

Impact of Covid

Going Forward, Focussing on Children's Rights

The pandemic may seem a unique and exceptional experience, but it is possible that another may occur, and in fact there are many situations that could disrupt normal life in similar ways: disasters and emergencies may present comparable challenges and are likely to occur more frequently with accelerated climate change. The pandemic brought to the surface the fact that the basic needs of babies and the youngest children, as well as expecting parents, were not given the consideration they deserve in the planning, response and recovery from the emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is therefore paramount that learning is taken from this experience to ensure that in future we are better prepared to safeguard babies and young children's needs and formulate a response that is mindful of the youngest children. We must also ensure that support is in place now for the babies and young children who lived through the COVID-19 pandemic.

Listening and documenting young children's experience of the pandemic can help provide the right support for children now and help inform preparedness and response in case of future crises, pandemic or otherwise.

It is important to consider the specific needs of young children in each of the stages of a major crisis. The model below indicates that this is an ongoing process. We may be in the recovery phase from the COVID-19 pandemic, but equally we are also in the planning and preparedness phases for future major disruptive events. Our learning from the impact of COVID-19 on babies and young children and how their needs were or weren't adequately considered can therefore impact on much wider contexts such as disasters, emergencies, or climate change. We need to [prioritise families with young children who experience poverty](#) as they are particularly vulnerable to the impact of disruptive events such as, but not limited to, the COVID-19 pandemic.



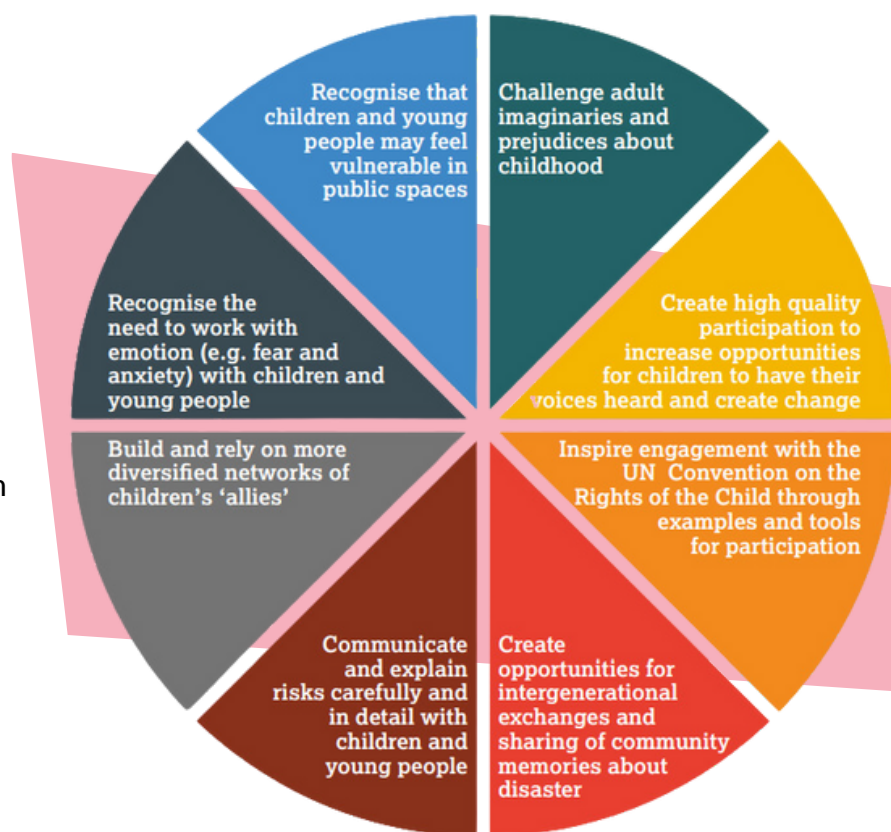
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The CUIDAR Framework

The CUIDAR project developed a [child-centred disaster management framework](#) steeped in Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) which establishes that children have a right to be heard on matters that affect them. It has been tested in different European nations including the UK and aims to reach the most marginalised groups of children. The framework can be applied to any type of disaster and sets out to ensure that decision makers appropriately consider the experiences and views of children, especially where children are experiencing inequality and discrimination. It can be a helpful tool and facilitate participatory approaches that allow children's experiences and voices to be appropriately considered. The framework increases community resilience to disasters, including children's resilience, while connecting decision makers with children and vice versa.

