

G R O W I N G H E A L T H Y C A N A D I A N S



**A Guide
For Positive Child
Development**

This publication was produced on behalf of the Promotion/Prevention Task Force of the Sparrow Lake Alliance and the Strategic Funding Task Group of the Funders Alliance for Children, Youth and Families.

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Introduction



Background

This guide was created to promote and illustrate a simple idea: that the healthy development of children and youth is a shared responsibility. There has been too much debate about who should be doing what in order to grow healthy children. The truth is, everyone has important contributions to make to ensure that young people grow up in the kinds of conditions they require to thrive. At the same time, it needs to be understood that no one category of contributor—neither families, communities, schools, workplaces nor governments—can successfully raise the next generation on their own.

This guide is one part of a set of resources on positive child development. This synthesis report is based on the information contained in a multifaceted Website which can be found at www.growinghealthykids.com. There is also a set of four fact sheets which were developed for community leaders, professionals, parents and other interested adults in communities, schools and workplaces. They are available for printing, like additional copies of this guide, through the Website.

The Conceptual Framework for this Guide

This guide is a rich source of information. It also offers a unique perspective on how best to promote the well-being of young people. This perspective has six important features:

A Focus on all Children

The guide focuses upon what is known about the factors that promote the healthy development of all children and youth. The message in this emphasis is that the best way to serve the interests of young people who are at risk or who have special needs is to first ensure that the conditions all children require to thrive are in place. A focus on all children also implies that if the primary needs of all children are not met, the likelihood of special services and supports being able to make up for their absence is extremely limited.

A Focus upon Successful Developmental Transitions

The concept of developmental transitions suggests that the process of growing up requires a young person to successfully adapt to a series of complex social environments, beginning with the family, then the school, the neighbourhood and community, and eventually, broader society. This concept was introduced in order to provide a clear and manageable focus for collective effort. Most people would agree that it is important to get children off to a good start in life, to make sure that they adapt well to school, to help them make a successful transition into adolescence, and to support them in becoming healthy, competent, contributing adults.



The healthy development of children and youth is a shared responsibility.

The content of the guide is organized around these four developmental transitions. For each transition, the optimum outcomes, the factors that influence these outcomes, and the strategies that different contributors can use to successfully promote healthy outcomes are presented.

A Focus upon Positive Outcomes

The emphasis on positive outcomes is closely linked to the focus on all young people and their successful developmental transitions. It reflects the view that we need to focus more upon what we want to achieve for all, rather than upon the negative outcomes we would like to avoid for a few. For each of the developmental transitions, the guide identifies a number of positive outcomes that tell us that a young person is doing well. These outcomes are like landmarks that indicate the child or youth is on the right developmental path.

A Focus upon Important Influences

For each positive outcome, the guide identifies a number of factors that can play an important role in influencing the extent to which the outcome is achieved. The guide does not attempt to identify all possible influences; only those that experts have agreed are most important. It also needs to be stressed that these influences rarely act in a simple fashion. Rather they act in complex ways, often in combination with other factors.

A Focus upon Multiple Contributors

The emphasis on multiple contributors is at the heart of the design of this guide. The term “contributor” was chosen to signal that there are different means (strategies) for achieving the same desired ends (optimum outcomes). The guide identifies five major contributors to the healthy development of young people: families, schools, communities, workplaces (including management and labour) and governments. By organizing effective strategies in terms of these five contributor categories, the guide is reinforcing the message that improving the life chances of our youngest citizens will require the broadest collective effort possible.

A Focus upon Effective Strategies

The term “strategy” is used to suggest a whole range of possible contributions to promoting the well-being of young people. These include the natural and informal supports provided by families, their social networks, and their communities, as well as the more formal assistance provided by professionals, agencies, and governments. The emphasis is on “effective” since the examples contained in the guide have all been reviewed by experts to ensure that there is evidence that they actually work.

Acknowledgements

This guide is the result of a unique collaboration between an alliance of child advocates—the Sparrow Lake Alliance, and an alliance of funders—the Funders Alliance for Children, Youth, and Families. The former group developed a new perspective on supporting healthy child development, and the latter provided the funding to allow them to illustrate that perspective with the content contained in the guide.

The need for a new perspective and its core features were first suggested by Craig Shields, a member of both alliances. The focus upon developmental transitions was suggested by Professor Marvyn Novick of Ryerson University. The original perspective was refined by the Sparrow Lake Alliance Promotion/Prevention Task Force, co-chaired by Clara Will and Dr. Naomi Rae-Grant. An early articulation of the perspective was presented in the paper *The Primary Needs of Children*, a collaborative effort of the task force written by Dr. Paul Steinhauer.

Funding for development of the guide was provided by Health Canada, the Laidlaw, Lawson and Trillium Foundations, and the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation. This guide, as well as the Website and fact sheets were developed, produced and translated by Jean-Marc Dupont, Peggy Edwards, as well as their associates at the Alder Group Inc. The project was supported by a joint task group of the two alliances, and managed by a three-member project management team consisting of Charleen Gorbet, Bev Koven, and Craig Shields.

The following experts reviewed and commented upon the Website:

Dr. Benjamin Gottlieb, Dr. Clyde Hertzman, Maureen Hynan, Dr. Dan Keating, Dr. Sarah Landry, Dr. Graham Lowe, Céline Morand, Dr. Ray Peters, Dr. Égide Royer, Dr. Paul Steinhauer, and Dr. Yvonne Unrau.

We extend our sincere thanks to all who have contributed to this guide, the Website and the fact sheets. We hope you find the guide informative and useful. *For further information about the guide please visit the Website at www.growinghealthykids.com.*



A Healthy Start

TRANSITION TO THE FIRST YEAR

Children's first worlds are created by the people who take care of them—who feed, bathe, talk, sing and play with them. The foundations are laid for the future development of all children in the first year of life through secure, loving and stimulating relationships between babies and their parents and caregivers. The chart below lists the major positive outcomes of a successful transition to age one and the key influences on each of these outcomes.

PHYSICALLY HEALTHY	SECURELY ATTACHED TO ADULT CAREGIVERS	DEVELOPING FEELINGS AND EMOTIONAL CONTROL	DEVELOPING LANGUAGE AND LEARNING SKILLS
A healthy pregnancy	Sensitive attunement and involvement of parents and care-givers	Sensitive attunement and responsiveness of parents	Appropriate stimulation
Adequate nutrition	Emotional health of parents	Infant's temperament	Positive parenting
A healthy safe environment	Parents' beliefs and expectations		
Early detection and treatment of developmental problems			

Key Outcomes and Influences in the First Transition

A number of key factors have a major influence during the period from conception to age one. These are highlighted within each outcome section.

Physically Healthy

Healthy physical development begins with a *healthy pregnancy*. Pregnant women who receive emotional support and care, who have nutritious foods to eat and who abstain from smoking and using drugs or alcohol give babies a healthy start. Mothers who are in good

neath and who are supported in their pregnancy are less likely to have low birth weight babies. Children who weigh more than 2,500 grams at birth have fewer health problems than those who weigh less than this at birth.

Although formulas provide the nutrients babies need, breast feeding is still the best option for ensuring that an infant has *adequate nutrition*. Breast milk provides protection against a number of childhood illnesses and has a nutritional balance that is particularly suited to rapid brain development.^{1, 2}

Babies need a *healthy, safe physical environment*. Because their organs are still developing, infants are highly susceptible to environmental contaminants. To prevent injuries, babies need to be supervised at all times. Caregivers need to ensure that toys and objects within their reach are safe and appropriate.

Violence and neglect in the first year of life can affect the brain's organization and chemical make-up. Therefore, it is essential that infants be protected from abuse, chronic stress and neglect in the earliest stages of life, before negative behavioural tendencies are hard wired into their brains.

New babies also need a series of regular health checkups to ensure that *developmental problems are detected and treated early*. Some conditions, such as binocular vision problems, can only be corrected if detected early.³

Securely Attached to Adult Caregivers

Babies and their parents need to get to know each other. When *parents (and caregivers) are sensitively attuned and involved* with their babies, a responsive, trusting relationship develops. Infants become confident that their parents will protect them and meet their needs. This relationship is referred to as secure attachment.

A secure attachment provides the basis for a child's capacity to develop trust, self-esteem, self-regulation, self-soothing and relationships with others. It influences language and cognitive development and gives infants the confidence they need to explore the world. Secure attachment also has been shown to establish wiring patterns in the brain which can reduce anxiety and allow the brain to take in new stimuli. Thus, the experience of successful attachment as an infant is an important base on which to build future emotional and social well-being.^{4, 5}

The critical period for secure attachment occurs in the first 18 months of life. This is not to say that children who are maltreated or who lack high caregiver involvement will never form a secure attachment. Such children, however, are significantly more likely to develop an insecure form of attachment that may lead to alienation from intimacy, chronically high levels of aggression, diminished self-esteem and difficulties in forming relationships with others.

The emotional health of a child's parents partly determines their ability to respond to the needs of their baby and to develop a positive, caring and involved relationship. Parents who are depressed or have other emotional or family problems are less able to become sensitively attuned and involved with their babies. Maternal depression, for example, is a risk for poor outcomes for infants, although some depressed mothers still form successful attachments with their children. A supportive, stable relationship between partners may help buffer a baby from the effect of one parent's emotional problems.⁶ The National Longitudinal Survey on Children and Youth has shown that parental depression is often linked with low-income status.⁷

Parents develop beliefs and expectations about a child even before he or she is born. These expectations can sometimes negatively influence the attachment relationship; however, most parents adjust their expectations to correspond with the way a child is, as they get to know their infants.



An infant who makes a healthy start is

- **physically healthy**
- **securely attached to adult caregivers**
- **developing feelings and emotional control**
- **getting ready for language and learning**



When families, schools, communities, workplaces and governments work together, babies have the best chance of making a healthy start.

Developing Feelings and Emotional Control

The development of children's early emotional capacities are linked to their rapidly developing neural systems. Emotions develop in layers as the brain matures.⁸ How the emotional response system is organized in the brain appears to be a combination of inherited predispositions and early experiences.⁹

Each time infants are soothed, the neural circuits in the brain that help them calm down are strengthened. As the organization of the cells in the emotional region of the brain that deals with stress is strengthened, the ability to deal with minor discomfort or delays is enhanced. In other words, they are learning to soothe themselves. Infants who receive sensitive, responsive care in the early months of life are more likely to show greater emotional control at the end of the first year of life.¹⁰

When parents and caregivers are *sensitively attuned* to their babies' needs, infants learn that their parents respond to their positive emotions, as well as to their distress. As the relationship between babies and caregivers develops over time, routines are established. Times for feeding, sleeping and bathing become more predictable. When routines are followed, babies experience less stress.

