

## **Child Development and Family Nurturing: Evidence Briefing**

This briefing paper supports the 'Child development and family nurturing' section of the [Early Years Mental Health Improvement Framework](#) which has been developed by NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde. It demonstrates the importance of work that promotes child development and family nurturing by outlining available evidence on the impact on babies, young children, and their families.

### **1. Introduction**

Babies' and toddlers' brains develop rapidly in response to stimuli from caregivers and their environment. Cognitive, language and problem-solving development is supported by talking, singing, reading, accessing a range of toys and books and providing opportunities to move, play and explore the world.

### **2. Impact of child development and family nurturing**

This section provides an overview of some of the key areas through which child development and family nurturing can influence babies and young children.

#### **Family nurturing and learning**

The quality of family nurturing and learning experienced by children in the early years is as important to their intellectual and cognitive development as individual care-giver factors, such as occupation, education and income, suggesting that what care-givers do with children is just as important as who they are.<sup>1</sup> Warm and nurturing care-giver behaviours that encourage children's natural curiosity and communicate reasonable expectations for learning are strong predictors of children's school achievement, over and above care-giver income and social status.<sup>2</sup>

Back and forth conversations between the care-giver and child that are age-appropriate and reflect the child's personal interests, feelings and memories are consistently associated with increases in vocabulary and use of language.<sup>3,4</sup>

Engaging in these types of activities support child development and acquisition of language skills:

- Book sharing and reading
- Songs, poems and rhymes
- Make-believe play
- Painting and drawing
- Trips to the park
- Visits to the library<sup>1,4</sup>

#### **Barriers to nurturing care-giver / child interactions**

Care-givers from lower socio-economic backgrounds may be less likely to access enrichment opportunities in their child's first year of life, including activities intended to improve care-giver / child communication and interaction (e.g. baby massage,

book bug). Children in lower income households are less likely to experience 'language rich' environments involving frequent caregiver-child conversations that reflect the child's personal interests.<sup>5</sup> This can result in language skills that are below age-related expectations on entry to Primary School, putting children at an educational disadvantage from the start; a good quality home learning environment can help moderate this, even into the teenage years.<sup>5</sup>

Barriers experienced by care-givers:

- Embarrassment or concerns about skills and confidence (e.g. singing, reading)
- Pressure to complete other more pressing tasks (e.g. work, household chores)
- Restricted financial resources to access books, toys and days out
- Living in cramped conditions which limit opportunities for quality one-to-one engagement
- Deterred from using parks due to antisocial behaviour, vandalism, or risk of injury
- Stress related money worries which limit capacity and patience to engage with children.<sup>5,6</sup>

## REFERENCES

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