

WHY IS EARLY LEARNING SO IMPORTANT?

As a parent, you may use an early education and care service so that your child is safe and cared for while you work or because you know that it is important for them to socialise with other children prior to school.

But why is early education so important?

Because babies and young children are primed to learn

When babies are born, their brains are not fully developed. Around 90 per cent of brain development happens in the first five years of a child's life.

You already know how much your child learns in the early years as you watch him or her learn to move their hands, crawl, walk and talk. If young children experience language, exploration and variety in a learning-rich environment, and have relationships with loving and engaged caregivers, they learn even more. They learn about the world around them and how it works, and gain a number of non-cognitive skills as well—how to get along with others, how to understand and manage their own emotions and how to stay at a task until it's completed.

Early learning amplifies what happens at home

Early education can help further develop what a child learns at home. Qualified early childhood educators are experts at building young brains; they will observe your child to discover what they are learning and how this can be built upon.



Early learning provides support for parents

Education and care services know that collaborative relationships with families are fundamental to achieving quality outcomes for children. Families are supported from enrolment to be involved in the service and contribute to service decisions. Your expertise, culture, values and beliefs as a family are respected, and families share in decision making about their child's learning and wellbeing.

Just as important though, is that early education and care services can help support you as you're learning the job of becoming a parent. Education and care services can help you learn if you are on track and can help support you if it all becomes too hard.

What do children learn in early learning settings?

- respect for others
- how to relate to others, both adults and other children
- how to resolve conflict
- problem-solving skills
- communication
- coordinating hands, feet and balance
- differences between people
- self-knowledge—understanding of feelings, a sense of one's own strengths, talents and uniqueness
- confidence
- a sense of belonging to family, community, culture
- how to look after and take care of yourself
- behaving in acceptable ways and controlling your own behaviour
- pre-literacy
- early scientific concepts
- early mathematical concepts.

(Adapted from State of Victoria, 2017.)

Early learning helps level the playing field

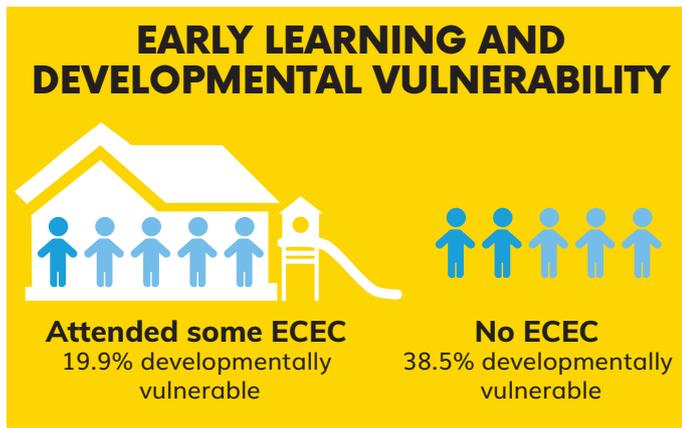
Did you know that children who attend early learning are less likely to start school developmentally vulnerable than other children? Early education helps level the playing field for all children. Some children start off developmentally behind others. Other children can fall behind due to factors such as poverty, family violence or parental drug and alcohol use.

Early education makes sure that every child starts school with a foundation in social skills, such as how to make friends, share, take turns, listen and follow instructions; how to concentrate and take in new information; and how to understand and manage their emotions. It helps bridge the word gap between children brought up in privileged environments and those that are less privileged.

Early learning lays the base for later education

'Caring and supportive environments that promote optimal early childhood development greatly increase children's chances of a successful transition to school. This, in turn, promotes children's chances of achieving better learning outcomes while at school and better education, employment and health after they have finished school' (AEDC, 2018).

Early learning is especially beneficial for children who are vulnerable in their development. Australian research shows that children who attended quality early learning were half as likely to be developmentally vulnerable when starting school, when compared to children who did not attend early learning.



Source: SCRGSP, 2017

Because children enjoy it!

It may be a bit hard at first, but after a while, almost every child at an early education and care service enjoys it. Play-based learning and learning with your friends is fun. Sandpits, dress-ups, construction, art activities, reading, science experiments—what's not to love?

Babies and young children learn differently to those who are school aged: they learn through playing. For example, babies and young children learn about the world around them by playing and testing: What happens when I do this, or this? If I put water in the sandpit, what does it do? If I mix yellow and red paint, what colour does it make? If I stack six blocks will they fall over? Early childhood educators and teachers are trained to extend this questioning and to set up a range of play experiences that lead to learning.



What better way is there to learn than by having fun through play?

#EARLYLearningMatters

www.everyonebenefits.org.au

Early Learning: Everyone Benefits is a national partnership of 25 organisations including early childhood peaks, research institutions, early childhood service providers and community organisations. Our goals are: to increase community understanding of the long-term benefits of early learning for children, families, communities and the nation; and to secure political commitment to increase access to quality early learning for all children from birth to the start of school.

References

Australian Early Development Census (AEDC). (2018). *The importance of early childhood development*. Retrieved from www.aedc.gov.au/parents/the-importance-of-early-childhood-development.

State of Victoria (Department of Education and Training). (2017). *Making the most of childhood: The importance of the early years*. Retrieved from www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/childhood/parents/mch/makingmostofchildhood.pdf.