

Submission to The Vancouver Province
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What are the three to five key things parents and government need to do to ensure our children age 0-12 have the best start in life?

The responsibility to see to it that children have the opportunity for optimal development belongs to all of us. Parents, neighbours, teachers, health care professionals and the community in general all have important roles to play. Government sets the stage with its decisions about public policies and expenditure of public funds. What do children need from us to have the best start in life?

First and foremost, they need our time. Today's world operates at a furious pace and there are endless demands on most parents' time. At an individual level, that means making the kids our priority, taking a positive interest in our neighbour's kids and the kids in our children's school and family. For government and business, it means ensuring that workplaces have family-friendly policies, and adequate child care options so that a caring adult is always present in the life of the child to provide patient attention, guidance and support.

Children also need the security of safe homes and communities, fresh air, clean water and healthy food. Families require an adequate income to provide good food and the basic necessities of life for children's development. As long as B.C. has the worst child poverty record in the country, we can be certain that many of our children do not have the best start in life. We urgently need a child poverty plan, with identified strategies and measurable outcomes for children's lives to be improved and make sure we are a society of equal opportunity for all children.

We especially need to understand what works for our most vulnerable children, including children with special needs, children living out of their parental homes, and Aboriginal children. For many children in vulnerable communities, their healthy support and development requires additional supports outside the family and the community tailored to their circumstances. Positive government programs and support are required at the level of the child.

Aboriginal children especially require us to be respectful of their culture and language but also supportive of the journey their families face to overcome the impact of intergenerational trauma, abuse and racism. We need to listen carefully to Aboriginal families and support them in creating the best opportunities for their children to overcome several generations of exclusion and to expect the best for Aboriginal children at school, at home and in our neighbourhoods and communities.