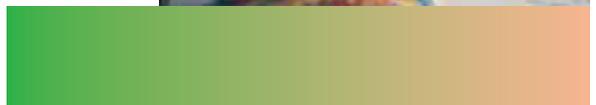
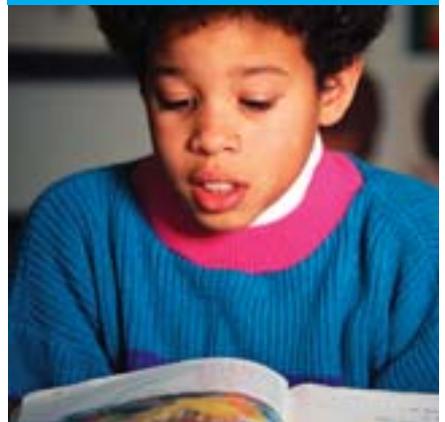


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Things
Research Says
About Child
Development



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25

Things
Research Says
About Child
Development

Dear Readers:

When you look over these 25 reasons, you may be thinking: “What’s the big deal? Don’t we all know this stuff?” For example, who would doubt that parental involvement is vital for the healthy development of children and teens, or that deep poverty poses grave risks to that development, or that both heredity and environment interact to shape the character and characteristics of our children? Well, a lot of people do indeed know all “this stuff,” but one of the reasons they do is that many kinds of knowledge about child development have accumulated over the years. For years, often away from the limelight, researchers have been conscientiously studying what children need to grow up into healthy, productive, well-adjusted adults, and what helps or hurts that progression.

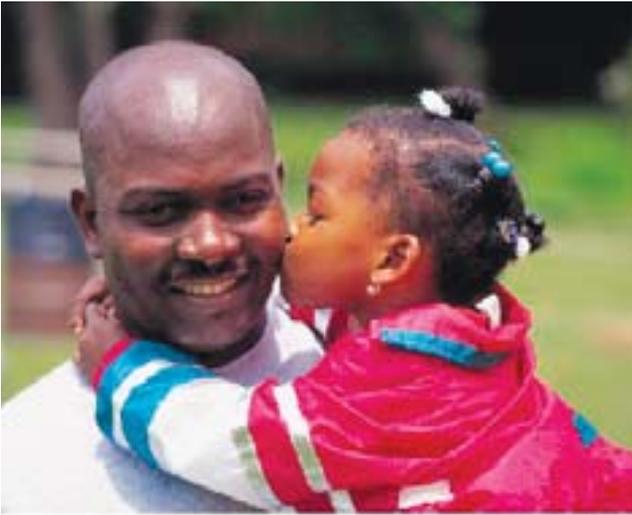
This year, as Child Trends commemorates its 25th anniversary, we are proud of our strong record of contributions to this accumulation of knowledge. During this signal year in our organization’s history, we thought it would be particularly appropriate to pull together key child development insights derived from research conducted at Child Trends and elsewhere. And we wanted to present this information in language and in a format that would be easily accessible to all. Hence, this booklet. Please note that the numbers beside the 25 points that we present are used for convenience—not to imply that some points are more important than others.

For 25 years, we have been conducting “Research in the Service of America’s Children,” as we often describe what we do. As we look ahead, we rededicate ourselves to this vital work and the commitment that fuels it.

Thank you for your interest in children and in Child Trends!

Kristin Anderson Moore, Ph.D.
President and Senior Scholar
Child Trends

Ann B. Schnare, Ph.D.
Board Chair
Child Trends



Relationships matter, especially family relationships...

- 1** Parents matter. Children with positive, caring relationships with their parents are more likely to avoid risks and develop positively.
- 2** Fathers, as well as mothers, matter for children. Fathers' active engagement, responsibility, and accessibility support children's development.
- 3** Relationships matter. Attachment between mother and infant, positive relationships between parents and children over the years, relationships with siblings and peers, and supportive relationships with extended family members and other caring adults are critical to child and youth development.

Other influences matter less than the family, but they do affect development...



4 Children's development is affected most strongly by factors close to the child, such as his or her immediate family. However, neighborhoods, schools, and extended families also affect children. More distant influences, such as public policies, the media and the larger culture, also can affect children, though the effects of these distant factors tend to be transmitted through family and community influences.

5 Peer influences can be negative but are more often positive and do not inevitably or necessarily displace parental influences, even among adolescents.



Nature and nurture interact during development...

6 Genetic influences affect possibilities for children's characteristics and development, but the effects of genes occur in interaction with environmental influences. Hence, it is not so much "nature versus nurture" as an ongoing interaction between heredity and environment.

7 Children's development occurs across multiple and interrelated outcome areas, including cognitive development and academic attainment; physical health and safety; mental health and emotional development; and social development and behavior. Children with multiple deficiencies are at greater risk for poor development.

