

MODULE 5

Supporting Mothers with Disabilities and Mothers of Infants with Disabilities

5.1 Effective Communication with Mothers with Disabilities

Time: 60 minutes

Preparation & materials required: Slide Deck, flipchart, markers, MAMI Counseling Cards (generic or country-specific).

Objectives: At the end of this module, learners will be able to:

- Apply communication strategies for mothers who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- Apply communication strategies for mothers who are blind or partially sighted.
- Apply communication strategies for mothers who have intellectual disabilities.

Key message(s) to take away for learners:

1. Effective communication with mothers with disabilities requires empathy, patience, and the use of appropriate strategies tailored to their specific needs.
2. When communicating with mothers who are deaf or hard of hearing, use clear written communication, gestures, visual aids, or sign language if possible.
3. When communicating with mothers who are blind or partially sighted, use detailed verbal descriptions and tactile aids or braille if available to convey information.
4. When communicating with mothers with intellectual disabilities, use simple, clear language and repeat key information.

Activity 5.1.1 (25 minutes)

Verbal and nonverbal communication

Activity Summary	Key message(s)	Slides & Material(s)
Game & group discussion	1	Slides 199-203

Instructions

- Tell participants that we are going to start this section about communication with mothers with disabilities by playing a game.
- Ask for 8-10 volunteers to participate in the game and to come stand at the front of the room. Make sure it is an even number of participants.
- Have the participants stand in a line at the front of the room. Ask the first person in line to face towards you. Everyone else turns away with their backs towards the first person in line.

- Explain the rules of the game:
 - I will whisper to you a sentence or phrase that will then be communicated down the line to the last person, who will share the message with all of us.
 - The first person will communicate the phrase without using words or speaking. You may act it out any way you choose. When you are ready, the next person in line will turn around to receive the message.
 - Then the second person will whisper quietly the phrase or sentence that they understood to the next person in line.
 - The message will continue down the line, alternating between acting out the phrase and whispering it until it reaches the last person, who will speak the message out loud to the group.
 - Remember that you will only turn around when it is your turn to receive the message.
- Select one of the following phrases for the first message:
 - A bird is sewing a dress.
 - A cat is washing the dishes.
 - A dog is riding a bicycle.
 - A snake is brushing its teeth.
 - A chicken is playing a piano.
- When the message makes it to the end of the line and is shared out loud, ask the first person to share the message that they received at the very beginning to compare it with the original message.
- If time allows, you can repeat the activity a second and third time with 8-10 new participants.
- Reconvene as a large group and ask participants:
 - In what ways did communication happen during this game?
 - What helped to make communication more successful?
- Listen to responses then say:
 - In this game, some of you were required to use nonverbal communication like gestures or facial expressions, while others were able to communicate using words. It was important for you to be creative and use whatever method you can think of to communicate the message as clearly and accurately as possible. You didn't worry much about saying the "wrong" thing and you tried your best explaining the message without words. This approach is important to counter a common type of attitudinal barrier. *[Ask participants to guess which one]*. That is "fear and avoidance" – avoiding a person with disability because of fear of saying or doing the "wrong" thing. Trying our best to communicate with all mothers and finding alternative ways of communicating, if required, is important. Think back to this activity when you encounter a mother with a disability as a reminder that it is more important to try to communicate and find out what the mother's needs are than to always "get it right".
 - Also, for the message to successfully pass down the line, it was very important for the person receiving the message to focus and pay close attention to the person communicating. This is true when working with all mothers, especially mothers who have disabilities resulting in difficulties in functioning (speech, hearing, communication, and comprehension). When we focus on understanding each mother's communication needs and style, we are better able to support them and their infants.
- Conclude this section:
 - Communicating effectively with mothers with disabilities involves demonstrating empathy, practicing patience, and applying strategies tailored for their particular type of disability. This approach ensures that each mother

receives the support and information she needs in a way that is accessible and respectful, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment for both the mothers and their infants.

