

Calderdale Social Worker Conference

The Role of the Health Visitor & The current picture in Child Health

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Who are we and what do we do?

- Registered Nurses or Midwives with an additional Specialist Community Health Practitioner degree at Master's level.
- We work with families from birth to 5 years up to the point the child starts Reception.
- Delivery of the Healthy Child Programme 0-5 years
- Comprehensive knowledge of child development as well as the factors which affect the normal development of infants and children
- Overarching knowledge of local families
- Partners: Who do we work with?
- Referrals to other services- who do we refer to?
- SEND
- Infant feeding
- Healthy diet
- Safeguarding
- Mental health: perinatal & infant
- GRFB
- Health Representative on Early Intervention Panel (EIP)
- Clinical Leads in Perinatal Mental Health and Infant Feeding.
- Presence in MAST and Youth Justice Service

Healthy Child Programme

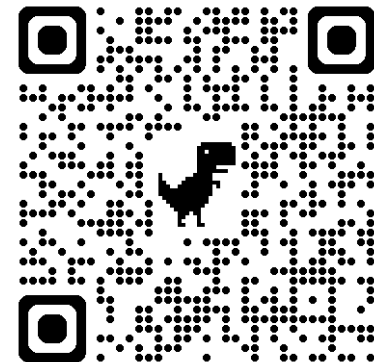
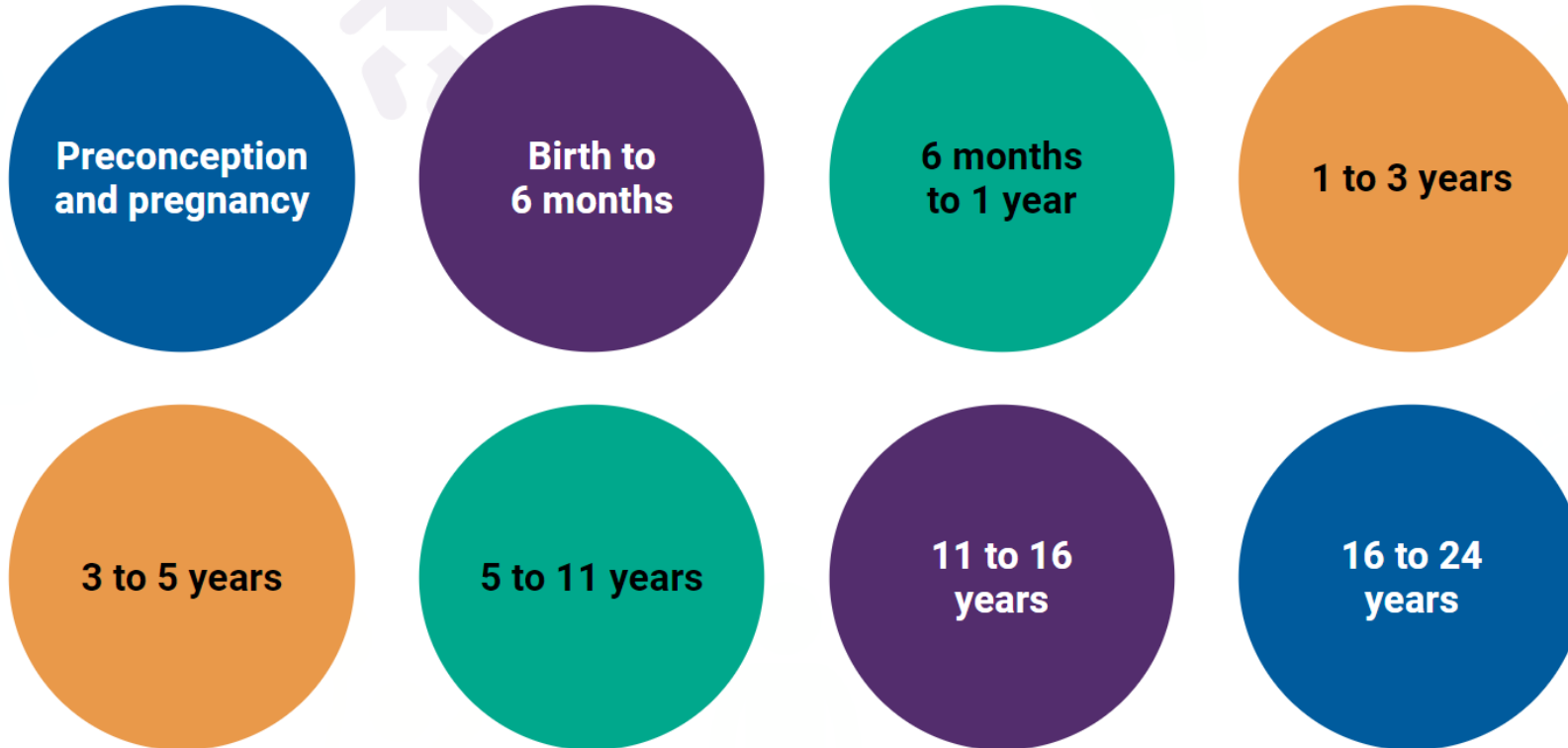


