



The Mamma Zamma Kiss uses a marshmallow twist to develop physical closeness between mama and child. ©USAID/ Tash McCarroll



PEPFAR
U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief

PEPFAR supports Objective 1 (Build Strong Beginnings) of the [Action Plan for Children in Adversity](#) (APCA) through comprehensive programs that promote sound development of children through the integration of health, nutrition, and family support.

PEPFAR Orphans and Vulnerable Children: Early Childhood Development

The U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) supports Objective 1 of the [Action Plan for Children in Adversity](#) through comprehensive programming working to promote sound development of children living with and affected by HIV/AIDS. Early childhood development (ECD) is a critical component for breaking the cycle of poverty and inequality, particularly among this most vulnerable young population. Evidence shows that interventions for children under age 5 that promote resilience and help soften adverse childhood experiences through secure attachment to a caregiver also support positive brain development, social and emotional development, and contribute to positive future health outcomes.

"When developing biological systems are strengthened by positive early experiences, children are more likely to thrive and grow up to be healthy, contributing adults. Sound health in early childhood provides the foundation for the construction of sturdy brain architecture and the achievement of a broad range of skills and learning capacities."

Shonkoff, Jack, MD, et al, American Academy

Facts for young children living with and affected by HIV/AIDS:

Young children living with HIV are more likely to have developmental delays:

- ✓ 51 out of 56 studies examining cognitive development in children 8 years or younger reported cognitive delays in children living with HIV.

Young children affected by HIV/AIDS are more likely to lose caregivers leading directly to childhood adversity and experience "toxic stress."

- ✓ A study in Botswana showed that orphaned children under five years of age were 49% more likely to be underweight than non-orphans of the same age.

A recent study from the Democratic Republic of Congo noted the following:

- ✓ 60% of children living with HIV had severe delay in cognitive function,
- ✓ 29% had severe delay in motor skills,
- ✓ 85% had delays in language expression, and
- ✓ 77% had delays in language comprehension, all significantly higher rates as compared with control children.

PEPFAR's Comprehensive ECD Programming

ECD programs can take a range of forms. ECD centers offer child care, nutritious meals, health screening, and opportunities for young children to safely explore and learn about their environment and begin to socialize with one another. Home visiting programs target new parents, monitor milestones and ensure that parents and care givers access other essential services, such as prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) as well as health and nutrition.

- **PEPFAR strengthens investments in pregnant women, young children, and caregivers to encourage healthy growth and development by:**
 - ✓ Expanding center-based and school-based ECD programs for pregnant and young mothers, including mothers living with HIV.
 - ✓ Promoting mothers and mothers-to-be educational and support groups.
- **PEPFAR supports the development and use of tools that encourage age-appropriate development through clinics, schools, and communities by:**
 - ✓ Integrating psychosocial care for HIV-exposed or -infected young children into other clinical or social services.
 - ✓ Supporting early childhood enrichment programs and linking them



to nutritional assessment and counseling.

- In **South Africa**, the Woz'obona Early Childhood Household Visits program teaches community facilitators skills to promote the healthy development of young children affected by AIDS, which are then transferred to parents during household visits. The program promotes strong mother-child bonding and improved cognitive development . It also encourages mothers to get tested for HIV and access appropriate services.
- In **Malawi**, PEPFAR supported the establishment of 68 community-based child care centers, and trained 285 caregivers, for delivery of ECD activities.
- In **Zimbabwe**, the PEPFAR-supported *Children First* program reaches 15,432 young learners through 80 community-based and 111 school-based Early Childhood Development Centers. PEPFAR also supports the *J.F. Kapnek Trust* which has established thousands of new preschool classes for young children, and new pediatric AIDS programs.

Case Study: Zimbabwe

Ruth is a grandmother living in a remote village in rural Zimbabwe. A few years ago three of her youngest grandchildren lost their parents to AIDS. Ruth was very sad and overwhelmed with this news; especially as she was already looking after 13 grandchildren, a heavy load for a woman of any age. She did her best to earn extra income and provide additional food for her family, but it wasn't enough. Her three smallest grandchildren especially needed more supervision and care. Ruth struggled to give them the attention they deserved, while still trying to maintain several jobs.

Thanks to a preschool program supported by PEPFAR, Ruth's three youngest grand children were able to enroll in an early childhood development center (ECDC) at a primary school about 1 kilometer from her home. The ECD Program provides Ruth's grandchildren and others like them with proper nutrition, important health services, early education, and an opportunity to play and learn life skills. As a result of the program, Ruth's grandchildren have become more independent, and are playing and socializing with other children – something they hadn't done on their own before.

The ECD program has also helped improve the children's health. With the nearest health clinic several kilometers from home, Ruth can't afford the bus fare to take the children to routine health check-ups. But with the ECD program, nurses from the clinic make regular visits to the preschool to provide health exams. The children also benefit from a bowl of fortified porridge each morning, helping them fight malnutrition and maintain a healthier weight. Today, Ruth's grandchildren are healthy, happy, and active.