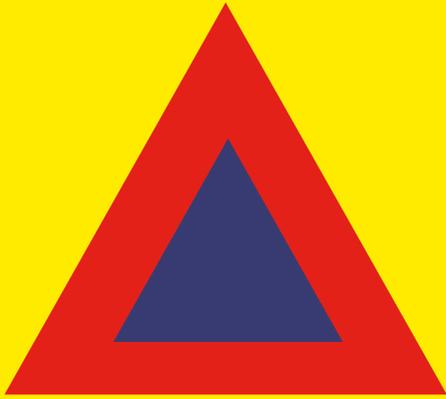


Learning Together

**A Parent's Guide to
Early Childhood Learning**



Written by **Michele McDermott**

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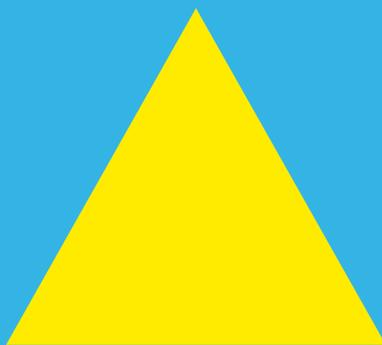
Barnardos supports children whose well-being is under threat, by working with them, their families and communities and by campaigning for the rights of children. Barnardos was established in Ireland in 1962 and is Ireland's leading independent children's charity.

Barnardos' vision is an Ireland where childhood is valued and all children and young people are cherished equally.

Barnardos' mission is to challenge and support families, communities, society and government to make Ireland the best place in the world to be a child, focusing specifically on children and young people whose well-being is under threat.

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What is this Guide About?

1

This guide is for the parents of children between birth and the age of six. Research studies have consistently found that these early years of life are critical to the emotional and intellectual development of a child.

The aim of this guide, therefore, is to provide parents with information about the value of early childhood learning and the impact it can have on a child's quality of life, their whole development and their future opportunities and experiences.

75% of brain growth is completed during the early years.

As the primary educator and carer of your child, you, as a parent, have many responsibilities. You have the task of providing your child with food, shelter, love and affection. It is also your job to help your child to become a confident and productive member of society, able to manage relationships with others. This may sometimes seem a daunting task, but with understanding of how a child develops and of what early childhood care and education is, you will be able to understand what your child needs.

The importance of play cannot be emphasised enough. The learning that a child does through play is invaluable to their future learning patterns and to developing their skills so that they can become a happy, motivated, competent adult.

In recent times, adults have become very concerned that children learn reading and writing skills before they start school. It has been shown, however, that 'hot housing' children – that is, initiating activities that do not take account of their level of development – can damage self confidence and may have no effect on academic development. Children who play and create at their own pace with the support of their parents will be the adults who creatively solve problems, and innovate and communicate well.

Being a parent is probably the most important job you will do in your life. The more you understand about a child's development and needs, the more you will be aware of what it takes to create the kind of environment your child needs in order to thrive. It is important to remember, however, that the most valuable thing you can give a child is the consistent love and affection they need to feel safe and happy.

The second book in this series, *Quality Counts: A Parent's Guide to Quality Childcare*, can be used along with this guide to ensure that your child experiences quality care and education both at home and in a childcare environment.

With understanding of how a child develops, you will be able to understand what your child needs.



What is Early Childhood Learning?



Early childhood learning is often called early childhood care and education. This term indicates how caring for a child's health and welfare and guiding their learning and development are intertwined – you can't have one without the other.

For example, if a child is not provided with enough food then they will not have the energy to play. If they do not play, then they will not learn all the skills that they need to understand and cope with the world.

Why is Early Childhood Learning Valuable?

Research has shown that the quality of experiences that a child has in childhood will shape their future. Quality care and education helps children to learn vital life skills, such as communication, and social skills, such as building and maintaining friendships, following accepted rules and boundaries, understanding others and negotiating with people.

To achieve these skills children need a mix of caring, nurturing adults around them who provide a warm, trusting and stimulating atmosphere. They also need friends with whom they can develop their skills.