The healthy child programme is the national prevention and early intervention public health framework. It includes screening, immunisation, health and development reviews, health improvement, wellbeing and parenting.

Local implementation of the healthy child programme framework include evidence-led approaches to:

- preconception care
- promoting child development
- improving child health outcomes
- ensuring that families at risk are identified at the earliest opportunity

Lifecourse stage



DfE Early Years Child Development Training

- Module 1: Understanding child development and the EYFS
- Module 2: Brain development and how children Learn
- Module 3: Supporting children's personal, social and emotional development
- Module 4: Supporting language development in the early years
- Module 5: Supporting physical development in the early years
- Module 6: Mathematics
- Module 7: Effective curriculum and assessment
- Module 8: Supporting individual differences and needs



**Module 1: Understanding
child development and
the EYFS**



The Current Picture

- A growth in reported developmental delays and SEND needs
- Parents who may not be emotionally available
- Children with increasing difficulties with self-regulation
- A reduction in time for unstructured, “free” play
- Fewer opportunities for risk taking
- In England, more than one in five children are overweight or obese by age 5, and one in four children have tooth decay
- 25% of children are not toilet-trained when they begin school
- One of the most important drivers of the crisis in children’s health is the number of children in the UK living in poverty. 1:5. Out of these five, four in ten are in very deep poverty
- 14 years of cuts to services
- The rise in infant mortality means that the UK is now ranked 10th out of 38 OECD countries- with 4 deaths per 1,000 live births. Children born to mothers who are poor, black or young are known to be at increased risk, with deaths almost 3 times higher in areas of high deprivation
- The impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on children’s socio-emotional wellbeing and attainment
- A surge in demand for mental health services



Why is Child Development so important?

Eighty percent of a child's brain development occurs in the first three years of life

Physical, social and emotional development are inextricably linked

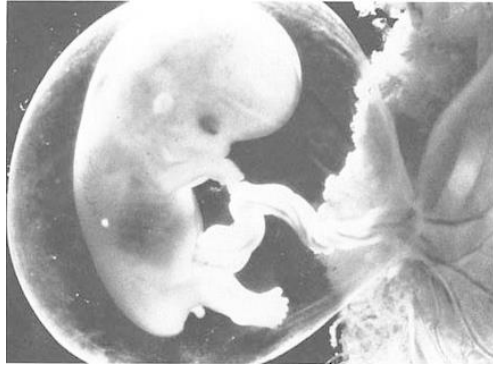
Play is vital for optimal child development and learning, so much so it was recognised by the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights as a right of every child



The human face is the most important stimulus in the visual world of the newborn

Neural synchrony between infant and mother is highest during play, likely stemming from the presence of social touch

Brain development



The development of the human brain during gestation is highly complex. By 12-14 weeks nerve cells are proliferating at the rate of about 15 million per hour.

Research has shown that maternal stress and anxiety and increased cortisol levels can alter the development of the baby's brain and can have a lasting effect- The placenta is crucial for fetal development, and it usually protects the unborn baby from the stress hormone cortisol. However, when the mother is stressed, the placenta becomes less protective.

At birth, the average baby's brain is about a quarter of the size of the average adult brain. Incredibly, it doubles in size in the first year and keeps growing to about 80% of adult size by age 3 and 90% – almost full grown – by age 5.

The first years of life are critical to a baby's brain development. During this time, their brain adapts according to the experiences and interactions they have. Their brains are very flexible, with millions of new connections being formed, especially in this first year. That's why positive early life experiences that nurture and respond to a baby's needs are so important.



When does physical development start?

Fetal kicks in utero in the later stages of pregnancy help to grow areas of the brain that deal with sensory input and are how the baby develops a sense of their own body enabling them to eventually explore their surroundings



<https://youtu.be/CE7NrKNcOMs>

Why is Physical Development becoming a priority area?

