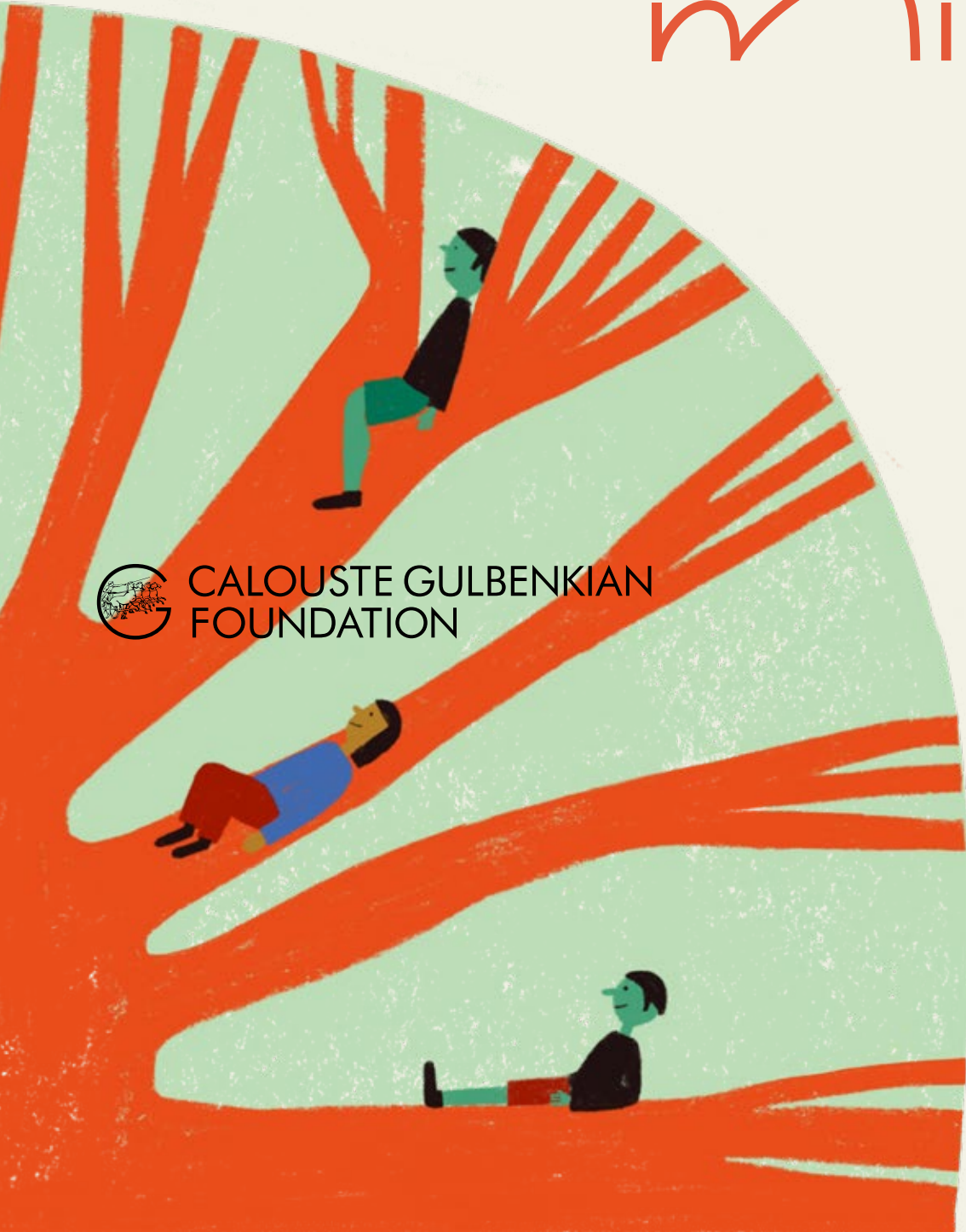


growing minds.



