



# A Better Start - Community of Practice

Research, evidence and practice resources

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Delivered by



# About A Better Start

A Better Start is the ten-year (2015-2025), £215 million programme set-up by [The National Lottery Community Fund](#), the largest funder of community activity in the UK. Five A Better Start partnerships based in Blackpool, Bradford, Lambeth, Nottingham and Southend are supporting families to give their babies and very young children the best possible start in life. Working with local parents, the A Better Start partnerships are developing and testing ways to improve their children's diet and nutrition, social and emotional development, and speech, language and communication. The work of the programme is grounded in scientific evidence and research. A Better Start is one of five major programmes set up by The National Lottery Community Fund to test and learn from new approaches to designing services which aim to make people's lives healthier and happier.

The National Children's Bureau is designing and delivering an ambitious programme of [shared learning and development support](#) for A Better Start, working within, across and beyond the five partnership areas.

Our aim is to amplify the impact of these programmes by:

- Embedding a culture of learning within and between the partnerships.
- Harnessing the best available evidence about what works in improving outcomes for children.
- Sharing the partnerships' experiences in creating innovative services far and wide, so that others working in early childhood development or place-based systems change can benefit.



**Welcome to our first summary of research, evidence and practice resources for the early years sector and beyond.**

**These resources were collated to share with the A Better Start ‘Communities of Practice’ which allow stakeholders from the five A Better Start partnerships to discuss the inspiration and challenges that inform their approach to early years work.**

**Many of these resources will also be of interest to other early years services and those working in other place-based systems.**

We hope you find this information useful - please share it widely and if you have relevant news for the next edition please send it to:  
[rnewson@ncb.org.uk](mailto:rnewson@ncb.org.uk).

**In this issue:**

- Resources, policy and evidence updates from the sector

## **Resources, policy and evidence updates from the sector**

In order to bring the best evidence and learning into the heart of Communications and Knowledge Curation Community of Practice we aim to regularly present research, policy, resources, evidence, reports and events relevant to A Better Start's work. This information will also be of interest to those working in early years services and other place-based systems elsewhere.

If you come across anything new, feel free to share with us - via rnewson@ncb.org.uk - and we can include in the next Research, Policy and Practice update.

### **Government updates**

#### **New Ofsted early years inspection handbook**

Following a consultation with the early years sector, Ofsted has published a new [early years inspection framework](#) for registered early years and childcare providers which will come into force in September 2019. A [report](#) in Nursery World said the new framework had been 'cautiously welcomed' by the early years sector.

#### **Government announces 'Chat, Play Read' campaign**

The Department for Education has announced a new 'Chat, Play, Read' campaign, which encourages parents to communicate, read and play with their children before they start school. For the launch, freuds (a communications agency) helped create a new [follow-along video](#) for parents, featuring journalist Natasha Kaplinsky OBE (@kaplinsky) and TV psychologist, Emma Kenny (@emmakennytv), to show that it is never too early to start interacting with your children.

#### **New training for experts to boost early communication skills**

Families with children who would benefit from additional help with their early speech and communication skills will have access to family reading sessions, local parenting pop ups and improved training for early years professionals, as part of a [£6.5 million investment](#) by the Department for Education so children have the language skills needed to thrive at school.

#### **Government response to report on tackling disadvantage in the early years**

The Department for Education has published a response to the Education Select Committee report focusing on quality early years education and a strong home learning environment. The response addresses the raft of recommendations made by the Select Committee on issues such as workforce development, service models, health in maternity, disadvantage and inequality. See the response [here](#).

#### **Call for more men to work in the early years**

More men are to be encouraged into careers in nurseries and early years settings, in

a new project to provide more diverse role models for children before they start school. Children and Families Minister Nadhim Zahawi has announced a £30,000 grant to support the scheme and help provide more male role models for children in the early years. Find out more [here](#).

### **House of Commons: Science and Technology Committee. Evidence-based early years intervention: Committee's Eleventh Report of Session 2017-19 (October 2018) and Government Response (February 2019)**

Following on from work led by Graham Allen MP and others to highlight the substantial evidence base and need for investment in early intervention and support, the UK Government launched an inquiry in 2017 to review the extent to which the evidence on early intervention was informing early intervention practice. A Better Start is highlighted throughout the report, with several partnerships featuring as case studies. The Committee's report including recommendations for a new national strategy for adversity-targeted early intervention and the UK Government response to this report can be accessed via the links below.

Link to: [Committee report](#) Link to: [Government response](#)

## **Research and Reports**

### **Key enablers to establish an effective partnership-based early help offer: report**

Commissioned by the LGA, this research explores the enablers of, and barriers to, developing and sustaining an effective local early help offer. The findings are based on in-depth engagement with eight local areas which were selected on the basis of interesting or innovative practice in the area of early help. The report explores in detail how these areas have constructed their early help offers; how these have evolved over time; the key enablers that have supported the creation of an effective offer; and the future challenges that local areas are addressing. Access the report [here](#).

### **Engaging disadvantaged and vulnerable parents: An evidence review**

This report sets out the findings from a rapid evidence review to understand what is known from the literature about encouraging disadvantaged and vulnerable parents to take up, fully participate in and complete parenting and parental conflict programmes and services. Find the report [here](#).

