School Guide to Supporting Marginalized Families of Children with Disabilities

April 2022

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Contents

Starting information

Let's start with some frequently asked questions

Who should use this guide?

This guide is for school staff at mainstream inclusive schools. It helps you support your students' learning by designing and providing targeted support to their parents and caregivers.

How should I use this guide?

Use the steps in this guide to understand your students' different needs and the challenges faced by parents and caregivers in meeting them. You can find solutions for these challenges in the linked *Workbook* and *Directory of Resources.*

Is this suitable for my students' specific disabilities?

The approach in this guide can be used with caregivers of children with any ability. However, many of the resources in the *Directory of Resources* are most suitable for children aged 3–12 with development delays, autism spectrum disorder, visual and/ or hearing impairments.

Who can help me with using this guide?

Teachers and caregivers from your school have also received the resources included with this guide. The best way to use these resources is to motivate your team to work together. You can also look for external support in the *Directory of Associations and Organizations.*

Introduction

As an inclusive school, you play an important role in making sure that all children feel safe, supported and included. Inclusion is most effective when schools create a culture that celebrates diversity and builds on the strengths of each student.

Building connections with children and their families can support inclusion. Work together to identify learning goals, and to create strategies to achieve these goals. Many families inform their school that their child has a disability when they enrol. However, some families may not wish to disclose that their child has a developmental challenge or disability, or they may not be aware of it yet.

Inclusive practices are supported when there is meaningful family engagement. An implementation plan for inclusive education should include informing family members of the benefits of inclusive practices. Well-informed families are the greatest ambassadors of the school. Include families in every step of implementation to ensure meaningful family–school relationships.

Family engagement may look different from school to school. It is important to remember that families are always involved in their child's life even if it is in ways we cannot see, understand, or value. It is important for schools to support families in a variety of ways, not just relying on one method.

Disability is linked with poverty, which has lifelong consequences for children with disabilities. Families of children with disabilities are more vulnerable to multidimensional poverty. They face extra costs and at times cannot work because of having to care for their children. Marginalized families of children with disabilities face additional challenges and barriers which have been amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic. This has created a wider learning gap and further marginalization and exclusion.

Purpose

This guide is designed to help schools to:

1. Identify specific **needs** faced by marginalized families of children with disabilities.

2. Identify **challenges** to meeting these needs, by categorizing to better understand them.

3. Identify **solutions** in the form of resources that address these challenges.

This guide can also be used by local education offices or organizations that provide support to marginalized families of children with disabilities. It focuses on helping you to assist marginalized families of children with disabilities in enabling their children to participate in learning.

You received this guide as part of a pack (see next page). Use the steps in this guide to understand needs and challenges of caregivers of children with disabilities. You can find solutions for these challenges in the linked documents: *Workbook*, *Directory of Resources* and *Directory of Associations and Organizations*.

This document is part of a set of resources to support caregivers of children with disabilities, which includes guides for caregivers, teachers and schools, a workbook containing tools to support the activities, a directory of resources and a directory of associations and organizations.

School Guide to Supporting Marginalized Families of Children with Disabilities
March 2022
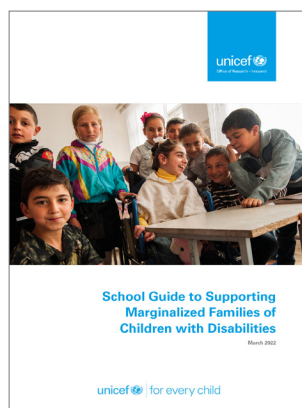
This **Guide to inclusive education** is the first document of the series. Teachers and caregivers of children with disabilities from your school also received similar guides. This guide will help you support caregivers to understand their rights and identify their needs and the challenges they face,and find ways to come up with solutions.


Workbook: Tools to Support Caregivers of Children with Disabilities
To be used with guideline documents on providing targeted support to caregivers of children with disabilities
April 2022

The **Workbook** contains tools that can help you reflect and work on the questions raised in this guide. These tools will help you think about the specific solutions that caregivers may need and how you can support them.

