

Growing up together...

If the child's health allows it, community integration optimizes his or her development

Press release from the French National Academy of Medicine [1]

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Child development is a dynamic process involving the interaction of biological, genetic, and environmental mechanisms. This development is not linear, and several stages or windows of vulnerability requiring intervention have been described throughout childhood (1). Biologically, the structural organization of appropriate neurons continues at least up to 1 year old (2). Corbetta et al. (3) have shown that, from the age of 6-9 months, early sensory-motor experiences and interactions are essential for acquiring the best cognitive and behavioral abilities. Indeed, the brain integrates this information to respond effectively to the environment (4). The development of communication and relationship skills is strongly influenced by early interpersonal relationships that control the child's regulation of emotions as well as present and future social interactions (5).

Assessing the motor abilities of children aged 6 to 12 months, Sacrey et al found that those who were less skilled in 'seeking to grasp' were more likely to develop autism spectrum features at 36 months. Early monitoring of simple motor skills would thus make it possible to identify children at risk of neurodevelopmental disorders, facilitating their orientation to appropriate cares (6). In another study of 82 children between 12 and 27 months, Neel et al showed that the type of parenting could modify the sensory development and behavior of children (5). A Brazilian study of 298 children aged 2-24 months confirmed that the risk of developmental delay in children was significantly reduced by a nurturing family environment (7). The influence of the environment is also found when the child spends his or her day in a community setting such as a nursery or childminder's home, interacting with adults and other children whose behavior is diverse.

Thus, these basic and behavioral studies support the importance of a varied and stimulating environment, whatever the intrinsic potentialities of the children. When children are integrated into a community, such as a nursery or childminder's home, the presence of all types of children, from a very early age, helps to broaden the behavioral and cognitive skills of those who are at risk to develop their full potential. The simultaneous presence of all children also contributes to the development of tolerance towards others for their further personal development.

[1] Press release from the Academy's Rapid Communication Unit validated by the members of the Governing Board on April 22, 2022.

The National Academy of Medicine recommends:

- to integrate all clinically eligible children into community, without distinction, so that the brain plasticity of early childhood benefits from an enriching environment for all;
- to facilitate parental guidance by including information on children's early development in health records, in order to take advantage of parents for increased competence;
- to increase the number of staff needed in the community in order to provide adequate supervision;
- to provide an additional training to the community staff in order to optimize the support of all children in their developmental trajectories, also to better identify those at risk of neurodevelopmental disorders.

References

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