The framework helps to:

- Better understand the risk perception, disaster needs and capacities of children.
- Increase awareness and understanding amongst disaster practitioners and policy makers of children's needs in disasters.
- Develop more effective communication between disaster planners, responders, and children.
- Improve disaster management, policies and practices that consider the unique needs of children and involves them in planning for future crises.



While the initial project was aimed at children aged nine and above, the [toolkit](#) and [annex](#) contain suggestions on how to adapt workshops for accessibility which makes the available resources adaptable to younger age ranges. The resources are based on the Lundy model for child participation, used for younger age groups. It furthermore offers practical tools for how to ensure children can speak to local, regional and national emergency planners and how to ensure that emergency planners consider the views, experiences and needs of all children.

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Key relevant principles of the framework are to:

- Acknowledge and work with emotions that children are feeling, in relation to risks, disasters, and crises.
- Start from a place-based point. Small action planning in local settings can best start a ripple effect throughout the system, while its action focus gives relevance and agency to children.
- Allow for intergenerational work that includes the whole family, to foster empathy with the perspective of children that is sustained after the engagement.
- Engage with the UNCRC through examples and participative tools.

Save the Children's [Young Children's Voices](#) resource explores the importance, challenges, and ethical considerations in more detail.

We are now both in the recovery phase from the pandemic, and in the planning phase for future disruptions. It is a time to learn from the impact it had on the youngest children who lived through it and mitigate against the ongoing impact it continues to have.

Recovery phase: Address the direct impact on babies and children who lived through the pandemic

The evidence points to key areas that should be focused on in the current recovery phase. These include monitoring progress and evaluating which initiatives have the most impact.

- Prioritise children's wellbeing first and foremost. As well as its importance for its own sake, children's wellbeing is also foundational to academic attainment and any attempts to "catch-up." Prioritising resources on supporting children's wellbeing can help to remove barriers to school and nursery attendance and support parents.
- Provide ongoing opportunities for young children to play and reconnect with their friends and peers.
- Target additional funding to improving outcomes for the most vulnerable children.
- Provide mental health support for children who continue to show distress, including those experiencing heightened anxiety and challenging behaviour.
- Adjust the system to put the needs of children first, based on empathy and trauma informed practice.



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Recovery phase: Address the ongoing impact on babies and children post-pandemic

The pandemic has brought into relief the support that specific elements of the early years system provide to babies and young children and the adverse effects of removing them. Prioritising those elements of the system that build resilience can soften unexpected future shocks.

- New parents need support and contact in pregnancy, during birth and in the early stages of parenting. While remote provision can have benefits for some families, increase access and decrease workload for health visitors, face-to-face support should not be compromised. Effective maternity and maternal and infant mental health support are crucial.
- Parents deserve to be provided with information on the importance of, and how to nurture, one-to-one relationships with their child to foster attachment, attunement, a sense of safety, and to support early learning and development.
- New parents should have effective ways of accessing evidence-based information and support. Core and universal services that support young families are an existing pathway for this, such as well-resourced [health visiting services](#).
- High quality early education and childcare can enhance children's early learning opportunities and particularly benefit children experiencing poverty. Expanding access to families unable to work or on very low incomes would provide young children with quality early learning experiences including opportunities to socialise with their peers. To ensure high quality provision, early years providers ideally need to be protected by funding levels that cover full costs.
- Community-based holistic family support that connects financial, health and emotional support as well as access to early education, especially in areas of disadvantage, is an effective enabler and should be available to all families who would benefit from it.
- The challenges of the pandemic compounded stressors that families were already exposed to. Young children will benefit from reduced family stress, particularly a reduction of financial stress: reducing child poverty is key to achieving this.



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Planning/preparedness phase: Consideration for future disruptions

- The risks and potential consequences specific to babies and young children should be considered when designing crisis responses, such as reducing the transmission of a disease.
- This means that there need to be policies, structures and processes in place that ensure the specific needs of babies and young children are fully considered systematically.
- Adequate investment in early years systems is needed, including core funding to support families from pregnancy to age two, alongside a renewed focus on [the voice of the child](#).
- To ensure the voices and needs of babies, young children and parents are fully considered, we need appropriate ways for families to participate in sharing their experiences as well as drawing on the growing body of research already gathered at the time of the pandemic. A key consideration put forward to the Covid Inquiry by children and young people's organisations is the importance of designing an approach to understand families' experiences of the pandemic in a way that avoids re-traumatisation and facilitates developing solutions both for the recovery phase and to plan for future disruptive events.