Directory of Resources to Support Caregivers of Children with Disability
April 2022
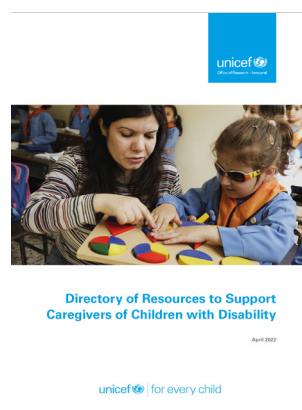
The **Directory of Resources** has helpful materials, information and links. It is a useful first place for caregivers to look for solutions to challenges they have identified. All the resources are free, although you may help caregivers to print the materials.

The summary table on page 4 tells you what challenge, need and age group each resource is best suited for.

DIRECTORY OF ASSOCIATIONS AND ORGANIZATIONS

[COUNTRY/REGION]

2021
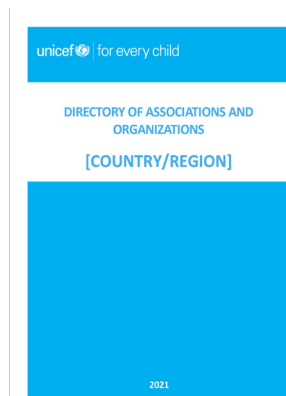
The **Directory of Associations and Organizations** has a list of local associations and organizations that exist to connect and support parents and caregivers of children with disabilities. Some of them may be a good source for more information, ideas for solutions and ways to connect with others.

What is inclusive education?[1]

All children are learners, and all children are unique.

Inclusion is much more than just physically 'being there' at school. It is what happens when someone is not left out of the classroom, of learning and curriculum, of play time, of relationships with teachers and other children, and every other aspect of school life. Children with disabilities are at greater risk of being excluded, so inclusion is all about making sure this doesn't happen.

What does an inclusive school look like?

- All children are included in the general education classroom all day, every day

- All students are working in naturally supportive, flexible structures and groupings with other students regardless of individual ability

- All students are presumed to be competent and able

- Students are supported (where needed, such as through curriculum adaptations and differentiated teaching) to access the core curriculum

- All students are known and valued as full members of the school community, developing meaningful social relationships with peers and able to participate in all aspects of the life at the school

In the *Workbook* see **Tool 1: School self-assessment on inclusion** for an example of a set of guiding questions that you can use for school self-assessment and to develop an action plan for school improvement.

You can also encourage and support the use of **Tool 2: Teacher self-assessment on inclusive education** and **Tool 3: Caregiver self-assessment on learning involvement** to further understand what teachers and caregivers already know and do, and where they need support.

What does the law say about inclusive education?

Inclusion is a right.

- Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognizes the right to an inclusive education as a human right of people with disabilities. The General Comment No. 4 issued by the UN Committee on the Convention on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities on 26 August 2016 gives guidance to governments, including the [country] government, about what is meant by 'inclusive education' and what they need to do under Article 24. It is an important document that every parent, educator and school administrator should read.

- In [country], [key inclusive education law and what it says about the rights of children with disability to inclusive education].

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1   This entire section has been adapted from All Means All's Inclusion Toolkit for Parents

STEP 1: IDENTIFY NEEDS

Who are the marginalized families of children with disabilities at your school? What are their needs when it comes to assisting their children with learning?

You may have started the process of investigating the specific challenges that marginalized caregivers of children with disabilities are facing in your community. Some of these challenges are universal, meaning that most marginalized caregivers of children with disabilities may have experienced these challenges at some point in their lives. These challenges include:

■ Being advocates for their children (this challenge has to do with knowing how to advocate for their children as well as knowing where to get access to all the necessary information in order to be able to advocate);

■ Understanding inclusive school practices (this difficulty has to do with understanding what to expect from inclusive education settings and how best to assist their child within these settings);

■ Managing transitions associated with schooling (these difficulties have to do with managing different types of transitions – both between pre-primary and primary/secondary schools as well as in-school transitions such as transitions between different classrooms and activities);

■ Ensuring other people relate to their child in a helpful way (no bullying, understanding the child's needs, etc.)