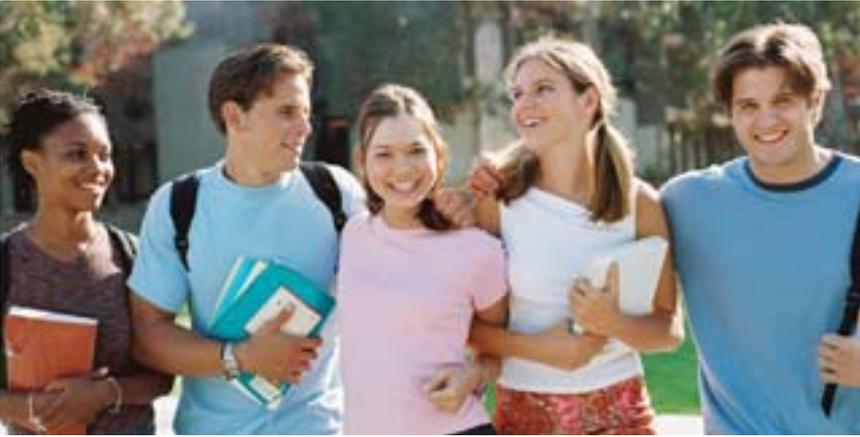
“Child Outcomes” are not singular. Many elements together make for a whole and healthy child...



8 Appropriate control (self-regulation) of emotions and behavior is a critical skill for a child.

9 Mental health matters as much for development as physical health.

10 Successful development includes not only the suppression of negative or risky behaviors, but also the fostering of positive characteristics, such as empathy, altruism, spirituality, curiosity, and being engaged in school.



Researchers have learned quite a bit about what helps children and what does not...

11 Providing information alone (e.g., through lectures) is not an effective strategy for changing adolescent behavior.

12 Interventions for disadvantaged children and adolescents that are brief, intermittent, superficial, and focused on the goals of adults rather than the needs and aspirations of children are less likely to enhance children's development.

13 Maternal employment, per se, is not intrinsically harmful to children (though the jury is still out for infants). However, the quality and stability of alternate care can affect children's development. For both parents, the implications of employment for families are complex and depend upon earnings, job security, role preferences, work hours and schedule, benefits, and flexibility.

14 High-quality early child care and education programs can enhance children's development in the short-term and the long-term.

15 High levels of turbulence (multiple changes) across, or within, areas of children's lives can undermine development. Turbulence can include changes in family composition, residence and neighborhood, child care arrangements, and school.

16 Poverty, especially deep poverty, beginning early in life and long-term, poses challenges to development.

17 In addition to love and warmth, positive parenting involves consistent and clear guidance, avoids harsh parenting and abuse, provides rich language and experiences to stimulate cognitive development, and models positive values. Fancy and expensive toys are not essential.

18 There are few critical periods, or times, when irreversible problems develop.



Demography isn't destiny, but it matters...



19 The circumstances of conception affect children's development. Unintended and, especially, unwanted children face greater challenges, and children with large numbers of closely-spaced siblings face health and developmental challenges.

20 A significant proportion of early sexual activity is coercive or unwanted.

21 Most children raised by single parents or in disrupted families generally develop normally. Nevertheless, children develop best when they are raised by both biological parents in a low-conflict marriage.

22 For children, parental cohabitation (living together) is not equivalent to marriage, and cohabiting unions are considerably more likely than marriages to break up.

Recent decades have seen important improvements in children's lives, but some groups and some child outcomes have not seen similar progress...



23 Enormous variation exists among contemporary children and families in the U.S. Some children have deep and serious problems. However, most children have multiple strengths and assets.

24 Important improvements in health, education, and housing have occurred for children in the past decade. Challenges center on *behaviors*, such as substance use, sex, violence, diet, and exercise.

25 The public's perception of children is much more negative than the evidence warrants. Polls indicate that adults believe problems are more prevalent than they really are, and that they are not aware of a number of positive trends.

About Child Trends

Child Trends is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research center dedicated to improving the lives of children and families by conducting research and providing science-based information to improve the decisions, programs, and policies that affect children. In advancing this mission, Child Trends collects and analyzes data; conducts, synthesizes, and disseminates research; designs and evaluates programs; and develops and tests promising approaches to research in the field. Child Trends provides valuable knowledge to government, service providers, foundations, and journalists on a wide range of topics related to the well-being of children, youth, and families. These topics include:

- Early childhood and school readiness
- Youth development
- Fatherhood
- Family well-being and parenting
- Teen pregnancy, family structure, and marriage
- International comparisons
- Health
- Education
- Positive indicators of child and youth development
- Welfare and poverty
- Transition to adulthood

To carry out this work, Child Trends has attracted an interdisciplinary staff that includes specialists in developmental and social psychology, sociology, economics, social demography, human development, public policy, and communications.

Child Trends was founded in 1979 by the Foundation for Child Development to bring a child development perspective to large-scale survey research so that a clearer picture of the well-being of America's children would begin to emerge. Both the size and the scope of the organization have expanded over the years, but its overall commitment to elucidating the status of America's children remains.

To learn more about Child Trends, visit our Web site (www.childtrends.org) and our sister Web site of the Child Trends DataBank (www.childtrendsdatabank.org), our continuously updated online resource of statistical information on children and families.



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