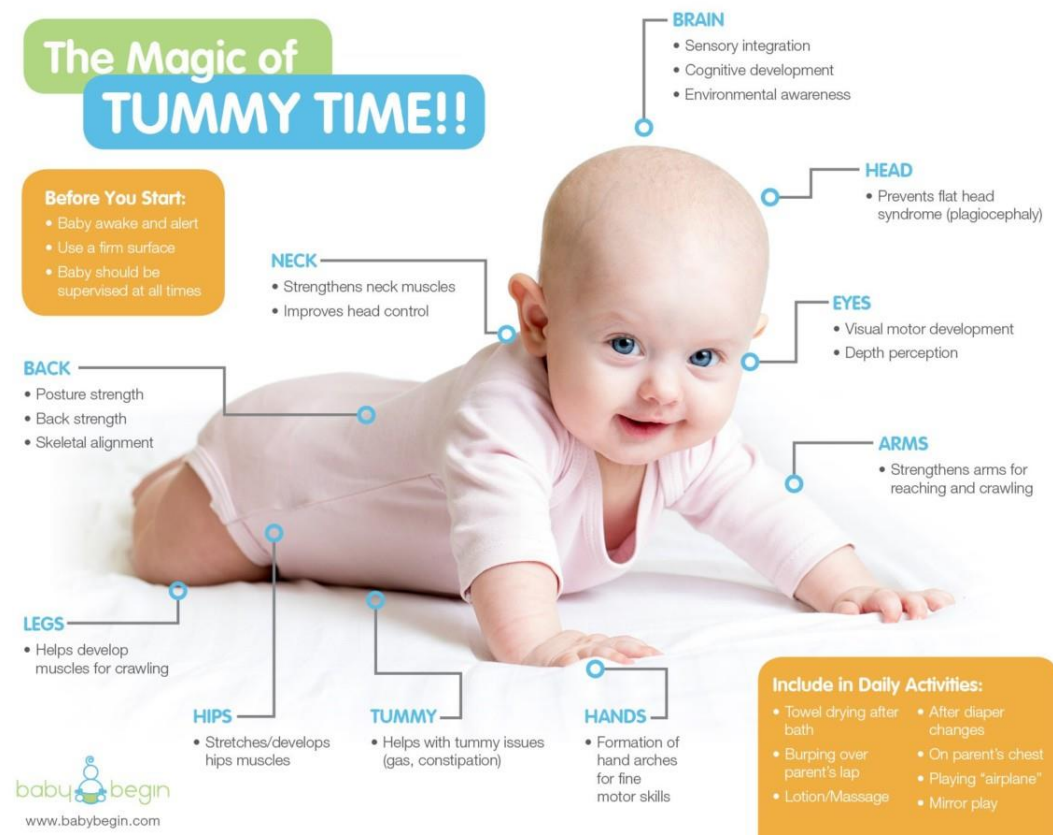
- Time-sensitive as developmental steps missed early on are much harder to address later.
- More time spent in car seats, travel system prams, buggies etc.
- Inactive role models.
- Children more passive and involved in IT.
- Young children need to move pretty much all the time, and it's not because they can't keep still, it's because they're hardwired to be in near constant motion to develop well.
- Back to sleep campaign means less time spent on tummies.
- Less spontaneous rough & tumble play – and opportunity for important activities such as spinning, rocking & rolling for vestibular stimulation.
- Less likely to walk anywhere.
- Less nutritious diets.
- These factors can cause difficulties for later schooling and for the rest of their lives.

Children with physical development delays may have:

- Poor balance & difficulty sitting still
- Poor sitting or standing posture
- Poor body and spatial awareness
- Lack of gross motor co-ordination
- Clumsiness
- Difficulty co-ordinating left and right side of body – e.g. going upstairs
- Poor fine motor control
- Low self-esteem
- Concentration & attention difficulties



The importance of supervised “Tummy Time”



- Tummy time is very important for developing head control, balance and core strength.
- Supports sensory integration, cognitive development and environmental awareness
- Prevents plagiocephaly (flat head)
- Supports visual motor development and depth perception
- Strengthens arms for reaching and crawling
- Supports formation of hand arches for fine motor skills
- Helps with tummy issues like wind and constipation
- Stretches and develops hip and leg muscles for crawling
- Strengthens the back for improved posture and skeletal alignment
- Strengthens neck muscles
- Starting a day or two after birth (two or three short 3 to 5 min sessions each day, building to 15-30 mins by 8 weeks of age) may also protect against SIDS

Problems that might be linked to a lack of tummy time!

