



Early Childhood Newsletter

Brought to you by your Public Health Nurses

We hope you found time to enjoy the warmth and beauty of our West Coast summer, and are embracing a new 'school' year with renewed energy to meet the opportunities and challenges with your children.

This fall, we are excited to share with you information that is coming from the Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP) at UBC. This fall, HELP will be releasing new Early Development Instrument (EDI) reports for all BC school districts. This data may raise new questions, insights and considerations about childhood development and vulnerability in your region or community.

When you read this newsletter, the language may feel more academic than it has in the past. This is because we are presenting information that is strongly research based. We hope that you find it interesting, and if you have questions or feedback after reading this, please share your comments with your Public Health Nurse.

Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP)

The Human Early Learning Partnership is a collaborative interdisciplinary research network based at UBC. The team at HELP, along with their partners, bring together scientific viewpoints to address complex Early Child Development (ECD) issues.

HELP studies are conducted throughout the province and have been conducted over several years. The research provides information on how early experience affects the development of the brain and children's development over time. This provides helpful information to plan for education and family policy throughout Canada. HELP takes a life course approach, accepting the early years as the first and most critical in determining life-long health and wellbeing.

To learn more about The Human Early Learning Partnership visit: <http://earlylearning.ubc.ca/>

Early Development Instrument (EDI)

The EDI is a data collection tool that gathers data on child development. Different provinces conduct their own EDI. The British Columbia questionnaire has 104 questions and measures five core areas of early child development that are known to be good predictors of adult health, education and social outcomes.

1. Physical Health & Well Being

In This Issue

**What is "HELP"? and
What is the "EDI"?**



2. Social Competence
3. Emotional Maturity
4. Language & Cognitive Development
5. Communications Skills & General Knowledge

The questionnaire is filled out by a Kindergarten teacher on each Kindergarten child. This provides a picture of how a group of Kindergarten children are doing developmentally at a specific point in time. It also provides a comparison how groups of Kindergarten children are doing developmentally over time. Most importantly, it is predictive of future developmental challenges.

To learn more about the EDI and reports in your neighbourhood visit:

<http://earlylearning.ubc.ca/edi/>



Why is EDI data important to Early Childhood?

The data collected from the EDI reflects children's early experiences in life. It highlights where intervention may be indicated in order to address vulnerabilities/developmental concerns prior to Kindergarten entry.

EDI data helps alert us to:

- Trends in child development and vulnerability over time
- Specific developmental issues that need attention
- Geographic regions where children's development is of more concern
- Opportunities to improve or introduce new programs and policies



Vulnerability

EDI data can be used to report on the proportion of children who scored below an established cut-off on one or more of the 5 developmental scales mentioned above. This proportion of children is referred to as "**vulnerable**". A vulnerable child is one who is more likely to be limited in his or her development than a child who scores above the

cut-off. The vulnerability rate refers to the proportion of the population that, without additional support and care, may experience future challenges in school and society.

Some child vulnerability is unavoidable. For example, at birth, 3% to 5% of children have congenital or diagnosable medical conditions that limit their development. However a large amount of child vulnerability is avoidable. In the 10+ years that EDI data has been collected in over 2000 neighbourhoods across Canada, there have been many neighbourhoods that have had a vulnerability rate of less than 10%. For this reason, vulnerability rates that are greater than 10% are considered as being avoidable.

In the last wave of data collection 2014/15, **36%** of Vancouver children were considered vulnerable on one or more of the EDI Scales.

As early childhood educators and daycare providers, you play an important role in the development of the children in your care. For the remainder of this newsletter, we will look more specifically at two of the core areas of Early Childhood Development.



Social Competence & Emotional Maturity

Over the past few years we have seen various EDI reports that have highlighted vulnerability in the areas of social competence and emotional maturity. This is of concern because research shows that poor social and emotional development is linked to anxiety, low self-esteem, weak coping skills, and lower academic achievement. Studies have also tied poor self-regulation to a wide range of issues, including obesity, attentional problems, and risky behaviour such as drug use.



Social Competence

Social competence is a person's ability to get along with others. It is a set of social skills that develops

as early as birth and continues to develop through infancy and into childhood.

Social competence is displayed through a child's behaviour within a social setting, and is indicated by a child's curiosity in their surroundings and an eagerness to play, learn and socialize.

