

Chapter 9

Healthy body, healthy mind

Introduction

This chapter contains information that promotes physical and emotional health. It outlines suggestions for activities and resources for both the children being cared for and child care providers.

It is important to provide children with healthy surroundings and help them make healthy choices. Positive experiences will promote healthy brain development and set the stage for lifelong learning behaviour and health. Healthy habits which children develop during their early years can be carried into their adult years and reduce their risk of developing chronic diseases.

This chapter contains information on the following topics:

- Brain development and early years messages
- Early identification of developmental lags and health concerns in children birth to age six
- Self-esteem
- Physical activity
- Bullying
- Healthy sexuality

Tips for success

- Healthy behaviours are learned by teaching and by example. Be a positive example for the children
- Providing appropriate stimulation and physical comfort as well as meeting physical needs are an important supportive role
- As child care providers, find ways to look after you
- Purchase or borrow good resources that can be available to children, parents and care providers as needed. Information must be appropriate to the child's level of mental and physical development.
- Refer to Appendix 9 *The first years last forever: How you can make a difference*

Brain development in the early years

Brain development between birth and six years of age affects a child's future learning, behaviour, self-confidence and ability to love and have healthy, trusting relationships. The way in which you comfort, teach and play with children in the early years impacts their development.

After birth the brain rapidly develops and grows. Neurons make connections and form patterns that enable movement, talking, emotion, and thought processes. The development of the brain is not only influenced by heredity but also by early experiences. These early experiences cause neurons to make new connections which change the physical structure of the brain and allow one to learn new skills. During this time children develop language and coping skills, develop their first relationships, and begin to develop a sense of self.

Parents and caregivers who smile, soothe, read, sing, talk and play with young children are helping the child's brain to organize itself into patterns. These patterns help children learn and cope throughout their lifespan. Early physical, emotional and social nurturing may impact a child's ability to reach their full developmental potential.

Attentive and effective early caregiving that stimulates learning and caring, along with positive support systems and experiences during childhood, can greatly effect growth and development.

Research on child development has shown the following:

- Environment and experiences influence health and a child's ability to reach their full developmental potential
- Ongoing support from a responsive caregiver guides healthy development
- Relationships are important. One caring and responsive adult in a child's life can make a tremendous difference.
- Early identification of developmental lags is crucial. A referral to an appropriate community service for formal assessment and treatment should follow. Parents and caregivers are in a unique position to conduct ongoing monitoring of a child's development. *Nipissing District Developmental Screens* can help parents decide if their child's development is on track for their age and alert them to any concerns. The *York Region Red Flags Guide* can help early years professionals i.e. child care providers, identify concerns in a child's development and make appropriate referrals to community services. Refer to the section on *Early identification of developmental lags in children birth to age six* in this chapter.

Important points about brain development:

- Brain development before age six is more rapid and extensive than previously thought
- Brain development is influenced by environmental experiences early in life
- Effects of these experiences are long lasting
- Negative stressors or lack of early stimulation can adversely effect brain development and function

For additional information on brain development in the early years refer to Appendix 9 *Website Resources*.

Early identification of developmental lags and health concerns in children birth to age six

The early years of development from conception to age six, particularly the first three years, determine the base for competence and coping skills that will affect learning, behaviour and health throughout life. (*McCain, M.N. & Mustard, J.F., April, 1999. Early Years Study – Final Report*)

To ensure healthy development, children who may need additional support must be identified as quickly as possible and referred to the appropriate programs and services. Early intervention is critical to ensure the best outcomes for the child. Refer to Appendix 9 *Early ID screening pathway*.

Early identification screening tools

Early identification screening tools are used to help monitor that a child's development and health is on track and may include information about where to go for support, assessment and/or treatment if concerns are identified. York Region Community and Health Services provides three types of screening tools to licensed child care providers in York Region: *Nipissing District Developmental Screens* and *Nutrition Screening Tool for Every Preschooler (NutriSTEP®)* which may be used by parents or caregivers, and the *York Region Red Flags Guide: A quick reference guide for early years professionals* which is for the use of early years professionals only. Refer to Appendix 9 *Nipissing District Developmental Screen Website and Flyer* and *Red Flags Guide* and to the York Region NutriSTEP ® website at www.york.ca/nutristep

Nipissing District Developmental Screens

Nipissing District Developmental Screens (NDDS) are developmental screening tools available to parents, caregivers, and early years professionals working with infants and children up to six years of age. NDDS help determine if a child's development is progressing as it should. Each checklist explores a child's development in the areas of vision, hearing, speech, language and communication, physical movement, understanding, emotional awareness, interacting with others and independence. The child's chronological age determines which screen to use. If the child falls between two ages, use the earlier screen.