Your Child's Development

3

Brain Development

Medical research has shown that the most rapid period of brain development occurs in the first few years of life and that the experiences of early childhood have an enduring effect on a child's future capacity for learning.

Allowing children to play for extended periods of time in an imaginative way gives them the opportunity to think about everything that they are doing and seeing, and discover new things. They can then build on old experiences and assimilate the new. From this, children gain new skills and further understanding about how the world works. Close nurturing relationships are also vital, laying down a healthy mental profile for future years.

Each child displays unique characteristics from birth .Your child's special personality and the skills that they develop will help them to learn about life and the world. However, the opportunities that children are given to get the best out of themselves are crucial to them reaching their full potential.

Facts about Brain Development

- What the research says¹

- ▶ Brain development that takes place before birth and in the first year of life is rapid and extensive.
- ▶ Brain development is vulnerable to environmental influence. For example, smoking, alcohol, drugs, stress and viruses will all, to a greater or lesser degree, have a part to play in outcomes for this development.
- ▶ The influence of early environment on brain development is long lasting.
- ▶ The environment affects not only the number of brain cells and number of connections among them, but also the way these connections are 'wired'.
- ▶ We continually develop new skills throughout life.
- ▶ Early stress has a negative impact on brain development.

Learning Experiences

Children learn from:

- ▶ Experiences and play activities that challenge them but don't frustrate them or make them feel bad about themselves.
- ▶ Experiences and play activities that help them to develop different interests and talents.
- ▶ Experiences and activities that are appropriate for their age and stage of development. Children learn skills much quicker when they are developmentally able for them.

1. Adapted from Carnegie Task Force on meeting the Needs of Young Children, 1994

Children are compelled to find out things through their senses. This is why your two-year-old son puts his hand out to touch a flame. His eyes, mouth, hands, hearing, sense of smell, in fact his whole body are the tools he uses.

When your 18-month-old son puts sand in his mouth he is discovering the texture, the taste, the sound it makes, what it is and what it does. He is not concerned about how 'dirty' the sand may be. As he becomes older, he will learn that this sand is fun. He can 'play' with it by sifting, shovelling, moulding, pressing it and even throwing it!

When your five-year-old daughter runs up and down the top of a wall, she is taking a calculated risk. She already believes that she can do it due to the experience that she has gained, perhaps through being able to balance her body on steps and running on painted lines in the playground umpteen times. She is pushing herself to meet another challenge.

Risk taking is a necessary and important part of growing and becoming independent. When children are too often told 'don't do that' or 'you will hurt yourself', it sends a message of distrust from you to them. Children may believe that they cannot really trust themselves and as time goes on may exhibit learned helplessness, where it is easier for them to let others decide things for them or to do things for them rather than take a risk themselves. Alternatively, children may ignore your warnings and rebel and become stubborn.



Emotional and Social Development

4

The social and emotional skills that children develop will assist them in their future lives as adults.

Emotional Needs

Your child has four basic emotional needs. These are the need for love and security, new experiences, encouragement and responsibility.

Love and security

Love and security are the most important emotional needs as they will be the basis for all future relationships, both with family and friends and later with work colleagues and eventually with your child's own family. Children require dependable, stable, affectionate relationships to be able to thrive and to become adults who are able to form and maintain loving relationships.

Security comes from the continuous care and attention that you offer while your child experiences all the new things that they need to come to understand the world.

The importance of attachment

Attachment is an emotional bond providing care, love, security and pleasure. Research has shown that secure attachment is necessary for us to survive.

There are four characteristics of childhood attachment:

- ▶ A need to be near the people the child is attached to.
- ▶ A return to people the child is attached to when feeling threatened or fearful.
- ▶ The attachment figure being seen as a secure base from which the child can explore the surrounding environment.
- ▶ An occurrence of anxiety in the absence of the attachment figure.

So when your one-year-old daughter is clinging to you in a new situation, it is a natural part of being attached to you. When your two-year-old son follows you around the house, even to the bathroom, it is because he needs to be near you at that time. It is also the reason why your child may get very upset when you have to leave him for a period of time.

