

Early Childhood Development and Learning Matters

Investing in young children not only helps them reach their full potential, but has positive impacts on families, communities and societies around the world.

The first five years of a child's life are the most critical time of growth and learning. In fact, 85% of a child's brain develops by age five, before a child even enters school. When children and their caregivers receive good care, a nutritious diet and learning opportunities during the child's earliest years, children have a better chance to grow up healthy, do well in school, and reach their highest potential.

What is Early Childhood Development?

Early childhood development (or ECD) spans from before birth through age eight. ECD programs help young children survive, thrive, learn and transition successfully to primary school.

Why is it important for children?

Children who participate in early childhood programs are more likely to enroll in school, complete school on time, plan their families, earn higher household incomes, become productive adults and educate their own children, than those children without exposure to early childhood programs.



Kabita Tamang, age 5, attends classes at the early childhood development center in Kavre, Nepal (Photo by Brent Stirton for Save the Children)



Noliet Kambuzuma, age 4, traces letters on the blackboard at the Early Childhood Center in Matau village of Zimbabwe. (Photo by Eileen Burke for Save the Children)

In fact, Save the Children recently found that children involved in preschool programs in Mozambique are much more likely to show interest in math and writing, recognize shapes, and show respect for other children, than those who do not have the same early learning opportunity.

The benefit of preschool in developing countries often has a positive ripple effect on other family members. In a 2012 World Bank study done in rural Africa, parents of children enrolled in a preschool program are more likely to work than those with children who do not attend. And older siblings of these preschoolers are more likely to go to school.

Why is it important for society?

Research shows that early learning programs for babies and toddlers have positive effects that extend beyond the first years of school, well into adulthood and go on to benefit society as a whole.

In the United States, research shows that society sees a savings of \$7 for every \$1 spent on early childhood programs for low-income children.



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Early Childhood Development in the US and Across the Globe

Millions of children in the US and around the world are not prepared to succeed in school. They start school overwhelmed and unprepared to learn, fall quickly behind other students and never catch up, or worse, drop out. Without early childhood education, children living in poverty in the US can fall 18 months behind their peers by age 4. This leaves a devastating imprint on their lives.

- In the United States, 2 out of 3 fourth graders are not reading at grade level. That's nearly 2.5 million fourth graders. There is a dire need for the US to get back on track and improved early childhood care and education can help.
- Globally, more than 200 million children, mostly in Africa and South Asia, will not reach their full potential due to poverty, poor health and nutrition, deficient care and lack of opportunities to learn. And only 15% of children in Africa and 18% of children in Arab states have access to early childhood development programs and education.



Three-year-old Sharifa claps along to a song along with her classmates during the group's morning early childhood development session in Afghanistan. (Photo by Jeff Holt for Save the Children)



Two-year-old Neveah and her sister three-year-old Paiscience White participate in the Early Steps to School Success program at Monarch Elementary in South Carolina. (Photo by Gary Dowd for Save the Children)

Tips for Helping Young Children Get an Early Start on Learning

There are simple, low-cost activities that parents, caretakers and siblings – even the poorest -- can do to help further early childhood development.

These activities are virtually the same, whether families live in the mountain villages of Nepal, the cattle ranches of Uganda, or Appalachian Kentucky. For example:

- Name things the baby hears and sees and tell the baby what is happening
- Provide objects for the baby to touch and use their hands
- Involve the child in daily activities that involve counting, sorting and identifying shapes
- Establish a regular reading routine

For more tips to help young children grow and develop at every age, please visit :

<http://www.campaignforeducationusa.org/tips-for-helping-young-children-get-an-early-start-on-learning/>.