Each screen has two parts

1. The “Activities for Your Child” section provides suggested age appropriate activities for parents or caregivers to help comfort, teach and play with their children.
2. The “Yes/No Checklist” section identifies what most children are able to do at the time of the screen.

Encourage parents or caregivers to use the checklists regularly to know if their child’s development is on track. If one item is checked “No”, refer parent or caregiver to the suggested activities section of the NDDS. If two or more “No” responses are checked off, the *York Region Red Flags Guide* can be used to help early years professionals determine when and where to refer families for additional advice, assessment and/or treatment in York Region.

While the NDDS is designed to be completed by parents and/or caregivers, it is not a substitute for professional advice, assessment or treatment. It is important to talk to health care professionals if there are any questions or concerns about a child’s development or well-being.

NDDS are available at no charge in English, French, and Chinese from York Region Community and Health Services by calling York Region *Health Connection* at 1-800-361-5653 or by using the *NDDS order form* in Appendix 9. Online interactive screens are also available by visiting www.ndds.ca.

NutriSTEP® (Nutrition Screening Tool for Every Preschooler)

NutriSTEP® stands for Nutrition Screening Tool for Every Preschooler. NutriSTEP® is a nutrition risk screening questionnaire where parents answer questions that are based on their preschooler, aged 3 to 5 years.

NutriSTEP® has 17 questions that ask parents or caregivers about their child’s eating and related habits. The NutriSTEP® questionnaire takes approximately five minutes for parents to complete. Parents get a nutrition risk score for their child (low, moderate or high risk). About 10% of children will score high risk. According to the child’s nutrition risk score, the questionnaire provides next steps for parents (e.g., talk to the NutriSTEP® registered dietitian at no cost for children who are high risk).

NutriSTEP® and its accompanying nutrition fact sheet called *How to Build a Healthy Preschooler* are available free of charge from York Region Community and Health Services Department, Nutrition Services by calling 905-895-4512 or 1-800-735-6625 ext 4335.

York Region Red Flags Guide

Red Flags is a quick reference guide for health and early years professionals. The purpose of *Red Flags* is to help early years professionals better understand areas that impact child health and development which are outside their scope of knowledge. It helps determine when a child could be at risk of not meeting their health and/or developmental milestones, alerting the need for further investigation. It can be used in conjunction with the *NDDS* to help identify a specific area

of concern. *Red Flags* reviews 26 areas of child development from birth to six years. It includes areas that may impact child health, and growth and development such as postpartum depression and abuse. Each area of development includes a “where to go for help” section for early years professionals to be able to guide families to the appropriate service and or agency in York Region for further investigation. The *York Region Red Flags Guide* is available at www.york.ca/redflags or by calling York Region *Health Connection* at 1-800-361-5653 and speak to a public health nurse.

To order *Nipissing District Developmental Screens*, call York Region *Health Connection* at 1-800-361-5653 or visit www.ndds.ca. The *York Region Red Flags Guide* is available at www.york.ca/redflags. The Nutrition Screening Tool for Every Preschooler is available at www.york.ca/nutristep. The original guide was developed by the Simcoe County Early Intervention Council and revised by the York Region Early Identification Community Planning Network.

Nurturing self-esteem in children

Self-esteem is an essential ingredient of a person's mental health. The Canadian Mental Health Association has defined self-esteem as "the value we place on ourselves. It is the feeling we have about all the things we see ourselves to be. It is the knowledge that we are lovable, we are capable, and we are unique."

Self-esteem is an essential building block to emotional development. Good self-esteem allows children to be open with others and to care about how they are feeling. It encourages them to try new things and handle difficult situations because it gives them confidence in themselves. We have the ability to increase or decrease a child's self-esteem with our words and actions.