CALOUSTE GULBENKIAN
FOUNDATION







Children's Mental Health

Mental health is an essential component of well-being, impacting one's ability to cope with everyday stresses, work productively, and positively contribute to their community.

It is estimated that between 8% and 14 % of the world's children and adolescents have a mental disorder, with 50% mental disorders in adults beginning before the age of 14.

In childhood, mental health is particularly critical and is linked to personality development, emotional and relational management skills, the ability to learn, and the biological tools for a healthy life.

Mental health problems disproportionately affect vulnerable populations, those living in poverty, babies and children exposed to abuse or neglect, and new mothers at risk of depression, made worse as a result of COVID-19. Anxiety and depression disorders can have profound and long-term effects, not only on the individual but also on their children, reinforcing a cycle of mental illness and social disadvantage.

8 – 14%

of the world's children and adolescents have a mental disorder

Investing in mental health from an early age not only improves children's quality of life, but also reduces future health costs and increases social productivity.



The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation where it is needed

By supporting projects focusing on children's mental health prevention, promotion and recovery, philanthropy can make a significant and lasting impact, promoting the well-being and healthy development of children and their families.

Children's mental health is a global priority that requires sustained attention and investment. Philanthropy is uniquely geared towards making a difference, enabling the financing of innovative projects that find it difficult to attract other sources of funding, normally allocated to sections of society with more immediate needs and of lower risk. This flexibility makes it possible to test new approaches and evidence-based interventions, leading to significant advances in mental health.

The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation will continue to be where help is needed and the *Growing Minds* initiative, as part of its 2023-2027 strategy, reaffirms the Foundation's commitment to promoting mental health and child development.

To reduce inequalities in access to mental health care, the Gulbenkian Foundation directs resources to projects targeting disadvantaged populations, such as children exposed to abuse, neglect or trauma, which are fundamental to breaking cycles of adversity. Helping to remove barriers to care from the beginning of biological development also reduces inequalities that can affect a child's future.

Promoting children's mental health is an investment in the future, by supporting the creation of intervention models that, once proven to be effective, can be incorporated by public health systems and the social and private sectors, ensuring a lasting impact.

Growing Minds

Promoting mental health
and healthy childhood development

The Growing Minds initiative aims at promoting mental health and childhood development by empowering institutions, professionals and carers.

It also aims to help mitigate risk factors and enhance mental health protective factors and introduce positive changes in the lives of children and their families.

We support innovative, high-potential projects that tackle the complex challenges faced by children. We also support the well-being and resilience of families, particularly those at risk, to make sure that every child can have and has the best possible start in life.

Action areas

I. Maternal and child health

Maternal mental health is crucial for the neurobiological development of a child. Supporting mental health during pregnancy and postpartum is vital not only to prevent future problems, but also to bring long-term benefits for the child's health, education and social well-being. Postpartum depression affects around 20% of new mothers, and can have significant negative impacts for both mother and child.

Goal:

To reduce postpartum depression through digital solutions and integrated psychological support

We help implement digital platforms and evidence-based interventions that offer users and professionals self-guided or self-directed resources with continuous monitoring and professional support to help mothers deal with postpartum depression effectively.





II. Nurturing and development

Bonds of trust between carers and children are crucial for healthy development. The absence of these bonds can result in developmental risks and emotional and behavioural problems. Around 40% of children lack secure attachments, which increases the risk of developmental delays and mental health problems. We seek to strengthen parent-child relationships up to the age of three in order to increase the chances of success.

Goal:

To strengthen secure attachment in vulnerable children and families by improving parenting skills

We support the development of parental training and child-carer interaction programmes, which provide practical tools and continued support to strengthen the emotional bonds between parents and children, promoting a safe and healthy family environment.

III. Childhood adversity

Adversity in childhood can have a profound influence on future mental health. Art and culture are powerful tools in this approach, with proven benefits for the cognitive, emotional and physical development of children between the ages of 3 and 12. It is estimated that between 8% and 14% of the world's children and adolescents have a mental disorder, many of which resulting from childhood adversity.