■ Assessing and maintaining specialized services for their child (these challenges have to do with having and gaining access to services as well as maintaining specialized services and understanding what services are required, what services are available and where; and how to access these services).

The first step in schools being able to address these challenges and barriers is to understand what they are and how to identify them. You will begin by answering these two questions:

■ Who are the marginalized families of children with disabilities?

■ What are the specific challenges they face when it comes to assisting their children with learning?

With these two questions in mind, you can begin the process of gathering this information. Once you have a better idea of what these specific needs are, then you can categorize the challenges faced in meeting these needs to 'match' them with an appropriate solution in a form of a resource, guide, information kit or a tool.

The following are some guiding questions that you can use to gather relevant background information:

■ Do you know how many children with disabilities are enrolled in your school?

■ Do you have information on the types of disabilities these children have?
Beyond any specific diagnoses that a child may have, it can also be helpful to think about the different areas of needs for the child's development:

• **Cognition and learning**, including general and specific learning difficulties

• **Communication and interaction**, including speech, language, and communication needs

• **Sensory and physical needs**, including visual and hearing impairments

• **Emotional and mental health**, including behavioural and emotional issues

- Do you have information on the types of accommodation and supports that these children
  - require;
  - currently receive;
  - require, but do not have access to?
- Are you able to identify children with disabilities that come from marginalized families (families that require/receive additional support/ are identified as marginalized in your country)?

If the school has this information, then this is the group you will be working with.

If the school does not have all this information, then agree on how and where you will be able to get some of this information. You may wish to appoint a focal person at the school who can work with teachers and parents to collect this information.

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STEP 2: IDENTIFY CHALLENGES

After identifying marginalized families of children with disabilities and their needs when it comes to assisting their children in the learning process, you will proceed by finding out what challenges they face in meeting these needs.

The main objective of this step is to understand specific challenges of marginalized families of children with disabilities when it comes to assisting their children in the learning process. It is helpful to think of these needs in terms of three possible types of challenges:

- **Capabilities:** physical and psychological ability to perform certain tasks;

- **Opportunities:** anything in the environment that may encourage or discourage a behaviour;

- **Motivations:** Internal thoughts or automatic processes that motivate or prevent a behaviour.

The main reason for categorizing these needs is to help 'match' the type of challenge with the most appropriate support /resource. Why do we want to do this? Categorizing these challenges and barriers into one of the three main groups will enable the schools to recommend specific interventions that correspond to these challenges. In other words, identifying and then breaking down the information helps in understanding and then addressing the challenge in a systematic way.

This process will also help identify gaps in the types of supports and services available based on the needs of your school community. This data can be used to help you plan demand-based support services targeting specific needs of marginalized families of children with disabilities.

After identifying marginalized families of children with disabilities, you need to decide how you will contact them. Use these guiding questions when collecting information about their needs:

- Do you think your child benefits from attending school?

- Does your child need help to get to school?

- Do you receive any support to help your child?

- Do teachers provide any support to your child?

- Does the school have any special services or assistance that your child needs to attend school (speech therapist, support workers, sign language interpretation, etc.)?

- Does the school have assistive devices/technology?

- What will help you to get your child with disabilities to succeed at school?

- What are some of your concerns when it comes to helping your child with disability to participate in education

Capabilities

Capabilities refers to our physical and psychological ability to perform certain behaviours. What does the caregiver need to do to support their child´s learning needs? Think of the following questions when interviewing caregivers about their needs:

- **Cognitive skills:** Do you understand what you need to do? Do you know how to do it?

- **Interpersonal skills:** Do you know how to talk to people, advocate or negotiate for what you need?

- **Awareness:** Do you know the options available to you?

- **Evaluating options and making decisions:** Can you evaluate the different options available and make the right decisions?

- **Attention span:** Will what you need to do capture and hold your attention?

- **Memory:** Will you remember to do what you need to do?

- **Physical ability:** Do you have the physical ability to do it?

Here are three examples of specific challenges that would go in the 'capabilities' category:

Example #1: Caregiver was not able to read and understand all the notes sent by the school.

