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## Benefits of Early Childhood Education and Family Support

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Benefits of Early Childhood Education and Family Support

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### Abstract

There have been misconceptions about the purpose of early childhood education and early childhood centers and how the program is designed. Many people believe that the early childhood education process is easy because young children do not really learn, but simply spend their time playing at early childhood centers. As a result, many people believe they can teach their child without the assistance of an early childhood center but what caregivers don't know is that there is more to Early Childhood Education than just playing games. Early Childhood Education helps young children give them a head start on giving the child the skills they need to successful later into their academic career and throughout life. The purpose of this paper is to explain that early childhood education, in conjunction with a strong family or home support system, can accelerate a child's learning and overall development. Both these areas are critical to helping children reach important physical, cognitive, socioemotional and language milestones that are key to their development. This paper will explain how early childhood centers operate to ensure that all children reach their appropriate developmental milestones, while providing broader support to families as well. Finally, this paper will provide a brief explanation of the difference between an early childhood center and a daycare center in order for people to be informed of the differences between how both centers operate and eliminate misconceptions that they are the same.

*Keywords:* Early Childhood, Physical, Socio-Emotional, Cognitive, Language, milestones, family, early childhood center, home support, development

### **Introduction of Early Childhood**

The development of a young child is always considered to be the most crucial period of learning. At a young age, children are beginning to explore and understand their environment along with developing trust with their caregiver. This is where early childhood education begins—with the caregiver. Early childhood education centers are a place where young children, usually from low socioeconomic status, attend and receive curriculum guidance and education in order to prepare for elementary school. Many people mistake an early childhood center for a daycare center but each work differently and the differences will be explained towards the end of this paper. Caregivers play a big role in a young child's academic career. There is evidence that when caregivers are not part of their child's early academic career, the child is more likely to struggle later into their academic careers. Early childhood education, particularly that provided by a center, can accelerate a child's learning development in conjunction with strong home support. These both help children to reach important physical, cognitive, socioemotional and language milestones critical to their development. There also will be an explanation on why it is preferable for a child to attend an early childhood education center rather than a daycare in order for the child to be adequately prepared for elementary school.

### **Purpose of Early Child Education Programs**

Some people wonder what to look for, in terms of curriculum, in an early childhood education program. There are several early childhood programs, or educational approaches, that caregivers can look into like Montessori, Waldorf, Parent Co-Ops, Reggio Emilia, High Scope, and Bank Street. The most well-known early childhood education center, and the program that is

the focus throughout this paper is the Head Start Program. According to Ludwig and Phillips (2008), “Head Start was launched in 1965 as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson’s War on Poverty and provides low-income children aged 3–5 years, and their parents, with schooling, health, nutrition, and social welfare services” (p. 257). Some of the beneficial results noted from attending an early childhood program include reduced grade repetition, less time at special education classes, and improved health. According to Ludwig and Phillips (2008), the average cost of attending a Head Start program is \$9,000 annually per child but there are options for caregivers to have their child attend a Head Start program free. When families are below the state’s poverty level or receive income assistance, families are allowed to enroll their child into Head Start free.

Another way in which a child can attend Head Start free is if a child is in foster care, homeless, or have a teenage mother. Caregivers can try to enroll their child into Head Start without meeting the qualifications noted above but may have a difficult time because Head Start makes families who meet their requirements, families demonstrating some form of need, the first priority. Some states offer other early childhood education centers; however, they may have requirements similar to Head Start and will vary by state. The goal of the state offered early childhood education center is to serve the communities demonstrating the greatest need and that caregivers cannot afford a private center. There have been

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questions on whether quality programs like Head Start are actually legit or truly provide a benefit to caregivers and communities.

According to Currie (2001):

One of the most interesting findings of the FACES study discussed above is that Head Start centers have been found to be of higher quality on average than other preschool programs. The better-than-average rating of Head Start centers in the FACES study appears to reflect the fact that there are very few really bad Head Start programs. In contrast, the Cost, Quality, and Outcomes Study Team (1999, p. 1) found that 11 percent of the sites they surveyed offered care that did not meet minimum levels of quality and that only one in seven child care centers “provides a level of quality that promotes healthy development” (p. 228).

Early childhood programs like Head Start have proven to be a quality program when compared to other preschool programs. Having a curriculum that is created to help children from low-income families make sure that their child is on track developmentally and prepared for kindergarten, is a key reason for Head Start’s success and longevity.

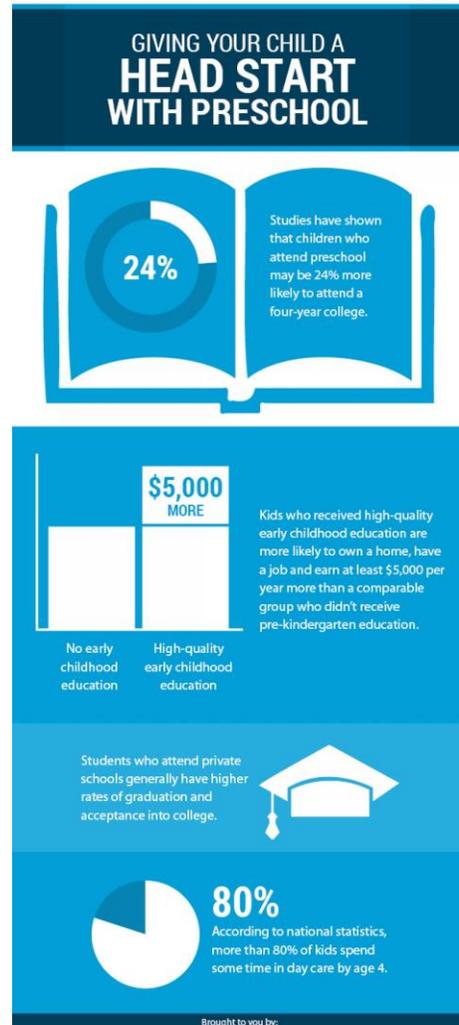
### **Explanation of Early Childhood Education**

The main purpose of early childhood education centers is to help children, especially from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, get a jump start into preparation for kindergarten. Early childhood centers set up their curriculum in a way that helps the children be prepared for kindergarten while also allowing children to explore and question their environment.

Many have questioned whether there is really a benefit to a child attending an early childhood center and research shows there is some evidence of the benefits of attending an early childhood center. Currie (2001) divided the benefits of early childhood centers into three separate categories: short-term, medium-term, and long term. Some short-term benefits Currie (2001) mentions is “improved health and nutrition, being in a safe and nurturing environment, prevention of abuse and neglect, and benefits to other members of family including parents and siblings” (p. 232). A medium-term benefit noted is preventing or reducing the need for special education.

According to Currie (2001) the:

rate of special education is approximately 12% and is reduced by a similar amount as grade repetition. Thus, 28 fewer children are placed in special education. Special education costs approximately \$8000 per year more than regular education and once placed in this track, children are unlikely to rejoin the mainstream. Children are assumed to leave school after 11 years (p. 232).



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As noted in the quote above, another medium-term benefit is preventing grade repetition. Currie (2001), mentions that the

“rate of grade repetition is approximately 20% and is reduced by 28%. Thus, 56 fewer children (out of the 1,000) repeat a grade” (p. 232). Finally, the long-term

<b>Benefits of Early Childhood Education to Highlight Summary</b>	
<b>Parents of Infants and Toddlers</b>	<b>Parents of Preschoolers and Pre-Kindergarteners</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning from other children</li> <li>• Environment structured to allow safe exploration</li> <li>• Opportunity to develop self-help skills</li> <li>• Communication benefits</li> <li>• Social skill development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic benefit in vocabulary, math, and early literacy</li> <li>• Academic advance carries into K12 schooling</li> <li>• Emotion labeling and management</li> <li>• Social-emotional skills established young show lasting effects into adulthood</li> </ul>

benefits of attending an early childhood education program according to Currie (2001) is “Possible improvements in schooling attainment and wages, and reductions in crime, teen pregnancy, etc.” (p. 232). Families can also save money in the long run by sending their child to an early childhood education center. Attending special education and repeating a grade can cost families thousands of dollars and by attending an early childhood program, children are less likely to repeat a grade or attend special education which helps families save money.

Caregivers are a young child’s first teacher so early childhood education centers try to help the entire family of a young child as well. In addition to helping families financially by allowing low-income families to enroll into an early childhood center for free, an additional benefit of an early childhood center to the family unit is health. Early childhood centers bring in doctors and dentists to the centers, mainly for screening, so that children can receive check-ups without families worrying about insurance. It is important for children to have yearly check-ups in order to identify developmental and learning delays to minimize the adverse impact on a young child’s academic career when they start elementary school. Early childhood centers host

events like family training programs that help create bonds between the child and the caregiver and also provides advice to families on how to teach their young child various subjects like reading and writing at home. According to Powell (1982), there are numerous benefits of early childhood programs when events are created or hosted to help children and their families.

Powell (1982) mentions:

There is little doubt that well-administered parent training programs have an immediate effect on children's intellectual performance and development; there are moderate to significant IQ gains for program children compared with control or comparison children. The evidence indicates that children experience gains in language ability, and several programs have demonstrated increases in personal security and in personal cooperation (p. 140).

Early childhood centers often have extended benefits that address needs that are normally provided in the home. Some examples of needs that an early childhood center may provide are food, clothing, job support, shoes, and even frequent home visits to make sure that the child is well taken care of.

Given the numerous benefits of an early childhood program, one may question the focus on children from low-income backgrounds. The reason why programs like Head Start focus on low-income children is because children from low-income families have a higher chance at falling behind developmentally and academically when compared to their peers. Programs like Head Start were established to ensure that children stay on track so that they are ready to attend

kindergarten. Not only do programs like Head Start focus on children, they focus on the entire family as well. According to Love, Kisker, Ross, Schochet, Brooks-Gunn, Boller, Paulsell, Fuligni, and Berlin (2001), low-income families are often struggling financially which may interfere with time spent parenting and focused on child development. To help support these families, programs such as Head Start provide broader assistance to the family in order to stabilize the household more.

