

EARLY YEARS, CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AND HEALTH

The Glasgow Centre for Population Health (GCPH) has drawn together its learning about the factors influencing the health of babies, children and young people. It is crucial to understand the role of society, effective universal services and targeted interventions, in supporting and nurturing all children during this critical life stage. The evidence is compelling regarding the importance of early years' and childhood experiences for healthy development, improving health throughout the life-course and reducing health inequalities.

This report brings together evidence from the GCPH and the GoWell research and learning programme about the different 'spheres' of influence impacting on children's health and wellbeing as outlined in the diagram below.

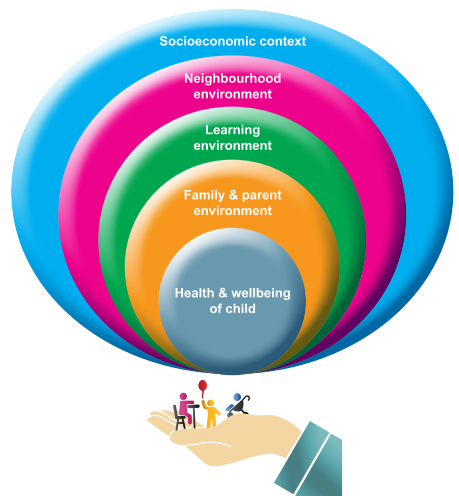
The family and parent environment, including the health and wellbeing of parents/carers and the love and care provided, is fundamental to healthy child development and attachment.

The learning environment of early years settings and schools, exert critical influences on children's development and future outcomes.

The neighbourhood environment in which children and young people live and socialise has significant impacts on their day-to-day lives and their health and wellbeing.

The socioeconomic context and families' material circumstances impact on the health of children and interact with children's family, learning and neighbourhood environments.

Key areas for action are summarised inside and cross-cutting themes which emerged from the evidence review are outlined on the back cover.



The following actions to improve health and reduce health inequalities are required across children's family, learning, neighbourhood and socioeconomic contexts.

SOCIOECONOMIC CONTEXT

- An understanding of difficulties faced by **families living in poverty** (e.g. food, heating, insecure work, parental stress) needs to be embedded into policies and services, including a focus on **gender inequality** and vulnerabilities for **lone parents**.
- Actions are required to **reduce poverty**, as well as **income inequalities** (since differences in children's outcomes operate across the full income spectrum, improving progressively up and worsening progressively down). Such actions include:
 - progressive **tax** of income and wealth and **welfare** in proportion to need
 - adoption of the **Living Wage** and increased income security (e.g. a guarantee of hours)
 - **poverty proofing** national/local policies and practices (e.g. the Cost of the School day recommendations for schools)
 - **services** that are universal and proportionate to need and adopt inequality sensitive practices and income maximisation approaches
 - affordable, high-quality **childcare** and family-friendly employment practices
 - affordable, quality **housing**, free/subsidised transport and support for communities in **disadvantaged areas**.

FAMILY AND PARENT ENVIRONMENT

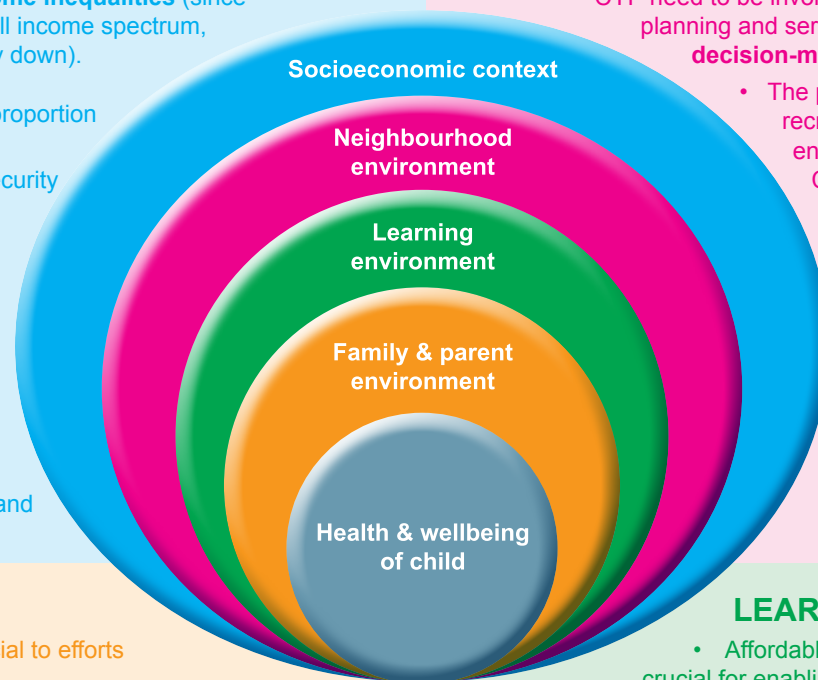
- A focus on the **health and wellbeing of parents** is crucial to efforts to improve outcomes for children.
- **Support for parents** needs to extend beyond parenting advice, linking parents to sources of help for difficult life circumstances and to social networks with other parents.
- A key aim of policy and practice should be to support the development of a **secure attachment** with caregivers and positive **relationships** within families. This is vital for children's healthy development.
- Children and young people with **negative parenting** and **home experiences** or other **difficult life circumstances** (e.g. young carers) require dedicated support.
- Preventing **adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)** and supporting those with ACEs is important for reducing the prevalence of physical and mental health problems in adulthood and the consequences for subsequent parenting.