Goal:

To promote the healthy development, through the arts, of children experiencing childhood adversity

We support arts-based interventions, such as those involving music, theatre and visual arts, to help children express emotions, build resilience and improve their emotional and social well-being.



Ongoing projects

Projects

Overview

Promoter

I. Maternal and child health

Be a mom	<p>Improve maternal mental health and prevent postpartum depression through a digital screening platform and cognitive-behavioural coping strategies.</p> <p>Reach: Northern (Gaia, Espinho, Guimarães), Central (Viseu, Castelo Branco) and Southern Region (Beja, Évora) of Portugal</p>	Centre for Research in Neuropsychology and Cognitive-Behavioural Intervention (University of Coimbra)
Ma(t)er	<p>Train healthcare and social welfare professionals to identify, prevent and work in the area of perinatal mental health, focusing on the risk of symptoms of postpartum depression and discussing cases through a digital pathway.</p> <p>Reach: Alentejo.</p>	Comprehensive Health Research Centre (University of Évora)
First 1000 days	<p>Prevent postpartum depression and behavioural problems in children, by offering family support from pregnancy to the first stages of a child's life, including interactions between the mom-to-be and the family setting and between the parents and the baby.</p> <p>Reach: Belmonte, Covilhã, Fundão</p>	Cova da Beira University Hospital Centre
The Sooner, the Better	<p>Intervention to prevent mental health problems in vulnerable families, making perinatal and postpartum support groups available, alongside parenting programmes focused on nurturing secure attachment.</p> <p>Reach: Porto</p>	Encontrar+Se Association

II. Nurturing and development

Co-Action Against Adversity	<p>Collaborative community model for dealing with children's mental health. Includes mental health screening and intervention for vulnerable children.</p> <p>Reach: Guimarães, Cascais</p>	ProChild CoLab
Parents of Little Ones	<p>Promote parenting skills in early childhood in vulnerable environments to ensure secure attachment and socio-emotional development, providing universal access and specialised face-to-face intervention.</p> <p>Reach: Douro, Central Portugal, Dão-Lafões Regions</p>	University of Coimbra
DROPI Parenting	<p>Promote parenting skills and secure attachment relationships in at-risk families, including single-parent families, victims of neglect and violence, who have been flagged for promotion and protection measures.</p> <p>Reach: Guimarães, Porto, Faro, Vila do Conde, Arouca, Lisbon</p>	Unificar Association
Empower Adoptive Parents	<p>Support in the post-adoption stage, promoting emotional regulation and parent-child relationships and reducing parental stress, based on the principles of conscious parenting.</p> <p>Reach: nationwide</p>	University of Coimbra

Projects	Overview	Promoter
Strengthening Affective Bonds	Brief intervention through video feedback for the carers of children, promoting positive parenting, sensitive discipline and the parent-child bond. Reach: Lisbon	ISPA – University Institute
Positive families, healthy children	Incorporation of Triple P (STP), an intensive intervention for families exposed to factors of vulnerability, in the work carried out with parents by family support professionals and in the community. Reach: Porto, Bragança	Faculty of Psychology and Education Science (University of Porto)
Circle of Security	Implementation of a universal prevention model that introduces and promotes security in family bonding structures. Reach: Lisbon	D. Estefania Hospital's Paediatric Studies Centre
Music and Motherhood	Artistic intervention for mothers with postpartum depression, led by singing professionals, aimed at promoting the mental well-being of mothers and strengthening family bonds. Reach: Lisbon, Loures, Odivelas	National School of Public Health
Dialogue with parents	Parent training, based on the Touchpoints Model, with children up to the age of 6 who are at risk or have cognitive difficulties. Reach: Coimbra, Aveiro	Brazelton Gomes-Pedro Foundation

III. Childhood adversity

Community Galleries – Art and Children in Action	Art workshops and psychological support to promote the social and emotional development of children in social housing districts. Reach: Porto	Espaço T
DROPI Roadmaps – Mental Health and Interiority	Promote the well-being and mental health of children and communities through artistic dance practices. Reach: Vale de Cambra	Unificar Association
Embracing Sounds	Musical activities to stimulate children's cognition, focus, emotional regulation, and creativity. Reach: Sines	Alentejo Litoral School of Arts
Connect: Green and Blue Social Prescribing for Children and Families	Social prescribing to improve the mental and physical health of at-risk children by connecting them to activities in natural and aquatic environments, promoting social bonds. Reach: Cascais, Oeiras, Almada, Lisbon	National School of Public Health

How we make an impact?