If your toddler becomes upset when separating from you it will help if you can accept that this is part of his developmental stage and run with it.

When leaving your child it can be distressing for you as well and it can be tempting to try to 'sneak' away. It is important, however, that you don't leave children without letting them know that you are going, but that you will be back.

New experiences

New experiences are essential for developing the mind, just as food is for physical growth and development. Language and play are the tools that your child uses to explore new situations and make sense of them. New experiences help your child to learn new things.

Your toddler knows his granny's dog. It has four legs, is small, brown and white. One day he visits his friend who has a Labrador. This dog also has four legs but looks different to granny's one, yet it is still called a dog. Your child has now learned that two things that look different may still be called by the same name. It is the beginning of his ability to sort and categorise objects and animals.

Encouragement

Encouragement and recognition are vital for children in helping them to keep trying, even when things are not going well. It also helps them to see that you realise they are trying. Encouragement is based on providing children with specific information on how they are doing at a task. For example, saying to your child, 'Well done for picking up all your train set' or 'Look at how you fastened your buttons, I know you found that hard to do yesterday.'

This type of encouragement is more helpful than non-specific praise such as 'You're such a good boy' or 'That is marvellous, aren't you a wonderful girl', which can put pressure on your child 'to be good'. This can create anxiety as, for a child, it is sometimes hard to even know what 'good' means as it covers a multitude. Your child may get used to looking for praise and approval from others rather than become motivated to try harder for their own satisfaction.

Encouragement is describing for your child what they have done well and focusing on the effort and enjoyment put into the task.

Responsibility

Giving responsibility to children when they are ready and able for it builds their confidence in their own abilities. It helps them to feel comfortable using their own initiative. Responsibility also helps children to understand that they are accountable for their actions.

Get your two-year-old son to take his cup and plate into the kitchen for washing up. This can then extend to him later helping to do the washing up.

Supporting your Child

Be sensitive to your child's feelings.

Your child should learn 'When I cry someone will comfort me, when I am hungry or thirsty I will be given food and drink.'

If children are not responded to in an empathetic way when they are hurt or feeling emotions, they learn that it is not ok to say that they feel pain or they feel upset. This stops them from asking for help as they have learned that they will not be listened to.

When children feel that they are loved and valued because they are unique, they come to love and value themselves. Building trusting relationships between children and the adults in their lives is vital to their optimism about life. For them to feel safe, happy and able to deal with life they need to know that they can rely on the adults around them to provide them with emotional support.

Think about recent examples when...

- ▶ You gave your child unconditional love and affection.
- ▶ Your child knew he was special to you.
- ▶ You gave your child consistent boundaries and limits.
- ▶ You gave your child one to one attention.
- ▶ You really understood what makes your child tick.

Talking and listening

Look out for how you talk and listen to your child. Communication plays an important role in helping children to feel special. It is also an essential ingredient in helping them to learn.

Taking time to listen to your child can be hard, especially when you are busy. It is important that you find the time, for example, perhaps when cooking dinner, you can chat to your daughter while she sits at the table and plays.

Think about recent examples when...

- ▶ You showed that you were interested in what your child said.
- ▶ You listened and acted on your child's suggestions and ideas.

Positive attitudes

The way adults model their behaviour is important to your child's perception of the world and the people in it. You build a child's self esteem by helping them to see their strengths and by showing them that they can work at things that are not so easy. Children will learn that they are effective at changing things for themselves.

Think about recent examples when...

- ▶ You helped your child to see his strengths.
- ▶ You helped your child to understand that it is effort that counts.
- ▶ Your child kept on trying when things didn't go according to plan.
- ▶ Your child heard you speaking well of others.

Social Development

It is important that children are encouraged to develop friendships and relationships with other children of their own age. This will help them to learn about the give and take of relationships. They need to learn about listening to others, sharing and taking turns. Playing with friends does not just keep children occupied and happy, it also helps them to realise how they have to manage their behaviour to fit in with others.

You can help your child by showing how you respond to the people in your life and how you maintain relationships with family and friends even when it is hard to find the time. Being honest and kind are important qualities for your child to learn so that they are trusted by others.