- If early primitive reflexes are not inhibited through natural movement exploration, they may persist and get in the way of later postural reflexes developing. This can affect all aspects of physical development and body control, including athletic skill and the ability to sit still
- Twisting or arching of the neck and flat spots on the head
- Poor breath control leading to low energy and fatigue
- Back and tummy muscles may not develop well, which can lead to later health and mobility problems
- The difficulties with grasp and fine motor skills that are linked to reduced weight bearing on the palms can lead to problems with pencil control and handwriting
- Eyes may not learn to work together when focusing, which has an impact on later reading and academic skills

The importance of Play and Movement

- Play is important to healthy brain development. Through play, children at a very early age engage and interact in the world around them.
- Play and motor development is linked to language development providing infants with more opportunities to experience their world.
- Play allows children to create and explore a world they can master, conquering their fears while practicing adult roles, sometimes in conjunction with other children or adult caregivers.
- Research links physical activity to improved academic performance, demonstrating that active children are often better learners.



UK charities warn of Children suffering due to lack of outdoor play

“Compared to previous generations, children’s lives have become incredibly restricted, indoors, isolated and inactive, largely due to changes in the outdoor environment.”

Alice Ferguson, *Playing Out* 2024



Factors stopping children from playing outside

- Traffic-dominated neighbourhoods - as a result of 'low-quality housing layouts, inadequate facilities, and poorly designed housing estates'
- A lack of parks and green spaces and other accessible high-quality natural spaces - these are said to have 'harmed children's health and undermined their quality of life'.
- No ball game areas - the signs put a restriction on children, stopping them from playing where they want outside and in 'door-step' space.
- Economic deprivation and racial inequality - these are considered to have 'compounded children's lack of access to outdoor play'



Children have a strong natural drive to move & certain movements are especially important at different ages

Many movements that young children naturally engage in have important developmental roles:

- **Vestibular** – spin, swing, twist, tilt, slide, fall
- **Proprioception** – push, pull, hang, stretch, jump
- **Cross-lateral coordination** – crawl, clamber, climb, pedal



Jumping and bouncing

Jumping and bouncing play a fundamental role in childhood development, far beyond being just a form of play. It is one of the key gross motor skills that stimulates the vestibular system and supports children's overall physical and cognitive growth. Research shows that activities like jumping are essential for balance, body awareness, and coordination.



- Jumping helps children understand where their body is in space, a concept known as proprioception. This understanding is crucial for tasks that require spatial awareness, such as climbing, navigating obstacles, or even sitting still.
- Each time a child jumps, they're building muscle strength, particularly in their legs and core. This strength is essential for other physical activities like running, climbing, and even everyday tasks like standing up from a seated position.
- Mastering jumping can be a significant confidence booster for children. Studies indicate that children who are given opportunities to engage in physical activities that challenge their balance and coordination develop a greater sense of self-efficacy, leading to improved emotional resilience and problem-solving skills.
- Jumping also activates both hemispheres of the brain, integrating sensory input and motor control, which supports cognitive skills like attention, memory, and problem-solving.
- By encouraging children to jump and engage in similar activities, we are not just supporting their physical fitness but also setting the stage for their academic, emotional, and social success.

Rolling, Rocking and Spinning

- Rolling helps to develop the muscles in the neck, tummy and back.
- Rocking stimulates the vestibular apparatus in the inner ear helping them with balance and making sense of the world around them.
- Children seek out opportunities to make themselves dizzy by spinning or tipping upside down, or to challenge their balance with swinging or rocking.
- Spinning enhances vestibular stimulation and helps the development of both sides of the brain for effective integration. It also helps with attention skills, since both sides of the brain are being utilized.



Swinging is an important part of a child's development because it helps with many aspects of their physical, mental and social growth

- **Physical development:** Swinging helps children develop core and leg muscles, as well as agility, balance, hand, arm & finger coordination, grip, and overall physical strength.
- **Mental development:** Swinging helps children develop skills like spatial awareness, rhythm, and muscle control. It also helps them improve their sensory skills, increase their attention span, and improve their moods.
- **Social development:** Swinging can help with social development.
- **Vestibular system:** Swinging helps develop a child's vestibular system, which is especially important for children who have balance or equilibrium problems.
- **Proprioceptive system:** Swinging helps develop a child's proprioceptive system, which involves motor planning and control, detection of body movement position, and coordinated movements.
- **Sensory integration:** Swinging helps with sensory integration and coordination by helping the child's brain process and integrate sensory information.
- **Sensory regulation:** Swinging can help a child regulate their sensory system and adapt to different sensations.



