

## **Early Learning and Childcare: Evidence Briefing**

This briefing paper supports the 'Early Learning and Childcare' section of the [Early Years Mental Health Improvement Framework](#) which has been developed by NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde. It outlines available evidence of the positive impact that early learning and childcare that is inclusive of all families, nurturing, and trauma-informed, can have on babies, young children, and their families.

### **1. Introduction**

Early learning and childcare can have a critical influence on a child's overall development and future outcomes. Children spend a significant amount of time in early learning and childcare, and the quality of provision is important for their mental health, wellbeing, and learning outcomes.<sup>1</sup>

Financial barriers and constraints that can be associated with early learning and childcare may be having unintended negative impacts on families, both from a financial and wellbeing perspective.<sup>2,3</sup> Children who grow up in poverty are less likely to do as well as their peers in meeting a range of health, wellbeing, and learning outcomes. It is therefore important that we understand the impact of poverty in these establishments, and don't inadvertently add to the pressure on families.

Early years establishments are also well placed to provide safe and nurturing environments where parents, staff, and children can learn about each other's differences and similarities and value each other. They also can offer a safe space and additional protection against adversities, including Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES), the mitigation of which is a key policy priority in Scotland.

The specific ways in which early learning and childcare can impact babies, young children, and their families are explored in more depth in Section 2 below.

### **2. Impact of early learning and childcare on babies, young children, and their families**

#### **Early learning and childcare that is inclusive of all families**

- Early years settings play a key role in offering support to the most vulnerable children and families within disadvantaged communities. Affordable, accessible, high-quality early learning and childcare enables children to learn and develop emotional literacy, cognitive, and social skills. It also tackles inequalities by supporting children from disadvantaged backgrounds and enables parents to work to improve their family income.<sup>4,5</sup>
- In contrast, employment prospects and associated financial gains for people with responsibilities for caring for children have been shown to be consistently damaged by the lack of affordable, high-quality childcare.<sup>5</sup>
- Living on a lower income can impact on daily experiences of young children in early years and school. The 'Cost of the School Day' and 'Cost of the Nursery Day' research highlighted that costs, policies, and practices can place pressure

on family budgets and mean children miss out on opportunities or feel excluded because of their family incomes.<sup>2,3</sup> Actions by early learning and childcare providers to poverty-proof policies and practices helps mitigate challenges experienced by families living in poverty.<sup>3,4</sup>

- Promoting diversity in early years settings are fundamental to realising children's rights. From a very young age, children show both positive and negative attitudes and preferences regarding diversity, including gender, disability and ethnicity. Early learning and childcare therefore offers the opportunity to make a difference to children's lives by promoting diversity, equality, and inclusion.<sup>6</sup>

### **Early learning and childcare that is nurturing**

- In addition to the relationships that children have with their peers, the relationships that they have with school staff and their views about safety and cohesion are important. Children who attend schools where they feel safe and part of a community have been found to have better health and wellbeing outcomes.<sup>1</sup>
- Key benefits of adopting a nurture approach for young children have been found to be related to the ability to support them with any communication and language difficulties they may be experiencing, developing their social skills, and regulating their behaviour and expression of their emotions.<sup>7,8</sup>
- There is also local and national evidence which show the numerous social, emotional, and educational benefits of being in a nurture group.<sup>9</sup>

### **Trauma-informed early learning and childcare**

- The evidence base around the impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) is well established, showing that those who are exposed to a number of harmful or distressing experiences are more likely to have mental health problems.<sup>4</sup>
- Studies which have looked at children's resilience have shown schools can offer protection against adversities such as ACEs.<sup>10</sup> Trauma-informed early learning and childcare establishments can mitigate some of these effects by creating a safe and supportive environment, understanding the impact of trauma on child development in order to better respond to children's needs and provide appropriate support.<sup>5</sup>

## REFERENCES

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