The social and emotional skills that children develop will assist them in their future lives as adults.



Your Child's Behaviour

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Understanding Emotions

As shown in the previous section, emotional and social skills are vital to a child's success in school and later in life. People who understand themselves, their emotions and their effect on others have emotional intelligence.

This means that they can recognise what others are feeling and why and respond appropriately. It is also important that a person can understand emotional cues from others through their facial expressions and body language.

A child who understands his own emotions and that of others is able to form good relationships with friends, teachers, and family.

Supporting your Child's Emotions

One of the most important ways that you can support children is to help them manage their emotions so that they are able to control their own feelings and respond appropriately to the emotions of others. This involves helping them to be able to express when they are feeling happy, sad or angry in a way that does not hurt or offend anyone else. It is important that children are able to recognise the emotions that they are feeling and are allowed to express these emotions as this will help in later life.

You can help your child to manage emotions to do particular tasks. For example, when feeling in a particularly physically energetic mood, suggest they play a game or activity that will use up that energy rather than expecting them to sit still. When your child cannot concentrate on homework, sometimes a ten minute run in the garden can help... of course, this has to be negotiated so that the homework still gets done.

Children need a lot of understanding and guidance in learning how to control their emotions in an appropriate way. However, they have to be at a certain stage of development for this.

Your eighteen-month-old daughter has no real idea of how others feel – when she slaps another child it is because her territory has been crossed and she is anxious, frustrated or angry. These emotions are all genuine; it is only through time and with support and encouragement that she will learn how to act in an appropriate way.

By expressing how you are feeling and naming the emotion you can help your child to model how to respond when in an angry, frustrated or sad mood. The same applies for joy and happiness. Sometimes people forget to express positive emotions.

Saying 'I am happy when...' or 'I am sad because...', gives your child a sense of how to express himself in a way that models appropriate behaviour. It also helps children to learn that other people also go through sadness, anger, frustration etc.

Limits and boundaries

Your child needs to know the limits and boundaries that you have set. These boundaries should be consistent and based on safety and respect for oneself and others. Emphasis should be on the 'do...', with only a few consistently observed 'don't...'

Recognition and attention

As mentioned in the section on emotional needs, children need recognition and attention from the adults in their lives. When your son acts up, you may think 'Oh, he's just looking for attention' as if this is a bad thing, but attention is necessary for a child. If he is behaving in an unwanted way it may well be his way of communicating that he is not getting enough of the right kind of attention.

Reinforcing Positive Behaviour

'Catch' your child behaving well.

Observe when your son has been kind to another child; when he has put away his shoes; when he has played with his sister without fighting. On these occasions give positive feedback by saying...

- ▶ 'I see that you gave John your truck to play with when he came to visit. That was a kind and thoughtful thing to do.'
- ▶ 'You put away your shoes so that no one would fall over them and that was a clever thing to do.'
- ▶ 'Isn't it a good thing that Martina had you to play with this afternoon and you were able to show her how build a house from the lego.'

On the rare times when you are getting five minutes to yourself because your child is absorbed in playing, it is too easy to leave him to it. This is the time to specifically refer to what he is doing and attend to him. As he gets older he will be very happy to play with his friends or on his own, but in the first years of your son's life, since you are his favourite person he will want you to notice the things that he does.

Helping children to learn to get along takes time and it is only through perseverance with these steps that your child will come to learn how to deal with conflict.

It is through your response to conflict that your child will learn how to behave appropriately.

Managing Conflict

Tamsin (aged 3) and Jonathan (4) are sitting in the playroom. Jonathan has taken a small truck from Tamsin and she has hit him, shouting at him to give it back to her. They are both pulling on either end of the truck. Both children are upset, Tamsin is crying and Jonathan is shouting.