It is easier to parent a happy, relaxed baby than one that is anxious, irritable or colicky. Sometimes an *infant's temperament* does not "fit" with the expectations of the parents, and this can make the emotional involvement and sensitivity needed for healthy development difficult.¹¹ But the more difficult the inherited temperament, the more crucial it is for parents and caregivers to respond with warmth and sensitivity. This kind of caregiving can help a difficult baby become a well-adapted child.

Parents and caregivers are influenced by many factors as they build a relationship with their babies. Their own personalities, how they view the parenting they received as children, and their intimate relationships as adults all play a role. Babies are active partners in how their relationships with parents are formed; however, studies have shown that adult caregivers have the major influence on the security of the attachment that is formed.¹²

Developing Language and Learning Skills

After birth, *appropriate stimulation* from caregivers helps the brain develop synapses that lead to the development of motor and language skills. Loving caregivers who hold babies, sing to them, play with them, talk to them and read to them provide the stimulation that babies need to thrive. Studies have shown, for example, that the size of toddlers' vocabularies is highly related to how much they were spoken to as infants and preschoolers.

Children learn by interacting with people, and their parents are the most significant source of stimulation in the first year of life. *Positive parenting* combines a high level of caring, involvement and responsiveness to an infant. A parent's readiness to respond to their children's facial expressions and body language is central to their children's language and cognitive development.¹³

Helping Children Make a Healthy Start

Supporting efforts to help all mothers have a healthy pregnancy and to help new parents get the information, skills and support they need to make secure attachments with their babies are the most important ways that funders, policy makers and others can help children make a healthy start.

Everyone has a stake in ensuring that babies get the love and stimulation they need to develop into well-adjusted, happy children. When families, schools, communities, workplaces and governments work together, babies have the best chance of making a healthy start. Here are some key support and intervention strategies in the first year of life.

Support expectant parents and new families

- Communities can give information to expectant parents and encourage new parents to share experiences with other parents.
- Prenatal programs can help expectant parents build their confidence and learn new skills.
- Well baby clinics and family resource centres that are staffed by friendly, competent people can detect early problems and provide advice on seeking treatment.
- When possible, have babies remain with the mother in hospital 24 hours a day and support breastfeeding on cue. Encourage breastfeeding by providing community support groups and a support telephone service.
- Governments can help families gain a stable and adequate standard of living that provides for the well-being of their children. Job creation and training programs for parents, fair unemployment benefits, adequate minimum wage laws, social transfers and tax redistribution measures all help to decrease inequities between low- and high-income families.
- Governments need to implement taxation and fiscal policies that recognize the expense and value of raising children and that do not penalize families when one parent chooses to stay at home with a child.

Reach out to vulnerable and isolated families

- Identify and track families that may need additional help, for example, adolescent mothers, new parents who do not speak English or French, and pregnant women who are poor or isolated. Homevisiting by public health nurses, dietitians or trained peers (sometimes combined with nutrition supplements) may be particularly helpful to vulnerable women and families.
- Help improve birth outcomes. Educate potential mothers and fathers and expectant parents about the dangers of smoking, drinking alcohol and taking drugs during pregnancy. Encourage young women to refrain from smoking and help those who smoke to quit. Help expectant mothers who drink or use drugs to stop using these substances.



MONTRÉAL DIET DISPENSARY

The Montréal Diet Dispensary works with high-risk, poor women including pregnant teenagers. They use an initial home visit to establish a relationship and continue to educate and motivate the women through counselling and food supplements. In 1991, only 4.9 percent of babies born to Montréal Diet Dispensary clients were low birth weight—less than half the norm for that population.

Contact: 2182 Lincoln Ave., Montréal, QC H3H 1J8; Tel: (514) 937-5375





Better Beginnings, Better Futures (BBBF) is a multi-ministry prevention program operating in eight high risk communities. An integral part of the program is longitudinal research to evaluate the effectiveness of the BBBF model of prevention. The programs operate in eight high-risk, low- income Ontario communities, including one First Nations community.

Programs are provided for children from birth to four-years-old in five communities, and, for four- to eight-year-olds in three communities. In both types of programs, the objectives are: to reduce the incidence of preventable serious long-term emotional and behavioural problems in children, to promote the optimal social, physical, and cognitive development in children at the highest risk for such problems; and to strengthen the ability of communities to respond effectively to the social and economic needs of children and their families.

The programs provide home visiting to expectant and new parents, high quality child care programs, and in-class and in-school assistance in primary schools. Family and community-identified components such as drop-in centres, recreational programs, breakfast/lunch programs, parent training and single parent support groups may also be offered.

The BBBF model is being extensively evaluated by researching the outcomes for children, families and communities by the Research Coordination Unit at Queen's University. The demonstration phase of the project has ended and a comprehensive outcome report on this phase is expected in late fall 1999. The next step will be to undertake a twenty-year follow-up study to evaluate the long-term effectiveness of this model of prevention as the children grow into adulthood.

The research funding is provided to address three main questions:

Effectiveness Is the model effective, i.e., does the model produce positive outcomes for children?

Organization If the model is effective, what were the processes that produced those outcomes, i.e. how was the model organized and managed?

Cost What are the costs, cost savings and costs effectiveness of the model?

Contact: Office of Integrated Services for Children, 56 Wellesley Street West, 15th Floor, Toronto, Ontario M5S 2S3; Tel: (416) 326-3231



Protect infants and young children from intentional and unintentional injuries

- Governments can protect infants and children from child abuse, neglect and family violence by enacting and supporting laws, policies and programs that provide help to people experiencing violence in the home. Since secure attachment and critical brain development occurs in the first 18 months of life, it is important to remove children early from abusive situations. They also need to be placed with adoptive parents early, so as not to impair the attachment process.
- Governments can help prevent injuries by developing and supporting safety regulations and age-appropriate labelling regulations for children's toys.
- Communities can provide parents with information on how to make their homes safe for infants. Communities and businesses can work together to provide infant car seats and other safety equipment to families who cannot afford to buy them.



The BABY project is a pregnancy outreach program for high-risk families, including Aboriginal and multicultural communities in northern British Columbia.

The objective of the BABY project is to encourage lifestyle changes that will help pregnant women have the healthiest babies possible. The programs help families learn how to eat foods that build a healthy baby, quit smoking and stop using drugs and alcohol, and encourages peer and community support. The success of the BABY program is due, in part, to support from the communities it serves. Donations of food, maternity and children's clothing, educational materials, and furnishings, and referrals to and from agencies, health and education professionals and other individuals, sustain the program.

Contact: Program Coordinator, The BABY Project, Dze I K'ant Aboriginal Friendship Centre, Box 2920, Smithers, BC V0J 2N0; Tel: (604) 847-5211, Fax: (604) 847-5144.



Protect pregnant women and infants from environmental contaminants

- Governments can support research and pass legislation to protect people from environmental contaminants which can have a particularly harmful effect on pregnant women, developing fetuses and young children.
- All Canadians need to persuade local governments and others to stop using pesticides in local parks.
- Communities can provide parents with information on how environmental tobacco smoke harms infants and young children, and help smoking parents to quit.
- Communities and government can enact and support bylaws that make public places smoke-free.

Help parents balance work and family life

- Workplaces can provide options, such as working fewer hours, that will reduce stress for pregnant women. Extended leave provisions allow women to continue breastfeeding for the recommended six months.
- Job sharing and part-time work can help reduce the pressure on new parents. Flexible working hours and workplace childcare programs allow new parents to make adequate childcare arrangements when they return to work.
- Governments and workplaces can work together to provide standards for parental leave and adequate income support during parental leaves.



The foundations are laid for the future development of all children in the first year of life through secure, loving and stimulating relationships between babies and their parents and caregivers.

Support high quality child care that stimulates infant growth

- Help parents stimulate their babies with community supports such as toy lending libraries and family resource centres that are staffed by friendly, competent people. Support infant stimulation programs that allow parents to learn from a trained leader.
- Support and sponsor parenting education programs in schools and communities.
- Set high quality standards for childcare outside the home and for the training of care providers.
- Provide subsidies and tax credits to reduce the cost of childcare for parents who need it.



GREAT LAKES HEALTH EFFECTS PROGRAM

The Great Lakes Health Effects Program's (GLHEP) mission is to protect human health in the Great Lakes basin from the effects of exposure to environmental contaminants. GLHEP is a resource for people living and working in the Great Lakes basin. It applies an ecosystem approach to human health, combines the latest science with informed action and works in partnership with public groups, communities and agencies.

Contact: Mary Hegan, Bioregional Health Effects Programs Division, Health Canada, Main Building, Tunney's Pasture, 0301 A1, Ottawa, ON K1A 0K9; Tel: (613) 952-8117; Fax: (613) 954-7612; E-mail: Mary_Hegan@hc-sc.gc.ca



Investing in Preschoolers



TRANSITION TO SCHOOL

Starting school is an important point in a child's life. The intellectual, social, physical and emotional skills children develop in their preschool years enable them to adapt to this new environment. Children who integrate successfully into the school environment have later academic success, establish better relationships with their peers and experience a sense of competence which contributes to their self-esteem. Schools must also be ready for children. They can help children adapt by being prepared to respond to children with different and varied preschool experiences and skills.

The chart below lists the major positive outcomes in this stage of child development as well as the key influences on each of these outcomes.

PHYSICALLY HEALTHY	AGE-APPROPRIATE SOCIAL SKILLS	POSITIVE EMOTIONAL HEALTH	APPROPRIATE LANGUAGE AND LEARNING SKILLS
Nutrition, exercise and medical care	Relationship with parents	Secure attachment	Stimulating homes
Protection from injuries	Experiences with other adults	Developing sense of competence	Quality childcare and preschool education
Healthy physical environment	Experiences with other children	Supportive communities	Prepared primary schools
Adequate financial resources		Protection from abuse	



Studies show that children who become more competent in all areas of development consistently have parents who are both responsive and demanding.

Key Outcomes and Influences in the Second Transition

A number of key factors have a major influence on whether or not the infant and preschooler will achieve the healthy outcomes in this transition. They are highlighted in the description below.

Physically Healthy

Nutritious food and plenty of *exercise* in a safe, clean environment provide preschoolers with the basics they need to fully develop their gross and fine motor skills. *Preventive care* and prompt *medical care* can usually avoid unnecessary complications as a result of an illness, and appropriate immunization prevents children from getting many childhood diseases.