As a child care provider, you play a vital role in helping to nurture a child's self-esteem. Children need to know they are important. This will help them to feel comfortable, safe and secure.

Tips to increase self-esteem in children

- Accept the child as a unique individual. Guard against labeling the child.
- Express faith and confidence in the child's capabilities
- Provide the child with opportunities to succeed
- Give the child choices and some control over their environment wherever possible
- Acknowledge the child's efforts
- Encourage pride in the child's ethnic background and heritage
- Respect a child's ideas and feelings
- Set clear rules and limits
- Encourage the child to be curious and to try new things
- Have realistic expectations of the child related to his or her stage of development
- Intervene when a child puts him or herself down
- Use phrases that build self-esteem, such as "*thank you for your help*", or "*that was an excellent idea*"
- Refer to Appendix 9 *Developing self esteem in young children*

**Healthy self-esteem is helping the child believe in the message:
"*I am loveable and capable*"**

Healthy active kids

Children naturally like to move and play. Unfortunately children are moving less and less. More than fifty percent of Canadian children are not physically active enough for good health. Children spend too much time being inactive – watching television, playing video games and using a computer.

Being active helps kids:

- Have fun, release energy, feel good about themselves, sleep better
- Develop balance, coordination, strength
- Maintain healthy weight, heart and lungs
- Develop healthy habits that last into their adult life and prevent many diseases

Tips to encourage kids to be active:

- Be an active role model – parents, siblings, and caregivers should participate with kids in physical activities
- Provide lots of opportunities to walk, run, jump and climb
- Play active games such as tag, hide and seek, hopping like a rabbit etc.
- Teach basic skills for games and sports – e.g. throwing and catching a ball
- Follow the child's lead – play games they like and help them explore their creativity by making up new games
- Get outside – kids will naturally find more active things to do outside
- Try nature walks – scavenger hunts are great fun
- Use up-beat music for dancing or unstructured time – kids will naturally move to music

Programs and resources

Have a ball: A toolkit for physical activity and the early years

This resource provides information, resources, tips and ideas to help you deliver and promoting physical activity for children from birth to six years of age. The toolkit helps child care and early learning settings to strengthen their physical activity programming.

Content of the toolkit includes:

- A binder with physical activity information
- A copy of *Moving and Growing: Ages Two, Three and Four*
- Chief Medical Officer of Health Report: *Healthy Weights, Healthy Lives*
- *Rainbow Fun* CD
- A beach ball

The binder content can be downloaded from the Best Start website or you may purchase the toolkit for \$25.00. For more information or to order your copy, contact Best Start at 1-800-397-9567 or visit www.beststart.org.

Canada's Physical Activity Guide for Children

This guide promotes the importance of physical activity.

Teacher's Guide to Physical Activity for Children age six to nine years

- A resource to use in talking with children about the importance of being active, having fun and feeling good about themselves
- Provides tips on how to motivate behaviour change, ideas for fun group activities and stories of how physical activity may be included in a child's day
- Available from the Public Health Agency of Canada's website:
www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/pau-uap/paguide/child_youth/resources.html#4

Physical Activity Chart & Activity Sticker (one page, single sided)

- Can be posted on a fridge or bulletin board
- Kids can add stickers that feature pictures of activities they have completed to track their progress in becoming more physically active
- Available from the Public Health Agency of Canada's website:
www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/pau-uap/paguide/child_youth/resources.html#4

Moving on the Spot

- A daily physical activity program for young children developed by Toronto Public Health
- Available from the Toronto Public Health website:
www.toronto.ca/health/movespot.pdf

Daily Vigorous Physical Activity Resource Guides: primary, junior, intermediate

- Available at a cost of \$3.00 from the York Region District School Board: Learning Resources-Education Centre 905-727-0022 x3475 &3686
<mailto:courseware@yrdsb.edu.on.ca>

For more information on promoting physical activity in children and youth, visit www.york.ca/healthyschools.

Preventing bullying

An individual is being bullied or victimized when they are exposed repeatedly and over time to negative actions.

Here are some important facts about bullying:

- All children are targets of occasional teasing behaviour or aggression but some children are **repeatedly targeted**
- There is an **imbalance of power** between the bully and the child being bullied
- Bullying is repeated aggression. It can take many forms, it can be **direct or indirect**.