Steps to managing this conflict

- ▶ Remain calm and approach calmly.
- ▶ Stop any hurtful actions.
- ▶ Get down to eye level.
- ▶ Be gentle in touch and use a calm voice.
- ▶ Acknowledge hurt and feelings – ‘You seem upset, tell me what happened.’
- ▶ Calmly ask for the toy so that they can focus on the situation and not the toy.
- ▶ Do not take sides – remember you may not have seen the whole ‘show’ so do not make assumptions.
- ▶ Listen to what is said and then restate the problem as they have told it to you.
- ▶ Ask the children for ideas on how to solve the problem. Encourage them to think about a solution that is acceptable to both.
- ▶ If they cannot come up with a solution then make a suggestion, but accept their response to your suggestion. You may need to revisit some of the steps the first few times you use this approach.
- ▶ Stay near them for a while to check that they are alright and the solution is working.



Physical Development

6

Babies develop from having purely reflex movements to beginning to learn that they can make things happen in their world. If they kick one of the bars of their cot they feel it move. If they reach out and touch the lampshade they can see it move. This is the very beginning of their attempts to be independent.

Physical development is to do with gross motor and fine motor skills. These skills are very closely linked and are equally important.

Gross Motor Skills

Gross motor skills are the ones we develop by climbing stairs, pushing and pulling on objects and jumping on and off things.

Your young child will want to bounce and jump and needs to be given the opportunity and space to do these things. The better a child's large muscle development, the more confident they will be about taking risks and the more assured they will be in their own abilities.

Fine Motor Skills

Fine motor skills are the ones we use to cut with scissors, to write, to draw, to tie up shoelaces. These skills can be developed by playing with finger puppets, jigsaws, blocks or lego, threading beads and using pens, brushes or any tools to make marks.

The Link between Physical and Intellectual Development

Physical activities also help children to develop intellectual capabilities.

It is important for babies to roll, crawl on the floor, pull themselves to standing and toddle around the furniture. Going through these steps in physical development will wire the neural circuits of the brain that facilitate later learning such as reading and writing.

Developing the ability to plan, to organise and to push themselves to complete things are skills that come from physically developing.

When your son first learns to kick a ball it may be a purely physical activity – he may try to use his whole body to move the ball and miss. As he practices he will learn how to use his leg and foot to kick. He then will learn how to direct the ball and plan where he wants it to go.

Once your daughter can run well, she will want to run for a specific purpose. So she may run from the shed over to the swing and then back to the shed, not only for the enjoyment and physicality of it, but also as a challenge to herself, to see if she can get faster and better at it.

Playing Outdoors

Playing outdoors is vital to your child's overall development and children should be given the opportunity to be outside as often as possible. Apart from the exercise benefits, the more being in the fresh air and enjoying it becomes a habit, the more likely children will be to seek outdoor activities as they get older. This will obviously have positive outcomes for later health.

Playing with mud, experiencing the grass and how it feels beneath their toes, splashing in the puddles all help children to understand concepts like wet and dry, and words like 'scratchy' and 'splashing'.

There is no reason why a child cannot be out in the garden every day, come sunshine or rain, as long as they have a set of waterproofs on.

When your toddler is outdoors she needs to use all her muscles and to find challenges and explore activities that she cannot do indoors. She will need things that she can dig with, ride on, pull and push. She needs to be able to climb on things and hide in and under things.

Providing obstacle races in the garden, playing with beanbags and playing hopscotch are activities that will enhance development. Playing statue games or chasing bubbles or balloons in the garden will be as much fun for you as for your child.

There is no reason why a child cannot be out in the garden every day, come sunshine or rain, as long as they have a set of waterproofs on.



Learning Through Play

7

Play starts in babyhood. When babies look at their fingers or put their toes in their mouths they are using play to investigate and explore their body. As they get older they begin to explore what is around them.

- ▶ Babies need to be sung to, to be read to, to have comfort toys for when they are tired, and toys and objects that they can investigate. Create a 'treasure basket' with natural objects such as pine cones, wooden eggs, feathers and large pebbles in it for your baby to experience.
- ▶ Toddlers need all that a baby needs but also water, sand, play dough and paint.
- ▶ Pre-school children need the opportunity to take 'junk' like cereal boxes, kitchen towel rolls and create a robot or elephant from their imagination. Children of this age also need friends to play and learn with.