Preschool children need freedom to explore and play in *safe, healthy environments* in both the home and community. Preschoolers are particularly sensitive to environmental contaminants. Respiratory problems, which can be provoked by contaminants, are the most common illnesses of early childhood. Preschoolers are also at high risk for injuries. *Protection from injuries* in the home and community environments is critical to their physical health.

While studies show that while the quality of parenting that a child receives is more significant than the level of household income, poverty greatly increases the stress on a family with young children. Access to *adequate financial resources* reduces parental stress and enables them to provide adequate food and housing, quality childcare and stimulating toys and social activities.¹⁴

Age-Appropriate Social Skills

Children's early social skills are primarily learned through their *relationships with parents* who play with them, teach them specific skills, model desirable social skills and control unacceptable behaviour. Studies show that children who become more competent in all areas of development consistently have parents who are both responsive and demanding. A recent Canadian study found that positive parenting practices, particularly consistency, were most strongly associated with positive social relationships and helping behaviour.¹⁵ Other studies show that preschoolers of mothers who have higher levels of education are more likely to score higher on both cognitive and behavioural tests at school entry.¹⁶

Other adult caregivers who look after children while their parents work or study have a significant influence on preschoolers' lives. Research indicates that quality childcare experiences improve both cognitive and behavioural outcomes. The importance of nonparental adults in the lives of children is not limited to adults in formal childcare or early education centres. A longitudinal study done on the island of Kauai in Hawaii found that one of the most significant factors in the lives of well-adjusted adolescents who had experienced four or more risk factors in their childhood was the availability of caring adults, other than their parents, during their early years. Supportive adults included extended family members, neighbours and friends.¹⁷

Interacting with other children of the same age provides preschoolers with the opportunity to learn and practice relationship skills such as negotiation, cooperation and handling competition. As early as age four, children are well on their way to establishing how they will deal with peers in later life. These social skills will help determine the quality of their relationships with peers in later life.

Positive Emotional Health

Researchers believe that the critical time for learning emotional control is between birth and age two and the critical time for learning to switch off the stress response is between birth and age four. Sensitive, loving care in the early years wires the "calm down" switch in

the emotional regulation region of the brain, enabling a four-year-old to tolerate frustration better. Preschoolers who have a *secure attachment* with loving caregivers learn the basics of self-control. They perceive themselves as worthy of love, and are trusting and eager to explore new experiences.

Children *develop the confidence and competence* to try new things when sensitive parents and caregivers encourage them to explore their environment and provide positive feedback. Positive self-esteem and a sense of competence have been shown to help protect children from other risks that threaten their healthy development.¹⁸

Starting school, making new friends and adjusting to new rules is a stressful experience for children. Children who are able to cope comfortably with normal levels of stress and anxiety are likely to adapt quickly to this new environment.

Supportive communities that value children help families acquire the resources they need to provide preschoolers with high quality care, toys and opportunities for group play. They recognize the importance and potential pay-back of investing in children's early years. Neighbourhoods high in crime, density and drug abuse and low in cohesion or a sense of control are likely to undermine even many committed families' attempts to raise their children successfully.¹⁹

Victims of abuse are found in all classes and ethnocultural communities. Children who have physical or mental disabilities are especially vulnerable to abuse, as are children who are isolated from friends, brothers and sisters and adults whom they can trust.²⁰ Experiencing abuse has a traumatic effect on children both in their young years and as adults later in life. Victims who are physically or emotionally abused as children are more likely to suffer physical and emotional problems as adults and are more likely to suffer additional abuse as adults.²¹ Children can best be *protected from abuse* by reducing parental stress, informing children about inappropriate touching and creating an atmosphere in our families and communities where children feel safe to talk about abusive situations and adults feel safe about reporting concerns about abuse.

Appropriate Language and Learning Skills

Children are especially primed for acquiring language skills between nine months and five years of age. During this time they must also master two essential cognitive skills to make the jump to formal learning which begins in grade one. These are the ability to understand symbols or substitutes (which is necessary when learning to read) and the ability to understand relative quantity (for example, that one pile of objects is bigger than another pile), which is a prerequisite for learning mathematics.

Studies have repeatedly shown that a child's readiness to learn when they enter kindergarten is the best predictor of academic success in the early grades and of high school completion.²² This includes general knowledge, minor muscle coordination, ability to focus attention and work independently, ability to take instructions from teachers and to control aggression and anxiety.

A *stimulating home environment* is the primary place that children get ready to learn. Parents need support and information on how to provide a high-quality preschool experience for their children. The home environment is supported by positive childcare and stimulating preschool education outside the home. Many studies have demonstrated the social and cognitive benefits of *quality childcare and preschool education* for preschoolers.^{23, 24}

Parents who require childcare outside the home need access to well-prepared caregivers and high-quality programs. The overall quality of nonparental childcare depends on many factors—the program, the relationship with the parents, the physical facility and resources, and most importantly, the relationship between the adult caregivers and the children. Quality childcare is provided by people who are knowledgeable about children's developmental stages and needs and who provide the kind of stimulating experiences and personal attention children need to further their development. For some children, it complements their experiences at home. For other children, it provides basic experiences essential to their healthy development that they would not otherwise receive.



Children who integrate successfully into the school environment have later academic success, establish better relationships with their peers and experience a sense of competence which contributes to their self-esteem.

A school's readiness to respond to individual children is as important as a child's readiness to learn.²⁵ *Prepared primary schools* are ready to accommodate a wide range of experiences, backgrounds and skill levels. Immigrant and refugee children may not speak English or French at all; even five-year-olds whose native language is English or French may differ in their language skill development by a full year or more.

Preschools and kindergartens need to stress developmental skills, play and socialization, not disciplined academic work. Studies show that five-year-olds who are put into academic programs too early may have poorer language skills and lower levels of self-esteem than children whose kindergarten experience is more creative.

Investing in Preschoolers

When families, schools, communities, workplaces and governments work together to invest in children, preschoolers have the best chance of making a successful transition to school.

Support parents with young children

- Communities can help young parents learn to parent by providing information and parenting support through mentoring and informal support networks, family resource centres, family service centres, libraries, recreation centres, telephone information lines, drop-in centres, community organizations and homevisiting.
- Schools can educate young people about child development and cooperate with local childcare centres and preschools to provide hands-on childcare experiences for senior students.
- Families and communities need to encourage fathers to be involved in day-to-day caregiving. Research suggests that males and females have different caregiving styles and that young children benefit from exposure to both.
- Communities and schools can provide parenting groups which help parents develop effective parenting skills and enhance their ability to form a secure attachment with their young children. One parenting program in Ontario reported greater improvements in behaviour problems at home among participants of a large-group community-based parenting program, than among parents in individual, clinic-based parent training.²⁶
- Workplaces can help parents balance work and family life by adopting flexible working hours that make it easier to accommodate childcare arrangements and providing parental leave to deal with childcare emergencies or sickness and time to visit childcare facilities. Employers need to reduce pressure for overtime work which takes time and energies required for good parenting.
- Workplaces can support parents who are experiencing mental health or family problems by training supervisors to recognize parents who are under stress, and providing Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) and information on family counselling and abuse prevention resources in the community.
- Governments can help families attain a stable and adequate standard of living that provides for the well-being of their children by providing job creation and training programs for parents, fair unemployment benefits and adequate minimum wage laws.
- Governments can support young families by implementing social transfer and taxation policies that recognize the expense and value of raising children. For example, taxation policies should not financially penalize families who choose to have one parent stay home with their children.
- Governments and communities can help low-income families by increasing access to affordable housing and nutritious foods, through initiatives such as food buying clubs, community gardens and collective kitchens.



GROWING UP HEALTHY DOWNTOWN

The Growing Up Healthy Downtown (GUHD) partnership involves eight multiservice organizations serving families with children up to six years of age in downtown Toronto. The program responds to local issues and respects cultural diversity. Families work with a family support worker at their GUHD agency to plan, implement and evaluate programs and community development activities. Activities and programs include parent relief programs, recreation for parents and young children, parent/child drop-ins, resource libraries, community kitchens for meals and baby food, good food box programs and food buying clubs, support groups and educational workshops, community development, individual support and referral.

Contact: Karen Serworka, GUHD Coordinator; Tel: (416) 586-9777, ext. 224.



Ensure that preschoolers have high quality care

- Families, schools, communities and governments need to support parent education programs in schools and communities.
- Parents who require childcare services need to be able to visit ahead of time and find out how a caregiver promotes cooperative behaviour and stimulates healthy child development.
- Communities can provide high quality family-centred childcare and play groups, particularly in low-income neighbourhoods.
- Governments can set high-quality standards for care and for the training of caregivers, and provide subsidies and tax credits to reduce the cost of childcare for parents who need it.
- Workplaces can establish childcare services for employees at the workplace or subsidize childcare spots for employees who earn low wages.
- Families, educators, employers and communities need to advocate increased funding for quality childcare spaces and financial support for preschools in low-income neighbourhoods.



COMMUNITIES TOGETHER FOR CHILDREN

This nonprofit group has a mission to support families to find quality childcare for their children. Their focus is on the family and the child. They provide consumer education and a one-stop shopping point for all forms of childcare support. They work with health, education and social services systems to heighten community awareness of needs of young children and to improve and extend the services available to meet the needs of young families.

**Contact: 200 South Syndicate Ave., Suite 501, Thunder Bay, ON K7E 1C9;
Tel: (807) 622-3980.**



Encourage learning, active play and socialization with other children

- Play is a child's work. Families and communities who give toddlers opportunities to climb, run, scribble on paper, play with blocks and have fun with other children help preschoolers develop the motor, concentration, social and language skills they need to be ready for school.
- Parents can provide a stimulating environment by reading to their preschoolers, playing games with them, engaging them in discussions and taking them to interesting places. Setting clear, reasonable expectations, including children in family decision-making and problem-solving and encouraging them in their efforts to master new skills will help build their sense of competence.
- Parents need to pay attention to sibling relationships and provide opportunities for their preschoolers to play with other children. Helping your child learn how to settle disagreements, take turns and be patient will help them in their relationships with other children and in getting ready to enter school.
- Communities and schools need to provide access to recreation programs and learning resources such as libraries and museums to all families with young children. User fees should not prevent low-income families from enjoying these important resources for healthy child development.
- Communities and employers can encourage developers to address children's needs for play when designing new neighbourhoods and apartment buildings.
- Schools can welcome families with preschool children by providing space for parent resource centres and preschools, and opening schools to parenting groups.
- Schools can smooth the transition to primary school by
 - linking with preschools, childcare providers and parents
 - having one-on-one interviews with parents and children who are entering kindergarten
 - having systems in place to accommodate the variety of skill levels children have when they enter kindergarten and grade one.
- Workplaces can provide financial support to preschools, and assist in renovating facilities or buying equipment. They can support healthy development in the preschool years by allowing employees time off to work at parent cooperative preschools.
- Communities, governments, workplaces and schools can support preschool education, especially for children living in high risk environments. This support should be viewed as an investment in their future as high school graduates and productive workers and citizens.



