# Child Development and Early Learning

### Why it is important to share and act on this information

<http://www.factsforlifeglobal.org/03/> Retrieved on January 12, 2012

Child development refers to the changes that occur as a child grows and develops in relation to being physically healthy, mentally alert, emotionally sound, socially competent and ready to learn.

The first five years of a child's life are fundamentally important. They are the foundation that shapes children's future health, happiness, growth, development and learning achievement at school, in the family and community, and in life in general.

Recent research confirms that the first five years are particularly important for the development of the child's brain, and the first three years are the most critical in shaping the child's brain architecture. Early experiences provide the base for the brain's organizational development and functioning throughout life. They have a direct impact on how children develop learning skills as well as social and emotional abilities.

Children learn more quickly during their early years than at any other time in life. They need love and nurturing to develop a sense of trust and security that turns into confidence as they grow.

Babies and young children grow, learn and develop rapidly when they receive love and affection, attention, encouragement and mental stimulation, as well as nutritious meals and good health care.

Understanding the stages of child development helps parents know what to expect and how to best support the child as she or he grows and develops. In many settings, early childhood programs support parents and their children from infancy through age 8, which includes the important transition from home to school.

All children have the right to be raised in a family and to have access to quality health care, good nutrition, education, play and protection from harm, abuse and discrimination. Children have the right to grow up in an environment in which they are enabled to reach their full potential in life.

It is the duty of parents, other caregivers and family members, communities, civil society and governments to ensure that these rights are respected, protected and fulfilled.