Crawling, climbing and peddling

Cross-lateral movements are any actions that require coordination from both sides of the body, an important developmental skill that helps children prepare for everyday tasks like writing, using a bat and ball, and putting on shoes. It also supports the development of higher thinking skills by connecting both sides of the brain



Let's talk about electronic devices

- Electronic devices have revolutionised learning, communication, and information dissemination
- Screen media use may result in both beneficial and detrimental effects on a child's cognitive development.
- Media devices with screens have the potential to improve education and learning. For instance, research has suggested that electronic books and learning-to-read applications may improve young children's early reading skills and creative thinking capacities.
- However, many studies have also demonstrated the negative effects of screen media use on several cognitive areas such as sensorimotor development, and academic outcomes.
- Numerous studies have highlighted the significance of human interaction, particularly the frequency and quality of exchanges between adults and children, in the development of language skills.
- Media multitasking was found to have a negative impact on executive functioning in teenagers, notably on working memory, inhibition, and the capacity to switch between tasks.



Effects of screen time on child development

The age at which children engage with media on a regular basis has fallen from four years in 1970 to four months in the present day.



- Studies have demonstrated a stress response in babies when exposed to screens.
- Children's heavy reliance on screen media has raised serious public health concerns due to the harm it may cause to their cognitive (executive functioning) linguistic, and social-emotional development.
- Screen time reduces the amount and quality of interactions between children and their caregivers, thereby impacting on language development.
- Young children need to move to develop well. Oxygenation levels in the brain increase during active play compared with play on screens.
- Potential serious adverse effects on their health over the long-term including obesity, behavioural problems and sleep irregularities.
- New global report shows that a third of children are short sighted due to screen time and lack of being outside.
- Risk of exposure to harmful digital media content.

Parental Mobile device Use (PMU)

- A growing body of research suggests that the use of mobile technologies can cause abrupt disruptions in social interactions when the adult-child “serve and return” cueing system, which is so essential to early learning, is interrupted – by a call, by a text, or by the need to check-in on Instagram. This is referred to as ‘technoference’.
- Time spent on mobile devices can displace time spent with the child in other activities, resulting in fewer opportunities for parent-child interaction.
- Mobile phone use often evokes emotional responses such as stress, anger, and jealousy within the parent which can negatively affect their ability to be emotionally available to their children.
- Evidence tells us PMU can result in negative behaviour responses in the child. And children with a pre-existing vulnerability to autism may be adversely affected by this pattern of parental behaviour.



Emotionally unavailable parents

- According to attachment theory (Bowlby, 1982), certain environmental cues (e.g., maternal separation or unresponsiveness) activate infants' attachment system resulting in varying levels of negative affect.
- PMU is associated with reduced parental responsiveness that mirrors the 'still-face' paradigm, it is possible that PMU similarly activates the attachment system, evoking a biobehavioural stress response.
- There have been significant worldwide increases in the diagnosis of ASD. The biggest environmental change over this decade has been the massive introduction of mobile technology. Eye contact is fundamental for infants' development, and parent-infant eye contact is impaired when parents are preoccupied by mobile devices.
- Observational studies examining the effect of PMU on children's behaviour in real-life settings such as playgrounds and restaurants, show that young children exhibit negative emotions such as frustration, anger, and withdrawal while their caregivers are absorbed with their mobile devices.



Impact of cosmetic procedures

Processing facial expressions is an essential component of social interaction, especially for preverbal infants

Babies are attuned to facial expressions. If a mother has had extensive cosmetic procedures, they will be getting less facial information

When a mother's face is unable to move naturally it makes it difficult for babies and young children to read their emotions.

It makes it difficult for a mother to elicit a response in the baby when their face doesn't move as they attempt to overemphasise their expressions.



Studies shows early maternal mirroring predicts infant motor system activation during facial expression observations

Trusted websites

- Tiny Happy People <https://www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people>
- Lullaby Trust [The Lullaby Trust - Safer sleep for babies, Support for families](#)
- Basis [BASIS – Baby Sleep Information Source](#)
- Unicef [Baby sleep | UNICEF Parenting](#)
- ICON [Home - ICON Cope](#)
- CAPT [Child Accident Prevention Trust | A safer world for all our children](#)
- RoSPA [RoSPA – The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents - RoSPA](#)
- WHO [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#)
- Eric [Home – ERIC](#)
- First Steps Nutrition [First Steps Nutrition Trust](#)