PAT provides comprehensive services to families from the third trimester of pregnancy until their children reach age three. It is a primary prevention program for all families designed to help parents give their children a solid foundation for school success and form a closer working relationship with the school. It is based on the philosophy that parents are children's first and most influential teachers. Parent educators trained in this model deliver family services using the Parents as Teachers curriculum, which includes information on child development. Services include regularly scheduled personal visits in the home, parent group meetings, periodic screening and monitoring of educational and sensory development and access to a parent resource centre.

CANADA

Contact: Pat Kenny; Tel: (403) 320-5983; Fax: (403) 320-5989;

E-mail: pat.kenny@lethsd.ab.ca

UNITED STATES

Contact: Director, Parents As Teachers National Centre, Inc., 9374 Olive Boulevard, St. Louis, MO 63132; Tel: (314) 432-4330



Protect young children from injury and harm

- Governments and communities need to enact laws, policies and programs that prevent child abuse, neglect and family violence, and remove young children from violent situations in a timely manner.
- Governments and communities can support homevisiting programs. Many evaluations of these programs have shown an improvement in parent-child relationships as a result.^{27, 28} The Hawaii Healthy Start program is a good example of a community program that successfully lowered the rates of child abuse and neglect for children aged four or less.
- Families can protect their children from unintentional injuries by:
 - child-proofing their homes and putting dangerous objects such as matches and poisons out of reach
 - keeping their homes and cars smoke-free
 - making sure that small children cannot get to backyard pools, streams or ponds
 - always buckling their children in a certified car seat
 - teaching and enforcing safe behaviour around roads, driveways, parking lots and farm machinery
 - supervising their preschooler at all times.
- Governments and communities need to develop and enforce safety regulations that prevent unintentional injuries, such as the labelling of children's products, the use of car seats and bicycle helmets, and fencing around all backyard pools.
- Governments need to support research and pass legislation to protect young children and others from environmental pollutants.



Children develop the confidence and competence to try new things when sensitive parents and caregivers encourage them to explore their environment and provide positive feedback.

- Schools and communities can provide parents with information on how to make their homes, yards and farms safe for young children. They can provide safe places for young children to meet and play in rural areas and ensure that safety and supervisory standards are maintained at all parks, playgrounds and community pools.
- Families, educators and health professionals can advocate against using pesticides in parks where children play. Communities can comply with these requests.



HAWAII HEALTHY START

The Hawaii Healthy Start program started in 1985 as a demonstration project in a very high-risk community. It was designed to lower the rates of child abuse and neglect for children aged four or less. It has evolved into a state-wide program designed to promote positive parenting, enhance parent/child interaction, improve child health and development, prevent child abuse and neglect, link all families to a primary health care provider and assure optimal use of community resources.

Family support workers meet with mothers before they leave the hospital and visit them weekly for about one year, then on a monthly basis, and finally four times a year until the child turns five. The visits are used to build a trusting relationship and to provide child development information, to model child/parent interaction, to link the family to a primary health care provider and to refer the family to other social services.

In 1992, families which were screened, assessed and served from July 1987 until July 1991, were compared to confirmed child abuse and neglect cases and to other homevisiting programs. Among the 2,193 well profiled high risk families in the program, there was no abuse in 99 percent of those families served. The rate of abuse in the high risk families which did receive service was half the state average and less than those in families which were rated low risk at birth. There was no further abuse in any of the families already known to child protection services when first assessed by the program. Neglect in program families was half of that of families involved with less intensive visiting programs.

**Contact: Program Coordinator, Healthy Start, Maternal & Child Health Branch,
1600 Kapiolani Boulevard, Suite 600, Honolulu, Hawaii 96814;
Tel: (808) 946-4771; Fax: (808) 942-2160**



The Search for Identity



TRANSITION TO ADOLESCENCE

Adolescents are in search of a unique identity. As they enter adolescence, their peer group becomes increasingly important to that search and they feel an intense need to belong. At the same time, they are experiencing the dramatic physical and emotional changes associated with puberty. Gender differences increase and teenagers experience a strong desire to experiment with new behaviours.

To achieve the main outcomes that describe a healthy transition to adolescence, school-age children and youth need to acquire knowledge and skills. But more importantly, they need a supportive environment that provides love, encouragement and clearly defined boundaries. Involving young people in decisions and activities that affect them is essential to positive youth development.

The chart below lists the major positive outcomes in healthy adolescence and the key influences on each of these outcomes.

SECURE AND INTEGRATED SELF-IDENTITY	STRONG SOCIAL SKILLS	COMMITMENT TO LEARNING AND SCHOOL	ABILITY TO MAKE HEALTHY CHOICES	ABILITY TO ADAPT
Home environment	Home environment	Home environment	Home environment	Home environment
Significant others	Significant others	Significant others	Significant others	Significant others
School and community	School and community	School and community	School and community	School and community
Media	Media	Media	Media	Media



When caring adults or older peers form a stable, supportive bond with children, it is often called mentoring.

Key Outcomes and Influences in the Third Transition

The description below describes the positive outcomes in this transition; key influences on each of these outcomes are highlighted in the text.

A Secure and Integrated Self-Identity

Children and young people with secure and integrated identities have positive self-esteem—they feel valued and worthwhile. They have a sense of belonging and being part of their culture and community. They have a growing sense of independence and personal power.

The adolescent quest for identity is partly related to the rapid and uneven changes that accompany puberty. Boys and girls who mature later or earlier than their peers may have a more difficult time adjusting to this stage of development.

Gender and culture also influence identity formation. Youth growing up in immigrant and indigenous families may experience a crisis in identity due to a lack of continuity with past traditions. Young people need to understand and be involved in their culture of origin while still being free to experience a childhood and early adolescence that is similar to their peers.

The *home environment* and adults in a parenting role have a significant impact on the development of self-identity and self-esteem in childhood and adolescence. Parental support, interest and involvement is particularly important. When parents are uninvolved, children develop negative self-concepts. Indeed, indifference has been found to be more damaging than physical punishment or rejection.²⁹

Significant others, including teachers, older adolescents, adult leaders (for example, coaches, Scout or Girl guide leaders, activity instructors), spiritual leaders, older citizens and adults from workplaces and unions can have a positive influence on a young person's development. So can extended family members, such as aunts and uncles, grandmothers and grandfathers. Mentoring a child or adolescent is not an easy task, but it can bring positive new meaning to the mentor's life as well.

To enhance children's sense of belonging in the broader community, *schools* need to become an integral part of the community and to forge partnerships with parents and community organizations. This requires new ways of working together—among parents, schools, school boards, ministries of education, community governments, municipal recreation departments, health and social service providers and other providers of youth services. *Community recreation* and sport programs can have a positive effect on self-esteem. It is essential that activities such as sports, fitness, art, drama, museums, etc. be accessible to all children. User fees and other costs must not prohibit children from low-income families from participating.

Positive media images can influence values and perceptions that affect self-identity and behaviour. For example, media that portrays girls and women in nontraditional roles and that breaks down stereotypes about ethnic minorities, gays and lesbians, and people with disabilities can help build tolerance, understanding and acceptance of diverse identity formations.

Strong Social Skills

As children move into the teen years, they expand their relationships with family members, peers and people in the broader community. Young people with strong social skills can communicate their ideas and feelings. They resolve conflicts peacefully, without aggressive or antisocial behaviour.

Young people whose antisocial behaviour begins early, for example around ages 12 to 15, are typically more troubled and violent than adolescents whose antisocial behaviour begins later. Often they have learning difficulties and poor family relationships. This is why it is important to address all young people's learning problems as soon as possible.³⁰

As children approach and enter puberty, gender roles become increasingly relevant to development. Boys between the ages of eight and 11 are more likely than girls of the same age to be physically aggressive; girls are more likely to use indirect methods of aggression such as isolating others or telling negative stories about a peer. Generally, physical aggression declines with age in both boys and girls. There is no truth to the stereotypical image of sudden increased aggression in adolescence; only six percent of adolescents are actually involved in violent acts and arrests.³¹

Gender tends to put boys and girls at risk for experiencing violence in different ways. Girls are more likely to experience sexual assault and harassment at school, on dates or from male friends and associates. Young men are more likely to experience physical violence at home, physical assault in schools and the community and assaults by strangers.

In *homes* where parents provide affection, respect, challenge, opportunities for success and freedom to make choices within clearly defined limits, children and adolescents are likely to develop positive social skills. Children who grow up in families that talk about their emotions are better able to define and describe their own feelings.

Children who have opportunities for mentoring relationships with *significant others* who nurture and respect them exhibit more positive social relationships than those who do not.³² Success in *school* is important to social adjustment. Early school problems and school failure are associated with behaviour problems and substance abuse.³³

In addition to providing children and youth with meaningful ways to participate, *communities* need to address underlying causes of conflict including racism and sexual harassment, bullying and verbal and physical abuse. They need to give girls and boys equal attention and implement gender equity policies in all aspects of programming.

The *media* portrayal of violence is often named as a factor in creating a culture that tolerates and sometimes stimulates violent behaviour.³⁴ Young people can unknowingly pick up and accept messages that portray violence and antisocial behaviour as an acceptable way to solve problems or obtain gratification.

A Commitment to Learning and School

Young people who are committed to learning have learned how to learn and are motivated to stay in school. Current estimates suggest that some 18 percent of young Canadians do not finish high school. Surprisingly, almost 40 percent of leavers in *The School Leavers Survey* were age 16 or less when they left school and 32 percent had grade nine education or less.³⁵

School leavers are more likely to:

- come from families who did not think high school graduation is important;
- come from families experiencing problems and needing help;
- have failed in elementary school;
- be less involved in leisure time activities;
- report that they did not enjoy school;
- participate less in class;
- associate with peers not attending school and peers who did not consider high school completion important;
- skip classes.

