

FACT SHEET



FSU Center for Prevention & Early Intervention Policy

Research on Quality Child Care for Infants and Toddlers

High quality child care can accelerate children's social, emotional, cognitive, and verbal development. Conversely, poor quality child care can cause stress, aggression, and social-emotional problems in infants and toddlers. Evidence-based practices can guide programs in understanding how various aspects of quality care affect children's development.

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RESEARCH

The single most important factor in both social-emotional development and quality care is the relationship between the child and the caregiver. **Early relationships with caregivers** are the strongest predictors of children's social and behavioral skills. Children who develop close relationships with their caregivers have fewer problem behaviors, better classroom and social skills, and greater language ability and math skills from the preschool years into elementary school.

The quality of caregiver-child relationships depends on the **sensitivity of the caregiver** and in part on the **ratio of caregivers to children**, the **number of children in a group**, and the **education and training levels** of the caregiver.

When the child care children receive is sensitive, **responsive**, and of higher quality, they are more likely to be securely attached to their caregivers and achieve greater levels of cognitive competence.

Ratios and group size determine the amount of time that the caregiver has to spend with each of the children. **Lower ratios and smaller group sizes** have been significantly related to overall quality, more developmentally appropriate activities, and more social competence for children.

Children's outcomes were better when they received care that met the recommended **child-staff ratios** at 24 months and the recommended levels of **teacher training and education** at 36 months. Further, the more recommendations met, the better the outcomes for school readiness, language comprehension, and behavior problems at 36 months.

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The strongest indicators for long term success tied to early child care were related to the **education level of the caregivers** and amount of participation in on-going training in early childhood development. National research underscores that quality child care is contingent upon the special training that caregivers receive in early childhood development. Teachers with college degrees provide superior care. Teachers with an AA provide higher quality care than teachers with a Child Development Associate (CDA). Teachers with a CDA provide higher quality care than those with only a high school diploma.

A national study of 100 child care centers found that 92% of them provided inadequate care to infants. These centers did not meet “children’s needs for **health, safety**, warm relationships, and learning.” In addition, it was reported that two in five centers were rated less than minimal. These centers were of such poor quality that basic sanitary conditions were not met, children’s safety was endangered, and caregivers offered little response to children’s efforts to communicate.

Considering the number of infants reported as participating in organized child care, the percentage who die of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) is disproportionately high. One major study indicated that 20.4% of SIDS deaths occurred in child care. These infants were more likely to be found or last placed on their stomachs in a prone position.

The most advantageous environment for the cognitive and language development of young children appears to be in a child care center with high levels of **sensitive and linguistically stimulating care**.

Actual classroom practices, including **materials, activities, and environmental arrangements**, contribute significantly to children’s language and math development.

One of the most consistent findings in this literature links the quality of child care that children receive to virtually every measure of development that has been examined.