

APRIL is the "Month of the Young Child"

Early Years Are Learning Years ... Make Them Count

Children's early years are the foundation for growth and development. Children are constantly developing and learning. What they are learning depends on their physical health, social-emotional health, relationships, and daily interactions and experiences. The MOYC Focus Weeks highlight children's development

FOCUS WEEKS:

Week One: Physical Development

Proper nutrition and rest, opportunities to explore in safe, supportive environments, sound health practices, and nurturing, responsive relationships help ensure children's physical development. Children vary in their physical abilities at different ages; different parts of the body grow at different rates. Children need to move and be active in many different ways to reach their full physical development.

- Healthy babies should sleep on their backs.
- Well-balanced meals support growth and development.
- Exercise and fresh air enhance well-being.
- Safe, secure environments support exploration which helps develop muscles and motor skills.

Week Two: Social-Emotional Development

Social-emotional development strongly influences interpersonal relations, behavior and learning. The early childhood years are a critical period for the development of self-esteem and social skills. Early interactions and how we relate and respond, directly affect the way the brain is 'wired'; children learn in the context of important relationships. Children with a healthy sense of self-esteem feel that the important adults in their lives love them, accept them, and would go out of their way to ensure their safety and well-being.

- Responding lovingly – smiling, holding, cuddling – helps build trusting relationships.
- Talk with and listen to children with genuine interest and respect.
- Focus on the positive; thank children for sharing, helping, cooperating.
- Set reasonable limits children can learn and depend on.

Week Three: Cognitive Development

Brain development research affirms what parents and teachers have known for years, 1) good prenatal care, 2) warm and loving attachments between young children and adults, and 3) positive stimulation from the time of birth makes a difference in children's development for a lifetime. Early experiences contribute significantly to the structure of the brain. The quality, quantity and consistency of stimulation determines how the brain connects and functions; this is true for cognitive and emotional development, and the effect is lifelong.

- 95% of information received comes to us through vision, touch and hearing.
- Positive feelings trigger the release of endorphins, which enhance the functioning of brain connections.
- The brain needs to be properly hydrated in order to be alert; only water provides proper hydration. Check with your physician for appropriate water intake for children under two.
- Offer information to young children in small doses and increase the amount as they show understanding.

Week Four: Language and Literacy

Communication is the vehicle for intellectual development, exchanging information, sharing feelings, and developing strong emotional bonds. Talking with children encouragingly about the things they are doing, thinking, and feeling enhances children's language development and helps build confidence and independence. Reading aloud with children is an essential component to language development and is one of the most important activities for preparing them to succeed as readers.

- Make time to read with your child each and every day.
- Read it again, and again, and again – children delight in the familiar and knowing what comes next.
- Talk to and with your child so they can learn about the sounds, rhythms and purpose of language.
- Talk about everyday print, read signs and point out letters and words so children learn the importance of written communication.

For more information on how you or your organization can become involved in the "Month of the Young Child," call MIAEYC at (517) 336-9700.