



The Importance of the Early Years
Written by Jane French

The early years in the life of a child are critical and set the scene for the type of person they will become in later life. This is primarily because the scaffolding of the brain is built during this period, and a template for psychological and emotional health is established.

There are three things that promote health brain development during the early years: good nutrition; a stimulating environment; healthy relationships with loving caregivers. An optimal environment is therefore one that is free from abuse and violence (including excessive shouting and verbal abuse) and offers children quality time with a consistent, nurturing caregiver or caregivers. A safe, consistent and enriching environment for children during the early years if life is now known to have lifelong positive outcomes including:

- Better life long physical and mental health
- Improved brain development (leading to smarter children and adults)
- Better school performance with children remaining in education for longer (school retention is then linked to better employment opportunities)
- Better behaved children both socially and at school
- Reduced substance abuse and involvement in crime in later life.

All governments around Australia now provide considerable community support for parents and children during the early years in the life of a child, including universal access to maternal and child health nurses and quality early childhood education programs. One of the roles of these services is to support parents to provide an optimal environment for their children.

For further information or support please contact your maternal and child health nurse and visit the below Australian Government websites:

<http://mychild.gov.au/>

<http://raisingchildren.net.au/>

<http://australia.gov.au/people/families>

Biography:

Jane is a psychologist and consultant with a passion for protecting children. She has spent much of her career working in Child Protection and more recently was a consultant with KPMG where she was part of a large practice, providing advice to governments around Australia about health and human services policy and practice. Her expertise spans child abuse, child protection, early childhood services, family violence, sexual assault, young people and many other areas. Jane is married, and now working in a private capacity in between caring for twin boys (aged 2) and two step daughters (a 'tweenie' and a teenager).