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Caring for Guyana’s Infants and Toddlers: From Policy to Practice

A POSITION STATEMENT

Kathryn Jones M.S.

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In March 2008, the CARICOM Secretariat published *Guidelines for Developing Policy, Regulation and Standards in Early Childhood Development Services*. The guidelines were intended to support member countries in developing early childhood policy, regulatory and standards regimes.

Part III, *Childcare Development Services of The Childcare and Development Services Act 2009*, provides guidelines to caregivers regarding all provisions required to ensure the healthy development of children being cared for in childcare settings.

How do we move from a collection of early childhood standards, policies, and regulations to a comprehensive system which focuses deliberate attention to the first three years of a child's development? By focusing on four key areas—**good health, strong families and communities, positive early learning experiences**, and **strong systems**, we can implement approaches to support the needs of the family and whole child from conception.



Good health

All Infants and toddlers learn best when they are healthy physically, socially, and emotionally. Establishing a strong foundation for the development of a child's brain and body is tied to health and nutrition. Breast feeding from birth provides the right nourishment for encouraging healthy brain development (UNICEF, 2017). Nutritious and healthy foods have the nutrients needed for growth, development, and learning. Promoting good nutrition practices can help children develop healthy dietary practices. Providing early health care is a key contribution to producing healthy adults which results in economics saving when expensive chronic diseases are prevented in adulthood (Heckman, 2018).

Strong families and communities

All Infants and toddlers need to grow and learn in strong families and communities. Parents need support and resources to face the challenges of caring for their children, while at the same time meeting their work and other responsibilities. Young children who have close relationships with nurturing and reliably available adults outside their immediate family can promote their social and emotional development (Center on the Developing Child, n.d.). Nurturing care is critical to



making a lasting impact on early childhood development. Community platforms such as faith groups, community health workers, and parent organizations serve as platforms for nurturing care.

Strengthening and supporting these community platforms, families are empowered to contribute to the implementation and improvement of quality services. The voices, beliefs, practices, and needs of families should be incorporated into local and national plans; creating an enabling environment where families have access to the knowledge and resources to provide nurturing care to their children (World Health Organization, 2018).



Positive early learning experiences

All Infants and toddlers learn through play, active exploration of their environment, and through interactions with the significant adults in their lives. Learning begins in infancy. Positive early learning experiences lay the foundation for future success. Play is used by infants and toddlers to explore the world around them while developing skills as they progress through developmental milestones. Opportunities for children to engage in active play is fundamentally important to children learning requisite 21st century skills. These skills include problem solving and collaboration, opportunities to experiment,

explore, and be creative. (Yogman, et al., 2018). Educators working with infants and toddlers in group settings need to develop nurturing relationships with children in environments that are safe and stable. Through scaffolded play opportunities children develop their cognitive, language, motor, social-emotional, and self-regulation skills. The development of these skills establishes a strong foundation for the structured learning which will occur in the primary school years.

Strong systems

All infants and toddlers need access to high quality childcare services, health and mental health, and family support services.

Policies which support investments in early education lead to better economic, health and social outcomes in childhood and adulthood (Heckman, 2018). Central to the Childcare and Development Services Act 2009, is the outlining of minimum standards for the provision of early childhood development services; articulating the responsibilities of registered caregivers for meeting the needs of children in their care. This includes the physical environment, play and learning opportunities, as well as addressing the health, safety, and nutritional needs of children. Children and families are members of both their immediate community and wider society. An important role of society is promoting ongoing collaborations across institutions, organizations, agencies and civic groups which provide the services infants, toddlers, families and caregivers require. This strategy can function as a comprehensive network for families and educators to access the information, resources, and support needed to put babies on the trajectory for positive developmental outcomes, laying the foundation for lifelong success.