Example #2: Caregiver did not know that there are resources available at the school to assist in helping their child learn better.

Example #3: Caregiver got confused with all the help available and was not able to select the right type of help.

Opportunities

This refers to anything in the environment that may encourage or discourage a behaviour. What does the caregiver need to do to support their child's learning needs? Think of the following questions when interviewing caregivers about their needs:

- **Opportunities in the environment:** Are there opportunities in your environment to do it? Does your environment make what you need to do difficult or impossible?

- **Resources and time:** Do you have the resources and the time to do what you need to do?

- **Prompts in the environment:** Does your environment encourage or discourage you to do what you need to do?

- **Role models:** What role models in your environment will encourage you to do it?

- **Social and cultural norms:** Is it the norm in the community to do it? Will others think badly of you if you do it?

Here are three examples of specific challenges that would go in the 'opportunities' category:

Example #1: There is nothing available in the community/neighbourhood that can be useful for the child.

Example #2: Caregiver does not have the resources or time to buy (something that is required).

Example #3: Caregiver does not know any other families that succeeded in helping their children with disabilities.

Motivations

Motivations are internal thoughts or automatic processes that motivate or prevent a behaviour. What does the caregiver need to do to support their child's learning needs? Think of the following questions when interviewing caregivers about their needs:

- **Identity:** Is what you need to do in line with how you see yourself?

- **Beliefs about consequences:** Will your behaviour lead to a positive or negative outcome? Is this outcome likely to happen? What impact will it have?

- **Emotions:** How do you feel when you do it? How do you feel about doing it?

- **Goals:** Do you have a clear goal or target? Is the goal a priority for you?

- **Beliefs in abilities:** Do you believe you can do it?

- **Habits:** Is the behaviour a habit?

- **Accountability:** Who will hold you accountable?

- **Automatic responses:** Do you do it without realizing? Is it an automated response that happens outside of your conscious awareness?

Here are three examples of specific challenges that would go in the 'motivations' category:

Example #1: Belief that helping children learn is only the responsibility of teachers and specialists, not caregivers

Example #2: Nobody seems to worry or ask about how things are going with caregivers

Example #3: Belief about whether or not caregivers spending time helping their child makes a big difference in their learning

You can use **Tool 4: Identifying needs, challenges and solutions** from the *Workbook* to record the needs and challenges that you identified from talking to caregivers. It includes a sample completed table as well as guiding questions and more examples of challenges.

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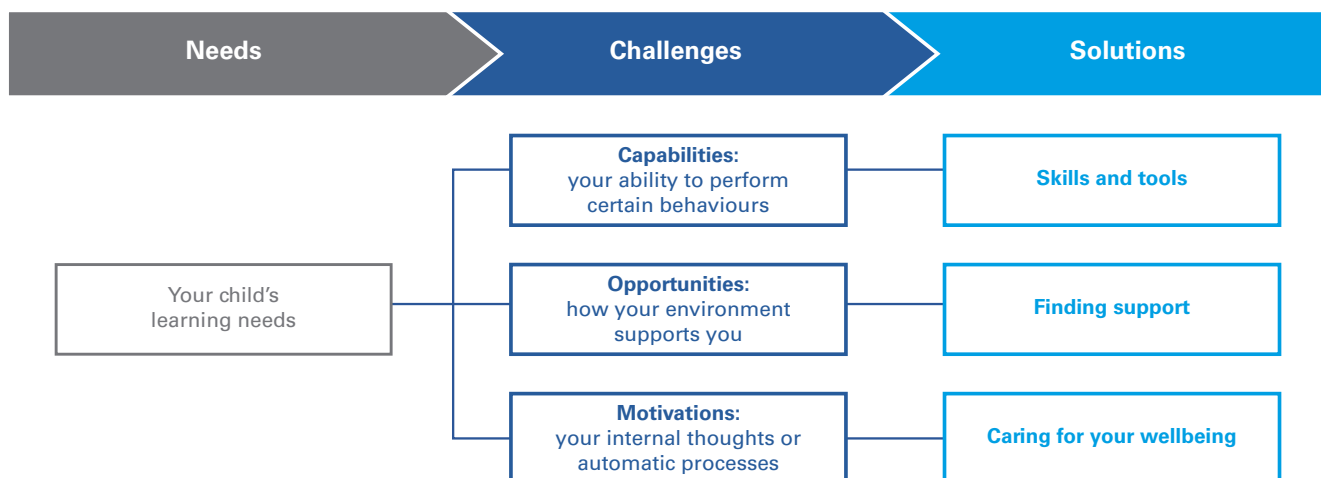
STEP 3: IDENTIFY SOLUTIONS

