

BPS Policy Statement

April 2021

The Early Years

The early years are an important time for child development. The quality of the care babies, toddlers and young children receive significantly impacts their psychological wellbeing and resilience. We know that a failure to support physical health and psychological wellbeing can have a significant impact on the rest of a child's life.

- Preschool children of parents with poor mental health are three times more likely to have a mental health difficulty than children whose parents have good mental health.
- Perinatal mental illness affects up to 20 per cent of new and expectant mothers (and up to 25 per cent in women in urban, diverse areas) and around 10 per cent of new fathers.
- Research has shown that adults with poorer health outcomes were more likely to have experienced adverse childhood experiences.
- 'Mothers often reported feeling isolated during the early years of their child's life, especially if they lived in rural areas or did not have family close by... Many mothers described children's centres as a lifeline'.
- A revised Healthy Child Programme should focus on 'recognising that the physical health and mental health of a baby's parents, and the strength of their relationships with each other and their child, are important influences on their child's health'.

A more holistic approach to the early years, including a recognition of the importance of support during pregnancy, is required that ensures equal focus is given to the physical and psychological wellbeing of every child under five and their family or carers. By intervening early and promoting positive wellbeing and development, we can prevent future challenges and improve the lives of children and their families.

We recommend

- The development of a cross-departmental under-fives health and wellbeing strategy.
- A dedicated Early Years Minister.
- Investment in a psychologically informed early years' workforce
- Ringfenced funding that can offer both social support/activities for parents to spend quality time with their children and to make relationships with others in their community.
- Family / Open Access Hubs be co-created with families to increase engagement, with an explicit commitment to engaging fathers and reducing any stigma.
- A review, update and strengthening of the Healthy Child Programme by taking full account of the psychological wellbeing and development of children in the early years, including emotional distress and poor emotional health.
- A range of evidenced based programmes that can be implemented according to the needs of individual families and the wider local community.

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