



Effectively supporting child development through actions that meet 10 essential conditions

Julie Poissant, Perinatal and Early Childhood Expert. Institut national de santé publique du Québec

Context

The *Initiative concertée d'intervention pour le développement des jeunes enfants (ICIDIE)* aims to support the development of Quebec children to better prepare them for their entry into the first cycle of elementary school, and to promote their academic success¹. The two main components consist of the *Enquête québécoise sur le développement des enfants à la maternelle (EQDEM)*, and the deployment of actions to support their development. Using information provided by teachers, the QSCDK helped assess the development level of 65,000 kindergarten students in five domains: social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive development, communication skills and general knowledge, as well as health and well-being.

The measuring instrument used in the survey identified the proportion of vulnerable children in each domain. Children are considered vulnerable if their score for a given domain is among the 10% lowest scores within the threshold established in Quebec. These children are more likely than others to experience learning difficulties later on. In Quebec, the QSCDK shows that one child out of four in kindergarten presents a vulnerability in at least one of the five domains of development².

Two out of three Canadians have to pay for some or all of their psychological services.



Ten conditions for success

How do we support child development and ensure a more promising start in school? A single action cannot reduce on its own the proportion of vulnerable children or promote overall child development. However, certain combinations of actions may be more conducive than others. Characteristics of successful actions were identified using scientific literature on effective practices, positions of national and international organizations, and expert consensus³.

1. **Promote the cooperation and engagement of the stakeholders.** Actions that promote the creation and maintenance of collaboration between stakeholders and that encourage their involvement, commitment, and enthusiasm increase the likelihood of achieving desired results. Such collaboration means establishing a shared vision of development, setting a goal and objectives, relying on the strengths of everyone involved, and strengthening partnerships. This will enable stakeholders to participate in the implementation, follow-up, or evaluation of actions.
2. **Meet the needs of children and families.** Actions that meet the needs of families, the needs identified by community stakeholders, and those established through research or studies are more likely to succeed. These different points of view provide a comprehensive picture of existing needs.
3. **Strengthen protective factors and reduce risk factors.** Lorsque l'on souhaite favoriser le développement global des enfants, il faut des actions qui agissent sur plusieurs facteurs de protection et facteurs de risque en considérant tous les niveaux d'influence soit les facteurs de nature individuelle, sociale, économique et environnementale.
4. **Maintain a level of quality.** The impact of proposed actions depends on their quality. Actions that support overall development in children are backed by solid theoretical or scientific evidence, consider the characteristics and skills of personnel, and include measures to monitor their implementation and impact.
5. **Work towards proportionate universality.** Actions that are aimed at all children and their parents, with needs-based methods and intensity, are required to effectively support child development. This is called proportionate



An assessment of the NAD program in the city of Nuremberg showed a significant decrease in attempted suicide rates.

- universalism⁴. These must include strategies to eliminate barriers that limit access to interventions for certain families, such as high cost and transportation issues.
6. **Focus on the child and all levels on influence.** Child development is linked to experiences upon conception and after birth involving parents and extended family, as well as experiences within the community (neighbourhood, educational daycare services, school and society). Therefore, the most successful actions offer overall support by combining direct interventions among children with interventions at all levels of influence.
 7. **Be established early and allow continuity up to age 8.** Interventions carried out early in life are more likely to have a beneficial impact on child development and decrease future problems, since the brain is at its peak development stage. Extending the intervention after the start of school helps maintain acquired knowledge, especially among disadvantaged children. It is also essential to support periods of transition. A harmonious transition will help children and their parents confidently face future transitions.
 8. **Permit significant intensity or significant accumulation.** An action's chances of success and the extent of its effects depend on the intensity offered, as well as on the cumulative effect that will produce substantial impact on the overall development of children. Important variables to consider are the intensity over time (duration, frequency), intensity of means or methods used, and the possibility of reinforcing acquired knowledge over time. How to determine whether the intensity or cumulative effect is significant? The answer depends on the objectives and must be adjusted according to the needs of families and according to targeted risk and protective factors.
 9. **Be complementary and consistent.** Actions that are organized in a complementary and coherent way are more likely to positively influence the overall development of children. The intervention considered must be a part of a set of existing actions and complement them. Knowledge acquired through an intervention is then reinforced, enhanced, or consolidated through another intervention. Ensuring coherence between actions requires significant fluidity between interventions, as well as similarity in messages conveyed and knowledge acquired.
 10. **Take into account the characteristics of targeted children and families.** Whether it is due to the developmental stage of children or the culture of families, actions are more likely to achieve objectives and can be really helpful when adapted to the interests and realities of each child, each family or each community.

Implications

Results of the QSCDK show that too many children do not have the acquired knowledge necessary when starting school. However, it is possible to promote their overall development thanks to a set of actions that meet certain conditions. We believe that the conditions for success described here will serve as inspiration and may be applied to several local and regional intervention levels.

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