



QUALITY INFANT AND TODDLER CHILD CARE MATTERS

The first three years of a child's life are a critical time of growth and development. Quality care is extremely important for babies and toddlers, and increasing numbers of children are cared for by someone other than their parent. Early environments make a difference, and nurturing relationships are important for all children.⁷⁰ Even families with plenty of financial resources need support to provide their children with the nurturing and stimulation they need. Families dealing with the challenges of poverty have an even greater need for support for their children⁷¹, to ensure they grow up healthy and ready for school.

Quick Facts

- There are more than 12 million infants and toddlers in the United States.⁷²
- 46 percent of infants and toddlers under age 3 live in low-income families, and 24 percent live in poor families.⁷³
- In 2005, 17.6 percent of infants and 26 percent of toddlers of employed mothers were in care in an organized facility (such as a child care center).⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Shonkoff, J. & Phillips, D. (Eds.) and National Research Council. (2000). *From neurons to neighborhoods: The science of early childhood development*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

⁷¹ Kreader, J.L., Ferguson, D., & Lawrence, S. (2005, August). Infant and toddler child care quality. Retrieved February 24, 2011 from the National Center for Children in Poverty at http://www.nccp.org/publications/pub_626.html

⁷² Chau, M., Thampi, K., & Wight, V.R. (2010). Basic facts about low-income children, 2009: Children under age 3. Retrieved February 24, 2011, from the National Center for Children in Poverty at http://www.nccp.org/publications/pub_971.html

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ United States Census Bureau (2008). *Who's minding the kids? Child care arrangements: Spring 2005, detailed tables*. Retrieved February 22, 2011, from <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/child/pl-2005.html>

- Another 9.5 percent of infants and 10 percent of toddlers of employed mothers were in family child care homes.⁷⁵

The supply of child care for infants and toddlers is not nearly enough to meet the needs of families.

- Licensed care is less available for infants and toddlers than for older children.⁷⁶
- Infant care is often the most difficult to find, and parents often face long waiting lists.⁷⁷
- Families earning low incomes find it particularly difficult to find care for their infants and toddlers because of other factors, including the need for part-time care, care during nontraditional work hours, care for children with special needs, or care for sick children.⁷⁸

Families need a variety of child care options available to them so that parents can go to work.

- Quality programs that reach families early and offer flexible service options have the largest positive impact on infants, toddlers and their parents.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Fuller, Bruce and Xiaoyan Liang. *Can Poor Families Find Child Care? Persisting Inequality Nationwide and in Massachusetts*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1996.

⁷⁷ Blank, Helen, Andrea Behr, and Karen Schulman. *State Developments in Child Care, Early Education and School Age Care, 2000*. Washington, DC: Children's Defense Fund 2001.

⁷⁸ Paulsnell, Diane, Julie Cohen, Ali Steiglitz, Erica Lurie-Hurvitz, Emily Fenichel, Ellen Kisker. *Partnerships for Quality: Improving Infant-Toddler Child Care for Low-Income Families*. Princeton, NJ: Mathematic Policy Research, Inc. 2002.

⁷⁹ Ounce of Prevention Foundation. *Ready for School: The Case for Including Babies and Toddlers as We Expand Preschool Opportunities* 2003

- Options may include center programs, family child care homes, or relative caregivers. For continuity and stability, and so parents can work, the provision of child care must be reliable for the family.

Infant and toddler child care must be of quality care.

- More than half of kindergarten children are considered not ready when they arrive at school.⁸⁰ School readiness includes behavioral development and social emotional skills, in addition to cognitive and language skills.
- Infants and toddlers are not too young to benefit from quality early learning environments. 80 percent of brain development occurs between birth and age 3.
- According to ZERO TO THREE, quality infant-and-toddler child care includes small groups; high staff-to-child ratios; continuity of care; primary caregiver assignments; health and safety; and cultural and linguistic continuity.⁸¹
- One study of 400 child care centers in four states found that only 8 percent of infant classrooms were of good or excellent quality. Forty percent of infant programs were of poor quality.⁸²
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⁸⁰ Knitzer, J. (2001). *Using Mental Health Strategies to Move the Early Childhood Agenda and Promote School Readiness*. New York, NY: Carnegie Corporation of New York and National Center for Children in Poverty.

⁸¹ Zero to Three Policy Center. "Improving Quality Child Care for Infants and Toddlers" January 2005.

⁸² Cost, Quality and Child Outcomes Study Team. *Cost, Quality and Child Outcomes in Child Care Centers*, Public report, 2nd Edition. (Denver Economics Department, University of Colorado at Denver, 1995).

⁸³ Ounce of Prevention Foundation. *Ready for School: The Case for Including Babies and Toddlers as We Expand Preschool Opportunities* 2003.