You can help your child to develop all of their skills by playing with them. For a child to use their imagination they need lots of raw materials rather than 'ready made' items.

A simple sheet hung over the sofa and attached to the radiator (turned off) with pegs will do the same thing as a wendy house. It is a space to play in and hide from, to imagine and to be quiet. Children need places where they can be warm and cosy, noisy and quiet, where they can experience light and dark and where they can be by themselves.

Play is your Child's Work

Play involves a vast number of skills and outcomes, some of which are outlined below.

Practice

Children will do the same activity over and over again to learn new things.

Confidence building

When children have mastered an activity that they were doing, they experience a sense of pride and confidence in completing it. By being allowed to do things for themselves, they will become more confident in their own capabilities and their ability to be able to rely on themselves to sort out everyday problems.

Exercise

When children carry their toys from the kitchen to the living room they are exercising their arm, back and leg muscles. When they run up and down the living room they are expending their excess energy as well as using their muscles, sense of balance and awareness of space.

Development of concentration

When they have spent time trying to turn the page on a book and finally succeed, children learn that if they keep on trying with something they will get there.

Provoking thought

When the piece of the jigsaw won't fit where a child wants it to go, they will start to ask why.

Problem solving/reasoning

When a child realises that the jigsaw piece only fits one way because it has a particular shape, they are learning about shape and size. Children have to learn this to be able to eventually understand that the shapes of letters and numbers can only look one way. These are the activities that help with pre-reading and numeracy skills.

Therapeutic

When children have seen something that has scared them, they can play to soothe themselves.

Practical knowledge

Your child might think that milk comes straight from the shop rather than from a cow. You can help them learn these things by playing together with a farm set.

Different materials

Children may have a lot of knowledge about play dough, how it feels and what they can do with it, but have you ever given your child a piece of clay to investigate and explore? The texture, how it can be manipulated, prodded and pummeled is very different. Your child will come to understand concepts such as heavy, dense and solid.

Intellectual development

While playing with water, children are learning basic science – what floats and what sinks. Through filling cups and saucepans with water they come to understand the idea that different sizes of vessel will hold different amounts. Allow your child to experiment with household objects. As time goes on they will understand just by looking at everyday things how they will act.

Play and Creativity

Children are being creative every time they make up a song to sing, when they pretend to be mummy or daddy or when they turn a chair upside down and use it as a pushchair for their doll. They have learned that you can use an object to represent another object. This develops to learning that symbols can represent objects and this is the starting point for beginning to read. For example, your child will come to understand that the letters C-A-T on a page may not look like a cat but they represent a cat.

Activities are not creative when they are adult driven or have specific instructions, for example pre-printed pages with drawings for colouring in. These types of activity put pressure on children to complete the task in the way that they might feel that the adult wants it done.

Children are being creative when they can explore and experiment with a variety of materials and equipment.

Movement

When children are dancing or running around the house they are expressing their need to use all their large muscles and their body. All of this frantic activity may be irritating, but they are communicating to you that they need some physical activity to help use up their excess energy. Children feel exhilaration when they are jumping, skipping and hopping. They are also learning about their body's limitations as much as their capabilities.

Even if you are not particularly physically active it is important that you still help your child in this aspect of development.

Music – listening to and making music

Banging pots and pans together is a noisy business, however when children do this they are listening to the different patterns of sound that they are creating and learning about different rhythms.

Playing a music CD that you and your son can bop to will help him to develop stronger leg and back muscles, give him a great sense of how he can move his body and provide you both with joy and a feeling of freedom.

Reading and storytelling

Do you have access to books for your child? Does your child belong to the library?

Choosing appropriate books for the different stages of a pre-school child's development can be challenging. Focusing on what stage your child is at and what they are interested in should help.

Storytelling is an alternative to reading to children. Knowing your child as you do, you can think about the things that

really interest him and tailor a story to meet those interests. It is a great way of calming your boisterous three year old down. It does require some preparation if you are unused to telling stories but you will be amazed how quickly you can gain that skill.

