



FAIR BY FIVE

Give every child
the best start.



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EARLY YEARS: A NATIONAL PRIORITY.

Action for Children works hard to make sure children have the love, support and opportunity to reach their potential.

We believe that giving every child the best start in life is important. There are things we can do to help children catch up later on but they are far less effective.¹

By age 5, most children in England have reached a good level of development. They are able to make friends, explore their world safely and are ready to learn. Others have already fallen behind.

The most deprived areas and most disadvantaged children are hardest hit, overall. At Action for Children, we believe it's possible to close this gap. But it will need vision, leadership and concerted effort by the Government.

There has never been a more important time to focus on tomorrow's adults. We can't afford to let our attention drift from the thousands of children who need a better start in life. It's bad for children, for families, for communities, and for our country's future success.

JOIN US AS WE CALL ON THE GOVERNMENT TO MAKE CHILD DEVELOPMENT A NATIONAL PRIORITY, HELP FAMILIES OVERCOME THE BARRIERS THAT HOLD CHILDREN BACK, AND GIVE EVERY CHILD THE BEST START.



THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT.

Politicians from all parties recognise that what happens in the earliest years affects our later lives. Our health, education, relationships, even our earnings, are affected by our experiences before we reach school.

Yet, despite the warm words, there are child-shaped holes in the Government's policy.

It cannot afford to take its eye off the ball. The country cannot afford to lose the potential of its youngest children. There has never been a more important time to focus on tomorrow's adults.

Childcare and education are only part of the picture. At home, from birth and even before, is where we have the earliest and best chance to support and improve children's development.

Support for parents to create a good environment for learning at home should be a pillar of the Government's early years policy.

In the most deprived areas of England, **2 out of 5** children walk through the school gates on their first day without a good level of development.²

In the best performing local authority in England, **77%** of children reached a good level of development compared to **52%** in the worst performing local authority.⁴

CHILD DEVELOPMENT IN ENGLAND

Despite this, funding of services that support good child development in the early years is falling. Between 2010 and 2020, the money given to local authorities by government is expected to **fall by 71%**. Councils will have new revenue raising powers from 2020, but nearly six in ten (59%) local councillors believe that this won't be enough to maintain current levels of spending on early intervention services.³

Children who receive free school meals are **less likely** to reach a good level of development than those who don't.⁵

Fewer children in the North East of England (63%) reach a good level of development, compared to the South East (70%).⁶

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY CHILD DEVELOPMENT?

Action for Children works with thousands of children and families every year. We look at children's whole journey as they grow and develop, including before birth.

Ready for school or ready for life?

Five is a good age to assess how well a child is developing, and many experts regard a good level of child development as essential for children to be 'ready for school'⁷. Children who start behind their peers are more likely to stay behind throughout their school career.

But that is only part of the picture – it's about much more than being ready to read and write. A child who is well developed is more likely to be healthy, less likely to experience unemployment and more able to build good relationships for the rest of their lives.

**WHILE PLAYING WITH GRANDAD, I'M LEARNING TO...
BE PATIENT – I KNOW HOW TO TAKE TURNS.**

Social and emotional skills are an important part of child development.

LET'S GET MORE CHILDREN READY FOR LIFE.

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Personal, Social and Emotional Development.

Even in the first few months of life, babies explore how to interact with others. As they grow, their attachment to their main carers becomes more important. These relationships give them a secure base from which to explore the wider world. They help to build their self-confidence and self-awareness. As they grow, these relationships will also help children learn how to understand their feelings, how others feel and to manage their own behaviour.

Communication, Language and Learning.

Communication is how we join in with the world around us. The skills we need to listen, pay attention, understand and speak are also built through our earliest relationships. Babies respond strongly to their mother's voice, and communicate through eye contact, long before they start to talk.

By joining in with rhymes and stories, or playing games that involve others (from peek-a-boo to hide and seek), young children start to understand others and make themselves understood.