In the third step you will analyse information you collected from caregivers in step 2 by matching it with recommended supports/resources based on the category of need (capabilities, opportunities or motivation). Once you know the challenges that caregivers face when it comes to assisting their children in the learning process you can start working with the caregivers to find appropriate solutions. Then assist them in trying out some resources that match their needs. You can then work with the caregivers and their children's teachers on how the school can provide continued support by regularly checking in on caregivers' progress with using their resources or providing reminders.

Use the *Directory of Resources* to identify appropriate solutions that fit specific needs and, as you evaluate different options, feel free to add any additional appropriate resources that you think the caregivers could benefit from.

The resources in the directory should be considered as starting points. You should use or add any additional appropriate resources that you think the caregivers could benefit from. If you have access to specialists or other service providers from your school or community, you can also ask them about additional resources that you can add to the directory and share with caregivers.

When evaluating different options, it helps to prioritize. For example, identify the most important need or the biggest challenge in meeting that need, and start there.

This section gives an overview of the resources that can help solve the challenges faced by caregivers. They are grouped into three categories: Skills and tools; Finding support; and Caring for your wellbeing. The resources in each group are broadly focused on addressing each group of challenges:

Needs	Challenges	Solutions

	Capabilities: your ability to perform certain behaviours	Skills and tools
Your child's learning needs	Opportunities: how your environment supports you	Finding support
	Motivations: your internal thoughts or automatic processes	Caring for your wellbeing

You can see some examples of a specific need, a challenge that the caregivers face in meeting that need, and a solution to help with that challenge in **Tool 4: Identifying needs, challenges and solutions.** There is also a blank table that can be used by the caregivers to write down their own plan to try out solutions to address a challenge.

Your role as a member of the school staff can support parents in accessing these resources by helping to find the best solution based on what is being used at home, access to internet or printing services.

Skills and tools

Caregivers of children with disabilities may need to learn specialized skills; for example, behaviour management techniques that can help their children manage various situations at home and in school. Some caregivers may also need help in learning how to use special equipment and assistive devices or tools such as communication tools.

You can support caregivers by helping them select a solution from the *Directory of Resources* that best addresses their challenges. You can also support them in understanding how to use the resource or tool, including accessing and printing the materials, and discussing the steps needed in a way that they understand.

This directory uses categories that are linked to type of challenge based on the child's developmental area of need and age group. Feel free to add to this list.

Teachers at your school may also need tools to help them engage caregivers of children with disabilities and use what they know about each individual child to adjust their teaching. If these are not already in use at your school, you may suggest the use of **Tool 5: Sample Individual Education Plan** and **Tool 6: Child's Learning Background Questionnaires.**

Finding support

Helping caregivers connect with others who understand their situation can be a great source of support. Schools can play a big role in connecting parents and caregivers of children with disabilities with each other and with different organizations. Caregivers may or may not come to you for help, but it is good practice for schools to have this information readily available and shared with the teachers.

When connecting caregivers with each other for peer support, it is useful to think about extending this support to other family members who are part of the child's life (for example, another parent, a grandparent, an older sibling or a paid caregiver).

How can a child's other caregivers support the main caregiver and the child's learning?

- Encourage main caregivers to discuss the importance of inclusive education and their child's learning goals with other caregivers and family members.

- If the main caregiver is learning a new skill or tackling the use of an assistive device or tool, encourage them to include other caregivers in that process by practising the new skill or using the tool together and then reflecting and providing feedback to one another.

