



Children and young people at risk

Extracted from Australia's welfare 2009

Chapter 2, pages 61–62

There is a demonstrated relationship between the health and wellbeing of children and young people and the environment in which they grow up.

Children who are raised in supportive, nurturing environments are more likely to have better social, behavioural and health outcomes. There are a range of factors that expose children and young people to a greater risk of disadvantage. These include family stressors such as financial difficulties, social isolation, domestic violence, mental health problems, disability, alcohol and/or substance abuse, and the lack of, or uninhabitable, housing.

Evidence from Growing up in Australia: the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children reveals a direct link between poorer parenting quality (such as parental hostility, lack of emotional warmth and low parental self-efficacy) and poorer development outcomes for infants and children. There is also a well-acknowledged relationship between the welfare of a child, parental neglect and criminal offending later in life.

Children who have been abused or neglected may experience lower social competence, poor school performance, impaired language ability, a higher likelihood of criminal offending and mental health problems.

Questions for discussion

1. Make a list of the factors described above that may contribute to poorer outcomes for children and young people.
2. Pick six of these factors that can be linked (for example, financial difficulties leading to housing problems, in turn leading to ...). Use a diagram and text to describe how your chosen factors could relate to one another.
3. Appoint yourself prime minister for the day, with an altered constitution that gives you enormous powers. Briefly describe five new policies that you would act on to improve outcomes for children. Explain how each of these policies would be effective.
4. 'Supporting families at risk costs a lot of money and people should learn to look after themselves.' Discuss this statement, concentrating on the total cost to society.