The reason early childhood centers want to focus on a child's home life just as much as their academics is because having a strong and healthy home helps a child to be healthy both physically and mentally, which results in the child thriving academically.

In Love et al. (2001), it is noted that a family's resources effects access to healthcare and opportunities to learn. When the household is safer and healthier, children tend to perform better in school and have fewer behavioral issues. As a result of this, assisting parents and caregivers toward better employment and resources is a way of further supporting a child's development.

Early childhood centers provide a great resource to families from lower socio-economic backgrounds through events aimed to help parents and caregivers navigate the struggles of raising a young child. Beyond just educating young children while attending an early childhood center, centers also provide advice to caregivers on ways to help their child meet certain developmental milestones at home by providing activities that they can do prevent their child from falling behind. In this way, early childhood programs also aid minority children and families by making sure they are prepared for kindergarten.

Magnuson and Waldfogel (2005) mentioned that:

children who attend center care or preschool programs enter school more ready to learn, but both the share of children enrolled in these programs and the quality of care they receive differ by race and ethnicity. Black children are more likely to attend preschool than white children but, may experience lower-quality care (p. 164).

While Magnuson and Waldfogel (2005) didn't go into details as to why black children and other minorities have a different outcome when attending an early childhood program, there are inferences as to what leads to a different outcome. One reason is minorities may be treated differently because of stereotyping. There are usually lots of negative stereotyping when it comes to minorities and that usually plays a role in how educators treat a child, impacting the overall educational experience. A child that is receiving less nurturing or understanding from their teacher may be apprehensive in engaging in the learning experience or asking for help when needed, both of these may lead to a reduction in learning. Another reason why minorities may have a different or reduced learning outcome with early childhood programs is because there may be an undiagnosed learning disability. Children who are from a poor and challenging living environment are usually developmentally behind and likely to have either a physical disability or a learning disability. Often there is a lack of quality medical care or a lack of nurturing from the primary caregiver if that individual is working multiple jobs to sustain the family finally or constantly under stress. While programs like Head Start are known to make sure that all children are receiving equal care, the centers cannot control the quality of care outside of the home. Additionally, and as suggested by Magnuson and Waldfogel (2005), families may not be taking advantage of quality early childhood programs, such as Headstart,

and instead may have selected a childcare center or daycare center, failing to understand or appreciate the difference between the two. If the overall quality of education in the childcare center is deficient or in some instances, non-existent, that would lead to an insufficient level of kindergarten readiness with minorities and other children from lower socio- economic backgrounds.

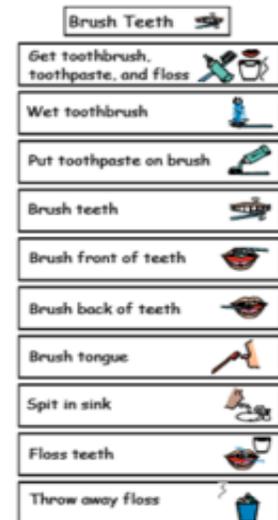
### **Task analysis**

Early childhood centers and programs aim to not only help children with academic success, but to also help children with life skills. Life skills include things such as dressing, tying one's shoes, putting things away, following directions, working well with others (collaborating and compromising), and manners, just to name a few examples. In order to help children, learn basic life skills, educators often use what is referred to as task analysis. Snodgrass, Meadan, Ostrosky, and Cheung (2017) explained that when teaching a skill or task, dividing the skill into smaller steps or milestones makes learning the skill more obtainable. This is what is known as task analysis and this process provides additional support for children struggling with the traditional classroom instruction. For younger children, breaking down lessons is important so that children do not feel overwhelmed and it makes it easier to understand certain content. Some examples of task analysis normally seen in early childhood centers are posters such as a hand-

washing poster hanging over the bathroom sink or a poster showing young children how to hang up their jackets and coats when coming from outside.

Task analysis can be particularly helpful to bilingual children and children with disabilities. For children with disabilities, Snodgrass, Meadan, Ostrosky, and Cheung (2017) noted a study performed by Dr. Montessori, which focused on children identified as having intellectual or learning disabilities. After working with the children for 2 years, teaching through the process of breaking complex skills into a series of smaller, simpler skills, the children were able to learn the complex skills and successfully passed Italy's standardized public-school exams. Dr. Montessori's process was further supplemented by encouraging students to identify their strengths and interests using a variety of enriching activities.

Children who are bilingual can use similar steps to help them improve their English. Using visual supports also makes task analysis easier. Snodgrass, Meadan, Ostrosky, and Cheung (2017) mentioned that using visual supports, such as photographs and picture symbols, for the milestones or smaller steps within a larger task, can assist children in learning on their own and promote independence. In addition to helping bilingual children, depending on a child's age, having a visual support can be very helpful for children who may have a language delay or have trouble reading.



### Parent Involvement

One of the things that can have an effect on a child's academic success is parent involvement. As mentioned earlier, the level of parent or caregiver involvement during the early years of development is very important to a child's life, and particularly their academic success in life. There are numerous reasons why families may not be as involved in their child's life as they should be. One reason why caregivers or family may not be as involved with their child is because

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of their work hours. According to Berthelsen and Walker (2008) “variation in levels of parental involvement in children’s learning at home and at school is strongly influenced by family socioeconomic status (SES)” (p. 37). Parents or caregivers who come from low socioeconomic backgrounds are more focused on making sure that the family has money to maintain their physical needs like food, shelter, and clothes. Caregivers who are struggling financially may not think about helping their child with their academic needs like reading and writing, and instead defer that to the school system alone to address. This can lead to the child struggling academically as they grow older since they due to the lack of support from their families which is required to be successful in school.

There are situations where home life can be dangerous for the child and this would clearly impact a child’s ability to succeed academically. A child who experiences direct abuse or

neglect will suffer academically. In addition to a child suffering from physical pain that impairs learning, a child that is fearful or suffering from low self-esteem will have difficulty focusing on content and this will also affect a child's academic success. A lack of safety will make it nearly impossible to focus on academic work. Asawa, Hansen and Flood (2008) note a reason why maltreatment happens at home is because "lack of parenting skills and knowledge of child development have been associated with child maltreatment risk, with high-risk parents exhibiting inappropriate expectations of their children and frequently using ineffective child management techniques" (p. 78). Additionally, "marital discord and partner violence risk factors as well, given that they negatively impact parenting skills, increase the level of stress in the home, and lead to feelings of isolation, all of which increase the risk of child maltreatment" (p. 78). As a result, children who are experiencing either abuse or neglect are likely to have physical, cognitive and social-emotional developmental delays.

This is where early childhood education centers can aid the child and to the family. Not only do early childhood education centers help a young child academically, they also make sure that every child is meeting their developmental benchmarks as well. Unlike daycares (in some cases), teachers who work at an early childhood center are required to have post-secondary education or certifications in early childhood education, making them more qualified to identify developmental delays. In addition to identifying developmental delays, teachers in an early childhood education center have the skills required to recommend solutions, helping a child to avoid academic challenges later on in life.

In an early childhood center, teachers can provide protection for a child. Teachers are more likely to identify whether a child has been abused or neglected and will call Child

Protective Services (CPS) or appropriate authorities when needed to. Early childhood centers also conduct what's called home visits. A home visit is when a worker, usually from the center, comes to visit a child's home and make sure the home environment is set where the child can thrive. During the home visit the teacher or early childhood center worker may interview the caregivers to get an update on what has been happening around the home and in the child's environment. This additional insight will better aid the teacher in addressing the child's academic and developmental needs.

The importance of having programs that provide parent training in order to help children and their families was noted earlier. An example of another program that can provide this critical training is the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA).

Powell (1982) mentioned that:

The Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), was formed in 1897 as the first nationwide parent education organization. One of the major goals of the early PTA was to work with poor families. Mother's club for poor women, supervised by PTA members, were formed to provide a forum for disseminating up-to-date knowledge on childcare and family life (p. 137).

While the PTA is an organization that starts when a child begins their elementary education, the goals and activities of the PTA aim to link formal education with the child's home life in ways similar to the early childhood center, confirming the important role that parental or caregiver involvement plays in the education and development of children. In some instances, early childhood centers, namely those that support children through the age of 12 years, continue to

provide a bridge between school and home, reinforcing what is learned in the classroom and assisting with homework in after-school programs.

### **Economics**

When it comes to the benefits of early childhood education, one thing that people do not think much about is economics. People may be familiar enough with early childhood programs to realize that families who are below the state's poverty line or meet other financial requirements are eligible for reduced or waived tuition to early childhood centers but there are additional ways that early childhood centers can help families financially. One way is federal funding.

Rolnick and Grunewald (2003) mentions:

A well-managed and well-funded early childhood development program, or ECDP, provides such support. Current ECDPs include home visits as well as center-based programs to supplement and enhance the ability of parents to provide a solid foundation for their children. Some have been initiated on a large scale, such as federally funded Head Start, while other small-scale model programs have been implemented locally, sometimes with relatively high levels of funding per participant” (p. 14).

## Child Care in State Economies

TALKING POINTS

2019 Update



United States

For FY2018 and FY2019, Congress approved large increases in child care funding allocated to states. For example, FY2018 funding for the U.S. was an increase of \$2.4 billion – providing an opportunity to both strengthen the quality of child care and to increase access for low-income families with children. The FY2018 increase was maintained in FY2019 (with a slight increase for states).

**Quality Child Care Matters!**

- Quality child care is essential to the safety and healthy development of children, particularly in the school readiness of low-income children. In the U.S., 20.3% of children under age 5 (about 3,932,969) live in poverty.
- Child care is not just a key work support for parents, but it is also critical for the healthy development of children to ensure they start school ready to learn.
- Child care as an industry has an economic impact on states – for example, in the U.S., industry revenue combined with spillover effects (additional spending) have a \$99.3 billion impact on state economies.

