

What About The Children?



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CHILDCARE SHOULD COST MORE, NOT LESS

THE MAJORITY OF BRITONS think that 'bringing up baby' is best done in group nursery settings even though the science shows that one-to-one care is optimal, according to a report launched today by What About The Children? (WATCH?)

Three in five adults surveyed said that 'generally the emotional development of the under-threes is better achieved in a group setting like nurseries than at home with one-to-one care'. Whereas this may be true for toddlers (aged 3 and 4 years), it is a very different picture for 0, 1 and 2 year olds.

What About The Children?'s report calls for one-to-one care to be enabled for under-threes by making family groupings statutory in nurseries. This is where each carer is assigned 2-3 children of different ages - much as a childminder is in a home setting – so that a child doesn't have to change carer during their time in the nursery.. It is also less stressful for the professional to balance the needs of different aged children and develop a close responsive relationship.

The current statutory ratios are: 1 member of staff allocated to 3 babies/children under two years, and 1 member of staff to 4 children above the age of 2 years. What About The Children? also believes that funding for the under-threes should be available to parents of all pre-school aged children, not just those of working parents or vulnerable families.

Other recommendations:

- Better information for parents about children's rapid brain development in the first three years and how, as parents, their early loving care and attachment relationship with their baby, shapes the infant brain architecture and the importance to their future mental, emotional and physical health
- A strengthening of the 'key person' system in nurseries to ensure that under-threes remain with the same carer during their time in the nursery. Currently staff absence, staff turnover and the nursery 'room' structure based on age groups compromises this. Frequent change of carer can be traumatic for an infant

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- Better training for health and early years professionals so they thoroughly understand the importance and process of secure 'attachment' support its development. and understand the effect that their 'professional love' has on the child's development and their future health and emotional wellbeing

Dr Carole Ulanowsky, director of What About the Children says: "In the UK, a third of 15-18 year olds are currently suffering from mental health and emotional wellbeing issues. Science tells us that the roots of this emotional pain are in the first three years which suggests that this pain is preventable.

"We must take the long view to ensure social justice for every child by investing in the early years in a sustainable way to lay down the foundations for future generations' health and emotional wellbeing."

A New Zealand study of early years education has found that inconsistent care and high staff turnover are the biggest barriers to quality childcare*. Several studies** have found that children in nurseries suffer from raised cortisol (the stress hormone) compared to those in a home setting. Stress in the early years can cause physical and emotional health problems both at the time and later in life***.

Minimising key person transitions is a practice called 'Continuity of Care' and can be executed in a number of different ways; 1) having a practitioner moving through the 'rooms' with her/his key children, 2) once assigned a room, having the key person and her/his children remain in the same room permanently or 3) family groupings where there are no 'rooms' and a key person is free to move about the space with her/his group of children, much as a childminder would at home.

Mary McMullen, professor of early childhood education at Indiana University in the US, and a proponent of 'Continuity of Care', says that: "Research shows that implementing continuity of care and primary caregiving not only benefits children and families, but presents professional development opportunities for practitioners which result in more thoughtful, sensitive caregiving practices."

What About The Children?'s survey shows that the public think that baby rearing is best left to the professionals. There are social and educational benefits of group settings for 3 & 4 year olds but not for babies. The Government have certainly encouraged parents of young children to get back to work creating a cultural norm that it's 'the thing to do'.

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Dr Carole Ulanowsky concludes: “While tax revenue from working parents generates considerable funds for the treasury, we have to ask whether this short-term gain leads to a longer-term loss in emotional fall out from little ones spending there first three years in inappropriate settings.

“After all for every £1 invested in the early years, a saving of £10 is made later in the cost to society of coping with issues such as crime, mental illness, and physical illness.”

A copy of the report plus research summaries and information on attachment and the under-threes, can be found on What About The Children?'s website, www.whataboutthechildren.org.uk

Ends

Notes to editors:

There is a media report to go with this release which can be found on our website <http://whataboutthechildren.org.uk> It contains more information on the following:

1. The survey. (It was carried out by Kantar TNS (Research Express) between January 11th – 15th 2018: 1026 adults aged 16-64 via OnLineBus, an Internet omnibus survey. The sample was weighted to represent the adult population of Great Britain 16-64). The statistics used in the press release excluded respondents who coded 'don't know'
2. Key scientific findings
3. Background on the charity and definition of attachment

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*Quality early childhood education for under-two-year-olds: What should it look like? A literature review. Report to the Ministry of Education (NZ) 2011

Dalli, C., White, E.J., Rockel, J., Duhn, I., with Buchanan, E., Davidson, S., Ganly, S., Kus, L., & Wang, B.

** For example Watamura et al (2010) and Drugli et al (2017)

*** Reduction of brain development (Gunnar, 2003) Asthma and nervous skin disorders (Sandberg, 2010) Childhood depression (Frodl, 2010)

And later in life:

depression (Bakersman-Kranenburg, 2009) and distress (Maselko, 2010) difficulty forming relationships (Strathearn, 2009) and physical health problems e.g. inflammatory disorders (Carpenter, 2010)