Activity 5.1.2 (35 minutes)

Communication strategies for mothers with disabilities

Activity Summary	Key message(s)	Slides & Material(s)
Role-play/Scenario & group discussion	1, 2, 3, & 4	<p>Slides 204-211</p> <p>Flipchart, markers</p> <p>MAMI Counseling Cards Kaarkas [Somalia/Somaliland]: A4, A8, A18, A19, A24, C1, C2, C4, C5, C6, C7, C8, C9, C10</p> <p>Mod 05_ActivitySheet_Mothers with Disabilities Scenario Cards_Somalia/Somaliland</p> <p><i>Note: MAMI Counseling Cards numbers may differ by the version used. If using the generic package, use the following materials:</i></p> <p>Mod 05_ActivitySheet_Mothers with Disabilities Scenario Cards_Generic</p> <p>MAMI Counseling Cards [Generic]: A3, A6, A16, A17, A22, C1, C2, C4, C5, C6, C7, C8, C9, C10</p>

Instructions

- Introduce activity:
 - In this activity, we will imagine that we are counselling mothers with a variety of types of disabilities and we will practice communication strategies for these mothers.
- Divide participants into small groups of 3-4.
- Each group receives a set of scenario cards which mentions the mother's type of disability and the purpose of her visit and a set of MAMI Counselling Cards. You may give each group the entire set or only the ones listed on the activity sheet. *[Note: Participants may bring their own set of MAMI Counseling Cards to the training if they have one.]*
- Groups will decide on a mother, counselor and observer(s). The roles can rotate for each scenario.
- Groups act out the scenario cards, including the appropriate communication strategies they think are effective depending on their mothers' disabilities. Observers take notes on the effectiveness of the communication techniques used.

- Several scenario cards list one or more MAMI Counseling Cards that the “counselor” can use during the role-play; other scenarios do not require counseling cards. Inform participants that using the MAMI Counseling Cards is optional and should only be done if it is appropriate for the mother’s disability.
- After 15 minutes, reconvene as a whole group.
- Each small group shares their experiences, challenges, and successful strategies from the role-plays.
- On a flipchart, create three columns and label them with Hearing, Visual, and Intellectual. Write the communication techniques as they are shared by participants for each type of disability.
- Present the key strategies below if not shared by participants:
 - When communicating with mothers who are deaf or hard of hearing:
 - If the mother uses sign language, you can use it if you know it or book a qualified sign language interpreter for counselling sessions.
 - Use gestures or visual cues and body language.
 - Use visual aids.
 - Use writing, written notes and instructions.
 - Use facial expressions to convey understanding and empathy.
 - Check for understanding.
 - When communicating with mothers who are blind and partially sighted:
 - Use clear, descriptive language.
 - With permission from the mother, use physical guidance and tactile demonstrations when explaining different techniques such as breastfeeding positions, latch techniques, and cup feeding.
 - Braille and/or high contrast colour and large print for written materials
 - Design communication materials in an audio format.
 - Use props to increase tactile input.
 - When communicating with mothers with intellectual disability:
 - Break down instructions into simple steps.
 - Use simple language.
 - Use repetition (e.g., repeat instructions).
 - Demonstrate techniques and have the mother show you.
 - Check for understanding.
 - Use visual aids and props.
 - Give take home pamphlets/visuals.
 - Send SMS text reminders.
 - Conduct home visits.
- Present additional tips on how to respectfully and effectively interact with mothers with disabilities [*adapted from Hesperian (2007) a health handbook for Women with Disabilities*]:
 - A mother who is deaf or hard of hearing:
 - Ask her what is the best way of communicating.
 - Make sure you have her attention before speaking. If she is not facing you, touch her gently on the shoulder.
 - Do not shout or exaggerate your speech.
 - Look directly at her, and do not cover your mouth with anything.
 - If the mother uses a sign language interpreter, look at her and not her interpreter or at the family member who interprets her home signs.
 - A mother who is blind or partially sighted:
 - Ask her what the best way of communicating is.

