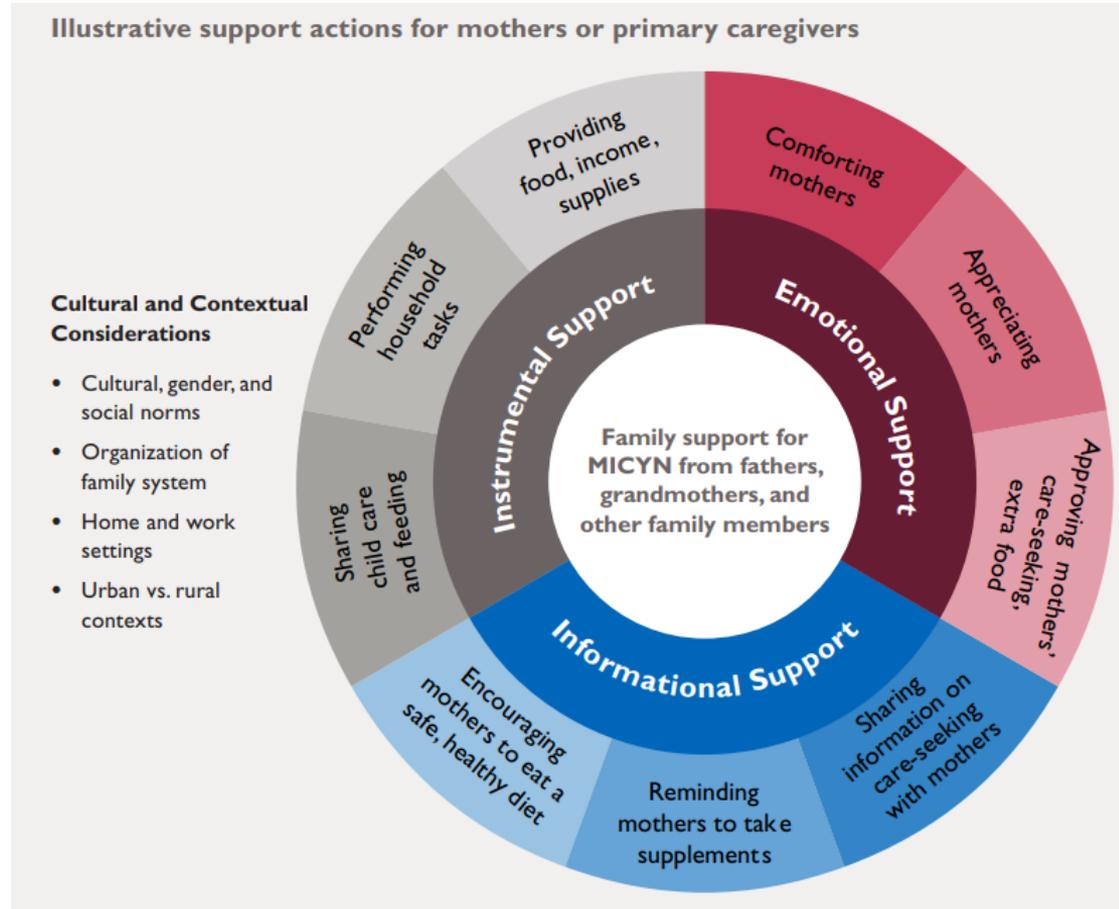
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Family Support Activities

- Three main types of support: instrumental, emotional, and informational
- Strategies to engage family members should not diminish maternal autonomy or areas of influence

(USAID Advancing Nutrition 2020, 9)



Counseling Resources

- [WHO Guideline: Counseling of Women to Improve Breastfeeding Practices](#)
- [USAID Advancing Nutrition: CHW Competency List for Nutrition SBC](#)
- [USAID Advancing Nutrition: Frontline Nutrition Service Delivery Packages](#)
- [UNICEF C-IYCF package](#)
- [FANTA NACS Module 3](#)
- [BFHI Training Course for Maternity Staff \(Sessions 3 and 4\)](#)
- [Essential Nutrition Actions](#)
- Others...