Refer caregivers to local associations of parents, organizations that represent people with disabilities, and other relevant bodies that can be approached for support. A starting point can be the *Directory of Associations and Organizations*. You can add other associations and organizations that you know of in your area, before sharing the list with caregivers.

Advocating for inclusive education[2]

Caregivers can also be your partners in advocating for inclusive education. Other family members may not support the decision to send a child to an inclusive school or may have other ideas about what should happen with a child's education. Caregivers may need your help in becoming strong or stronger advocates.

A caregiver has the insight on where a child is at when it comes to their learning needs, but they may not always have the right skills or communication tools to express these needs. As an inclusive school, work with your teachers and caregivers by sitting down and discussing these questions:

- Goals: What changes would you like to see in your child's learning environment?

- Actions: How can the school and teachers help reach these goals?

Once you understand caregivers' needs and goals, you can help in carrying out the following actions:

- Offer to sit down with the caregiver and their child and share how important inclusive education and learning in mainstream schools can be. In return, ask them to identify two or three practices that they think would benefit them.

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2   This section was adapted from National Center for Learning Disabilities' [Parent Advocacy Toolkit on 21st Century Learning and Inclusion](#)

- Organize a meeting with parents of other children with and without disabilities and talk about how inclusive education benefits all children and why inclusive education is important for all children's future.

- Be open to meeting with other school staff, school board members, other schools or district education staff to discuss specific ways that your local school can be more inclusive.

You can suggest or support caregivers to use Tool 7: Caregivers' advocacy kit for inclusive education in the *Workbook* as a starting point to guide and produce a roadmap on how to improve inclusive education in their child's classroom, school or local district.

Caring for caregivers' wellbeing[3]

Being a caregiver, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, can be stressful. As an inclusive school you should find ways to support caregivers in taking the time to take care of themselves.

Some messages that you may want to share with caregivers to care for their own wellbeing include:

- Take a pause: When feeling stressed, it helps to try a short relaxation pause to focus on breath.

- Remember that they are not alone: millions of people have the same fears. Try to keep connected with people who understand their situation. Share challenges AND successes.

- Take a break: We all need it sometimes. When given the chance, do something fun or relaxing.

- Exercise: It can help to include some form of exercise in each day

- Reflect: At the end of each day, think about one positive or fun thing that happened that day.

Find the best way to communicate these short reminders or messages that can help caregivers to stay on track.
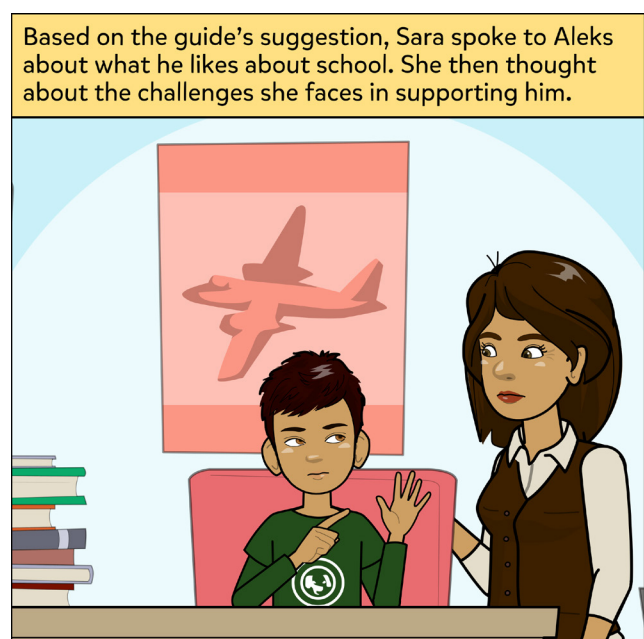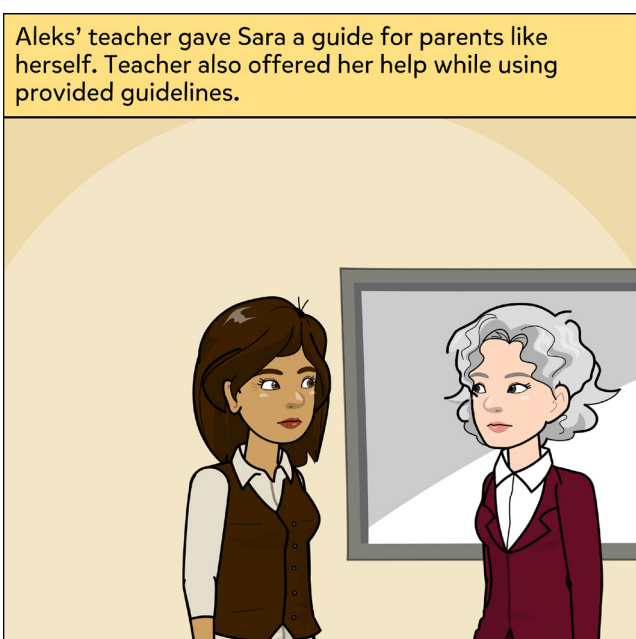
For example, these one-page tips are available in many languages, including [language] and Russian, and can be printed and posted at school or given to caregivers: Keeping Calm and Managing Stress, Managing Anger, Supporting Children with Disabilities, Education and remote learning, Making a Routine, Family Harmony at Home and Parenting in Crowded Homes and Communities.

