



A Nationwide Network of Doctors
Advocating For Young Children

Kids Matter
Improving Outcomes for Children in Washington State

Healthy Children Learn

Why Health and School Readiness are Inseparable

Health is about the Whole Child

Health and development are broad terms which encompass many things, including:

Physical Health – “Is the body healthy?”

- Promotion of “good health” such as through nutrition and physical activity
- Absence of disease or illness
- Early diagnosis and treatment of illness or chronic conditions

Oral Health – “Are the teeth and mouth healthy?”

- Promotion of good oral hygiene and healthy teeth
- Absence of decay and pain
- Early diagnosis and treatment of oral disease

Social-Emotional and Mental Health – “Is the child happy and interacting well?”

- Promotion of self-confidence, self-control and social competence
- Presence of positive adult-child and child-child relationships
- Absence of behavior or mental health problems
- Early identification and management of any problems

Cognitive Development – “Is the child learning?”

- Promotion of brain development “learning and making connections”
- Early identification of and intervention for cognitive delays

Motor Development – “Is the child moving and developing skills?”

- Promotion of physical skills
- Fine motor – progress in using the hands to manipulate objects
- Gross motor – progress in using the whole body/large muscles – such as walking, climbing
- Early identification of and intervention for motor delays

Language Development – “Is the child recognizing and using language?”

- Promotion of language development
- Presence of emerging skills – understanding language, making sounds and words, interest in books and reading
- Early identification of and intervention for language delays

A child’s health includes learning...

Health is inseparable from development

Development is inseparable from health

... Good health leads to better learning

Poor Health Prevents Learning

Some examples:

Physical Health

Children with under-treated asthma miss more days of child care or school, and often participate less when present.

Oral Health

Children with tooth pain from untreated decay are distracted from learning.

Social-Emotional Health

Children living in stressful environments often develop relational problems that interfere with their ability to interact positively with adults and peers and learn in group settings, keys to early school readiness.

Cognitive Development

Children without age-appropriate activities and interactions do not stimulate their brains to grow and change optimally to set the stage for more learning.

Large Motor Development

Children who are not given the chance to play in safe environments do not learn to use their bodies as well, and are at greater risk for obesity.

Small Motor Development

Children who do not have the chance to play with crayons may have a harder time learning to use a pencil for later writing skills.

Language Development

Children who are not read to or exposed to interactive language with adults may be delayed in their language skills.

How can we promote young children's health and development?

Focus on prevention. By supporting and promoting the health of children from birth (and even before) we will enhance their learning and later success in school.

Provide comprehensive health care to all children in a medical home. Make sure all children have insurance that connects them to a regular place for preventive care, and the early diagnosis and treatment of medical, dental and mental health needs.

Provide nurturing environments for all children. Adults who care for children at home, in child care and in the community can promote children's healthy development through nurturing relationships. The community can welcome and support young children and families through "child friendly" policies and programs.

Provide support and information to parents. Being a parent is a tough job. Make sure parents have access to information and tools to help them promote their child's health and development. Governments, employers and businesses can promote children's health and development through "child and family friendly" policies.

Provide support and information to child care and early childhood teachers and other caregivers. Make sure all caregivers have the skills they need to nurture all children in their care. Parents and other caregivers can partner together to promote children's health and development.