- Unless it is an emergency, do not touch the woman before telling her who you are and requesting permission.
- Do not think she cannot see you at all.
- Explain to her where she is and guide her to a chair or exam table. Do not leave her in the middle of a room.
- Speak in your normal voice.
- If she has a walking cane, do not take it away from her at any time.
- Say goodbye before walking away or leaving.
- Provide written educational materials in high-contrast colors and large-print or braille
- A mother who has a physical disability (difficulty moving or different anatomy):
 - Act as you would with any other mother.
 - Do not assume she has an associated intellectual disability.
 - If there is a difference between you and her in eye level, try to adjust so you sit at the same level.
 - Speak directly with her and not to her family member or caregiver.
 - Do not touch or move any crutches, sticks, walkers, or wheelchairs without the mother's permission or without arranging for their return.
 - If she is a wheelchair user, do not lean on or touch her wheelchair without her permission.
 - Ensure that your recommendations are anatomically appropriate or make necessary adjustments and show how.
- A mother who has difficulty being understood (speech difficulty):
 - Even though her speech may be slow or difficult to understand, this does not mean she has any difficulties learning or understanding.
 - Ask her to repeat anything you do not understand. Do not pretend you understand her if you do not.
 - Ask questions she can answer by "yes" or "no."
 - Let her take as much time as she needs to explain her problem. Be patient. Do not interrupt.
- A mother who has an intellectual disability (difficulty learning or understanding):
 - Find out how she learns best.
 - Give clear instructions.
 - Use simple words and short sentences.
 - Be polite and patient, and do not treat her like a child.
 - Give her one piece of information at a time and repeat it if necessary.
- Conclude this section:
 - Ask participants:
 - How has this scenario/activity changed your understanding of communicating with mothers with disabilities?
 - What is one new strategy you will implement in your practice?



Check before proceeding.

These are the key messages for this module. Have these been explicitly addressed and learners appear to have a good understanding of them?

1. Effective communication with mothers with disabilities requires empathy, patience, and the use of appropriate strategies tailored to each type of disability.



2. When communicating with mothers who are deaf or hard of hearing, use clear written communication, gestures, visual aids, or sign language if possible.
3. When communicating with mothers who are blind or partially sighted, use detailed verbal descriptions and tactile aids or braille if available to convey information.
4. When communicating with mothers with intellectual disabilities, use simple, clear language and repeat key information.

5.2 Counseling Mothers Impacted by Disability

Time: 80 minutes

Preparation & materials required: Slide Deck, positive counseling skills flashcards and answer key, MAMI Counseling Cards (generic or country-specific), MAMI Counseling Cards activity sheet and answer key.

Objectives: At the end of this module, learners will be able to:

- Apply positive communication skills when counseling mothers impacted by disability.
- Discuss considerations for supporting mothers with disabilities to breastfeed and address feeding difficulties.

Key message(s) to take away for learners:

1. Counseling of mothers impacted by disability is most effective if mothers receive accessible and relevant information, if they are listened to, have their difficulties acknowledged, have their questions answered, and if there is a caring and supportive environment.
2. When supporting mothers with disabilities in addressing infant feeding difficulties, it is important to collaborate with them to identify practical, tailored solutions. This can include trying different breastfeeding positions, receiving physical assistance from others, and connecting with peers.

Activity 5.2.1 (30 minutes)

Positive counseling skills: a review

Activity Summary	Key message(s)	Slides & Material(s)
Quiz game	1	Slides 212-217 Mod 05_ActivitySheet_Positive Counseling Skills Flashcards Mod 05_ActivitySheet_Positive Counseling Skills Flashcards_Answers

Instructions

- Introduce the activity:

- Almost all of you have participated in a training on positive counseling skills and have experience counseling mothers on nutrition and breastfeeding. Today, we will be reviewing these essential counseling skills with a fun and competitive game.
- Divide participants into five teams.
- Explain the rules of the game:
 - Each team will take turns drawing a flashcard.
 - Each card will have a question or scenario related to positive counseling skills. Some are easier than others.
 - The team will have 1 minute to discuss and respond to the question or scenario.
 - If you answer correctly, you earn 10 points.
 - The team with the most points at the end wins.
- Start the game, having each team draw a flashcard and respond.
- Use a flipchart to keep track of points.
- Encourage teams to explain their reasoning or demonstrate their skills when applicable.
- Refer to the answer key to offer additional suggestions.
- After the first round, play two more rounds if time allows. Rotate turns quickly to maintain engagement.
- Tally the points on the flipchart. The winning team gets a round of applause.
- Summarize the key points reviewed during the game and fill gaps as needed by sharing the following about positive counseling skills:
 - The three steps in counseling are:
 - Step 1: Assess – ask, listen and observe
 - Step 2: Analyze – identify difficulty and, if there is more than one, prioritize difficulties
 - Step 3: Act: discuss, suggest a small amount of relevant information, agree on doable action
 - Basic counselling skills include listening and learning, building confidence, and giving support. For all mothers, but especially those with mental health concerns, it is important to also create a safe environment.
 - The MAMI Counseling Cards and Support Action booklet lists positive counseling and communication skills (pages 4-5). Some key ones are:
 - Be welcoming and conduct introductions.
 - Treat the mother with kindness and respect.
 - Sit at same level.
 - Make eye contact.
 - Use authentic communication to establish trust.
 - Ask open-ended questions.
 - Listen carefully to the mother without interruptions.
 - Give mother time to talk and ask questions.
 - Summarize what the mother says.
 - Use simple and clear language.
 - Avoid judging words and scolding gestures.
 - Accept how the mother feels. Do not rush into correcting wrong ideas.
 - Recognize and praise what a mother and child are doing right.
 - Identify small, 'doable' (achievable) actions, which mothers can easily integrate.
 - Make one or two practical suggestions, not commands.
 - Be mindful of considerations for mothers with mental health concerns.
 - Present additional considerations for mothers impacted by disability or emergency contexts:

- Do not force mothers to talk about their disabilities or their infants' disabilities. Some mothers may talk about their disability or infants' disability on their own while others may need more time. It is also possible that in some counseling sessions, mothers will want to discuss other issues they are facing.
- Suggest additional bonding and stimulation activities for infants with disabilities and their mothers.
- If you are working in emergency settings:
 - Recognize that the ongoing disruption, violence, and limited access to quality services affects a mother's ability to care for the child.
 - Identify and acknowledge the stress and possible trauma caused by the crisis and understand how these factors might influence the mother's infant feeding and care practices.
 - Ensure a strong focus on psychosocial and mental health support, including listening to, reassuring, and supporting the mother.
- Conclude this section:
 - Just like with any mother, we should use positive counselling and communication skills with mothers who have disabilities or who have infants with disabilities. Considering the extra stress associated with these circumstances, it is crucial to create a safe and supportive environment for both the mother and her child.

Activity 5.2.2 (50 minutes)

Considerations for supporting mothers with disabilities

Activity Summary	Key message(s)	Slides & Material(s)
Brainstorming in small groups	2	<p>Slides 218-224</p> <p>MAMI Counseling Cards/Kaarkas [Somalia/Somaliland]: A1, A2, A4, A8, A24, C9, C10</p> <p>Mod05_ActivitySheet_MAMI Counseling Card Adaptations</p> <p>Mod05_ActivitySheet_MAMI Counseling Card Adaptations_Answers</p> <p><i>Note: MAMI Counseling Cards numbers may differ by the version used. If using the generic package, use the following cards: A1, A3, A6, A22, C8</i></p>

Instructions

- Introduce this section:
 - All new mothers, including those with disabilities, can face challenges with breastfeeding and appreciate help with taking care of their infants.

- Most mothers with disabilities can breastfeed, but some might need help with positioning, may not produce enough milk, have difficulty with latching, or feel too weak and tired.
 - A mother with a physical disability may not have the physical strength to hold, position and burp her infant.
 - A mother with limb length difference, one-sided weakness, or only one arm, may need to consider other ways to support her breast while holding her infant.
 - A mother with a spinal cord injury may have reduced or absent sensation, which can impact milk production.
 - A mother who is deaf or hard of hearing may have difficulty hearing and responding promptly to her infant's crying.
 - A mother who is blind or partially sighted may have difficulty knowing if her infant has a good latch.
- These mothers also face additional barriers such as insufficient support, limited access to information, stigma and misconceptions about their ability to breastfeed. By using positive counselling skills, we can empower mothers to decide for themselves if they can breastfeed and collaborate with them to find practical solutions that work for their unique situations.
- The MAMI Counseling Cards and Support Action booklet are excellent job aids for counseling mothers with disabilities and mothers of infants with disabilities. For some mothers, you may need to adapt information on certain cards to provide targeted, individualized counselling.
- *Note: An updated version of the Community IYCF Counseling Package was launched in April 2024. It includes improved and increased focus on counseling, the needs of children with disabilities and with feeding difficulties, and consideration for emergency contexts.*