Books and storytelling are vital for language development. Giving children a love of listening to stories and a love of reading provides them with an appreciation of language. When children obtain all this language and information from books and storytelling, they are better equipped to learn to read and to write. Storytelling or reading a book also develops a child's listening skills as he sits paying great attention to his favourite book being read for the millionth time!

Painting and drawing

Providing chalk and crayons for your older toddler enables them to 'make their marks'.

Allow your child to paint using their fingers, children's brushes, old paint brushes or household objects. They can 'paint' using water and a brush on a wall or use a mixture of cornflour and water to finger paint on a table or on a piece of lino. This is easily cleaned up afterwards.

Let's pretend play

Through play, children learn about being a boy or a girl, being part of a family, feeling good or feeling bad. This is all done in a safe way in which they control the story

and the path it will take. Role play is important in helping children put themselves in others' shoes to understand other perspectives.

Gardening

Children derive great pleasure from planting seeds in pots to then be put into the garden. They learn how soil, sun and rain help things to grow. They learn about the importance of nurturing in keeping plants alive. Gardening also soothes and relieves stress. It creates a sense of wonder as they see the sunflower that they planted as a tiny seed grow so high. This sense of wonder extends to wanting to investigate the bugs and insects too. Give your child time to experience this and explore nature.

Television and computer games

Television and computer games may have some part to play in the modern child's development but both need to be controlled and monitored.

It has been shown that extended periods of watching television do not help a child's development. In fact, children who watch too much television tend to be less active and more prone to obesity than those who are engaged in other activities. Although there are programmes that are geared towards the young child, this is an inactive, non interactive way to spend time.

Help your child to decide what they watch and then turn off the television when the programme has finished. While watching these programmes, children should have the opportunity to discuss what they are watching and what meaning it has for them. This requires that you are there to interact with your child while they are watching television.

Playing computer games for short periods of time has been shown to help with visual development and dexterity. However, spending prolonged periods on computers can delay the enhancement of other aspects of development, such as controlling behaviour, developing memory and other learning.

Watching television and playing computer games should make up only one part of your child's activities.

Enriched play opportunities will benefit children more than attempts to have them reading and writing before they go to school.

Final thoughts...

Children develop physically, intellectually, linguistically, socially, spiritually and emotionally through everything that they do and all of their experiences in the world. Your role is to give them the opportunity and time to engage in different experiences that will enhance their knowledge and understanding of life, what it has to offer and help them to become a happy, stable and valuable member of society.

Play has been shown to have a very important role in your child becoming a competent adult. However, play is not just important for the future. Children need the opportunity to play and experience different play activities because that is what children are meant to do.

Above all it is the love and affection along with consistent boundaries and limits that you give your child that will make them feel secure and happy.

Sources of Further Information

Useful contacts

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- ▶ You can find contact details for your local Pre-school Officer at www.hse.ie
- ▶ You can find contact details for your local City/County Childcare committee on www.pobal.ie/childcare

Useful resources

All About Children: Questions Parents Ask

Tony Humphreys (2004) New Leaf, US

Detoxing Childhood: What Parents Need to Know to Raise Happy Successful Children

Sue Palmer (2007) Orion Books, UK

The Needs of Children

Mia Kellmer Pringle (1986)
Routledge, UK

Parenting Is Child's Play: How to Give Your Child the Best Start in Life and Have Fun Doing It

David Coleman (2007) Penguin, Ireland

Play with a Purpose for Under-sevens

Elizabeth M. Matterson (1989)
Penguin, UK

Raising Boys

Steve Biddulph (2003)
HarperThorsons, London

Self Esteem – the key to your child's future

Tony Humphreys (1996)
Gill & Macmillan, Ireland

The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Families

Stephen Covey (1999)
Simon and Schuster, UK

What Worries Parents: The Most Common Concerns of Parents Explored and Explained

Kristina Murrin and Paul Martin (2004)
Random House, UK

A Guide to Games and Activities for 0-5 Year-olds and A Guide to Books for 0-5 Year-olds

can be downloaded from www.barnardos.ie

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