

Importance of Health in Young Children White Paper

Developed by the Early Learning Advisory Committee's
Child Development and Well Being Workgroup
April 2015

In Indiana, we know that good health is the foundation from which young children grow and that health is tied closely to child development and later outcomes. Cognitive, social-emotional, and physical development are intricately connected during the first five years of life, so poor health in a young child can lead to developmental problems in other areas. Health and school readiness begin long before a child enters a classroom. Young children who are healthy and safe are more prepared to succeed in school.ⁱ

Physical and Nutritional Health

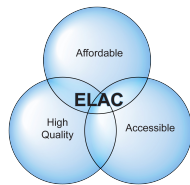
- Childhood physical activity is related to better health, higher test scores, and fewer behavioral problems.ⁱⁱ
- Inadequate maternal nutrition during pregnancy is associated with a range of undesirable outcomes in children, including obesity in childhood and adulthood.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Vitamin deficiencies early in life can have adverse impacts on a wide range of cognitive, motor, social-emotional, and neurophysiological development, as well as behavioral outcomes and chronic medical conditions such as osteoporosis, asthma, and diabetes.^{iv}
- Adults who themselves experience under-nutrition as infants and in early childhood are 10 times more likely to die from an infection than others.^v
- In the US, 31.7% of children between the ages of 2 and 19 are overweight or obese.^{vi} More than half of all obese children are overweight by age 2.^{vii} About one-third of overweight preschoolers and one-half of overweight school-age children remain overweight as adults.^{viii}
- One in three Hoosier children is overweight or obese, and childhood obesity rates have tripled in the last three decades.^{ix}

Mental Health

- Social and emotional development is an integral part of the foundation that helps guide a young child into adulthood and is firmly tied to every other area of development, such as physical health, language and literacy development, cognitive skills, and approaches to learning.^x
- 10% to 14% of children under age 5 experience social and emotional problems. These problems can adversely affect their development, school readiness, and school success.^{xi}
- The emotional, social, and behavioral competence of young children is a strong predictor of academic performance in elementary school.^{xii}
- Toxic stress can lead to disruptions in brain development that last a lifetime.^{xiii}
- Stable, responsive, and sensitive relationships are the organizing focus of all early development.^{xiv} With this, children are free to explore and interact in ways that promote healthy development across all domains.^{xv}

Environmental Health

- Young children need physical and emotional spaces that are free from toxins and fear and allow active exploration (play and socialization) without significant risk of harm.^{xvi}
- Unsafe environments significantly increase the risk of disease, disability, and injury.^{xvii}



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List of References

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- ⁱⁱⁱ Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, The Foundations of Lifelong Health Are Built in Early Childhood. Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2010, www.developingchild.harvard.edu
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- ^v Ibid.
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- ^{vii} J. W. Harrington, et al., "Identifying the Tipping Point Age for Overweight Pediatric Patients." Clinical Pediatrics 49, no. 7 (July 2010): 638-643
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- ^{ix} <http://www.jumpinforhealthykids.org/Facts-Stats>
- ^x Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, A Science-Based Framework for Early Childhood Policy: Using Evidence to Improve Outcomes in Learning, Behavior, and Health for Vulnerable Children. Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2007, www.developingchild.harvard.edu
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- ^{xii} C. Cybele Raver, "Emotions Matter: Making the Case for the Role of Young Children's Emotional Development for Early School Readiness." Social Policy Report of the Society for Research in Child Development 16, no. 1 (2002): 3-23. See also National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, Children's Emotional Development Is Built into the Architecture of Their Brains: Working Paper No. 2. National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004, www.developingchild.net.
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- ^{xiv} <http://www.zerotothree.org/public-policy/state-community-policy/nitcci/multidisciplinary-consultant-module-1.pdf>
- ^{xv} <http://www.zerotothree.org/wo/assets/docs/quality-care-for-infants-and-toddlers-in-california.pdf>
- ^{xvi} Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2010.
- ^{xvii} Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2010.