Learning or cognitive skills refer to memory, problem solving and reasoning. These develop more in the early years than at any other time in our lives.⁸

**WHILE PLAYING WITH MUM,
I'M LEARNING TO... FOLLOW
A STORY AND TALK ABOUT
WHAT HAPPENED.**

Communication & language
is an important part of
child development.

**LET'S GET
MORE CHILDREN
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Physical Development.

Growing up strong and well-nourished affects children's physical health, as well their ability to look after themselves. As they go out into the world, they need to be able to keep their balance, handle objects or catch themselves if they fall. They also need to learn to care for themselves – brushing their teeth, going to the toilet or eating lunch without extra help.

**WHILE PLAYING WITH DAD,
I'M LEARNING TO...
DRESS MYSELF AND
USE THE TOILET.**

Health and self-care is
an important part
of child development.

**LET'S GET MORE
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What about children with extra health challenges or disabilities?

Every child is unique. Every child will develop differently, but they should all have the chance to develop as well as possible. Understanding the child development journey helps to identify children who need extra help and get it to them at a time, and in a way, that is right for them.

WHAT CAN GET IN THE WAY OF GOOD CHILD DEVELOPMENT?

Life is complicated. There are lots of things that can affect how parents spend time with their children.



WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?

One in three children across England arrive at school not ready to learn.⁹ That is ten children in every reception class. Even fewer children from disadvantaged backgrounds are ready to start school.



1 IN 2 children eligible for free school meals don't reach a good level of development.¹⁰



219,460 children in England do not reach a good level of development by age 5.¹¹

This isn't acceptable. Why? Because children who are not achieving their potential even at this young age are more likely to experience poor health, employment and educational attainment for the rest of their lives. It could even affect their parenting when they have children of their own.

Closing the gap.

Sadly, this isn't a new problem. Though the number of children who are ready for school has grown in the past, progress has now stalled. We are not improving quickly enough, especially for those from the most disadvantaged groups.¹²

The gap between the least and most deprived communities has grown in the last three years.¹³

Closing these gaps matters. We need to make faster progress for disadvantaged children because they are more likely to be affected by poor development.

We can do something about it. Reaching a good level of development won't guarantee their futures, but it will give them a better start.

Serious about social mobility.

The Government promised to "drive real change in children's lives"¹⁴ by tackling the causes of child poverty.

On her first day in office, Prime Minister Theresa May said, "...we will do everything we can to help anybody, whatever your background, to go as far as your talents will take you."

We believe this help must start as early as possible. It means making sure that children aren't left behind before they start school. It means helping parents to nurture their children, giving them a safe, healthy and stimulating home from birth.

We need the Government (and all political parties) to commit to doing more for children in the most deprived areas. It's time to jump start progress on closing the gap in school readiness.

WHAT IS THE SOCIAL MOBILITY AGENDA?

Successive governments have tried to tackle what they see as the causes of poverty, low social mobility, entrenched disadvantaged and inequality.

2012

The Coalition Government looked at how it could improve “the life chances of children in low income families”¹⁵. Before the most recent election, the Conservative Manifesto pledged to drive changes in areas it thought would tackle poverty – “entrenched worklessness, family breakdown, problem debt, and drug and alcohol dependency”.

2015

After the election, Conservative Ministers replaced the Child Poverty Act, which measured poverty in terms of income, with the Life Chances Act, which measures ‘life chances’ through children’s grades at age 16 (Key Stage 4) and the number of children living in workless households.

2016

The Government announced it would introduce more ways to monitor progress.¹⁶ A speech by the Prime Minister David Cameron suggested that “improving family life and the early years” will be one of the areas it will focus on.¹⁷

**JULY
2016**

In her first speech as Prime Minister, Theresa May promised a future in which anybody, “whatever your background”, can go as far as their talents will take them. For children in the most deprived areas, this means better support from birth.

WHY SHOULD SOCIAL MOBILITY START WITH THE EARLY YEARS?