A socially competent child will:

- show an interest in their peers' emotions
- learn to cooperatively play with others
- display self-control and an understanding of basic rules and instructions
- demonstrate respect for others, themselves and their surroundings
- demonstrate responsibility for their belongings and actions
- demonstrate tolerance of others' mistakes

Children are more likely to be socially competent when they grow within a warm and loving environment and are provided with opportunities to play and interact with peers.

Children with a well-developed sense of social competence will tend to be confident, secure in relationships and physically healthy.



Emotional Maturity

Emotional maturity includes one's ability to understand and manage emotions at an age-appropriate level. Children who are emotionally mature can identify, verbalize and control feelings before acting upon them. They are able to work through difficult emotions, are calm when challenges arise and demonstrate helping behaviours. Children who are vulnerable in this area may have behaviour management issues and fail to be empathetic to other people's feelings.

Below is a list of skills that demonstrate emotional maturity in preschoolers:

- Ability to express feelings through words and pretend play

- Awareness of own feelings and feelings of others
- Curiosity about the world
- Eagerness to engage in activities such as playing a new game, playing with a new toy, or exploring a new book
- Playing with others and developing skills such as sharing and taking turns
- Desiring approval and praise
- Copying adult behavior
- Becoming more comfortable with new people

As early childhood educators/caregivers, you can support healthy social and emotional development through the following actions:

- Accept feelings and talk about them
- Offer chances to play with other children
- Provide supportive and trusting adults during play
- Ensure children have access to safe, comfortable and supportive environments
- Praise good behavior

“Prosocial” or “Helping Behaviours” are part of healthy social and emotional development

A 4-year-old falls down while running at the playground. Her knee gets scraped, is bleeding and she is crying. A boy at the playground goes over to her. He puts his hand on her shoulder and crouches down to look at her scraped knee with her. He says that he fell 2 days ago and got a scrape too. He shows her the scabbed area. The girl stops crying as she is interested in the boy's story and is distracted by looking at his scab. Another boy then comes over to see what's going on. They all decide that they need an adult's help to take care of the girl and her scraped knee.

Prosocial or helping behaviours are actions that are meant to benefit someone other than the self. They do not in any way benefit or get that person ahead; they are simply kind actions.

Some examples of these actions are:

- Picking up something that someone else dropped
- Helping another child who is hurt

- Offering to help another child clean up their toys
- Comforting a sad child
- Sharing toys
- Inviting another child to join in a game.

Empathy plays a large role in bringing out prosocial behaviours. Children who have empathy can put themselves in their peers' shoes and understand how they must be feeling. The example above provides a good example of empathy and prosocial behaviour.

When to Be Concerned

Socially vulnerable children typically experience challenges with self-control and with getting along with peers. As a result, they are often less curious or behaviourally ready to explore new toys and activities. A child may benefit from further social assessment if they:

- Are frequently uncooperative during play
- Are disrespectful towards other people and/or their belongings
- Do not take responsibility for their actions
- Have difficulty following rules and class routines
- Struggle to follow instructions and work independently
- Resist changing routines

Emotionally vulnerable children have difficulty regulating their emotions. They will often not demonstrate empathetic or "helping behaviour" and instead behave aggressively, anxiously or impulsively. A child may benefit from further emotional assessment if (s)he shows behaviour that is:

- Hyperactive and inattentive: they are restless, distractible or have difficulty concentrating and taking turns
- Aggressive and disobedient: they bully others, throw tantrums or get into physical fights
- Anxious and fearful: they appear frightened or worried most of the time

- Antisocial: they do not help out or seem to not care about the feelings of others



Conclusion

As an early childhood educator, you have a significant impact on children's early childhood experience by continuing to promote a supporting environment that is both safe and stimulating, by continuing to foster responsive and nurturing relationships and by linking families to community resources.

If there are questions or concerns regarding social-emotional development, Public Health Nurses (PHNs) are available to support you. If indicated, PHNs can help families and caregivers use an assessment tool called the Ages and Stages Questionnaire: Social-Emotional Edition. These simple questions examine the behaviour and social-emotional development of young children to determine both their strengths and any areas where they may benefit from additional supports.

If this newsletter has peaked your interest and you want more information about HELP, you can sign up for their newsletter at <http://earlylearning.ubc.ca>