**The Child Care Industry Affects the Economy**

- Throughout the U.S., there are 674,332 market-based child care providers with revenue of \$47.2 billion. This includes 599,018 sole proprietors (family child care home-based providers) and 75,314 child care centers.
- In terms of jobs, 1,524,753 home-based providers and wage and salary employees in the child care sector are estimated to support about 507,089 workers in other industries for a total jobs impact of 2,031,843 throughout the U.S.
- The \$24.1 billion in employee compensation and home-based child care provider earnings supports about \$15.73 billion in additional earnings across the country for a total earnings impact of \$39.85 billion.

**Child Care Usage in the United States**

- About 53.9% of children birth to 5 in the U.S. are in some type of non-parental care for at least 10 hours every week.
- About 15,056,515 children under age 15 are in paid care – 6,425,592 (32.2%) under age 5 and 8,630,923 (21%) between the ages of 5 and 14.
- The average annual cost of care for an infant is \$10,759 in a child care center and \$7,887 in a family child care home. Center-based infant care is 19.4% of state median income.
- Since 2010, family child care homes have declined from 752,212 to 599,018 in 2016 – a decline of 20.4%. For working families, the decline in home-based care reduces the availability of the least expensive care option for families.

**Child Care Link to the Economy**

- Access to affordable child care increases labor force participation and supports state and local economic growth.
- Access to affordable child care supports parents seeking additional education and training, which contributes to higher earnings over an individual's lifetime.
- Increased subsidy payments trigger state level responses in wage rates, the mix of low- and high-skilled labor used in the state, prices of goods and services, and access to quality programs for children.

Sources: Committee for Economic Development of The Conference Board, *Child Care in State Economies: 2019 Update*; 2016 U.S. Census Bureau Economic Census and County Business Pattern data and non-employer statistics data; Current Population Survey for the 2015-2017 period; 2016-2017 National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; Child Care Aware of America 2017 child care rates, *the U.S. and the High Cost of Child Care* (2018); and FY2018 Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) funding, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.



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A well-funded early childhood center can do wonders for a child. Having one can allow a child and their families more access to resources and better care for the child. Rolnick and Grunewald

(2003) mentioned that “without support during these early years, a child is more likely to drop out of school, receive welfare benefits and commit crime” (p. 13). Another way early childhood can help with finances is decreasing repetition in school and special education. Children from low-income families are more likely to repeat and have some kind of developmental delay and by receiving intervention at an early age, it gives a child a head start into becoming successful later in life.

### **Parent-Teacher Relationships**

Another important relationship that will make a difference in a child’s education is the parent-teacher relationship. Many people understand that caregivers play a big role in their child’s education but sometimes they forget that teachers play a big role in a child’s education as well.

Kaneez, Haider, and Ali (2013) mentioned that:

A motivated, enthusiastic, competent and well-trained teacher can promote liberated early childhood education in Pakistan. Furthermore it is a teacher who can convince the people that parents and other adults should supervise and guide the activities of young children but education and especially early childhood education should center’s around the developmental needs and interest of the young children rather than the adults or teachers centered (p. 143).

Normally it is the teacher’s responsibility to make sure that they find a way to connect with their student’s families. Knopf and Swick (2007) mention that “A key aspect of the approach

presented is to capitalize on family strengths in developing positive and empowering relations with families” (p. 419).

Knopf and Swick (2007) also note that jobs today putting more demands on parents and as a result impacting a child’s homelife. Parents are required to work longer hours, attend social events after work, travel for work, all of which results in parents spending less time with children. These additional work demands create a conflict with parents trying to balance time with their children. One way that a teacher can create a relationship with a child’s family is to understand their home life. Once a teacher understands the family’s home life, the teacher can help the family plan out how they can help their child with their academic work and also maintain contact to make sure that everyone is still on the same page. Both Knopf and Swick (2007), indicate that it is important that teachers be creative in establishing contact and involvement with families due to busy schedule of families. Some examples from Knopf and Swick (2007) of ways that teachers can communicate with families include home visits, phone calls, emails, parent conference, focus groups, and a family communication journal. It is important that teachers at early childhood centers establish a way to maintain communication with families and make sure that every family engages in order for the children to improve their academic work and also their cognitive and social-emotional development.

It is important that parents and teachers are on the same when it comes to their roles in a child’s education. Knopf and Swick (2007) stated that “Research has clearly shown that strong parent–teacher relationships lead to increased parental involvement” (p. 291). More often there are cases where both teachers and parents are not on the same page which causes conflict with not only the teacher and parent but the child as well. Many adults do not realize that young

children can tell when there is tension between their caregivers (parent and teacher) and they may feel stuck in between the tension. Results of a good parent-teacher relationship include parents gaining confidence in themselves as partners in educating their child, parents view teachers in a more light, parents and teachers have more meaningful involvement with the children and each other, and teachers see parental involvement in more positive and diverse ways (Knopf & Swick, 2007).

Establishing a parent-teacher relationship can help develop a relationship between teacher and child and make learning much easier for the child. Knopf and Swick (2007) note that teachers who project a positive attitude toward the parent and the child and who are responsive to both the parent and child needs, appear to create a respectful relationship with the parent. Similarly, when parents fail to establish a relationship of respect and trust with their child's teacher, they tend to view the education as sub-par and lacking which may result in dis-enrolling their children. Knopf and Swick (2007) generally describe how the difference between a child succeeding or failing academically is dependent in part on the parent- teacher relationship. It is important for parents and teachers to create a relationship so that the child can receive the best educational care.

### **How Early Childhood Education & Strong Home Support Promotes Language Development**

Language is the most important skill one needs to master. Peterson, McIntyre, and Forsyth (2016) share that “language is the foundation for learning to read and write (Dockrell, Lindsay & Palikara, 2011) and is the means through which children make sense of their world”

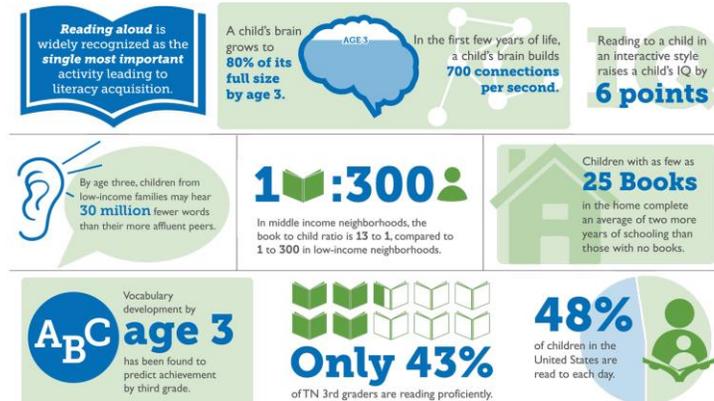
(p. 12). Understanding language can help young children improve their communication and literacy skills. In an early childhood education and preschool programs, there are at least 20 kids in the classroom from age three to five at different language development skills. People usually wonder how children can learn language in a classroom when there are children at different developmental milestones. One way that children, especially the younger children, can improve their language skills is to listen to people around them that have more advanced language development skills. In other words, children learn a lot from other children. To some people it may not make sense, but this is recommended because children need to add more vocabulary words as they are beginning to improve their language skills. Peterson, McIntyre, and Forsyth (2016) pointed out that “Encouraging children to take the lead and initiate conversations enhances children’s self-confidence and pleasure in communicating orally with others and provides them with more opportunities to learn language” (p. 12). By having a three-year old around four and five-year old children, they can gain confidence in communicating and add more vocabulary into their language development.

A strong home support also plays a big role in a child’s development of language skills. At home, caregivers can help their child’s language development by reading, writing and asking open-ended questions (questions that solicit more than just a yes or no answer) in order to engage them in using their language skills.

According to Ma, Shen, Krenn, Hu, and Yuan (2015), the intellectual involvement of parents, such as reading books, solving math problems, and discussing current social events, exposes children to mentally challenging activities that encourage children to achieve a higher level of cognition or thinking.

Because children spend a large portion of their time at home, it is critical that the caregiver engages in conversation and interaction with their children that will aid them in using and improving their language skills and as a result improve their language development. Peterson, McIntyre, & Forsyth (2016)

mentioned that encouraging parents to interact with their children in their first language at home and promoting children's first language in the classroom is important to providing a foundation for learning English. By



frequently communicating with children in their first language, along with helping them read and write English, the child is on the right track to having much improved language skills overall.

Another important aspect in a young child's language development is creating a language rich environment. Justice (2004) explains that "A language-rich classroom environment is one in which children are exposed deliberately and recurrently to high-quality verbal input among peers and adults and in which adult-child verbal interactions are characterized by high levels of adult responsiveness" (p. 37).

In the article "*Creating Language Rich Preschool Classroom Environments*", Justice (2004) mentions there are five elements that meets the needs of a language rich environment and first element noted is exposure. According to Justice (2004), "Exposure means that children experience high-quality linguistic input both passively and actively within the classroom" (p.

37). The second one is deliberateness. “Deliberateness means that the adults in the classroom are intentional in the language that they choose to use with children” (p. 37). The third is recurrence. “Recurrence refers to the importance of repetition to children's acquisition of important linguistic concepts. This point is demonstrated well in studies that have investigated young children's acquisition of new vocabulary words when someone reads storybooks to them” (p.37). The fourth element needed for language rich environment is high-quality input. “High-quality input means that adult language in the classroom is characterized by diverse content, form, and use” (p. 37). Finally, the last element is adult responsiveness. “Adult responsiveness means that adults frequently and consistently respond to a child's communicative acts in a way that is sensitive to the child's developing competencies” (p. 37). There are ways that both teachers and caregivers can provide a language rich environment. Having resources with pictures and words, like posters and books in rooms where young children spend the majority of their time is a key strategy employed for providing a language rich environment. Teachers and caregivers can put up new words on a weekly basis so that young children can continue to expand their vocabulary. Picture books can help with a child’s language development as well since a child can figure out a word, they might not be familiar with by using the pictures in the book as a guide. As mentioned earlier, communicating with children helps their language development progress. Talking to adults or older siblings can expose young children to a wider variety of vocabulary that enhances their language skills. Using positive reinforcement, such as verbally praising good behavior, helps a child with language by encouraging the child to learn more.