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3   These tips were adapted from Parenting for Lifelong Health's COVID-19 Parenting Tips.

Example of the use of these resources

## Real-life story from the use of guide and resources by a caregiver and teacher

The following example came from a trial of the resources in Central Asia (names have been changed), to demonstrate the process of using the guide to identify a child's needs and a caregiver's challenges, and work together to identify solutions to try:

This is Sara and her son Aleks. Aleks used to attend a special kindergarten. For Grade 1, Sara wanted Aleks to be at a primary school with other children including his friends and neighbors.

Aleks has a developmental delay. He never spoke before attending kindergarten. Now he can say a few words. At school, he sometimes finds it difficult to sit still and gets frustrated at his teachers.

Aleks' teacher gave Sara a guide for parents like herself. Teacher also offered her help while using provided guidelines.

Based on the guide's suggestion, Sara spoke to Aleks about what he likes about school. She then thought about the challenges she faces in supporting him.

Together, Sara and Aleks' teacher decided that their priority is to be able to communicate better with Aleks so they can speak to him and understand his needs and feelings.

Priority is to be able to communicate better with Aleks.

Aleks' teacher and the school speech pathologist used the Directory of Resources and suggested that helping Aleks use a communication board.
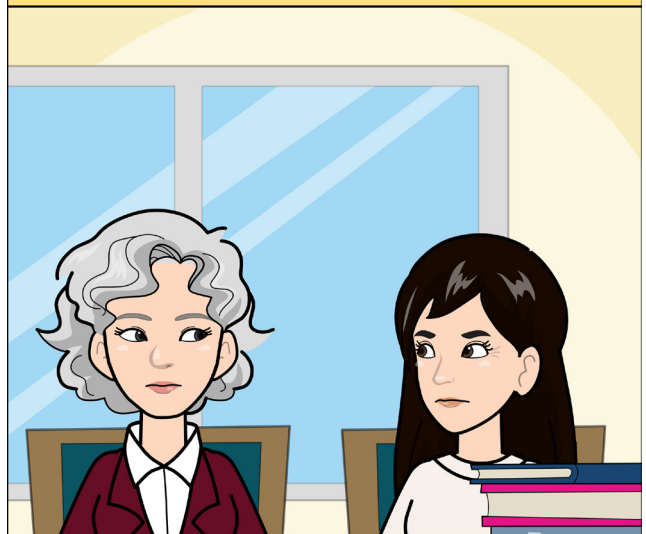
They also worked together to create a visual schedule to talk to Aleks about the day's activities at home and at school.

After a few weeks, Sara was asked about Aleks. She said:

His behavior is getting better. First days he was crying and didn't want to stay at school. Now he became more calm and obey rules.

for every child, answers

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