### **Children's Commissioner: Early access to mental health support**

The Children's Commissioner's research is the first time any organisations has collected data to show how much is being spent by areas in England on "low-level" mental health support for children. It reveals that local areas allocated a total of £226 million for low-level mental health services in 2018/9, just over £14 per child. Find the report [here](#).

## **Five areas to focus on maternity and early years support**

The [Early Intervention Foundation](#) has announced plans to work with five local areas on improving outcomes for children in the early years. The programme is based on using evidence and local intelligence to create a shared vision for maternity and early years services.

## **Sounds of intent in the early years: Soundabout report**

This research from music charity Soundabout reveals that targeted music sessions for children in the early years and their families in areas of high deprivation can improve their capacity to manage their feelings and behaviour, boost their self-confidence, and heighten their ability to listen and pay attention, enabling them to ‘close the gap’ in terms of meeting their age-related expectations. The research also found that early years music workshops can help children with complex needs to overcome developmental delays. Find the report [here](#).

## **Early Intervention Foundation: Realising the potential of early intervention**

This report reviews the current state of play for early intervention, including barriers and challenges to support child development and improve outcomes for children and young people. Report can be accessed [here](#).

## **House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee. First 1001 Days of life: Thirteenth report of session 2017-2019**

This report reflects on the critical importance of the first 1001 days of a child’s life and the need to support children, parents and families during this period, and presents the findings of the Health and Social Care Committee following a substantial review of both written and oral evidence. Link to: [Committee report](#)

## **NCB briefing summarising the changes proposed by the NHS Long Term Plan**

Briefing summarising proposed changes, with a particular focus on commitments most relevant to children and young people. Access [here](#).

## **The Maternity Transformation Programme**

‘Better Births: Improving Outcomes of Maternity Services in England’ (2016) is the report of the national review of maternity services led by Baroness Julia Cumberlege and commissioned by NHS England. The Maternity Transformation Programme was launched in July 2016 seeking to achieve the vision set out in Better Births by bringing together a wide range of organisations to lead and deliver on nine national work streams. Find out more about the MTP [here](#).

## Resources

### Early Intervention Foundation (EIF): Key competencies in cognitive development (Dec 2018)

This report from EIF reports the evidence on how best to support cognitive development in the early years, including knowledge of objects, people, numbers and language. Summary and full reports can be accessed [here](#).

### Free evidence-based resources to support children's language development

The ESRC International Centre for Language and Communicative Development (LuCiD) is a research collaboration of over 40 researchers at the Universities of Manchester, Liverpool and Lancaster, as well as associated universities abroad. LuCiD's goal is to transform our understanding of how children learn to communicate with language. LuCiD has produced a number of free resources to help caregivers, early years practitioners and healthcare professionals to support children's language development. Visit the LuCiD website for more information or subscribe to their newsletter for regular updates. <http://www.lucid.ac.uk/>.

## Events

### 1 to 7 June

#### Volunteers' Week

<https://volunteersweek.org/>

Volunteers' Week is a chance to celebrate and say thank you for the fantastic contribution millions of volunteers make across the UK. It takes place 1-7 June every year and is an opportunity to celebrate volunteering in all its diversity.

### 9 to 15 June

#### Infant Mental Health Awareness Week

[aimh.org.uk](http://aimh.org.uk)

Join the Association for Infant Mental Health UK in celebrating a week looking at emotional wellbeing in the early years. #IMHAW19

### 13 June, Nottingham

#### Small Steps Big Changes, Annual Event

[www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/our-early-development-tickets-60531792220](http://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/our-early-development-tickets-60531792220)

Small Steps Big Changes' annual event will focus on the importance of early social, emotional and language development in babies and young children. The event will feature both expert speakers in the field of child development and masterclass options.

**15 June 2019, Birmingham**

**TACTYC One Day Conference and AGM 2019**

<https://tactyc.org.uk/conferences/>

The focus of this TACTYC one-day conference will be on happiness and wellbeing in the early years. TACTYC is calling for papers for the conference; the closing date for applications is 15th May 2019.

**17 June 2019, Blackpool**

**Talking Dads**

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/talking-dads-tickets-59817094540>

Bringing together a national audience of fellow practitioners, academics and volunteers to discuss the importance of dads in the early years.

**26 June 2019, London**

**Parental Engagement in Children's Learning Conference**

[https://westminsterinsight.com/event/3318/QZLPZO-960324?utm\\_source=email&utm\\_medium=html&utm\\_campaign=QZLPZO0313&utm\\_content=960324&utm\\_term=960324](https://westminsterinsight.com/event/3318/QZLPZO-960324?utm_source=email&utm_medium=html&utm_campaign=QZLPZO0313&utm_content=960324&utm_term=960324)

This Westminster Insight conference aims to provide practical support and advice on how to narrow the achievement gap, and will also focus on raising attainment through nurturing positive partnerships with disengaged parents and carers. The event includes listening to case studies from early years and primary schools.

**27 June 2019, London**

**Begin Before Birth**

<https://www.symposia.org.uk/main/main.asp>

The importance of mental health during pregnancy for the mother and the child - this symposium will bring together international experts to give updates on the latest research. Relevant to all those who care for women in the peri-natal period.