A language rich environment can help bilingual children or children who have English as their second language. By using pictures hung on the wall or referenced in a book, children are able to associate the image with words, helping them to expand their language skills and learn English. Peterson, McIntyre, and Forsyth (2016) noted “A large portion of a child’s language learning occurs during the first five years of life” (p. 12).



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As a result, it is important for early childhood center teachers and caregivers to find ways to introduce language to children at an early age, improving their ability to learn throughout their life.

Early childhood education centers do many things to help promote a child’s language development. One of the main things early childhood centers do to promote language is promote reading skills. It is important for children to develop reading skills in order for children to learn more vocabulary and to thrive academically.

According to the website [talkingkids.org](http://talkingkids.org):

Children typically speak their **first word** somewhere around **12 months**. Some children, however, take up to 16 months to utter that long-awaited **first word** and this is still considered to be within the range of typical. At **18 months**, children typically use around **50** (but we do not worry too much unless they have fewer than 10-



20). At **24 months**, children usually have an expressive vocabulary of **200-300 words** (but we do not worry too much unless they have fewer than 50). At **3 years**, children can have anywhere from **500-1,100 words** in their vocabulary. By **5-7 years**, children have an expressive vocabulary of **3000-5000 words** (“How Many Words Should My Child Be Saying? A Quick Guide to Vocabulary Development,” 2011).

Educators at some point during the day, whether it during group time, one-on-one, or during indoor play, spend time reading children books about various topics. Educators usually ask the children the meaning of a word they are familiar with to reinforce vocabulary already learned. Similarly, an educator or teacher might ask a child about a less familiar word in order to provide an explanation in hopes that a child will retain the meaning and add the new word to their vocabulary. The latter also supports the cognitive development of a child as well. Teachers and

educators also engage in parallel-talk and self-talk. Parallel-talk is a process employed where a caregiver or teacher talks about what a child is doing. An example of parallel-talk is “you are picking up the block”. With self-talk, a caregiver or teacher tells a child what they are doing. An example of self-talk is “I am cleaning the kitchen”. Using both parallel-talk and self-talk can help children who are non-verbal gain valuable language skills and a broader understanding of their surroundings, in addition to helping all children expand their vocabulary.

### Physical Development

An important developmental aspect that applies to every child but is often overlooked by teachers and educators is physical development.

Lu and Montague (2015) shared that childcare centers are the most influential

factor in children’s physical activity and the earlier habits are formed, the more likely they will continue throughout life. As a result, early childhood centers play a significant role in promoting physical activity that will last a lifetime and potentially slow or reverse the obesity trend. Nonetheless, this critical benefit to early childhood centers is still misunderstood or significantly understated.

Recently, people have been hearing about the cancellation of recess and physical education (PE) classes and do not think much about it. Given the news reports of the growing obesity epidemic in the United States, one should realize that poor habits start at an early age.



The cancelation of recess and PE during the early stages of life only promotes a sedentary life, which contributes to obesity and other health issues.

Lu and Montague (2015) note the growing global childhood trend toward obesity and unhealthy lifestyles is a concern and has produced a generation of children where their life expectancy is shorter than that of their parents. Overweight children are more likely to be overweight adults due to insufficient physical activity that continues from childhood into adulthood.

According to the Center for Disease Control and Preventions (CDC), about 13.9% children from two to five years of age are obese. When it comes to socioeconomic status, CDC mentioned “Obesity prevalence was 18.9% among children and adolescents aged 2-19 years in the lowest income group, 19.9%

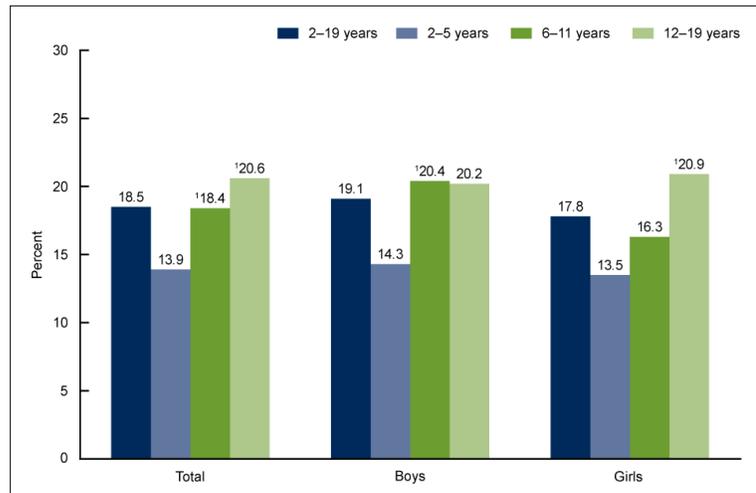
among those in the middle-income group, and 10.9% among those in the highest income group” (Center for Disease Control and

Preventions, 2016). The statistics show that children from a low socioeconomic background

continue to be at a high risk

developmentally. Poorer education and access to information contributes to obesity. Enrollment in an early childhood education center can offset this negative trend by providing an avenue for

Figure 3. Prevalence of obesity among youth aged 2–19 years, by sex and age: United States, 2015–2016



\*Significantly different from those aged 2–5 years.  
NOTE: Access data table for Figure 3 at: [https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db288\\_table.pdf#3](https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db288_table.pdf#3).  
SOURCE: NCHS, National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, 2015–2016.

caregivers to receive vital information regarding the health and overall development of their child.

Lu and Montague (2015) observed that early childhood centers are in an optimal position to prevent childhood obesity because children are still learning their formative behaviors, and this is the best time to teach children the benefit of physical activity. When children learn at this age, there are learning behaviors that continue into adulthood. As a result, it is important to make childhood centers a place where children develop positive (enjoyable) feeling about physical activity, which will help them carry those positive associations through to adulthood.

At early childhood centers it is relatively easy to make sure that a child's physical needs are addressed. Going outside and playing is the most common way of making sure that children are getting their physical developmental needs met. Early childhood centers and daycares all set a schedule where children regularly go out to the playground for physical activity. When the weather is bad, children often play games or engage in other indoor activities that involves some kind of physical movement. In addition to playing games, children may engage in stretching or dancing for physical activity. Early childhood educators make sure that there is some kind of physical activity in their lesson plans since young children learn best by doing hands-on activities.

When it comes to the benefits of physical activity, Lu and Montague (2015) note the benefits to mental health that come from physical activity is not always recognized. Research has shown that physical activity improves one's mood. Similarly, active play can have a positive influence on child's mood, social skills and ability to focus and learn in the classroom. With

active play, children tend to have less anxiety and better sleeping habits, which improves the learning and development outcome in the classroom.

Regular physical activities can help educators evaluate a child's gross motor movements and skills. Gross motor skills involve using most of the muscles. Examples of gross motor skills include running, walking, jumping, and crawling. Another type of motor skill that children need to master is fine motor skills. Fine motor skills are motor skills that involve using a few muscles. Anything that involves using one's hands, such as coloring, is an example of fine motor movement. Teaching children how to grip and handle objects like scissors and pencils is important because they are life skills that will be used repeatedly.

There are additional benefits to children when they are involved in physical activity. Physical activity helps children meet other developmental milestones like cognitive, language, and social-emotional.

Lu and Montague (2015) indicate there is a misconception that physical activity only results in physical benefits, which takes away from much needed academic time in the classroom. Studies have shown a variety of beneficial effects of physical activity on the brain including, improvements to memory and attention. Physical activity can aid children in the development of language and provide socio-emotional benefits as well. Since physical activity mainly takes place outdoors during recess or free time, children have time to interact with their peers, which can help with language development and it also makes children more relaxed which can help with social-emotional development.

There has been evidence that physical activity helps children with their physical and mental mindset, but some educators often ignore the importance of physical activity, mistaking it for something that only interferes with classroom time. When it comes to early childhood development, the most important approach to learning often involves



having children engage in active play. Active play is engaging in hands-on activity that allows children to use their five senses. Many children learn best when learning lesson involves some kind of active play, which also makes learning fun for children and educators. A key goal for teachers and educators should be to develop lesson plans that are fun because it will increase the engagement of the children and aid in retention. At early childhood centers, educators make sure that children get as much active play as often as they can so that children will stay motivated to engage in physical activity and be excited to learn. For caregivers, a key strategy for maintaining physical activity is making sure children are involved in extracurricular activities, such as dance, organized sports, scouts, etc. Engaging children at a young age allows them to develop a passion for being physically active and encourages them to find things that they enjoy and will carry into adulthood.

Nutrition is another key ingredient to physical development. Lu and Montague (2015) noted that early childhood development centers play a critical role in fostering healthy food

habits and sound motor skills. Without nutrition, children won't be able to do physical activities and won't be able to meet certain developmental milestones.

According to Ruel and Hoddinott (2008), health and nutritional status in preschool children is often evaluated based on a child's height, given their age and gender. Stunting, or a low height or weight for age, is often associated with nutritional deficiency.

Ruel and Hoddinott (2008), noted "...the window of opportunity for addressing child nutritional needs in ways that produce healthy, productive adults lasts from conception through age two. After that, the effects of undernutrition are largely irreversible" (p. 2). It is important that young children's nutritional needs are satisfied, or they can suffer developmentally and may have a difficult chance of recovering later in life. Many children who are from low-income families are at risk for malnourishment according to Rue and Hoddinott. (2008). Both attributed the link between low-income families and malnourishment to "...underlying causes include poverty, food insecurity, low education, inadequate maternal and childcare, gender inequality, and the lack of access to high-quality health care, hygiene, and sanitation services" (Rue & Hoddinott, 2008, p. 5). For low-income families, enrolling their child at an early childhood center may be the solution needed to ensure proper nutrition is received.

Early childhood centers tend to provide children with nutritionally balanced meals that may not be available to them at home, especially for children from disadvantaged background or low socioeconomic status. It is well known that nutritious or high-quality food is more expensive than processed foods or fillers. When it comes to addressing malnutrition at home Rue and Hoddinott (2008) indicated that there are three types of programs aimed at helping to eliminate poverty. Those three programs are agricultural interventions, cash-transfer programs,

and credit-with-education programs. The three programs typically target women (who tend to head the household) and provide training or financial resources. These programs often aim to provide information regarding nutrition and feeding practices in an effort to intervene in a child's life as early as possible and provide more balanced nutrition. Balanced and nutritional food offered by early childhood centers allow children the opportunity to thrive physically and academically.