Studies have shown that *families* who value an education and who stay involved with a child's school provide children and teens with the essential support they need to stay in school. When a family is not able to support continuous learning, *a significant other* or mentor can step in to support a child's natural interests and curiosity and thus nurture broad-based learning.

The *school* experience is central to developing a commitment to learning. Research suggests that students achieve better outcomes in schools with a firm but fair disciplinary climate, strong parental involvement and high expectations of student performance.³⁶



In homes where parents provide affection, respect, challenge, opportunities for success and freedom to make choices within clearly defined limits, children and adolescents are likely to develop positive social skills.



Teenagers who have the ability to resist peer and social pressures are most likely to make healthy choices.

Helping children adjust to intermediate and high school can improve academic achievements, school attendance and social interactions. This can be done by creating a welcoming, safe environment for students in transition, providing school-based social support, and classroom programs that focus on problem solving and improving coping responses to stress.³⁷ This may be especially important for Aboriginal students whose school dropout rates are two to four times higher than non-Aboriginal students.³⁸

Communities play an important partnership role with the school, especially in helping young people who have dropped out, to return to school. **Media** outlets (television, radio, print and Internet) as well as multimedia packages and computer games have enormous potential to help children learn and enjoy learning outside of school.

The Ability to Make Healthy Choices

During the preteen and early adolescent years, young people experiment and make important decisions related to sexuality and the use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. Teenagers who have the ability to resist peer and social pressures are most likely to make healthy choices. Healthy behaviour choices are linked to the capacity of the home, school and community to make “the healthy choices the easy choices.”

Gender differences in health behaviours become increasingly obvious in adolescence. Studies have shown, for example, that teenage girls are more likely to smoke than boys and that they may smoke for different reasons. Adolescent boys are more likely than girls to binge drink and to engage in activities involving high levels of physical risk.

Parents are powerful role models for children. Children whose parents drink alcohol or use illegal drugs are more likely to adopt these habits than children whose parents do not.³⁹ **Significant others** also serve as role models for young people. Older siblings, relatives, teachers, coaches and community leaders model attitudes and behaviours that influence children and youth. In addition, young girls and boys often look up to media personalities, sports stars and fashion models.

As young people approach adolescence, **peers** have a great potential to influence behaviour and lifestyle choices, either in a negative or positive way. Young people who smoke, for example, are much more likely to have peers who smoke.⁴⁰ In fact, risky behaviours tend to occur together among groups of friends who smoke, use alcohol and other drugs, engage in premature sex and cut classes.

On the positive side, there is a substantial body of evidence to support the effectiveness of peer teaching and peer helping when it comes to making healthy lifestyle choices. A peer mentor can provide advice, role modelling, emotional support and sometimes, assistance with academic subjects. Self-help and support groups can also help young people talk out issues.

School-based health instruction is essential. Extensive evaluations have reported that 50 hours of well-planned health education programs can effect changes in students' health behaviours, attitudes and knowledge.⁴¹ These benefits are enhanced by a comprehensive approach that complements health instruction with a healthy physical and social environment in the school and collaboration with services and supports in the community.⁴² This approach, which is called “comprehensive school health”, has been endorsed by more than 20 national associations in Canada as well as UNESCO and UNICEF.

Communities can help children and teens make healthy choices by ensuring that public events and the places where children and youth go are smoke- and alcohol-free. Offering positive eating choices in public cafeterias and vending machines, as well as affordable and accessible opportunities for active living helps adolescents make positive lifestyle choices. Communities who care about children and teens include young people when they plan programs and develop policies that support youth.

Media advertising, movies, television programming and music bombard young people with seductive messages that glamorize smoking, drinking, drug use, foods with little nutrition value and provocative sexual behaviour. Young people need to develop media awareness skills that allow them to critically analyze media messages and images, especially those that glamorize violence, unrealistic body shapes, stereotyping, discrimination, smoking, drinking, drug use and unhealthy sexual behaviours.

The Ability to Adapt

Adaptable children and teens are learning to be resilient—the ability to adapt and cope despite adversity. Adaptable young people have problem-solving and stress management skills, and a positive view of their personal future. Resilient children have three kinds of protective factors: a cohesive and stable *family*, sources of external support and particular coping skills and resources.⁴³

Girls are more likely to exhibit emotional distress and to internalize it than boys. At age four to seven, three percent of girls are “worried”; this increases to eight percent at ages eight to 11.⁴⁴ Boys, on the other hand, are more likely to exhibit “outward” and aggressive behaviour in response to stress. Boys are more likely to drop out or be expelled from school.

Resilience is important for all children, but especially for children who are disadvantaged. What makes children disadvantaged? Dr. Paul Steinhauer and others assert that while poverty is a stress in its own right, it is more likely that a combination of stresses—that may or may not be associated with poverty—undermine competence and resiliency.⁴⁵ Children from families who are neglectful, violent or abusive are disadvantaged, whether or not they are poor.

Marginalization, poverty, discrimination, cultural alienation, loss of the parenting role (when children are taken away) and a feeling of powerlessness are all factors in the lives of many Aboriginal families in Canada. The rate of suicide and substance abuse among Aboriginal young people is truly alarming. At the same time, healing, resilience and empowerment have become hallmarks of Aboriginal *communities* who have made healthy child development a priority in their efforts to take control of their lives and their health.

Children in chronically stressful circumstances or who experience the death of a parent or sibling may be denied a key attachment they need to succeed in life. In these cases, a *significant other* who acts as a caring and concerned mentor and offers security and guidance can compensate for loss and sharply reduce the probability of negative developmental outcomes.⁴⁶

Helping Young People Make a Successful Transition to Adolescence

When governments, businesses, schools, communities, families and young people work together, children have the best chance of making a successful transition to adolescence. Some of the key integrated strategies that have been shown to be effective are described in this section.

Support parents and families

- Communities and schools can help parents learn about normal changes in adolescence, how to recognize signs of distress and how to support the development of positive self-esteem. Parenting programs, outreach to troubled families and public education campaigns can show families how to interact with their children in an optimal way and how to reduce conflict and manage behavioural problems.
- Governments need to provide a social safety net which ensures that all families are able to address the basic needs of their children and adolescents. Policies that reduce inequities through job creation and training programs for parents and social transfer policies that recognize the expense and value of raising children are also important.
- Governments can help families stay involved in their children’s education by providing instruction for parents who need help with English-or French-as-a-second-language or with basic literacy and numeracy skills.
- Workplaces can help parents balance work and family life by providing family-friendly workplace policies, for example, flexible hours, work-at-home arrangements and job sharing, that allow parents to spend time with their children.



The Rancho Ehrlo Society in Saskatchewan offers recreation, social and cultural activities to Aboriginal youth. One program called “Dress-A-Champion” collects and distributes used hockey equipment to Aboriginal youth in Regina’s inner city. More than 2,000 pairs of skates and 600 sets of hockey equipment were distributed between 1992 and 1997. The Outdoor Hockey League has over 450 youth at seven different inner city communities playing organized hockey.

**Contact: Ehrlo Community Services, P.O. Box 570, Pilot Butte, SK S0G 3Z0;
Tel: (306) 781-1800; Fax: (306) 757-0599**

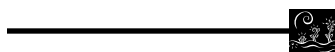


Help children and young people feel loved and connected

- Making sure that every child and adolescent is known by at least one adult in community and school programs is one way to help young people feel acknowledged. All groups can support mentoring programs in schools, workplaces and community organizations; intergenerational activities that link children, youth and older citizens; and training opportunities for peer leaders.
- Work with young people to ensure the safety of schools, playgrounds, community centres, malls and other places that young people frequent. Address underlying causes of conflict, including racism and gender inequities, harassment, bullying and verbal and physical abuse.
- Provide accessible, fun, skill-building recreation programming for all children and youth—physical, mental and creative activities. Support youth-serving agencies that provide young people with meaningful activities that build skills, for example, Girl Guides, Boy Scouts, Boys and Girls Clubs, 4H Clubs. Do not let user fees limit the access of low-income families to recreational and sport activities.
- Support spiritual development and cultural identity. Encourage churches, faith communities and cultural organizations to set up mentoring programs and initiatives led by young people that foster spiritual development.
- Families help children develop positive self-esteem when they give their children affection, love and respect. Set high but achievable standards and praise children for hard work and achievements.
- Give young people age-appropriate freedoms while setting clear limits and consequences that are agreed to ahead of time. Agree on expectations related to the treatment of others, homework, curfews, alcohol and drug use, etc. Be firm but never bully or shame a child or teenager.
- Give children information about the physical and emotional changes associated with puberty and encourage them to talk about how this affects them. Reassure children who mature later or earlier than their peers. Discourage preoccupations about body weight and size, which can lead to serious problems such as eating disorders and body image disturbances. Engage preteens and teens in straight talk about sexuality, safe sex, intimate relationships, alcohol use, family planning and reproductive health.
- Communities can support self-esteem by ensuring that community leaders and coaches understand child development and how to support positive self-esteem through clearly defined limits, appropriate discipline techniques and the liberal use of praise and encouragement.

The goal of the Cultural Program at Joe Duquette High School is to help Aboriginal students and elders learn about each other, to provide students with an opportunity to learn traditional crafts, skills, and cultural teachings, and to create a dance troupe. Grade 11 students help the elders teach skills and traditional ways to grade nine students in the school. Peer teachers are selected on the basis of the knowledge and experience gained through overcoming challenging life circumstances. Elders provide supervision for both peer educators and learners, and work with the school principal to provide any needed support.

Contact: Kevin Pilon, Joe Duquette High School, 919 Broadway Ave., Saskatoon, SK S7N 1B8; Tel: (306) 668-7490



Provide children and adolescents with safe, welcoming environments

- Sponsor programs and policies that help prevent child abuse and family violence; provide help to families experiencing violence in the home.
- Work with children, schools, police and others to ensure that playgrounds, schools, community centres, malls and other places children go are safe for all children. Monitor the safety of school and community environments and take action immediately if bullying, threatening or property damage occurs.
- Use discipline that is firm but not coercive—do not bully or shame children or withhold age-appropriate freedoms. Harsh, coercive parenting is associated with antisocial behaviour, academic problems, peer rejection and depression.⁴⁷
- Make schools an integral part of the community. Involve parents, youth-serving agencies, employers and other members of the community in school life. Provide before- and after-school programs developed by and for youth. Use the school as a centre for community activities. Integrate voluntarism and community involvement into school-based projects and assignments. This helps children and adolescents feel useful to others.
- Governments can encourage positive media programming by developing and monitoring guidelines for programming directed at children and youth. They can provide a positive example in all government communications by using nonsexist language and a broad range of images of young people which show the multicultural diversity we enjoy in Canada as a strength and advantage.
- Families, schools and communities can advocate media coverage that portrays healthy young people with a variety of shapes, looks and levels of ability and does not reinforce unrealistic images of masculinity and femininity. They can encourage and support media outlets that portray young people engaging in leadership activities and healthy lifestyle activities; involve children and youth; sponsor youth sports and activities; and provide coverage of young people's events.