Activity (40 minutes):

Note: If time is limited, do this activity as a large group discussion. Select three counselling cards and ask the group how they would adapt them for mothers with various impairments. For example: 1) Adapting "Good positioning" (Kaarkas A2) for a mother with limited use of one arm; 2) Adapting "Good attachment" (Kaarkas A1) for a mother who is blind or partially sighted; 3) Adapting "Crying a lot & not sleeping" (Kaarkas A8) for a mother who is deaf or hard of hearing. Refer to the answer key for suggestions to add to the discussion.

- Divide participants into six small groups.
 - Give each group an activity sheet and a counseling card (kaarkas):
 - Card A1: Good Attachment
 - Card A2: Good Positioning
 - Card A4: How often to breastfeed
 - Card A8: Crying a lot and not sleeping
 - Card A24: Cup feeding
 - Card C9: Nurturing care for early childhood development: recommendations
- Note: If using the generic package, use card numbers listed in Slides & Materials.*
- Share activity instructions:
 - Indicate your assigned MAMI Counseling Card number on the activity sheet.
 - Brainstorm suggestions on how you would adapt the card to meet the needs of a mother
 - with a physical disability (limited use of arms and/or upper body; limited mobility)
 - who is deaf or hard of hearing (partial or total hearing loss)

- who is blind or partially sighted (partial or total vision loss)
- Adaptations can include tailoring the “Key messages,” the information under “Check,” and “Counseling and support actions” to the mother’s needs. For example, how should the “Good Positioning” counseling card be adapted for a mother with limited use of her arms? What strategies, techniques, or support actions can you suggest to support this mother? You may think about equipment or materials that might be helpful, receiving physical assistance from others, and peer support, among other strategies.
- Write your specific suggestions on the activity sheet for each type of disability.
- If you do not think your card requires adaptation, indicate so on the activity sheet.
- After 10 minutes, reconvene as a large group. Ask each group to share some of their suggestions.
- Share additional suggestions by referring to the answer key.
- Present information on general considerations when supporting mothers with disabilities:
 - The experiences of mothers with disabilities vary widely so it is important to collaborate with the mother to identify strategies that are most useful for her and customize your suggestions accordingly.
 - Depending on the mother and her needs, you may consider partial breastfeeding (supplement with cup feeding or other supports).
 - Identify practical solutions (e.g., use of pillows, cushions, and towels) that work within the financial constraints of the family.
 - Ongoing support is key. Conduct home visits and provide resources on community and peer support.
 - Consider the following three key strategies:
 - *Positioning during breastfeeding:* This may require mothers to modify traditional positions and try various positions before they are successful. This is particularly important for mothers with physical disabilities.
 - *Physical help from others:* It may be necessary for mothers to receive physical help from others, such as the father, a family member, or a close neighbor or friend. Collaborate with the mother to identify people in her family/community that can assist her with breastfeeding, breast milk expression, and/or infant care. This is particularly important for mothers with physical disabilities and mothers who are blind or partially sighted.
 - *Peer support:* Women with disabilities may find value in receiving breastfeeding information from peers, particularly those who share similar disabilities. This allows for the exchange of advice on adaptation and positioning during breastfeeding.
- Conclude this section:
 - Mothers with disabilities are more likely to initiate and continue breastfeeding when provided with accessible information, practical guidance, and emotional support tailored to their specific needs. Using your positive communication and counseling skills and strategies from this training to ensuring a supportive environment that promotes both the mother's and the infant's wellbeing.



Check before proceeding.



Save the Children

These are the key messages for this module. Have these been explicitly addressed and learners appear to have a good understanding of them?

1. Counseling of mothers impacted by disability is most effective if mothers receive accessible and relevant information, if they are listened to, have their difficulties acknowledged, have their questions answered, and if there is a caring and supportive environment.
2. When supporting mothers with disabilities in addressing infant feeding difficulties, it is important to collaborate with them to identify practical, tailored solutions. This can include trying different breastfeeding positions, receiving physical assistance from others, and connecting with peers.