

Overcoming disability and discrimination

UNICEF-supported parental education helps a family see a child's true potential

By Nitu Mishra

Mahottari, Nepal – Sahina Khatun always yearned for love and care.

Five year old Sahina has a physical disability, her left hand is shorter than her right. Because of this, her birth was a disappointment to her parents living in Jaleshwar Municipality in Mahottari, a district in the southern plains of Nepal. She is often neglected by her family and was never provided with enough care and support.

Sahina's family has limited financial means and belongs to a traditionally marginalized community. Her father, like many poor Nepali men, has emigrated for work, desperate to earn enough to support his family. Her mother is always busy doing household chores and taking care of her three younger siblings.

Sahina not only faced discrimination in the house but also outside the house. Her relatives and other children discriminated against her, refusing to play with her and not seeing her as worth the effort to invest in learning opportunities. She was never sent to an early childhood development (ECD) centre. Yet Sahina, like any young child, wants to play, to learn, to be part of the community and most of all to make friends.



Sahina Khatun, 5, is happy to be in school and finally have a chance to learn new things. Photo by Nitu Mishra for UNICEF.



Sahina Khatun (front right, in purple) with her grade one classmates at Shree Rastriya Aadharbhut Vidhyalaya in Jaleshwar Municipality in Mahottari, a district in southern plains of Nepal. Photo by Nitu Mishra for UNICEF.

This was until a parental education class was started in Sahina's community by ECD facilitator Ms Gayatri Chaudhary. The classes were provided because of collaboration between UNICEF and the local education authorities.

During the parental education classes, Sahina's mother and grandfather learned about child development, child rights, child participation, early identification of disabilities, responsive care to children and many more critically important. The family also received counseling support, whereby they agreed to send Sahina to an ECD centre, where she received the opportunity to learn new things and build her confidence in communicating with her new friends, teachers and family.

She recently graduated from ECD and is now enrolled in grade one. The family has also started providing proper care and love to Sahina.

"The parental education classes provided me with knowledge about how to care properly for Sahina, caring for a daughter with a disability is different, but it should not bring shame to the family" said Sajada Khatun, Sahina's mother. "Before the parental education classes I had negative thoughts about my child and I did not properly care for her. "But now I have changed my perception and have learned that if we provide opportunities any child can learn and develop with full potential."

Sahina's grandfather Ebris Ansari is also very happy to see his granddaughter's progress.

He took her to a parental education fair where Sahina received free medical treatment. The fair was jointly organized by UNICEF, Seto Gurans and district-level government and community stakeholders.

Mr Ansari says he is committed to continue Sahina's treatment and is very happy that her health is improving.

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Sahina Khatun, 5, holds her grandfather Ebris Ansari's hand as they visit UNICEF-supported parental education fair in 2017. UNICEF Nepal/2017/SJThapa