First three years critical

A child’s development is heavily influenced by experiences and relationships up to the age of three years for brain development. The relationships and experiences children have during these early years influence how their brains develop, especially the social and emotional areas of the brain.

Close relationships where adults interact with young children with care, affection and responsive attention stimulate brain growth and provide children with a sense of emotional security and belonging. Everything a young child sees, hears, feels, tastes and smells in these early years influences neural connections and shapes how the child will think, feel, learn and behave into the future.

As a society we all have a responsibility to improve children’s futures. How child friendly is your workplace? Is supporting work/life balance and reducing stress for families something you feel committed to? Clearly, the brain research is showing us we can improve children’s futures by supporting families, by valuing our young children, and ensuring they experience nurturing experiences during their childhoods, especially during the very early years.

To improve outcomes in adult life, there must be a focus on these critical early years. There must be a valuing of families, of early learning environments and quality child care. Good beginnings last forever.

Optimal brain development is dependent on a positive environment, including nurturing relationships, and good nutrition for pregnant mums as well as babies. Babies learn when responsive adults interact and engage them in conversation – so cuddle, chat, read, and sing to your baby and toddler often.

Parents, family members, carers, and early childhood professionals have a big role in caring for the growth and development of children – the relationships a young child has literally sculpt the brain determining the development of brain circuits and life outcomes.

Communities can support parents and families – how might your organisation or workplace support family relationships and reduce stress for families? Child care centres are a great resource for families and communities. Governments need to radically review support of them.