Advising the mayor on city policy, reviewing a museum display, evaluating a restaurant, assisting in a senior's residence—these are typical activities for the teens who take part in Child Friendly Calgary's Youth Volunteer Corps and Youth Advisory Council to the Mayor. The Child Friendly Calgary program is designed to make the city more attuned to children's needs and to involve youth in the community.

In addition to the 250 member Youth Volunteer Corps and 30 member Advisory Council, the program has a teen-led Youth Foundation that raises money for philanthropic causes, a Peace Heroes Program that fosters a peaceful learning environment in the schools, an accreditation program that uses teen volunteers to carry out inspections of businesses that want a "child-friendly" designation, and a convention package for children who come to Calgary with parents who are attending conventions.

Contact: Child Friendly Calgary, #720 Lancaster Building, 304-8th Ave S.W., Calgary, Alberta T2P 1C2; Tel: (403) 266-5448; Fax: (403) 265-1932; Website: <http://www.calcna.ab.ca/populati/communit/friendly/friendly.html>



Involve youth in decisions and activities that affect their lives

- Schools and communities can provide young people with opportunities to take on leadership roles and make meaningful decisions about activities and policies that affect them. Encourage children and youth to define the issues that affect their well-being and work together to address these issues. Include youth in the development and operation of community facilities and services that have a direct impact on young people. Provide preteens and adolescents with meaningful voluntary work in the community. Support peer-led activities and provide training for peer leaders. Recognize the contributions of young people and welcome them into their adult roles in the community.

Promote positive social behaviour and reduce aggressive behaviour

- Support youth-serving agencies that teach children social adjustment skills for example, Girl Guides, Boy Scouts, 4H Clubs.
- Private and public sector, schools and youth-serving agencies can work together to set up meaningful work and volunteer activities for youth.
- Encourage churches and faith communities to provide opportunities for children to socialize, discuss values and explore their spiritual well-being.
- Encourage youth to show leadership in developing community activities that prevent crime and reduce violence.
- Provide recreation and skill development programs—for both athletic and non-athletic skills. These build positive behaviour and can help reduce antisocial behaviour in the community.

- Show children and adolescents how to solve interpersonal problems in a nonviolent, productive way. This can include programs in anger management, conflict resolution, assertiveness training and peer mediation—trained, neutral peers who help other students resolve conflicts.
- Maintain a positive peer culture that helps to prevent the formation of gangs and antisocial peer groups.
- Encourage the development of guidelines regarding the portrayal of violence in the media.
- Families can support positive social skill development by not allowing family members to discriminate against others, showing children how to avoid and resolve conflicts in a nonviolent, productive way, and monitoring how older siblings treat younger ones.
- Police-school liaison officers, schools, communities, workplaces and governments can work together to fund and support exemplary violence prevention programs.



ASAP: A SCHOOL-BASED ANTI-VIOLENCE PROGRAM

ASAP: A School-Based Anti Violence Program is an example of how governments, the private sector and the community can work together to develop model programs. ASAP was developed by the London Family Court Clinic in cooperation with educators and community members. It was originally designed as a violence prevention program for secondary schools focussing on gender issues in violence. Later, it grew to include elementary school initiatives including anti-bullying programs and gender- and culture-equity programs. Evaluations have shown positive results and the interventions have been well-documented in a manual and in videos. The program is now being replicated in several sites across Canada. In addition to local school, community and government resources, financial contributions to the development, evaluation and dissemination of the program included Health Canada, the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, the *London Free Press*, the Ontario Hydro Corporate Citizenship Fund, the Richard and Jean Ivey Foundation and the Donner Canadian Foundation.

Contact: London Family Court Clinic, 254 Pall Mall St., Suite 200, London, ON N6A 5P6; Tel: (519) 679-7250; Fax: (519) 675-7772; E-mail: info@lfcc.ca



Provide opportunities for learning and academic success

- Families can encourage learning by valuing school and graduation. Be involved in your child's school and provide opportunities for learning outside of school. Read to young children and take them to the library, exhibits and other places. Encourage older children and adolescents to go on their own.
- Communities can promote learning by providing public access to multimedia and computers at libraries and other community meeting points, and by providing English/French-as-a-second language programs for children, young people and family members who need them.
- Workplaces and governments can sponsor learning events such as science fairs and contests as well as programs and summer camps that help children learn. They can support the development, evaluation and dissemination of innovative learning tools.
- Communities encourage learning when they provide accessible, motivating learning opportunities for children and youth in a broad range of areas outside of school—for example, music, drama, physical activity, babysitting, first aid.
- Early interventions with children who are experiencing learning difficulties have an important effect on school adjustment as well as on academic success. Early academic success in school leads to further academic successes, increasingly positive attitudes toward school, and positive self-perception, and in boys, fewer juvenile offenses.⁴⁸
- Encourage media outlets to work with schools and community groups to arrange for young people to publish or broadcast their views.
- Schools can help children adjust to the transition from elementary school to intermediate and high schools by creating a welcoming, safe school environment and providing high quality instruction that includes a focus on problem-solving and how to respond to stress.

Make the healthy choices the easy choices

- Families can reinforce healthy choices by setting a good example, for instance, by being active, eating healthy foods and refraining from smoking, using illegal drugs and engaging in unsafe sex.
- Communities and schools can create walking and cycling paths, ski trails, skating areas, swimming areas and other incentives for spontaneous physical activity.
- Communities can adopt and enforce policies of no smoking nor use of alcohol or other drugs in public places where children gather and in all community programs that include children and young people. Sponsor alcohol-free family dances and special events, for example, New Year's Eve celebrations.
- Governments can sponsor media campaigns and programs that provide children and young teens with relevant information about healthy lifestyle choices in a way that appeals to them. Portray youth and role models choosing not to use alcohol, tobacco or drugs or engage in unhealthy sexual behaviour.

- Schools can provide opportunities for daily physical activity. Studies have shown that schools which provide daily physical activity at school can increase academic success despite a 13 percent concomitant decrease in time for academic instruction.⁴⁹
- Schools and communities can offer healthy food choices in school cafeterias and vending machines.
- Families and schools can help young people learn to critically analyze media messages and images, especially those that glamorize violence, sexism, racism, drinking, smoking, drug use and unhealthy sexual behaviour. Support youth involvement in positive media activities.
- Create walking and cycling paths, ski trails, skating areas, swimming areas and other incentives for spontaneous physical activity.
- Consider offering breakfast or school lunch programs in schools where children are coming to class hungry. Collaborate with parents and community members and make the program available to all, so as not to stigmatize participants.
- Adopt and enforce policies of no smoking or use of alcohol or other drugs on school property and in public places where children gather and in all community programs that include children and young people.
- Protest advertising of tobacco and alcohol near school properties or at events designed for young people and families. Report merchants who sell tobacco or alcohol to underage children.
- Sponsor media campaigns and programs that provide children and young teens with relevant information about healthy lifestyle choices in a way that appeals to them. Portray youth and role models choosing not to use alcohol, tobacco or drugs or engage in unhealthy sexual behaviour.
- Schools can adopt a comprehensive school health approach that complements high quality health instruction with a healthy physical and social environment in the school, and collaboration with services and supports in the community. Schools and communities can work together to provide teachers with in-service training on emerging health issues, and facilitate meetings of the principal, school nurse, guidance counsellors, social workers, police liaison officers and parent representatives.

Help children adapt and learn deal with stress and adversity

- Teach decision-making and problem-solving skills at home, in school and in the community. Train youth workers and teachers to help children and adolescents learn these skills.
- Work in partnership to help young people who are having serious academic and social problems stay in school or return to school.
- Ensure that children and youth who have disabilities or who come from low income families are not excluded from mainstream recreation activities because of physical, social or economic barriers.
- Adopt gender equity policies and zero tolerance policies for racism and discrimination in all community and school programming. Deal with young people who step outside of these boundaries by helping them learn alternative attitudes and behaviours.
- Provide post-divorce support to children. There is evidence that post-divorce programs in grades four to six that emphasize communication skills, the expression of feelings, problem solving, anger control and enhancing self-esteem may improve both academic achievement and social and emotional functioning.⁵⁰
- Work in partnership to provide breakfast or lunch programs in schools where children are coming to class hungry. Adopt and enforce policies prohibiting smoking, alcohol and drugs on school property.
- Workplaces can help young people learn how to learn. Set up collaborative mentoring programs with schools and community organizations as well as meaningful work and volunteer activities for adolescents. Donate used computers and other multimedia equipment to schools and youth-serving organizations.
- Workplaces can support community activities for children and youth. Sponsor events such as science fairs and contests. Support sports teams and other community activities for children and youth.



THE INDUSTRY-EDUCATION COUNCIL

In 1980, citizens in Hamilton, Ontario recognized the need to help youth prepare for the world of work by founding Canada's first Industry-Education Council (IEC), a community-based organization that brought together decision-makers from education, business, government and civic groups. The IEC complements the work of schools by providing elementary students and adolescents with early exposure to career options and positive role models from the community.

One program—Grade 8 Career Days—is offered in cooperation with Hamilton's Downtown Rotary Club. Guest speakers talk to students and teachers about workplace issues. The IEC also helps with an Inner City Mentoring program. To date, 170 inner city school children have been paired with screened and trained volunteers from the corporate sector.

**Contact: P.O. Box 57451, Jackson Station, Hamilton, ON L8P 4X3;
Tel: (888) 698-4888 or (905) 529-4483; Fax: (905) 529-5525; E-mail: iec@icom.ca;
Website: <http://www.icom.ca/~iec/iec/abtusnf.htm>**



Coming of Age



TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD

The transition to adulthood, which begins in adolescence and proceeds into the mid- or late-twenties, is never a linear, straightforward process. Increasingly, young people move back and forth between home, school, employment and an independent family life. This passage is unique for each individual. But regardless of their path, healthy young people exhibit achievement in four key outcome areas. These outcomes and the major factors that affect these outcomes are summarized in the box below.