Early childhood education centers engaging in a hands-on learning curriculum and active play help children learn but also help children with their physical development as well. Hands-on and active play work very similar when in early childhood education centers. Both involve letting providing a safe environment in which children interact with each other and are encouraged to explore their environment. For children who come from a low socioeconomic

background, being involved in play can help their physical development and their mental health as well. Engaging in active play helps teachers and educators ensure that children are meeting certain milestones for physical



development, such as being able to run, walk, jump and crawl. Additionally, the early childhood center provides a safe and secure place, away from the stress and tension that may exists in their home environment. Safety and security, including knowing where your next nutritional meal comes from, plays a critical role in a child's ability to learn and thrive.

### **Cognitive Development**

Cognitive development refers to understanding how a child's brain develops. To understand cognitive development, it is important to understand that young children are egocentric, which means they do not understand another person's point of view. According to Jean Piaget, a developmental theorist who is well known for creating the Theory of Cognitive Development Stages, young children think that everyone can see, feel, and understand how they feel or view things from their same perspective (McLeod, 2018).

Miller (2006) provided:

Because preschoolers' thinking is often dominated by their own perceptions, they can become upset when they do not understand that the same thing can look quite different depending on the circumstance. For example, when lemonade is poured into Abby's tall, thin glass and then the same amount poured into Anika's short, wide glass, Anika demands to have as much as Abby. There's no reasoning with her until she has a tall glass, too (p. 63).

When it comes to understanding a child's cognitive development, educators and teachers usually rely on Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development in order to adjust their lesson plans to help children learn and maximize brain development. In Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development there are four stages which are Sensorimotor, Preoperational, Concrete Operational, and Formal Operational. When it comes to early childhood, educators and caregivers should

### Piaget's Stages of Cognitive Development



<b>Sensorimotor</b>	Birth to 2 years	Infants know the world through their senses and through their actions. For example, they learn what dogs look like and what petting them feels like.
<b>Preoperational</b>	2 - 7 years	Toddlers and young children acquire the ability to internally represent the world through language and mental imagery. They also begin to be able to see the world from other people's perspectives, not just from their own.

focus on Sensorimotor and/or Preoperational stages. Sensorimotor begins from birth through two years. In the Sensorimotor stage infants are beginning to learn object permanence. Object permanence is when a child understands that a certain object, like a toy, exist but is not in their view. For caregivers and educators, playing peek-a-boo with an infant can serve as a test as to whether the infant understands object permanence. Younger infants, between 0-5 months, do not understand object permanence but older infants should. The second stage in Piaget's Theory is the Preoperational stage which typically occurs from two to seven years of age. The Preoperational stage is when children learn during symbolic play. Preschool age children learn best through pretend play which is why active play is very important at that age.

It was mentioned earlier how active play can help a child's physical development in addition to aiding a child's cognitive development. Children being involved in active play tend to develop problem-solving skills, leadership skills and demonstrate a willingness to work with others which is important throughout life. When a child is physically healthy, it helps with their cognitive development since a healthy lifestyle leads to a healthy mind. To elaborate, when a child is physically healthy, they are more likely to be more focused and more involved in classroom activities, which helps improve their cognitive development. When it comes to cognitive development for preschool-age children, it is considered to be the most important developmental area because children are starting to learn about the world and will ask questions about their environment. At this point in a preschooler's life, it is important for caregivers, a child's first teacher, to give the child the correct knowledge and understanding in order for a child to develop an understanding of the world around them. At an early childhood center the curriculum is established where children can learn more about the things that they may have seen

or experienced. Preschoolers will also begin to learn to read, write, understand numbers, and vocabulary which are things they need to be prepared for kindergarten.

Pretend play or symbolic function plays a key role in cognitive development as well. Symbolic function is when a child uses an object or action to represent another object. An example of symbolic function is when a child uses a television remote control as a telephone. Every day we see children pretend to be doctors, race car drivers, firefighters, etc. and while many people will write it off as a silly phase or playing silly games, in reality pretend play can help a child with their cognitive development. According to Bergen (2002), research shows the effectiveness of play in promoting problem-solving skills. One study found that giving children divergent problem-solving training resulted in an increase in figural problem-solving ability. In another study, it was noted that pretend play training resulted in an increase in thematic play and in semantic problem solving, whereas the cooperative play groups increased in cooperative play and on both semantic and figural problem solving.

What Bergen is saying is that one reason why pretend play helps a child's cognitive development is because it helps them develop problem-solving skills. The benefits of pretend play are very similar to active play in that it gives a child leadership, problem-solving skills, and teaches them to effectively communicate with others. Pretend play or symbolic function can help with language development as well and specifically helps with receptive and expressive language. Receptive language is the ability to understand words and language, which means understanding the information given to them. If a child doesn't master receptive language or has a receptive language disorder, they will have trouble responding to certain questions and requests because they struggle to understand what is being said to them. Express language is how a person communicates their wants and needs. Children who have an expressive language disorder may need to rely on body language to understand what others are trying to communicate. If a child has a receptive language disorder, a caregiver or teacher can minimize



verbal instructions, leverage visual aids, repeat visual instruction when used, make eye contact, and play Simon Says to try to aid in making sure the child understands. If a child has an expressive language disorder, a caregiver can improve their expressive language by reading stories to them, talking about a certain picture that they see, singing songs, doing day-to-day activities and have them either write or draw what they have seen, or learned together. Another cognitive development milestone is understanding measurements. You may have seen kids fuss about a beverage poured in a cup that is not their normal cup. A child may perceive the quantity of their drink to be less than what it would be in their normal cup when in actuality the amount is the same. As preschoolers grow, their cognitive perception or understanding grows and they soon begin to understand measurements and quantities. They will begin to understand volume regardless of the cup or container in which their beverage is poured.

Another important developmental theory that involves a child's cognitive development is Information Process Theory. Information Process Theory refers to the way people process information. Psychologists compare the process of Information Processing Theory to the way a computer processes information that comes through a mainframe system. Psychologists explain this analogy further by referring to three different stages. The first stage is input. The information is introduced to the computer. The second stage is storage. The information introduced is now stored, similar to how your memory retains information. The last stage is output. When needed, the computer will release information that was previously saved in the computer's system, similar to how the brain pulls information stored in memory for recitation. How Information Process Theory connects with cognitive development is that psychologists believe that humans

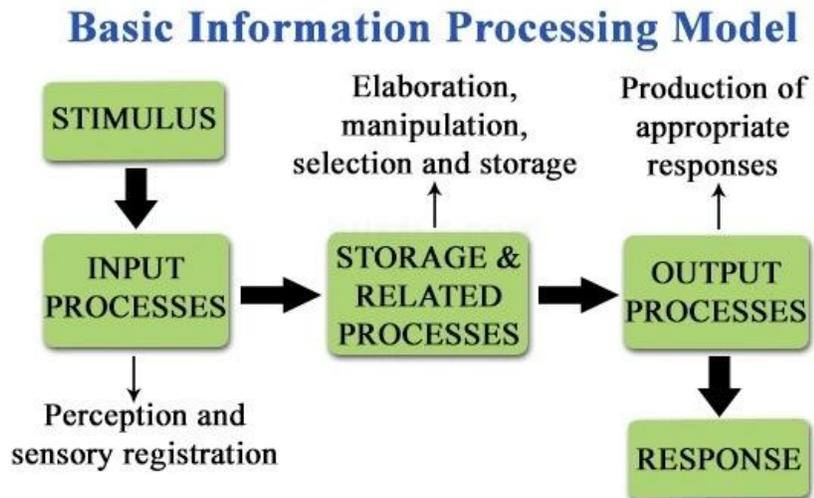
process information the same way that computers do, as provided in the stages previously mentioned.

Information Processing Theory connects with early childhood in that as young children begin to learn more about

their environment, they are storing information in a way that a computer does. The first stage, which is input, begins when a child asks a question or hears

information that they have

never learned before. Then, the new information is stored in their brain (or memory) which represents storage and then when needed to, a child will be able to recall information that they have just learn which would represent output. Information Processing can help young children further develop their memory skills. Since young children learn best at doing hands-on activities, they will have a much easier time recalling information that they either learned through active play or acting or physical manipulation. It also helps if both teachers and caregivers keep routines as consistent as possible in order for children to memorize the routines without being reminded. In other words, children learn or process information through repetition. Young children also have a very short attention span which means that when it comes to giving a child new information, it is important to keep it short and to the point or they will zone out.



Another thing to know when it comes to a young child's cognitive development is that they do not understand what is real and what is pretend. Caregivers and educators usually encounter children who believe in imaginary figures like Santa Claus, the Tooth Fairy, and even imaginary friends. Many people play along with the child in order to keep them happy and they also know that children usually grow out of this phase. There have been cases, when it comes to imaginary friends or objects that children take it more seriously than they should, such as believing in an imaginary friend or fearing something that doesn't exist. In situations where a child cannot distinguish between what is real and what is imaginary, caregivers and/or educators can develop creative solutions to help the children cope such as keeping them involved with their peers as much as possible.

Young children go through a period where they do not understand that their thought process may differ from someone else's thinking. Theory of Mind is when a person understands that others have different beliefs, perspective and intentions from theirs. This is somewhat opposite to being egocentric because egocentric means that a child is not able to see one person's point of view or a point of view that differs from theirs. Infants, toddlers, and younger preschool children, like three-year olds, won't understand the Theory of Mind concept since they are too young but around four and five, children will understand that people's view and mindset are different from their own. According to Lowery (2016), who works as a speech-language pathologist for Hanen Centre which helps children with language development, young children are learning the skills they need to understand the Theory of Mind at an early age.

