

YMCA Healthy Kids



Issue:

Healthy Child Development is considered one of the 12 key determinants of health by the Public Health Agency of Canada. Positively impacting this determinant is a strategic priority for the YMCA. This developmental period has been deeply studied for its impact on long-term health:

“The early child period is considered to be the most important developmental phase throughout the lifespan. Healthy early child development—which includes the physical, social/emotional, and language/cognitive domains of development, each equally important—strongly influences well-being, obesity/stunting, mental health, heart disease, competence in literacy and numeracy, criminality, and economic participation throughout life. What happens to the child in the early years is critical for the child’s developmental trajectory and life course.”

“School age” refers to the transition from early (prenatal to age 5) to middle (age 6-12) childhood. Middle childhood marks the “beginning of a child’s journey into the wider community... as children progress through their middle childhood years, they become more independent of, and have less supervised time with parents/adults.”

Context:

Our 2010-2020 strategic plan Strong Start, Great Future places young people at the centre of a community health strategy that is inclusive of adults and older adults. Helping young people grow up healthy makes our whole community stronger. By focusing on the health of children, teens, and young adults we are setting the foundation for a healthier community for generations to come. We have a vision that our communities will be home to the healthiest children, teens, and young adults.

Our call to action lies in our belief that health is about more than the absence of disease; that is it a resource for everyday life. There is emerging worrisome evidence that if current trends continue, this may be the first generation of young people who do not live as healthy or as long a life as their parents:

• **Healthy Child Development:**

A 2014 YMCA study revealed 37% of Southern Ontario parents with children under six described their kids as behind in one or more key developmental areas.

• **Poverty:**

1 in 5 children aged 17 and under in the Toronto area lives in a low-income household.

• **Childhood Obesity:**

1 in 5 young people in the GTA are obese and 9 out of 10 young Canadians aren’t getting enough daily physical activity.

• **Early learning:**

Only 1 in 5 children under the age of 12 in Toronto have access to a licensed child care space.

¹ World Health Organization. Online. Early Childhood Development as a social determinant of health.

Accessed: http://www.who.int/social_determinants/themes/earlychilddevelopment/en/

² (Hanvey, 2002: 6). As cited in Lyn, André. *Middle Childhood Matters: An inventory of full-week after-school programs for children 6-12 years in Toronto*. Community Social Planning Council of Toronto in partnership with Middle Childhood Matters Coalition Toronto. January 2009. Accessed: http://www.kidsnowcanada.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/Middle_Childhood_Matters_January_2009.pdf

YMCA Position:

We believe that everyone deserves the chance to grow and flourish in spirit, mind and body. And more than that, we believe that with the right support and opportunities, everyone can.

At the YMCA, we know families are our children's most important teachers and that healthy families are supported families. Together, through providing opportunities for children to explore, discover, and create we can directly affect developmental outcomes in behaviour, learning, and health.

Through involvement with the YMCA and through our advocacy, children will be enabled to have the skills, confidence and resilience necessary to make healthy choices. Families will have the skills, confidence and resilience necessary to expand the healthy choices available to children.

The YMCA will:

- Help children, teens, and young adults achieve their full potential by supporting them as they make significant transitions in their lives.
- Ensure children have access to the social, cultural, and physical environments that allow them to flourish in spirit, mind and body.
- Focus our new investments in programs, research, and advocacy on GTA residents under the age of 30. This will mean working in partnership to ensure that our whole community is prepared to respond appropriately to the health needs of children, teens, and young adults.
- Create values and strength-based health promoting programs and services for children based on YMCA Healthy Child Development framework principles of Play, Relationships, and Health.
- Use a flexible curriculum framework that assumes learning is a natural process occurring through self-directed experiences and optimized by supportive and safe environments
- Advocate for the healthful conditions for children, teens, and young adults. We will share what we know and continually expand our knowledge about young people in order to engage and support them more effectively.

The YMCA believes:

• **That every family who needs a child care space should have access to one.** A high quality, licensed, accessible, and affordable child care system that provides families with a mix of child care choices, best supports the healthy development of children.

• **That healthy habits start early and are influenced by your surroundings.** It is essential to make the social and physical environments where children live, learn and play more supportive of physical activity and healthy eating.

• **That kids need to have places where they can be kids.** Child care, camp, and recreation programs led by qualified professionals play an important role in the healthy development of children and are critical supports to families. These programs form a network of safe, developmentally appropriate, and fun places for all children to belong and to participate.