— Promote new projects with high potential

The *Growing Minds* initiative aims to empower innovative, evidence-based projects that promote child development and mental health. This support includes a combination of funding, training, technical guidance and other resources that ensure beneficiaries have the tools they need to maximise the impact of their interventions. Training is provided in areas such as project management, monitoring and evaluation. Experts are also on hand to provide personalised technical support, helping with the design, implementation, evaluation and continuous improvement of initiatives. The funded projects are integrated into an active community of practice, where they can share experiences and work together to tackle common challenges, encouraging collaboration and knowledge sharing. The Foundation also hosts events and conferences to facilitate the exchange of ideas and expand opportunities for collaboration and report impact.

— Improvement science and collaborative implementation

This approach combines specialised knowledge with improvement tools, promoting rapid cycles of testing and innovation to identify effective changes in different contexts to expand the reach of projects that demonstrate robust evidence and the potential for large-scale implementation. The Improvement Model asks three questions – What are we trying to achieve? How do we know if a change is an improvement? What changes can be made to bring about improvements? – and then implements rapid cycles of change. The aim is to learn continuously and amplify the changes that lead to significant improvements, guaranteeing the sustainable adoption of successful practices. This multidisciplinary process is essential for turning pilot projects into large-scale initiatives and ensuring their sustainable integration into public policy.

— Behavioural sciences, creating environments conducive to choices

The application of behavioural science principles aims to increase the effectiveness of projects and encourage desired behaviours by optimising recruitment, acceptance, maintenance, platform usability, and communication. The techniques applied include the use of incentives, continuous feedback, process simplification and personalised messages, promoting greater involvement and retention. The aim is to create an environment that facilitates access and adherence to the programmes, ensuring that participants remain involved and that the projects achieve the desired outcomes.



— Research, evidence-based support and knowledge transfer

This collaboration involves using scientific evidence to guide the design and implementation of arts-based activities, ensuring that they are not only culturally relevant but also effective in promoting mental well-being. The partnership with University College London aims to align the artistic actions of the projects with the desired health outcomes. Techniques such as art therapy and music, theatre and other forms of creative expression are adapted to meet the specific needs of children and their families, enhancing their preventive and rehabilitation effects, ensuring that arts-based initiatives not only enrich the experience of the participants, but also contribute to significant improvements in mental health. By fostering an environment where art and science complement each other, this partnership maximises the positive impact of the projects, providing children with a powerful tool for healthy emotional and psychological development.

How we measure impact

Economic evaluation demonstrates cost-effectiveness and return on investment, ensuring that available resources are used efficiently, resulting in the best health outcomes at the lowest cost. This evaluation involves identifying, measuring and valuing the resources needed to implement programmes, and assessing health and quality of life outcomes. With this approach, designed by Uppsala University, the additional cost of an intervention can be weighed against the additional health benefits it provides. Both the carer's perspective and that of society in general are considered, assessing not only direct health costs, but also the impacts on areas such as social security, education and employment. Economic evaluation is key to ensuring that interventions are able to transform public policies and guarantee the adoption and implementation of programmes.



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[Learn more](#)



The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation contributes to the development of people and organisations through art, science, education and charity, for a more equitable and sustainable society. It promotes greater access to culture and the transformational power of the arts in the development of people and societies and seeks to reduce inequalities in access to education and care for the most vulnerable. The Foundation promotes knowledge, scientific research, and the greater participation and involvement of citizens and civil society in building more sustainable communities.

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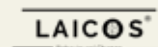
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children's mental health