The evidence is overwhelming that what happens in the early years has a big impact on children's prospects. If the Government wants improve children's ability to take up opportunities throughout life, a focus on the early years is crucial.

The Institute of Health Equity has shown that children's development in four main areas (cognitive, communication and language, social and emotional, physical) has a huge influence on future economic wellbeing, relationships, educational attainment and health.^{18 19}

Economic wellbeing.

Cognitive skills (eg memory, problem solving and reasoning) develop more in the early years than at any other time in our lives.²⁰ They have a strong correlation to future employment.

Research has found that children with strong cognitive skills, measured through things such as drawing and vocabulary, had higher incomes at age 30 than children with lower cognitive scores.

Relationships.

Young children rapidly develop their ability to experience and express emotions, and to manage a variety of feelings.²¹ The development of skills like empathy and self-regulation enable children to have positive relationships²² at school and into adulthood.²³

By the time they reach school, children with a strong emotional foundation are able to anticipate and talk about their own and others' feelings. This makes it easier to manage everyday social interactions.²⁴

As adults, these same social skills are essential for the formation of lasting friendships and intimate relationships, effective parenting, the ability to hold a job and work well with others, and for becoming a contributing member of a community.²⁵



Educational attainment.

Almost all children (94%) who achieve a good level of development at age 5 go on to achieve expected levels of for reading at age 7 – the end of Key Stage 1.²⁶ They are five times more likely to reach the highest level.²⁷ But children who start off at the bottom at age 5 are six times more likely to be in the bottom at the end of Key Stage 1.²⁸

The impact carries on through primary and secondary school²⁹. Over half (55%) of children who are at the bottom of attainment at age 7 remain there when they take their GCSEs.³⁰

Quite simply, children at the bottom at age 5 are much more likely to be there age 7. Those at the bottom at age 7 are likely to be there when they sit their GCSE exams at age 16. This is important because a student who achieves five A*-C GCSE grades will earn on average £80,000 more over their lifetime.³¹

Health and wellbeing.

Parents have a big role in the early years in helping their children develop healthy behaviours. Maternal health also has significant influence on early cognitive development.³²

During these critical years, the foundation is laid for a child's physical and mental health. Children who are overweight are at an increased risk of health complications, such as asthma, emotional and behavioural problems, sleeping problems, musculoskeletal problems and type 2 diabetes in childhood. They are also more likely to suffer from cardiovascular disease and diabetes in later life.³³

Good parent-child relationships help build children's self-esteem and confidence and reduce the risk of children adopting unhealthy lifestyles.³⁴ The emotional bond between parent and child is known as attachment. Children's social and emotional skills are formed in large part by their attachment with their parents.³⁵



HOW CAN I HELP?

To create a better start for our under-fives, politicians to need to act. That's where you come in.

We want the Government to:

- **recognise** that child development, particularly what happens at home, is essential to social mobility
- **set a goal** to increase the number of children from disadvantaged backgrounds reaching a good level of development by age five
- **work with partners** (like local authorities, schools and health providers) to come up with a national strategy to achieve it
- **kickstart progress** by investing more in the 20% most deprived areas of England
- **track progress** by keeping a universal assessment of child development at age five, covering the three key domains of development – physical, social/emotional and cognitive
- **let us hold them to account** by requiring the Government to report each year on levels of child development, and specifically on progress for the most disadvantaged children.

You can take action now at

actionforchildren.org.uk/fairbyfive

Whether you're:

- A parent
- An early years professional
- A teacher
- A grandparent, aunt or uncle
- Or someone who believes that no child should be left behind

SIGN UP TODAY TO JOIN THE FAIR BY FIVE CAMPAIGN. BECOME PART OF THE NATIONAL EFFORT TO MAKE THE EARLY YEARS MATTER.



ENDNOTES

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We want all of the main political parties in England to commit to making early child development a national priority.

Sign up today to join the Fair By Five campaign and become part of the national effort to make the early years matter.

actionforchildren.org.uk/fairbyfive

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