PREPARED FOR WORK	PREPARED FOR INTIMACY AND FAMILY LIFE	PREPARED TO PARTICIPATE IN COMMUNITY LIFE	PREPARED TO MANAGE ONE'S PERSONAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING
Educational achievement	Integrated sense of identity	Opportunities to learn civic and social skills	Capacity for self-care
Opportunities to work and learn work related skills-	Positive relationships	Opportunities to make a meaningful contribution	Supportive environments
	Gender and role socialization		
	Societal influences: media, education, sports and recreation		

Key Outcomes and Influences in the Fourth Transition

In addition to gender and culture, a number of key factors have a major influence on the transition period from adolescence to adulthood. These are highlighted within each outcome section.



Environments that break down stereotypes and foster equity, tolerance and diversity support the development of positive self-identities in young people.

Prepared for Work

Research indicates that the most important factors in obtaining a good job are *educational achievement* and staying in school. Factors that affect young peoples' educational aspirations and achievements (and thus their opportunities in the labour market) include ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, which part of the country they live in and whether they live in a rural or urban area.

Parents and other significant adults who value education and stay involved in a child's schooling have a major influence on a young person's decision to stay in school. Supportive schools that have high but achievable standards and provide early interventions with learning and/or social problems help young people succeed in school. Involved workplaces and communities, and the removal of financial and social barriers to higher education are especially important for students from low-income families, isolated regions and diverse cultures.

Young people who are experiencing difficulties with learning or who come from families that do not support learning can benefit from a mentor—an adult or older peer who acts as a role model and caring friend. Mentors can be family members, friends, teachers, coaches, faith leaders and members of the community. Leaders in activities that appeal to a young person's interest in music, art or sport may be particularly useful at helping to nurture young peoples' motivation to learn outside of school. Similarly, mentors from unions and workplaces can be excellent tutors in specific subject areas.

Low educational attainment leads to high levels of unemployment. In 1994, the unemployment rate for young people age 25 to 29 with no more than a primary school education was almost four times the rate for young people with a university degree (27 versus seven percent), and over twice the overall unemployment rate among all 25 to 29 year olds.⁵¹

Males are more likely than females to leave school because of behaviour problems, for example, suspension or expulsion for failing to cooperate with the teacher as well as for economic reasons, for example, being offered a job or helping to support the family. Females are more likely to leave due to impending motherhood. Studies indicate that pregnancy frequently relates to other problems, such as low self-esteem, poor academic achievement and a lack of options.⁵²

Even for young people who attain higher levels of education, the transition from school to work is far from easy. Pervasive underemployment and the growth of temporary and part-time work in Canada has led to a growing gap between skill levels and job rewards. Well educated young Canadians may find themselves unable to support themselves due to limited job opportunities and a lack of effective bridging mechanisms from school to work.⁵³

Cooperative education, apprenticeship programs and school curriculums that teach *work-related skills* such as teamwork and problem-solving can help young people make a smoother transition from school to work. While many adolescents benefit from a part-time job, it is important that they maintain a healthy balance of time spent on work, educational and social activities.

Prepared for Intimacy and Family Life

Adolescence is characterized by a (sometimes troubled) search for an *integrated identity*. As young people reach adulthood, a more stable sense of self emerges. Gender, culture and sexual preference are important influences on identity formation. Environments that break down stereotypes and foster equity, tolerance and diversity support the development of positive self-identities in young people.

Positive relationships with peers, family members and other adults prepare young people for intimacy and family life. As young people grow older, peers and significant others outside the home play an increasingly important role in mentoring, role modelling and providing support. As young people mature, they develop the ability to see things from another person's point of view.

A number of circumstances increase the likelihood that young people will have difficulty in forming and maintaining intimate relationships. These include child sexual abuse, living in care, teen pregnancy and young parenting.

Young people whose peers and parents use alcohol or drugs are much more likely to do the same. In terms of smoking, the social network is believed to be the single most important determinant of smoking onset among young people.⁵⁴ On the other hand, there is a substantial body of evidence to support the effectiveness of peer teaching and peer helping when it comes to making healthy lifestyle choices.

This is the period when *gender and role socialization* are most evident. Young people who are ready for intimate relationships respect each other and share roles among the sexes. They are willing and able to make an intimate commitment to another person.

While family life experience is critical in learning how to develop healthy relationships, *societal influences in education, media and sport and recreation* systems can also have a positive or negative effect on how people learn to form and maintain relationships.

Prepared to Participate in Community Life

Social and civic competency are learned in the home, the school and the broader community. Partnerships among schools, community agencies, businesses and parents are increasingly seen as the most effective way to help young people learn the civic and social skills they need for adulthood.

Research suggests that older adolescents who have opportunities to help others and *make a meaningful contribution* make major developmental gains themselves. Community service and volunteer work give youth the opportunity to develop meaningful roles, to apply academic learning in real-life situations, to learn job skills such as cooperation and decision-making, to develop self-respect and to earn the respect of the community. Teens who participate in these programs have enhanced social skills and self-understanding, as well as an increased sense of making a contribution in other people's lives.

Remote, isolated communities and high density urban housing areas face special challenges in supporting young adults. Sometimes, the whole community needs to engage in a healing process that involves young people as important contributors to the process. Communities that care about young people will make every effort to break down patterns of inequity and hopelessness among young people, many of whom are unemployed and not attending school.

Prepared to Manage One's Personal Health and Well-Being

Self-care relates to people's ability to manage and improve their own health. This requires the knowledge, skills and motivation to carry out everyday tasks such as nutritious food preparation and dental care to knowing when to seek help for an emotional problem such as depression, and how to access health and social services for issues such as family violence. Finding productive ways to deal with stress that do not involve substance misuse or abuse is especially important to this age group. Much of these skills are learned at home and in school, but communities and workplaces also have a role to play in assisting young people outside of school.

Many of the concerns related to health in young adulthood are linked to personal lifestyle choices. However, all of these "choices" are linked to the capacity of the home, school, community, workplaces and governments to make "the healthy choices the easy choices" for young people. Strategies to support healthy development in this transition need to focus on providing *supportive environments* in which young people learn and live.

Crowded housing, neighbourhoods where there is a lot of drug dealing, isolated living conditions with little to do, and threatening school environments contribute to increased violence, youth misuse of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs, and increased feelings of alienation and depression.

Community cohesion—the extent to which community members, employees or students and staff in a school feel a collective sense of responsibility to the health and well-being of their fellows—also affects the health practices of youth. When residents have little attachment to the community and each other, there are more likely to be drug and alcohol related problems.⁵⁵

Media are powerful transmitters of culture, learning and values. Young people need to develop media awareness skills that allow them to critically analyze media messages and images, especially those that glamorize violence, unrealistic body shapes, stereotyping, discrimination, smoking, drinking, drug use and unhealthy sexual behaviours.

Helping Young People Make a Successful Transition to Adulthood

When families, young people, schools, communities, workplaces and governments work together, young people have the best chance of making a successful transition to adulthood. Strategies that support lifelong learning, healthy lifestyle choices and the transition to employment in meaningful jobs are most important in this transition.

Here are some key support and intervention strategies in the transition to adulthood stage of development. Some examples of successfully evaluated initiatives that demonstrate these strategies are highlighted in boxes in this section.



CHANGE YOUR FUTURE

Change Your Future (CYF) which operates in twelve Ontario school boards is funded by the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship Anti-Racism Secretariat and administered by the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training. CYF targets visible-minority students considered to be at risk of dropping out of school. Mentoring in the form of individual counselling with a CYF counsellor and group sessions are used to improve students' marks and interest in school, and reduce dropout and transfer rates. Alternative schooling methods are also used. A two-year evaluation by the Toronto Board of Education showed a nine percent dropout rate compared to a 19 percent dropout rate for a comparison group. While CYF is designed for visible minority students, participants believe that the program has much to offer to all students.

Contact: 1 Dundas Street West, P.O. Box 79, Toronto, Ontario M5J 1Z3

Tel: (416) 204-4478; Fax: (416) 204-4378; E-mail: info@tlp.on.ca

Website: <http://www.tlp.on.ca/cyf/whatis.html>





The Fredericton High School Student Parent Program is a stay-in-school initiative to help student parents continue their education or re-enter the educational system. It is now in its seventh year of operation. The program has two main components: a licensed day care centre and learning sessions which provide information, skills, and support to student parents. The program also offers counselling and a peer support group. Student parents who use the day care centre are required to take a credit course in parenting. The course helps students meet the challenge of being a parent by focusing on topics such as methods of effective discipline, child safety, nutrition, self-esteem, parenting and stress. The course is also open to other students (parents or non-parents) in the school.

Contact: Principal, Fredericton High School, 300 Priestman Street, Fredericton, NB E3B 6J8; Tel: (506) 453-5830



Help young people stay in school or continue to learn in other settings

- Young people are more likely to stay in school when their families value education and graduation and their parents stay involved in their school.
- Schools help students achieve academically when they provide clear, school- wide expectations for academic achievement, appropriate conduct, teaching practices and student responsibilities.
- Mentoring programs involving families, schools, workplaces and communities can help keep high-risk students in school.
- Schools can help pregnant teens and young parents stay in school by providing daycare on site and other supports.
- Governments and workplaces can make bursaries and scholarships available to encourage young people to further their education and to attract young women into nontraditional fields of learning. This is particularly important for young people in low-income families and/or those who live in remote areas, as well as for young people with disabilities.
- Young people with school or learning problems do not usually respond well to rigid structure and authority. Communities, schools and workplaces can work together to offer alternative educational opportunities.



Strategies that support lifelong learning, healthy lifestyle choices and the transition to employment in meaningful jobs are most important.



The Dufferin Mall in Toronto, Ontario was experiencing serious problems related to youth, street drugs and safety for women. The manager of the mall decided to develop the mall's potential as a community resource to help address these issues. Through a series of negotiations, he brought services to the mall to address a variety of issues and problems.

A number of partners joined him in the following efforts:

- West Toronto Collegiate offered educational services, on site, for students at risk and drop-outs.
- Many of the students that were hanging out at the mall now attend school there and work part-time to earn school credits.
- A local high-school has set up a school reentry program that has encouraged a number of students to return to school.
- A youth worker spends 40 percent of his time providing daily counselling on site, and provides a series of programs and organizes tournaments with equipment and trophies donated by the mall.
- Mall security people ally themselves with the families of problem youth, involving families in the decision to ban young people from the mall for disruptive behaviour.
- An Economic Recovery Program of the Bloor Lansdowne Committee Against Drugs was established to offer programs to revitalize neighbourhood business.