Lowery (2016) list the skills needed to understand Theory of Mind, which includes:

- Paying attention to people and copying them,

- Recognizing others’ emotions and using words to express them (“happy”, “sad”, “mad”),
- Realizing that they are different from other people and have different likes/dislikes from others,
- Knowing that people act according to the things they want,
- Understanding the causes and consequences of emotions (such as throwing a toy will make your teacher or caregiver mad), and
- Pretending to be someone else (like a doctor or a cashier) when they play

Lowery (2016) notes that “Between ages 4-5, children really start to think about others’ thoughts and feelings, and this is when true theory of mind emerges” (p.1).

Children develop theory of mind skills in the following order:

**Understanding “wanting”** – Different people want different things, and to get what they want, people act in different ways, **Understanding “thinking”** –

Different people have different, but potentially true, beliefs about the same thing. People’s actions are

## LIFESPAN DEVELOPMENT

### Cognitive Development in Early Childhood

- Theory of Mind and Metacognition
  - Developmental Transition in False Belief Understanding
    - By age 3: Children understand that two people can believe different things.
    - Four-year-olds: Understand that people who are presented with different versions of the same event develop different beliefs.
    - By age 4 or 5: Children become aware that they and other people can hold false beliefs.

based on what they think is going to happen.

**Understanding that “seeing leads to knowing”** – If you haven’t seen something, you do not necessarily know about it. If someone hasn’t seen something, they will need extra information to understand.

**Understanding “false beliefs”** – Sometimes people believe things that are not true, and they act according to their beliefs, not according to what is really true.

**Understanding “hidden feelings”** – People can feel a different emotion from the one they display (Lowery, p. 1).

There have been questions on whether or not Theory of Mind can be taught. Lowery indicates that caregivers may be able to teach their child the skills needed for Theory of Mind by engaging in the activities and developing the skills listed above. However, most believe Theory of Mind develops over time in a child and is not part of a prescribed curriculum or lesson plan.

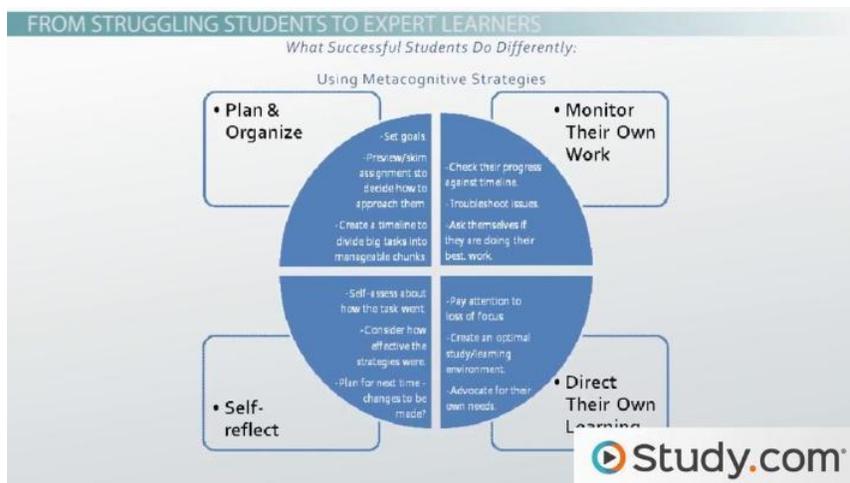
There is a cognitive milestone that will help young children understand self-thinking, referred to as Metacognition.

According to Chick (2019), who is an assistant director for the Center for Teaching at Vanderbilt University:

Metacognition is, put simply, thinking about one’s thinking. More precisely, it refers to the processes used to plan, monitor, and assess one’s understanding and performance. Metacognition includes a critical awareness of a) one’s thinking and learning and b) oneself as a thinker and learner (p. 1).

Chick (2019) also mentioned that:

Metacognitive practices help students become aware of their strengths and weaknesses as learners, writers, readers, test-takers, group members, etc. A key element is recognizing the limit of one's knowledge or ability and then figuring out how to expand that knowledge or extend the ability. Those who know their strengths and weaknesses in these areas will be more likely to “actively monitor their learning strategies and resources and assess their readiness for particular tasks and performances (p. 1).



It is important that young children are taught the skills needed to understand metacognition and to understand what challenges young children deal with that would affect their

metacognition skills. Jacobson (2019) believed that one problem that young children are faced with that affects their metacognition skills is impatience. Young children do not have a long attention span and as a result they often get frustrated easily and may give up on something they are working on.

Jacobson (2019) notes:

In order to thrive, kids need to be able to make the transition from the negative “I can’t” to the proactive “How can I?” To do that, they need to think about why

they're stuck, what's frustrating them, what they would need to get unstuck. They need to think about their own thinking (p. 1).

Jacobson (2019) goes on to note that kids are less likely to tackle challenges if they are taught or told that they are good at some skills and bad at others. In order to manage the frustration that young preschoolers naturally suffer from, it is important that children are taught or encouraged to address challenges. Children, through assistance, guidance and reward, can be taught to understand how to manage and solve problems on their own. Children who develop the skills to understand Metacognition are able to self-regulate, meaning they are able to control their emotions, and try to create a plan to solve an issue that they are going through. Preschool-age children do not naturally have the skills to understand Metacognition since they have an egocentric mindset (to begin with) and believe that people think and feel the same way as they do. Jacobson mentions that there are ways caregivers can encourage Metacognition to their child.

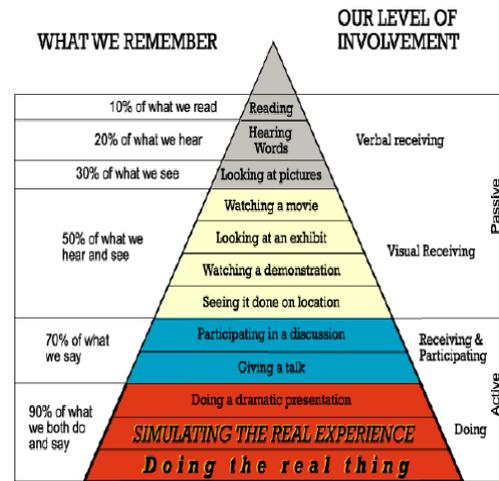
When caregivers ask their questions in order to help their child, Jacobson (2019) suggests questions are open-ended, non-blaming, solution-focused, process-oriented. The most important thing for caregivers is to be patient with their child. Everybody learns at their own pace and for young children it usually takes a while to understand something that is being taught to them. Nonetheless, eventually the child will understand so as a caregiver it is important to relax and understand that everything is a process for a young child.

The benefit of a child attending an early childhood center is found in the curriculum. While curriculum varies from center to center, what every early childhood center focuses on is hands-on learning. For those who might not know, hands-on learning is the best way for a young child to learn and develop cognitive skills. Hands-on learning is characterized by children

moving around and doing activities that involve in their five senses, instead of sitting and listening to the teacher all day. The reason why hands-on learning helps with cognitive development is because it helps children retain information better and also it helps with their memory skills. It also helps make sure that children stay engaged in learning activities. In the picture shown to the right, you can see that 90 percent of our learning is based on what we say and do. The chart tells us that children learn best when participating in fun activities. By having a child enrolled at an early childhood center, every child from every background can have the experience of understanding their environment and exploring other interests by participating in hands-on activities.

### Social-Emotional Development

Social-emotional development focuses on the social and emotional aspects of child development, along with a child’s behavior. The explanation of social-emotional development begins with a psychologist, Lev Vygotsky, who made significant contributions to understanding the role social-emotional development plays in a young child’s life. Vygotsky focuses on cognition, like Piaget, but the one difference between Vygotsky and Piaget is that Piaget focuses on intellectual growth relating to cognitive development, and Vygotsky focuses on the environmental aspects of cognitive development. As a result, Vygotsky believes that people learn best through social interaction. Vygotsky is well-known primarily for his work on the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). According to McLeod (2019), “The zone of proximal development refers



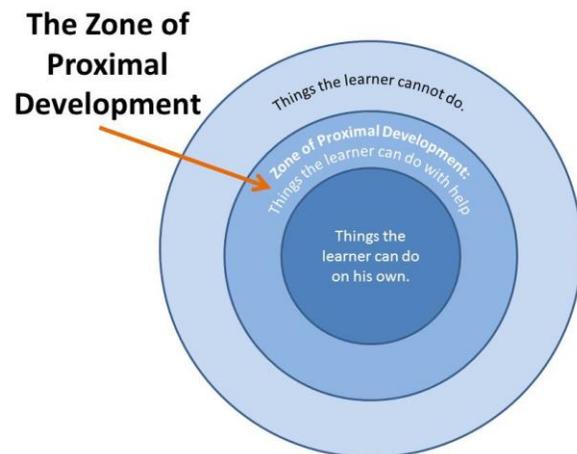
to the difference between what a learner can do without help and what he or she can achieve with guidance and encouragement from a skilled partner” (p. 1). Vygotsky explained that ZPD works by creating a diagram that has three circles similar to a target. In the inner circle is what a child can learn on their own. The middle circle is what a child can learn with assistance and then the outer circle represents that a child is unable to learn something. ZPD is connected to early childhood education in that at a young age, children are beginning to explore their environment and start asking lots of questions. There are times where young children will be able to learn on their own but in most instances a child will need some kind of assistance.

Scaffolding works similar to ZPD.

According to McLeod (2018):

Scaffolding consists of the activities provided by the educator, or more competent peer, to support the student as he or she is led through the zone of proximal development. Support is tapered off (i.e. withdrawn) as it becomes unnecessary, much as a scaffold is removed from a building during construction. The student will then be able to complete the task again on his own (p. 1).

When a child is working on something that is difficult to them like either reading or writing or recreating a move during a certain activity either in or out of the classroom, an instructor, whether it is a teacher, parent, or a coach, aids the child. As time goes on, the child begins to



understand how to figure out how to solve challenges on their own and as the child begins to figure it out, the instructor gives less and less assistance. This process should continue until the child is able to solve challenges on their own without the assistance of the teacher or caregiver.

