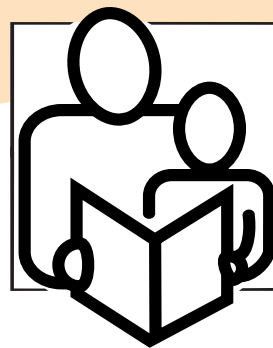




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Why it is important to share
and act on information
about



Child Development and Early Learning

The first eight years of childhood are critically important, particularly the first three years. They are the foundation of future health, growth and development. During this period, children learn more quickly than at any other time. Babies and young children develop more rapidly and learn more quickly when they receive love and affection, attention, encouragement and mental stimulation, as well as nutritious meals and good health care.

All children have the right to legal registration at birth, health care, good nutrition, education, and protection from harm, abuse and discrimination. It is the duty of parents and governments to ensure that these rights are respected, protected and fulfilled.



Key Messages:

What every family and community
has a right to know about

Child Development and Early Learning

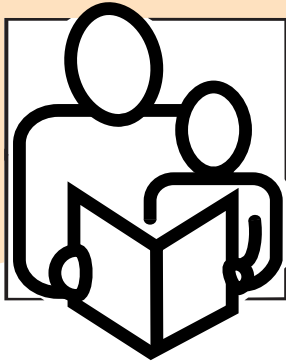
1. The care and attention a child receives in the first eight years of life, particularly during the first three years, are critically important and influence her or him for life.
2. Babies learn rapidly from the moment of birth. They grow and learn fastest when they receive affection, attention and stimulation in addition to good nutrition and proper health care.





3. Encouraging children to play and explore helps them learn and develop socially, emotionally, physically and intellectually.
4. Children learn how to behave by imitating the behaviour of those closest to them.
5. All parents and caregivers should know the warning signs that show the child's growth and development are faltering.





Supporting Information

Child Development and Early Learning

1. The care and attention a child receives in the first eight years of life, particularly during the first three years, are critically important and influence her or him for life.

Care and affection during the first years help a child thrive. Holding, cuddling and talking to the child stimulate growth and promote emotional development. Being kept close to the mother and breastfed on demand also provide the infant with a sense of security. The baby needs to suckle for both nutrition and comfort.

Boys and girls have the same physical, mental, emotional and social needs. Both have the same capacity for learning. And both have the same need for affection, attention and approval.

Crying is a young child's way of communicating his or her needs. Responding promptly to the child's cry by holding and talking soothingly to her or him will help establish a sense of trust and security.

Children who are anaemic, malnourished or frequently sick may become fearful and upset more easily than healthy children and will lack the drive to play, explore and interact with others. These children need special attention and encouragement to eat.

Children's emotions are real and powerful. They may become frustrated if they are unable to do something or have something they want. Children are often frightened of strangers or the dark. Children whose reactions





are laughed at, punished or ignored may grow up shy and unable to express emotions normally. If caregivers are patient and sympathetic when a child expresses strong emotions, the child is more likely to grow up happy, secure and well balanced.

Physical punishment or displays of violence can harm the child's development. Children who are punished in anger are more likely to become violent themselves. Clear explanations about what to do, firm rules about what not to do and praise for good behaviour are more effective ways of encouraging children to become full and productive members of the family and community.

Both parents, as well as other family members, need to be involved in caring for the children. The father's role is especially important. The father can help meet the child's needs for love, affection and stimulation and ensure the child receives a good quality education, good nutrition and health care. The father can help ensure that the environment is safe and free of violence. Fathers can also perform household tasks, particularly when the mother is pregnant or breastfeeding.

2. Babies learn rapidly from the moment of birth. They grow and learn fastest when they receive affection, attention and stimulation in addition to good nutrition and proper health care.

Skin-to-skin contact and breastfeeding within one hour after birth helps babies achieve better growth and development and establishes contact with their mother.

Touch, hearing, smell, sight and taste are learning tools the child uses to explore the surrounding world.

Children's minds develop rapidly when they are talked to, touched and cuddled, and when they see familiar faces, hear familiar voices and handle different objects. They learn quickly when they feel loved and secure from birth and when they frequently play and interact with family members. Children who feel secure usually do better in school and cope more easily with the difficulties of life.

Exclusive breastfeeding on demand for the first six months, timely introduction of safe and nutritious complementary foods at the age of six months, and continued breastfeeding for two years or beyond provide the child with nutrition and health benefits as well as affection and contact with the caregiver.

The most important way children develop and learn is through interaction with others. The more often parents and caregivers talk and respond to the child, the quicker he or she learns. Parents or caregivers should talk, read or sing to infants and young children. Even if children are not yet able to understand the words, these early 'conversations' develop their language and learning capacities.

Caregivers can help children learn and grow by giving them new and interesting things to look at, listen to, hold and play with.



Babies and small children should not be left alone for long periods of time. This delays their physical and mental development.

Girls need the same amount of food, attention, affection and care as do boys. All children need to be encouraged and praised when they learn to do and say new things.

When the child is not growing well, physically or mentally, parents need to seek advice from a health care worker.

