

# Child care quality key for children from disadvantaged homes

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Decades of research have demonstrated the importance of the resources in children's homes and the benefits of high-quality interactions with parents in supporting healthy development. High-quality child care plays a similar, albeit less powerful, role. Children who come from more difficult home environments and have lower-quality child care have more social and emotional problems, but high-quality child care may help make up for their home environments.

Those are the findings of a new study by researchers at the University of Denver, Georgetown University, American University, Harvard University, and Auburn University. The research is published in the January/February issue of the journal, *Child Development*.

Researchers used information from a large-scale [longitudinal study](#) carried out under the auspices of the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD). The Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development followed children from birth through the middle-school years.

This research looked at the double jeopardy of children at ages 2, 3, and 4-1/2 who come from more difficult home environments and have lower-quality child care. Difficult family environments were characterized by fewer resources, fewer learning opportunities, and less sensitivity and acceptance of the child as rated by trained observers in the home. Lower-quality child care was characterized by fewer observed learning opportunities, caregivers who used negative or neutral [facial expressions](#)

and tone of voice, as well as insensitive responses, as rated by trained observers in the care environment. The study also assessed the child's age, gender, race, and ethnicity; the family's resources in the child's first 6 months of life and at each assessment age; the age the child started child care; and how many hours per week the child spent in nonmaternal care.

The study found that children in difficult home and child care environments had more social-emotional problems--such as being anxious or fearful; behaving disruptively or aggressively; or being less helpful, friendly, and open to peers--than children who attended lower-quality care but were raised in more advantaged and supportive homes.

It also found that when children who grow up in homes that lack important influences are enrolled in high-quality child care, the child care may compensate for the children's challenging home environments. The researchers posit that experiencing high-quality child care may offer children models of positive ways to express themselves and interact with the world, and provide a safe emotional space to grow and learn. In so doing, children may be protected from developing anxious, fearful, aggressive, or unfriendly behaviors.

"This pattern of findings is consistent with existing evidence that the quality of child care that young [children](#) experience may matter more for those from more disadvantaged home environments," according to Sarah Enos Watamura, assistant professor of psychology at the University of Denver, who directed the investigation.

"The study also confirms the importance of integrating early intervention strategies and policies across home and child care environments."

Provided by Society for Research in Child Development

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