Another name for scaffolding is guided learning. Another psychologist who played a role in the social-emotional aspect of child development is Erik Erickson. Erikson is well-known for his study into psychosocial development and created stages to understand psychosocial development. The stages are called Theory of Psychosocial Development. There are eight stages in the Theory of Psychosocial Development which are:

- trust vs mistrust,
- autonomy vs shame and doubt,
- initiative versus guilt,
- industry vs inferiority,
- identity vs role confusion,
- intimacy versus isolation,
- generativity vs stagnation, and
- ego integrity versus despair.

In this paper, we focus mainly on trust vs mistrust, autonomy vs shame and doubt, initiative versus guilt, and industry versus inferiority. These stages focus on young children five and under, which is the age group typically represented in an early childhood classroom.

The first stage is trust vs mistrust. This stage starts from birth to about a year and a half.

McLeod (2018) notes:

During the trust vs mistrust stage, if an infant receives consistent and reliable care, then they develop trust with their caregiver that carries through

### Cause of...

#### Trust (maladaptive)

A parent who overly protects their child when they young.



#### Mistrust (malignant)

Parents who are unreliable and often rejects or harmed the child as an infant.



to other relationships. The reverse is also true. If an infant develops mistrust, then an infant develops anxiety, insecurity and may even feel threatened, and this carries through to other relationships as well.

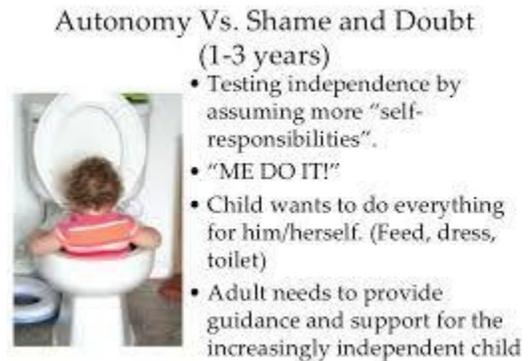
The trust vs mistrust stage is the most important stage for educators and caregivers since this is the stage in which infants begin to learn trust and bond with the people that are taking care of them. Once mistrust sets in, it is difficult to reach the other stages, as the child begins to form negative associations with their environment. Missteps during this stage may result in ongoing challenges in life, as fear and insecurity is established.

The second stage is autonomy vs shame and doubt. This stage begins when a child is about a year and a half to three years old.

McLeod shares that during the autonomy vs shame and doubt stage, a child is developing confidence through independence. If children are overly controlled or criticized during this

stage, it may result in a lack of confidence in their abilities and result in the child being overly dependent on others.

At this stage, a child begins to develop independence and explore their environment. A child will begin to do things, like getting dressed or choosing to eat something on their own. At this stage, it is important for caregivers to allow children to learn things on their own and explore their environment. Guiding children provides a sense of balance between independence and



protection for the child. It is key to provide guidance without dominating or being too restrictive which will only impede a child's development.

The third stage is initiative vs guilt. This stage typically includes children three to five years of age. According to McLeod (2018) during the initiative versus guilt stage, children assert themselves more frequently and begin to ask questions. If the parents are dismissive of a child's questioning, a child may retreat and have feelings of guilt or insecurity. Too much guilt can make a child slow to interact with others and may inhibit their creativity.

At this stage, children will tend to get in trouble because they do not understand the boundaries of society (social norms) or safe play. For caregivers, it is important that when you discipline a child you make sure that it not perceived as threatening or embarrassing. A child may develop guilt to the point that they won't show their creativity as often as they should if they

are disciplined in a way that is threatening or drives shame. When a child gets in trouble, it's important that caregivers educate their child on what they have done wrong and provide guidance on the right way, the right time or the right approach. The latter provides a solution for the child so they can begin to demonstrate judgement on their own and avoid challenges or repeat instances of getting in trouble.

The fourth stage is

**Stage 3 Play Age (3-6 years)**

Central to this stage is play, as it provides children with the opportunity to explore their interpersonal skills through initiating activities.



According to Bee (1992) it is a "time of vigor of action and of behaviors that the parents may see as aggressive".



Conversely, if this tendency is squelched, either through criticism or control, children develop a sense of guilt. They may feel like a nuisance to others and will therefore remain followers, lacking in self-initiative.

**Initiative vs. Guilt**

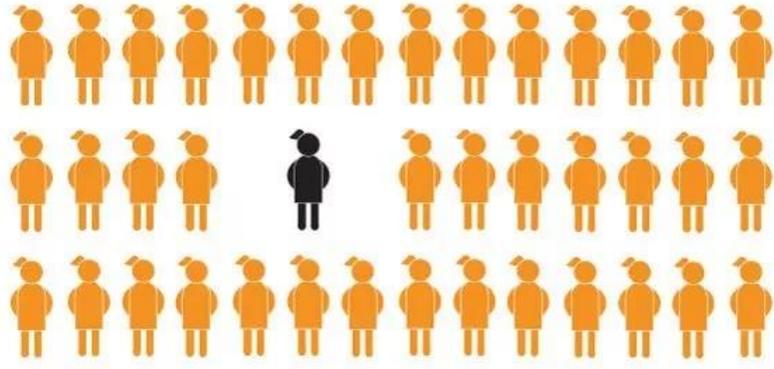


industry vs inferiority. This stage begins at age five and continues on to age twelve. Even though this stage focuses on school-age children the reason why this stage is being mentioned is because of the impact children at the age of five. While some five-year olds are starting elementary school, others are still attending an early childhood center.

McLeod indicated that the industry vs inferiority stage is where a child develops the majority of their self-esteem. Children begin to interact more with their peer group and encouragement during this stage results in a child feeling industrious and proud of their accomplishments. If initiative is not encouraged, a child develops insecurity and a sense of inferiority—doubting their own abilities.

This is the stage where a child begins to seek acceptance from their peers. The child will likely feel pressure to fit in with their peers and if they are not able to fit in then they may feel left out. It is important for caregivers to be aware of what their child may be doing with their peers and either encourage

or reject the things that a child is doing. If you reject what a child wants to do, it is very important that one explains to the child why you reject it and take into consideration how a child's peers may treat them.



How early childhood centers help with socio-emotional development is that the educators who work at a center teach children how to play, communicate, work, and express their emotions to their peers. Having a safe and stable environment plays a big role in a child's socio-emotional development as well.

According to Parrett and Budge (2019):

A healthy, safe, and supportive learning environment enables students, adults, and even the school as a system to learn in powerful ways. Such an environment promotes innovation, inquiry, and risk taking. Moreover, such an environment reinforces and enhances the leadership capacity in the school because competent, excellent, and dedicated educators want to work under such conditions (p. 4).

In many educators teaching philosophy, the importance of having a safe environment is usually expressed. Educators understand that children won't be able to reach their full potential if they are too busy worrying about the situations that are happening around them. Early childhood centers use a variety of ways to make sure that children have a safe learning environment. Many centers have security cameras surrounding the building, and in the classrooms, to keep track of who is coming in and out of the building. The majority of centers also have some kind of security code that employees and sometimes caregivers have access to in order to make sure that people who have no reason to enter the classrooms aren't going in the classrooms. Then finally, some centers may require caregivers to provide a list of people who are allowed to pick up their child from the center and then require them to show an ID. The latter prevents a child from being kidnapped or being in the custody of an inappropriate or unapproved individual.

When it comes to safety there needs to be emotional safety as well. Emotional safety means that children feel safe when they are around a certain caretaker and also make sure that a child receive balance structure from that particular caregiver as well. At an early childhood center, what educators do to promote emotional safety to bond with the children. What bonding with children means is that the educators participate with the children in the activities they may be doing and also interact with them as much as possible. When a bond is created between an educator and a child, the child is aware that the caregiver will help make sure that they are safe from danger and provide emotional support as well. This will help the child gain self-esteem and thrive both academically and socially. Another thing that early childhood centers do to promote emotional safety is create classroom rules. The reason for classroom rules is basically self-explanatory as it gives children some structure as well as safety. Children should not be in a

classroom where rules are either too relaxed or too restrictive as these can stagnate a child's socio-emotional development. Being too relaxed in rules can make the child not feel safe since they won't feel as they aren't being cared enough by the caregiver and being too restrictive may prevent the child from exploring their environment and reaching their potential.

Being in a safe environment also helps with social interaction as well. Knowing that they are in a safe place, children will feel comfortable communicating and playing with their caregivers and their peers which can help them learn leadership skills and problem-solving skills. In a child development center, many people would see that a classroom have different stations. There is an art station, computer station, housekeeping station, reading station (see picture of reading station) etc. but caregiver shrug it off and think that it is just toys for kids to play with. To a certain extent that is true, but there is a reason why childcare centers are set up that way. Part of the reason why childcare center have different stations is because it helps children work together with their peers. Having stations is also an introduction to group work as well. Having stations and interaction with caregivers can play a role in children understanding their gender roles as well.

Play and interaction with others is how children learn about gender roles.

According to Chick, Heilman-Houser, and (2002):

Once a child knows they are a boy or a girl, at around age two, preference for gender-typed play activities, objects, and playmates soon emerge. Psychologists believe children want to be like those who are similar to them.

Children are motivated to learn

and practice in order to achieve what they consider to be gender-appropriate behavior. Unless issues such as social justice and gender bias are raised, children come to believe simply that life within contemporary gender boundaries is natural



and correct (p. 149).

Chick, Heilman-Houser and Hunter (2002) focused on how boys and girls are treated differently, and their results show that boys receive more attention than girls.

One example they mentioned is

In the preschool room, one caregiver asked a girl if she was drinking coffee, since she had so much energy one morning. When boys were

active, there were never comments attributing causation. In addition, when girls were active, they were often cautioned to be careful. In the older toddler room, both boys and girls played on the sliding board and some crawled over the side.

The girls were cautioned to stop crawling or they would “hurt their bellies.” no comments were made to the boys (Chick et al., 2002, p. 152).

While the comments and other similar interaction are not harmful to the child, it could end up discouraging the child from pursuing male or female dominated activities. Early childhood centers usually do a good job making sure that all children are treated equally and making sure that all children have access to toys even though it may not fit their gender role. When disciplining, early childhood educators should be consistent between males and females, such as “use your words” and educators can use the same tone for everyone in order to make sure that they do not show any favoritism to a child. At the end, Chick, Heilman-Houser and Hunter (2002) gave some recommendations on reducing gender stereotyping that both caregivers and educators can remember for future lessons.