The initiative has resulted in a reduction in problems and demonstrated benefits to the population using the mall. Residents agree that the safety of the mall and the neighbourhood has improved. A number of young people have continued their education through outreach and educational opportunities offered at the mall. Job training opportunities have been created, and concrete changes, such as the attraction of more businesses and better business returns, have resulted from the Economic Recovery Program.

Contact: Dufferin Mall Youth Services; Tel: (416) 535-1140



Help young people find meaningful employment

- Governments and workplaces can provide policies, incentives and training programs that help young workers move from under-employment and part-time work to meaningful full-time employment.
- Workplaces, schools and governments can work together to provide cooperative education and apprenticeship opportunities. Studies show that students who participated in cooperative education programs are more likely to be employed than those who did not.
- Schools and workplaces can work together to provide high-learning quality career counselling, career day events and cooperative programs that help young people learn life and work skills such as decision-making, conflict resolution and working in teams.



The Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP) builds on the Cooperative Education Program which is offered by most Ontario school boards as an adaptation of a German model of apprenticeship. It is administered by the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training and the Ontario Training and Adjustment Board. Students who do not plan to take post-secondary studies apply to OYAP in Grade 10 and begin in Grade 11 or when they reach age 16. The program is tied into cooperative education.

Each participant begins with an unpaid work placement as a co-operative student. After 90 days, the employer decides whether to retain the student as an apprentice. A formal contract commits the apprentice to three or four years with the employer and the employer is responsible for training and paying the apprentice. Since 1992, approximately 600 students per year have participated in OYAP although some 60,000 Ontario students are in co-op programs. The economic recession of the early 1990s which made it difficult for employers to hire apprentices is largely responsible for the low rate of participation in OYAP. Female participation is low, although OYAP does make an effort to steer young women into nontraditional occupations.

OYAP helps students learn work skills in real jobs and allows them to earn wages and high school credits at the same time. Schools benefit through exposure to training methods used in industry and employers benefit through reduced recruitment and training costs.

Contact: Training Hotline: (416) 326-5656; Info line: 1-800-387-5656;

Website: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/training/apprenticeship/oyap.html>



Support self-esteem and positive mental health

- Families can help young people develop a strong, positive sense of self by recognizing their uniqueness, helping them to set short-term, achievable goals and setting clearly-defined limits that are agreed to ahead of time around issues such as honesty, school work, the use of alcohol and other drugs, respect for others and household commitments.
- Everyone—families, schools, communities, workplaces and governments—should respect the emerging adult's views and growing need for autonomy.
- Families, schools and communities promote positive mental health by reassuring young people that they are recognized and loved. Encouraging young people to talk about their feelings helps them feel in control of their emotions when they are under pressure.

Encourage young people to be involved in community life

- Schools and communities can support peer mentoring and provide training for peer leaders.
- Families can encourage young people to join activities at school and in the community, to take on leadership roles and to work with others in faith congregations and voluntary groups.
- Everyone needs to be aware of signs of emotional distress in young people and to take action immediately if you suspect that an adolescent is depressed or suicidal.

- Schools and communities can work together to provide counselling for students who are depressed, experiencing abuse or exhibiting signs of eating disorders or other emotional problems.
- Communities need to welcome youth in organized events and public places. They can encourage youth to be involved in decision-making and provide opportunities for young people to volunteer and learn civic skills.

Creating safe, equitable environments for young people

- In the home, families can create safe, equitable environments by modelling respectful relationships at home, finding non-violent solutions to problems and intervening in sibling conflict and abuse.
- Families, schools and communities need to discuss gender violence with young people and make it clear that harassment and abuse are unacceptable in any form (psychological and verbal abuse are good predictors of physical abuse).
- Schools, workplaces and communities can adopt gender equity policies that encourage mutual respect and set clear boundaries related to racism, harassment and discrimination based on gender, religion, sexual preference and ability.
- Workplaces, governments and communities can empower residents in distressed neighbourhoods to work together with youth to change other environments in the community.
- Families and significant others need to talk with teens about family planning and the responsibility of parenting. Encourage young men (as well as young women) to learn skills related to child care and home management.
- Schools and communities can provide full access to family planning for young people and provide culturally-sensitive, age-specific support to young pregnant women and their partners. Offering daycare programs in schools, classes in family life, information in parenting and homevisiting to young parents can help young people become better parents.
- Workplaces can adopt family-friendly workplace policies such as flexible hours, work-at-home arrangements and job sharing to allow parents to spend time with their children, and provide information and counselling for young parents and parents of adolescents who are experiencing distress.
- Workplaces can provide extra support to middle and low-income employees who are young parents by:
 - allowing for greater mobility for young working class employees through bridging programs that allow for upward mobility
 - providing educational sessions on parenting and home management skills for young parents who need help
 - providing Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) and referrals to help in the community for young employees who have been sexually abused
 - supporting family events such as picnics and family bowling leagues.
- Governments can help young families attain a stable and adequate standard of living that provides for the well-being of their children through taxation and income transfer policies that recognize the expense and value of raising children.
- Governments, communities and schools can work together to provide job creation and training programs for young parents.



Through the efforts of the Residents' Association, Alexandra Park has undergone a transformation—from a centre for drug trafficking, where residents were plagued by crime and violence—to a vibrant cohesive community where residents of all ages are involved in community life.

With the assistance of the Metropolitan Toronto Housing Authority (MTHA) and City of Toronto officials, the Residents' Association removed walls and shrubs that hid drug dealers and improved lighting in the community. The association worked with the police and the MTHA to evict tenants operating crack houses and increase the frequency of patrols to discourage gangs of drug traffickers.

In addition to these enforcement measures, the Residents' Association worked with the MTHA and the City of Toronto Mayor's Task Force on Drugs to develop a prevention program for young people. Through this project, a youth coordinator worked with a group of young people at high risk for drug abuse and drug trafficking.

The Residents' Association has continued to devote resources to activities aimed at preventing substance abuse among young people and involving them in community life. Current initiatives include an economic development project to help young people create small businesses and access job-readiness training; recreational programs and youth dances and other social events at the community centre. Two young people are members of the association's board of directors, which is made up exclusively of community members.

In recognition of the positive changes its activities have fostered in the community, the Alexandra Park Residents' Association received the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse (CCSA) Award of Distinction in 1995.

Contact: Alexandra Park Residents' Association, 105 Grange Crt, Toronto, ON
Tel: (416) 603-9603



Make the healthy choices the easy choices

- Family members, teachers, community leaders and media spokespeople are important role models for adolescents. Modelling healthy lifestyle choices such as not smoking and staying active will have a positive effect on young people.
- Communities can provide meaningful, healthy ways for young people to use their leisure time. All young people need meeting places of their own, access to skill-building recreation and sport programs and opportunities to enjoy spontaneous physical activity at venues such as rinks, skateboarding parks, and swimming areas.
- Health-promoting workplaces offer EAPs and counselling for troubled employees. They have an occupational nurse liaison who can provide advice on health concerns and organize health promotion programs for employees. They provide a smoke-free workplace and enforce policies against drinking or drug use at work. They offer healthy food choices in cafeterias as well as sport and active living programs for employees either on site or in collaboration with a community facility. Health-promoting workplaces also maintain strict occupational health and safety standards. Young workers are at particularly high risk for injury on the job.

- Governments and communities can regulate and enforce bans on the advertising and sale of tobacco and alcohol to underage youth.
- Families, schools and communities can help young people learn to critically analyze media messages and images. They can encourage media outlets to support and cover young people's sports and activities, and to provide a space for them to publish or broadcast their views.
- Governments can sponsor the development, evaluation and sharing of best practice health promotion programs for young people in the home, school and community. They can provide subsidies to schools and communities to ensure that no young people are excluded from participating in athletics and other recreational activities because they do not have enough money.

Conclusion



*“We did not simply inherit the earth from our ancestors,
we are also borrowing it from our children”*

Chief Seattle
1788-1866.

The Growing Healthy Canadians set of resources—this guide, a Website at www.growinghealthykids.com, and four fact sheets—were developed to organize and make accessible the growing body of evidence on what children need to grow into healthy adults. The Website is comprehensive and intended for a wide range of groups and individuals to use. The fact sheets contain the most salient highlights of the information found on the site; they were developed for community leaders, professionals, parents and other interested adults in communities, schools and workplaces. This guide is a synthesis of the information found on the Website, and is intended as a quick reference tool. The guide and all four fact sheets can be viewed, downloaded or printed from the Website.

As with each of these resources, this guide has attempted to illustrate the important role we all have to play in positive child development. When young people, families, communities, schools, workplaces and governments make a serious commitment to contributing to the well being of children and youth, we all stand to benefit.

All three components of the Growing Healthy Canadians set of resources are based on four main developmental transitions, and are further organized according to the positive outcomes that all children and young people need to achieve. By achieving these outcomes, infants, children and youth are better able to move into the next major life transition which awaits them: into the first year of life; into the formal educational system; into a healthy adolescence; and into socially responsible, productive and healthy adults and possible future parents. The resources also identify what influences these outcomes, as well as what can be done by all of us in society to help children achieve these positive outcomes at each developmental stage.

This framework helps clarify what needs to be achieved, how and by whom. The challenges raised in the “what can we do” sections of this guide, while at times ambitious, are certainly achievable. Funders, for example governments, foundations and others can use the information with confidence to determine where money will best be spent. Policy makers at all levels can justify establishing family-friendly policies and programs within their jurisdictions which make a difference for children and youth. Managers and colleagues in workplaces can also do their part by setting policies and fostering environments which support their employees’ important roles as working parents.



**When young people,
families, communities,
schools, workplaces
and governments make
a serious commitment
to contributing to the
well being of children
and youth, we all
stand to benefit.**

Communities and schools also have an important role to play in ensuring that they provide the opportunities, services, recreational facilities and underlying structures for a healthy social and physical environment for the next generation of responsible and civic-minded adults. And the role of individuals should not be overlooked, as there are many ways for family members and non-family members alike to make a difference in the lives of the children around them, through taking the time to volunteer, advocating positive change, or just being there to listen and support a child.

We hope this guide and the other Growing Healthy Canadians resources will capture the imaginations of groups and individuals and inspire them to become more involved in the healthy development of all children and youth in this country.

Investing in children now in any of the many ways mentioned in this guide is not just financially sound and socially responsible, it can make you feel proud that you have made an important difference. *And, it can even be fun!*

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