



The Early Years: Early Child Care Experiences

Early child care experiences affect children's development in two primary ways. First, high-quality child care helps provide important social skills necessary for healthy relationships with others. Second, high-quality child care contributes to children's early language development and ability to learn, which, in turn, helps children do better in school later on.

Many factors determine if your child will do well in child care. These factors include:

- *The quality of care.* Poor-quality child care may be harmful to children. High-quality child care centers tend to have a high ratio of teachers to children, a small group of children, and a high level of staff education or training.
- *The mother or family's feelings about working outside the home.* If the mother doesn't believe she should be working, or the father is opposed to the mother's employment, the resulting family stress may affect the child. On the other hand, if the parents are happy about working, the family may view their child's time in day care as a positive part of a normal day.
- *The conditions of the mother's or father's job.* Tension with co-workers and supervisors, and other severe job stresses, can be carried home and affect your child's adjustment to child care. If parents enjoy their jobs and their employers have family-friendly policies, the child is less likely to experience problems.
- *The presence of stressful family events.* Tensions at home, such as marital problems, can interact with job-related problems and affect the child and her behavior in child care. However, if families have support from their child care providers and employers through difficult times, their children are likely to do well in child care.

When you are concerned about the quality of your child's early care experiences, you can talk to your community's child care resource and referral agency (CCR&R). CCR&Rs assist parents in finding and choosing high-quality child care providers. In cases where parents have serious concerns about the level of care being provided, CCR&Rs can help parents identify the appropriate agency for registering complaints.

The information contained in this summary is taken from the Early Years chapter of the Violence Prevention Resource Guide for Parents by Peggy Patten and Anne S. Robertson (Champaign, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education, 2001).

Funding for this publication was provided in part by the Illinois Violence Prevention Authority. The views and statements expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of the Illinois Violence Prevention Authority.

This project has been funded at least in part with Federal funds from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, under contract number ED-99-CO-0020. The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Education, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.