



**Understanding  
The Early Years**

Creating a Community for Children.



## Family and Community Factors that Impact Early Childhood Development

Factors such as limiting TV viewing times and participating in unorganized sports can reduce the risk of childhood obesity<sup>1</sup>.

Family functioning is related to children's developmental outcomes, especially behaviour<sup>2</sup>.

When parents are loving and responsive to their child's needs and socialize their child through supervision and by demanding mature behaviour, children have better developmental outcomes<sup>3</sup>.

Authoritative parenting style results in better developmental outcomes<sup>4</sup>.

The National Longitudinal Study of Children and Youth found that parental engagement with children in activities such as reading with them, playing with them, and talking and laughing together has positive developmental effects.

Exposure to high-quality child care programs greatly impacts early childhood outcomes<sup>5</sup>. This includes child care programming which has a low child-to-teacher ratio, focuses on language development, and is embedded into local service delivery systems<sup>6</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> Tremblay, M. S. & Willms, J. D. (2003). Is the Canadian childhood obesity epidemic related to physical inactivity? *International Journal of Obesity*, 27(9), 1100-1105.

<sup>2</sup> Racine, Y. & Boyle, M. H. (2002). Family functioning and children's behaviour problems. In J. D. Willms, (Ed.), *Vulnerable Children: Findings from Canada's National Longitudinal Study of Children and Youth* (pp. 199-210). Edmonton, AB: University of Alberta Press.

<sup>3</sup> Baumrind, D. (1991). The influence of parenting style on adolescent competence and substance abuse. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 11(1), 56-95.

<sup>4</sup> Chao, R. K. & Willms, J. D. (2002). The effects of parenting practices on children's outcomes. In J. D. Willms, (Ed.), *Vulnerable Children: Findings from Canada's National Longitudinal Study of Children and Youth* (pp. 149-165). Edmonton, AB: University of Alberta Press.

<sup>5</sup> Currie, J. (2001). Early childhood education programs. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 15, 213-238.

Schweinhart, L. J. & Weikart, D. P. (1997). The high/scope preschool curriculum comparison study through age 23. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 12(2), 117-43.

Shonkoff, J. & Phillips (2000). *From neurons to neighborhoods: The science of early childhood development*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

<sup>6</sup> Ramey, C. T. & Ramey, S. L. (1998). Early intervention and early experience. *American Psychologist*, 53(2), 109-120.



## Understanding The Early Years

Creating a Community for Children.



When parents feel supported by their neighbours, friends and family, family stress is lower, as is the number of parents experiencing depression<sup>7</sup>.

Accessing safe outdoor and indoor play areas (both formal and informal) where children can play and learn with parents and peers helps to promote physical health and well-being as well as social competence and emotional maturity in children<sup>8</sup>.

Having places where people knowledgeable about normal development observe children can help to ensure that any delays result in early referrals to professional services (i.e. early childhood educators, nurses, family doctors, etc.)

Having spaces where children can talk about their feelings promotes emotional maturity.

Accessibility of programming and services such as:

- Pregnancy care (health care, social supports, smoking, alcohol and drug use prevention programs, nutrition, healthy workplaces for pregnant women)
- Food Safety (friendly to children and families such as nutritional education for expectant and new mothers, community kitchens, free or low cost community meals)
- Health services (i.e. public health, medical care, hearing and vision screening)
- Parent Education programs and support
- Book exchange opportunities for children's stories

A home environment which encourages:

- Making wise use of the TV by limiting exposure to negative, scary, exploitive, or violent media
- Playing games with numbers as part of everyday life
- Story telling by both adults and children (both pretend stories and stories about adult experiences growing up)

A community which values and advocates for:

- Making early literacy initiatives and story times a priority
- Partnerships between preschools and libraries to develop preschool programs
- Partnerships with school districts to share early literacy resources
- Supporting English as a Second Language (ESL) programs for children who have different home languages

---

<sup>7</sup> Mulvaney, C. & Kendrick, D. (2005). Depressive symptoms in mothers of pre-school children effects of deprivation, social support, stress and neighbourhood social capital. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 40, 202-208.

<sup>8</sup> Pellegrini, A. D. & Smith, P. K. (1998). Physical activity play: The nature and function of a neglected aspect of play. *Child Development*, 69(3), 577-598.