Teaching children in their mother tongue first helps them develop their ability to think and express themselves. Children learn language quickly and easily through songs, family stories, rhymes and games.

A child who has completed immunization on time and has been given proper nutrition has an increased chance of survival and is more apt to interact, play and learn. This will reduce the family's expenditure on health care, the child's absence from school due to illness, and the parents' loss of income when they have to care for a sick child.



3. Encouraging children to play and explore helps them learn and develop socially, emotionally, physically and intellectually.

Children play because it is fun, but play is also key to their learning and development. Playing builds children's knowledge and experience and helps develop their curiosity and confidence. Children learn by trying things, comparing results, asking questions and meeting challenges. Play develops the skills of language, thinking, planning, organizing and decision-making. Stimulation and play are especially important if the child has a disability.

Girls and boys need the same opportunities for play and for interaction with all family members. Play and interaction with the father help strengthen the bond between the father and the child.

Family members and other caregivers can help children learn by giving them simple tasks with clear instructions, providing objects to play with and suggesting new activities, but without dominating the child's play. Watch the child closely and follow her or his ideas.

Caregivers need to be patient when a very young child insists on trying to do something unaided. Children learn from trying until they succeed. As long as the child is protected from danger, struggling to do something new and difficult is a positive step in the child's development.

All children need a variety of simple materials to play with that are suitable for their stage of development. Water, sand, cardboard boxes, wooden building blocks, and pots and lids are just as good as toys bought from a shop.

Children are constantly changing and developing new abilities. Caregivers should notice these changes and follow the child's lead to help her or him develop more quickly.



4. Children learn how to behave by imitating the behaviour of those closest to them.

By watching and imitating others, young children learn how to interact socially. They learn what kinds of behaviour are and are not acceptable.

The examples set by adults and older children are the most powerful influences in shaping a child's behaviour and personality. Children learn by copying what others *do*, not what others *tell them to do*. If adults shout and behave violently, children will learn this type of behaviour. If adults treat others with kindness, respect and patience, children will follow their example.

Children like to pretend. This should be encouraged as it develops the child's imagination. It also helps the child understand and accept the ways other people behave.

5. All parents and caregivers should know the warning signs that show the child's growth and development are faltering.

Parents and caregivers need to know the major milestones that show the child is developing normally. They also need to know when to seek help and how to provide a caring and loving environment for a child with a physical or mental disability.

All children grow and develop in similar patterns, but each child develops at his or her own rate.

By observing young children to see how they respond to touch, sound and sight, parents can identify signs of possible developmental problems or disabilities. If a child is developing slowly, parents and caregivers can help by spending extra time with the child, playing and talking with the child, and massaging the child's body.

If the child does not respond to stimulation and attention, parents and caregivers need to seek help. Taking early action is very important in helping children with



disabilities reach their full potential. Parents and caregivers need to encourage the greatest possible development of the child's abilities.

A girl or boy with a disability needs extra love and protection. Like all children, such a child needs to be registered at birth or soon afterwards, breastfed, immunized, given nutritious food and protected from abuse and violence. Children with disabilities should be encouraged to play and interact with other children.

A child who is unhappy or experiencing emotional difficulties may behave abnormally. Examples include suddenly becoming unfriendly, sad, lazy, unhelpful or naughty; crying often; becoming violent with other children; sitting alone instead of playing with friends; or suddenly having no interest in usual activities or school work and losing appetite and sleep.

- Parents should be encouraged to talk with and listen to the child and, if the problem persists, to seek help from a teacher or health worker.
- If a child has mental or emotional difficulties or has been abused, he or she should be given counselling to prevent further complications.

The following guide gives parents an idea of how children develop. There are differences in the growth and development of all children. Slow progress may be normal or may be due to inadequate nutrition, poor health, a lack of stimulation or a more serious problem. Parents may wish to discuss the child's progress with a trained health worker or a teacher.



How Children Develop

By the age of ONE MONTH

A baby should be able to:

- ▶ turn her or his head towards a hand that is stroking the child's cheek or mouth
- ▶ bring both hands towards her or his mouth
- ▶ turn towards familiar voices and sounds
- ▶ suckle the breast and touch it with her or his hands.

Advice for parents and caregivers:

- ▶ make skin-to-skin contact and breastfeed within one hour of birth
- ▶ support the baby's head when you hold the baby upright
- ▶ massage and cuddle the baby often
- ▶ always handle the baby gently, even when you are tired or upset
- ▶ breastfeed frequently, at least every four hours
- ▶ talk, read and sing to the child as often as possible
- ▶ visit the health worker with the infant six weeks after birth.

Warning signs to watch for:

- ▶ poor suckling at the breast or refusing to suckle
- ▶ little movement of arms and legs
- ▶ little or no reaction to loud sounds or bright lights
- ▶ crying for long periods for no apparent reason
- ▶ vomiting and diarrhoea, which can lead to dehydration.