Direct/Face to face

- Physical (pushing, hitting, shoving)
- Verbal (insults, teasing, name calling)
- Psychological (threats, intimidation)

Indirect

- Exclusion, shunning
- Harming victims' reputation/relationships by spreading rumours, gossiping, etc.
- Electronic (cyber bullying) – spreading rumours through email, cell phone, text messaging and the internet

Different roles individuals can represent in a bullying situation:

- Bully
- Victim – child who is being bullied
- Bystander – children who are present and witness a bullying incident
- Intervener – child who helps the person being bullied
- Bully Supporter – child who indicates approval of the bully by supporting his/her actions, joining in, laughing, knowingly ignoring, or standing close to the bully
- Reporter – child who attempts to get help for the victim by telling someone

Characteristics of a child who is being bullied:

- Targeted because of personality traits and external appearance
- Tends to be quiet, shy and feel insecure
- Has a high level of anxiety and distress
- Tends to have low self-esteem
- Typically lacks friends and, therefore, is socially isolated
- Lacks confidence, is physically weaker and, therefore, is unable to defend him or herself
- May have overprotective parents who have not encouraged development of social skills necessary to cope with bullying

- Tends **not** to seek adult help
- Fears that telling on others will result in even more taunting, humiliation and exclusion

Signs to look for in a bullying situation

The child being bullied:

- Shows an abrupt lack of interest or refusal to go to school or child care
- Wants to stay close to the child care providers
- Often refuses to play outside and wants to stay indoors
- May experience difficulty sleeping and changes in appetite
- May have nightmares, become withdrawn and have mood swings
- May have unexplained bruises, cuts or torn clothing
- May suffer a drop in grades
- May be increasingly fearful and anxious

The child being the bully:

- Likes to take charge/dominate/take control of others
- Tends to hurt other kids when parents or other adults are not around
- Views bullying as fun, satisfying their need to feel powerful and in control
- Values the rewards that aggression can bring
- Lacks empathy for other children
- Constantly teases, taunts and puts down others
- Refuses to accept responsibility for their actions
- Craves attention
- Is concerned primarily with their own pleasure
- Models aggressive behaviours. It is often found that a child who is being bullied at home bullies at school.

What child care providers can do:

- Develop a code of conduct and provide a positive, supportive and stimulating child care environment which encourages empathy
- Educate children to seek the help of an adult by “reporting” bullying incidents that they have witnessed
- Recognize the difference between “tattling” (intent is to get someone **into** trouble) and “reporting” (intent is to get someone **out** of trouble)
- Assume responsibility in resolving conflicts immediately, without blaming
- Praise and reward positive behaviour of all children
- Notify parents of each bullying incident that involved their children
- Praise the child who is being bullied, when they display self-confident behaviour
- Praise the bully's self control toward non-violent and responsible behaviour
- Help children to develop social skills and to become more assertive

Healthy sexuality

Sexuality is an important part of child's healthy development. Child care providers can play an active role in these discussions. Being open to talk about sexuality issues as they arise will help children feel good about themselves and make healthy choices.

Tips for talking to children about sexuality

Child care providers have the following roles to play in contributing to children's sexuality learning:

- Don't feel that you need to be an expert. If you are unsure about an issue tell the child that you will get back to them with an answer
- Don't jump to conclusions about a child's question. Clarify exactly what information they are seeking. You may want to reflect the question back to the child to see what information they are really asking for. This also gives you time to come up with an answer.
- Use proper terms for body parts. Children need correct information and it helps to avoid confusion.
- Use teachable moments to talk about sexuality. A teachable moment occurs when a child is most interested in an issue. For example, when a family member is pregnant, a child may be curious about pregnancy and conception.
- Give age appropriate responses. Although the questions asked at different ages are similar, the amount and depth of information needed is different.

Children need to have positive feelings about themselves and their body. Answer a child's questions in a way that will make them feel good about themselves. Refer to the section on *Tips to increase self-esteem in children* in this chapter.

Three simple rules when answering questions

1. Listen carefully
2. Give a simple answer
3. Check to see if they understand