Some of the things that they recommended is:

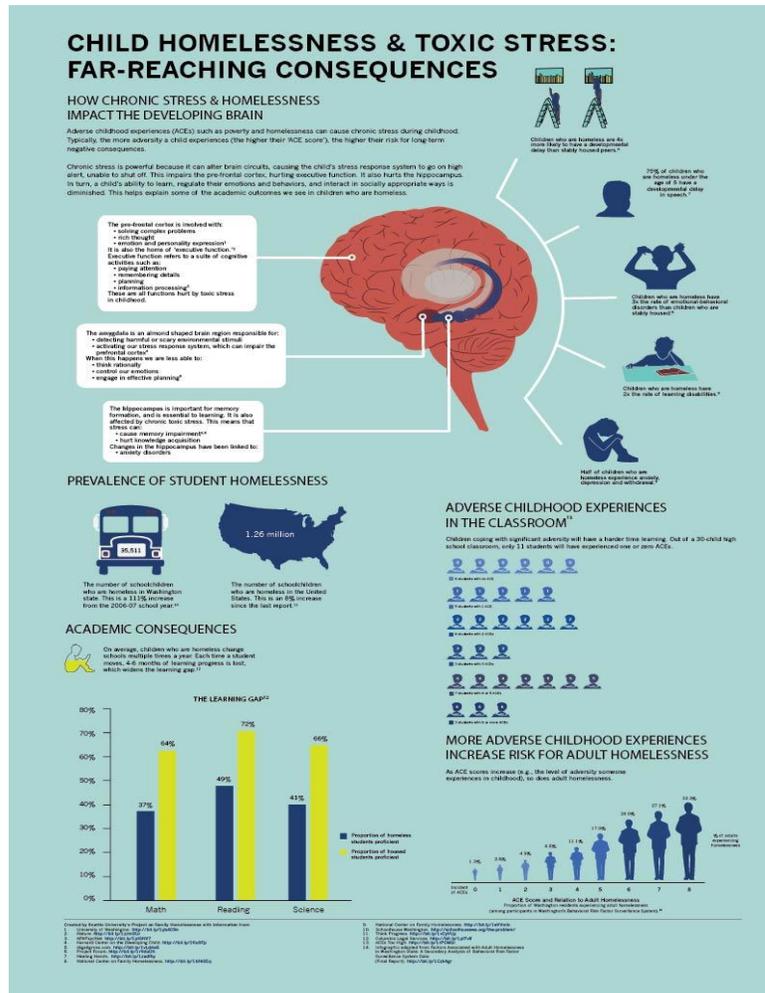
Actively challenge gender stereotypes by monitoring the actions and language of caregivers, as well as those of the children, consider the consequences of all-female staff and the hidden message this may send to children, reinforce children for playing with non-stereotyped toys, participating in nontraditional activities and demonstrating a wide range of behaviors and emotions, then finally ensure that the curriculum is gender fair through self-evaluation and peer observations (p.154).

When it comes to a child's socio-emotional development, environment plays a big factor in their development. The reason environment plays a big role is because the environment that a child is being raised in can have an effect in their development.

Children being raised in a toxic environment can hurt their socio-emotional development as well as other developmental milestones as well. The graph shown above shows ways of how a child can be affected by a toxic environment.

Some of the things that are mentioned in the graph is how a child can experience both physical and emotional delays in their developments. Some things a child who is raised in a toxic environment will deal with is academic delays, physical delays, emotional distress,

and behavioral problems. Early



CNN Source: Lotta Rajalin

childhood centers make sure that children are receiving the needs that they aren't getting from. Early childhood centers work with families to make sure that both the child and their family's needs are met. One of the biggest benefits of a child attending an early childhood center is that not only do centers help children, but they also help families as well. This is a key reason why caregivers should enroll their child into an early childhood center.

### **Early Childhood vs Daycare**

There are some misunderstandings when it comes to the difference between the functions of an early childhood center vs a daycare center. Many people believe that early childhood centers and daycare centers are the same thing and that is somewhat correct depending on the center. Early childhood centers like Headstart, Montessori, and High Scope work very differently than a daycare. This section will break down the main difference between the two in order for families to get a better idea of how early childhood centers and daycares work. Before breaking down the difference between the two, people should be aware that there isn't a right or wrong answer when it comes to choosing between the two centers and it is important for caregivers to understand their child's wants and needs in order to choose which one is right for their child. This section will explain some of the main differences like curriculum, teachers, working with children and their families, as well as explain some of the similarities that both shares.

When it comes to similarities, the main similarities between the two is accreditation and tuition. Both places need a license in order to run and require that only qualified people (such as background check qualifications) are hired to work with children. For tuition, while the cost varies depending on the center and a child's attendance, it usually cost thousands of dollars a year for a child to be enrolled in either an early childhood center or a daycare center. Parents

often pay several hundred dollars per week for childcare, the cost typically being higher for younger children. Also, both places then to make sure that the classroom environment is set up where children can explore their surroundings and feel safe while learning.

In terms of differences, one of the biggest differences between the two is the curriculum. Early childhood centers have stressed the importance of their curriculum when it comes to convincing caregivers as to why they should enroll their child at their particular center. While the curriculums at centers varies, most curriculums stress the importance of hands-on learning.

According to LePort Montessori (2019):

Toddlers in a Montessori program are surrounded by opportunities to develop their skills: they practice opening and closing containers; they learn to button shirts; they identify objects by touch, sort things by color, transfer items with spoons, learn to pour water, put together puzzles, learn to cut with scissors, sew with laces, string beads, and so much more. This is in contrast to many daycare settings, where shelves and boxes are full of the same things your child already has at home—Duplo Legos, blocks, wooden trains, cars, dolls, dress-up cloths, noisy plastic toys, and the like (p. 1).

Differing curriculums that people may see in an early childhood center is Montessori, Project-based, Reggio Emilia, and High Scope. For the most part daycares spend time supervising children from sunrise to sundown. At daycares, the focus is more on children interacting with their peers rather than learning.

Another big difference between the two is the teachers who work at both places. It was mentioned earlier that both centers hire qualified teachers but what is expected from teachers

varies at both places. When a person applies at early childhood center, early childhood centers, depending on the position, require at least some kind of degree or certification in early childhood or a certain amount of years working with children in order to teach. Most of the time when it comes to daycare requirements, teachers are only required to demonstrate a couple of years of experience with children. The more focused the center is on education and child development, the higher the educational requirements for its teachers. The big difference between the two is that teachers at early childhood centers have experience working with children and understand child development and psychology and have a better understanding of how to detect signs of disabilities since they have training and education on these topics. Teachers with degrees in early childhood can work at a daycare center so in many instances, both will have qualified teachers to offer children.

When it comes to families, early childhood centers focus on helping the families just as much as the child. Unlike daycares, early childhood centers reach to families and help them come up with a plan to help a child succeed both in and out of the classroom.

Pratt, Lipscomb, and Schmitt (2015) note that Head Start requires the completion of a need's assessment for each family at the beginning of the program and services may include home visits. Early childhood centers like HeadStart go as far as making sure families receive household needs, they might not be able to afford like clothes, shoes, food/water, and even go as far as to help caregivers find jobs. Daycares primarily host family events and may help families with needs to a certain extent like providing information regarding a financial program or child assistance program that can help them with childcare payments, but they do not reach out to families outside the classroom.

As mentioned earlier, there is no right or wrong answer when it comes to choosing either an early childhood center or daycare. It depends on what is best for your child. The purpose of this section is to explain that there is a difference between the two and to help caregivers receive accurate information on both centers to determine which choice is the best for their child. The information explained the difference between an early childhood center and a daycare center should put to rest the misconception that both are the same.

### **Discussion**

In conclusion, Early Childhood Education can accelerate a child's learning development in connection with strong home support. These both help children to reach important physical, cognitive, socioemotional and language milestones critical to their development. A child, along with their families, who is enrolled in an early childhood center are able to receive many benefits that will help them succeed both in and out of the classroom like financial help, food and clothing if necessary, security (for the child), and home visits if necessary. The purpose of this paper is to inform caregivers about the benefits, both academically and developmentally, of a child receiving education at an early childhood center and explain some of the misconceptions that surrounds early childhood education. This paper also explains how early childhood can help families and gives some recommendations to caregivers on how to help their child continue to learn more about the things that they learn in the classroom. It is important that children are enrolled at an early childhood center in order to be prepared for elementary school. Bates (2015), an Information Resource Specialist in the Office of

Communication and Outreach at the U.S. Department of Education, explains reasons why young children should be enrolled into a good quality early childhood center.

Some of the reasons noted by Bates include:

1. There is a growing recognition that quality matters tremendously when it comes to early learning. Programs that are high-quality have high staff qualifications, including a Bachelor of Arts for teachers; professional development for teachers and staff; low staff-child ratios and small class sizes; a full-day program and more.
2. High-quality early learning is critical to sustaining our country's economic competitiveness. Children in countries as diverse as Mexico, France, and Singapore have a better chance of receiving preschool education than do children in the United States.
3. Studies demonstrate that children who have rich early learning experiences are better prepared to thrive in kindergarten and beyond.
4. The early years are important in shaping the long-term health and success of our children and our communities. Economist James Heckman analyzed research of a decades-long study that began in 1972. He found that kids who received full-day care—along with meals, games, and activity—are actually healthier as adults, with lower rates of high blood pressure and obesity, than kids who didn't receive such services.

5. Well-qualified caregivers and educators are fundamental to high-quality early learning programs. As a parent, you can have peace of mind knowing that your child is safe, and with adults who know how to support your child's early development (p.1).

While the cost is a concern to many people, enrolling in an early childhood center like Head Start, Montessori, and High Scope is important because children having a head start academically and developmentally will help the child thrive throughout their entire educational career. The child will be helped by well-qualified educators who will make sure that the child is on the right path to making sure that they are prepared for elementary school and beyond.

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