By the age of SIX MONTHS

A baby should be able to:

- ▶ raise the head and chest when lying on her or his stomach
- ▶ reach for dangling objects
- ▶ grasp and shake objects
- ▶ roll both ways
- ▶ sit with support
- ▶ explore objects with hands and mouth
- ▶ begin to imitate sounds and facial expressions
- ▶ respond to her or his own name and to familiar faces.

Advice for parents and caregivers:

- ▶ lay the baby on a clean, flat, safe surface so she or he can move freely and reach for objects
- ▶ prop or hold the baby in a position so she or he can see what is happening nearby
- ▶ continue to breastfeed on demand day and night, and start adding other foods (two meals a day at 6-8 months, 3-4 meals a day at 8-12 months)
- ▶ talk, read or sing to the child as often as possible.

Warning signs to watch for:

- ▶ stiffness or difficulty moving limbs
- ▶ constant moving of the head (this might indicate an ear infection, which could lead to deafness if not treated)
- ▶ little or no response to sounds, familiar faces or the breast
- ▶ refusing the breast or other foods.



*By the age of 12 MONTHS****A baby should be able to:***

- ▶ sit without support
- ▶ crawl on hands and knees and pull up to stand
- ▶ take steps holding onto support
- ▶ try to imitate words and sounds and respond to simple requests
- ▶ enjoy playing and clapping
- ▶ repeat sounds and gestures for attention
- ▶ pick things up with thumb and one finger
- ▶ start holding objects such as a spoon and cup and attempt self-feeding.

Advice for parents and caregivers:

- ▶ point to objects and name them, talk and play with the child frequently
- ▶ use mealtimes to encourage interaction with all family members
- ▶ if the child is developing slowly or has a physical disability, focus on the child's abilities and give extra stimulation and interaction
- ▶ do not leave a child in one position for many hours
- ▶ make the area as safe as possible to prevent accidents
- ▶ continue to breastfeed and ensure that the child has enough food and a variety of family foods
- ▶ help the child experiment with spoon/cup feeding
- ▶ make sure that the child is fully immunized and receives all recommended doses of micronutrient supplements.



By the age of 12 MONTHS (continued)

Warning signs to watch for:

- ▶ the child does not make sounds in response to others
- ▶ the child does not look at objects that move
- ▶ the child is listless and does not respond to the caregiver
- ▶ the child has no appetite or refuses food.

By the age of TWO YEARS

A child should be able to:

- ▶ walk, climb and run
- ▶ point to objects or pictures when they are named (e.g., nose, eyes)
- ▶ say several words together (from about 15 months)
- ▶ follow simple instructions
- ▶ scribble if given a pencil or crayon
- ▶ enjoy simple stories and songs
- ▶ imitate the behaviour of others
- ▶ begin to eat by herself or himself.

Advice for parents and caregivers:

- ▶ read, sing or play games with the child
- ▶ teach the child to avoid dangerous objects
- ▶ talk to the child normally – do not use baby talk
- ▶ continue to breastfeed and ensure the child has enough food and a variety of family foods
- ▶ encourage, but do not force, the child to eat
- ▶ provide simple rules and set reasonable expectations
- ▶ praise the child's achievements.



*By the age of TWO YEARS (continued)****Warning signs to watch for:***

- ▶ lack of response to others
- ▶ difficulty keeping balance while walking (see a trained health worker)
- ▶ injuries and unexplained changes in behaviour (especially if the child has been cared for by others)
- ▶ lack of appetite.

*By the age of THREE YEARS****A child should be able to:***

- ▶ walk, run, climb, kick and jump easily
- ▶ recognize and identify common objects and pictures by pointing
- ▶ make sentences of two or three words
- ▶ say her or his own name and age
- ▶ name colours
- ▶ understand numbers
- ▶ use make-believe objects in play
- ▶ feed herself or himself
- ▶ express affection.

Advice for parents and caregivers:

- ▶ read and look at books with the child and talk about the pictures
- ▶ tell the child stories and teach rhymes and songs
- ▶ give the child her or his own bowl or plate of food
- ▶ continue to encourage the child to eat, giving the child as much time as he or she needs
- ▶ help the child learn to dress, wash her or his hands and use the toilet.



By the age of THREE YEARS (continued)

Warning signs to watch for:

- ▶ loss of interest in playing
- ▶ frequent falling
- ▶ difficulty manipulating small objects
- ▶ failure to understand simple messages
- ▶ inability to speak using several words
- ▶ little or no interest in food.

By the age of FIVE YEARS

A child should be able to:

- ▶ move in a coordinated way
- ▶ speak in sentences and use many different words
- ▶ understand opposites (e.g., fat and thin, tall and short)
- ▶ play with other children
- ▶ dress without help
- ▶ answer simple questions
- ▶ count 5 to 10 objects
- ▶ wash her or his hands.

Advice for parents and caregivers:

- ▶ listen to the child
- ▶ interact frequently with the child
- ▶ if the child stutters, suggest she or he speak more slowly
- ▶ read and tell stories
- ▶ encourage the child to play and explore.



By the age of FIVE YEARS (continued)

***Warning signs
to watch for:***

- ▶ observe the roles children take in play. If the child is fearful, angry or violent, these may be signs of emotional problems or abuse.