NEIGHBOURHOOD ENVIRONMENT

- The **welfare of children and young people (CYP)** needs to be integrated into the development and maintenance of the physical and social aspects of neighbourhood environments.
 - CYP need to be involved in the development and delivery of neighbourhood planning and services, in a way that ensures that they have an **influence on decision-making**.
 - The provision of **safe, good quality greenspaces** and recreational facilities is essential for increasing physical activity, enabling social friendships and supporting the resilience of CYP.
 - The provision of **alternative activities and support to transition to different friendship networks** is important where peer relationships have a negative influence on the health of CYP (e.g. gangs, alcohol/drug misuse).
 - A range of measures are needed to enhance **neighbourhood safety** for CYP, including: increasing community connections; tackling alcohol and drug problems for all age groups; maintaining neighbourhood parks and facilities; providing activities for CYP (combined with personal support for vulnerable CYP).

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

- Affordable and high-quality **childcare and early years education** are crucial for enabling children to learn and develop socially; as well as tackling inequalities by supporting children from disadvantaged backgrounds and enabling parents to work.
 - **Nurturing approaches** support health and wellbeing and educational attainment, through increasing communication skills, confidence and social development.
 - Schools have an important role in enabling children's **social development** and can play a protective role where children experience adversities at home and/or in their communities.
 - Actions by schools to **poverty proof** their policies and practices, to support **healthy food** consumption and **active travel** are needed to support children's health and wellbeing.
 - **Music programmes** can increase the confidence, achievements and inclusion of children from disadvantaged communities (e.g. Big Noise) and children with disabilities (e.g. musicALL).



The evidence and actions highlighted in this leaflet are discussed in detail in the 2016 GCPH publication “**Health and early years, children and young people: a GCPH synthesis**”. This report and other GCPH publications are available on the GCPH website. Information about the GoWell research and learning programme, including publications, is available on the GoWell website.

Early years, children and young people and health

- **Emotional attachment** – Strong bonds and positive relationships within families, in schools and in neighbourhoods are crucial to children’s healthy development and underpin their future development of good relationships and good parenting.
- **Safety** – Not feeling safe at home can have damaging long-lasting impacts for children into adulthood; levels of safety and cohesion in schools impact on health and wellbeing; and use and enjoyment of neighbourhoods is affected by experiences and perceptions of safety.
- **Healing approaches** – A lack of attachment and stressful experiences impact negatively on physical and emotional development, with potentially life-long consequences. However, there is also significant capacity for healing through changing circumstances, nurturing approaches, and supporting resilience through family support, schools, communities and services.
- **Understanding different circumstances** – There is a need for approaches and service delivery to understand and respond to differences in personal circumstances. In particular, to prevent and mitigate against the impacts of poverty and inequalities.
- **Involvement in decision-making** – Children and young people need to be involved in decisions affecting their lives. Meaningful involvement is required which influences outcomes and cut across children’s different environments – their family, schools and neighbourhoods.



Further information

GCPH: www.gcph.co.uk

GCPH Twitter: [@theGCPH](https://twitter.com/theGCPH)

GoWell: www.gowellonline.com