

SPN DEPARTMENT



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Position Statement on Early Childhood Development

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Introduction/Problem Statement

The first 3 to 5 years of life is a time of rapid growth and development, including brain growth and foundational social-emotional development. Early childhood development (ECD) is affected by both positive and negative experiences that have lifelong impact on a child's health and social outcomes. Early childhood refers to birth to age 5. Social relationships with parents and others form a foundation for future relationship success. As detailed in the classic report "From Neurons to Neighborhoods," early childhood brain development, with dramatic changes in size and complexity, makes this an important period to positively influence a child's development through interaction and intervention (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2000; National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2007).

Pediatric nurses are in a unique position to impact ECD by identifying infants and young children who are at risk for developmental delays, collaborating with other disciplines to assess and implement resources, encouraging appropriate parent-child interaction, and providing parent education and support. As advocates for children and families, pediatric nurses influence public policy makers to promote high-quality ECD services and resources.

Rationale and Supporting Information

Children who exhibit secure attachment to their primary caregiver demonstrate better outcomes, including increased engagement in the classroom setting, higher secondary

school graduation rates, and stronger resilience (Moss & St. Laurent, 2001). Secure attachment is enhanced through parents who consistently, reliably, and sensitively meet the basic and emotional needs of their young child. Frequent, stimulating language by parents supports vocabulary development in children (Fernald, Marcham, & Weisleder, 2013; Hart & Risley, 2003). Simply reading to young children as part of a routine health visit can encourage language, literacy, and ECD (Zuckerman & Khandeker, 2010).

Children who develop within supportive interactions and environments rich in stimulating language, literacy, and movement experiences are healthier and do better in school (Campbell et al., 2012; Nurse-Family Partnership, 2013; Schweinhart et al., 2005). Multiple early adverse experiences can contribute to a child developing in an atmosphere of "toxic stress" (Johnson, Riley, Granger, & Riis, 2013). Adverse experiences, including abuse, divorce, neglect, poverty, and racism, in early childhood can impact brain development and have a lasting effect on later adult health (CDC, 2013; Johnson et al., 2013).

The prevalence of children with developmental disabilities is trending upward, offering opportunities for pediatric nurses to address the increased need for high-quality ECD services and resources (Betz, 2012; Boyle et al., 2011). Less than half of children with developmental delays are identified prior to school entry (Rosenberg, Zhang, & Robinson, 2008). Late diagnosis of developmental delay contributes to underutilization of early intervention services, which likely lessens the opportunity for optimal outcomes.

Children who are members of vulnerable populations require special attention from pediatric nurses. Often infants

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The mission of the Society of Pediatric Nurses is to support its members in their practice. One means of accomplishing this mission is to keep membership informed of innovative initiatives involving the board, committees, and members that promote research, clinical practice, education, and advocacy within the larger pediatric healthcare community. This column serves that purpose.

and toddlers under the supervision of child welfare agencies exhibit developmental delays or other chronic conditions (Szilagyi, 2012). With one in 50 school-aged children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and evidence that early intervention improves their outcomes, early diagnosis and treatment are critical (Blumberg et al., 2013).

Research suggests that, for disadvantaged children, each \$1 devoted to well-done ECD programs leads to \$2–\$23 in future savings to investing localities and states (Bialik, 2012 March; Cohn, 2011; Heckman, 2011). Examples of ECD programs include private child care programs, federal programs like Early Head Start and Head Start, the nonprofit Nurse-Family Partnership, state Early Intervention programs, and local preschool programs for at-risk young children and those with developmental delay.

SPN's Position

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In an effort to address issues related to early childhood development (ECD), the Society of Pediatric Nurses affirms and supports the work of members as they:

Assess each child and family to ensure that their ECD needs are being met.

Engage in developmental surveillance and developmental screening of young children as a standard of care on a scheduled and consistent basis.

Work closely with educators and social service providers to ensure access to high quality ECD services delivered in healthy and safe settings.

Provide child health nursing consultation to ECD programs, including developing and vetting health policies and procedures, immunization review, and parent and staff teaching.

Advocate for quality ECD by influencing and educating policy makers about the value of investing in programs that support ECD, supporting legislation to improve and increase access and availability of quality ECD, and serving on program boards.

Partner with other child health professionals and associations to enhance and support ECD.

Ensure appropriate ECD content is included in nursing education programs.

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Resources

- American Academy of Pediatrics Early Brain and Child Development <http://www.aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/aap-health-initiatives/EBCD/Pages/default.aspx>
- The Heckman Equation <http://www.heckmanequation.org/>
- National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) <http://www.naeyc.org/>
- Nurse Family Partnership <http://www.nursefamilypartnership.org/>
- Reach Out and Read <http://www.reachoutandread.org/>
- Too Small To Fail www.toosmall.com
- Zero To Three <http://www.zerotothree.org>