

Understanding the Early Years



COMMUNITY RESEARCH
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UNDERSTANDING THE EARLY YEARS "READY OR NOT"

EMOTIONAL MATURITY AND SCHOOL READINESS

Community Update
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THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING READY TO LEARN

A child's first years at school are very important. A good start in school increases the likelihood that children will feel good about themselves; complete high school; find and retain employment; and become caring, contributing members of society.

Recently, school readiness has been the topic of much research. Studies have shown that readiness to learn at age six can predict a child's ability to benefit from the opportunities school has to offer, both academically, and socially. On the other hand, lack of readiness may make it difficult for children to adjust to school; to succeed academically; and to be accepted by their peers.

School readiness is often thought of in terms of chronological age and the possession of certain academic skills (i.e. the ability to identify numbers and letters), and cognitive skills (i.e. the ability to memorize and retain information).

Emotionally maturity in terms of school readiness

Developmental area	Behaviour of a child who is emotionally ready to learn	Behaviour of a child who is NOT emotionally ready to learn
Prosocial & helping behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offer to or helps someone hurt, or upset Invites bystanders to join in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not offer to or help someone hurt or upset Does not invite bystanders to join in
Anxious & fearful behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is happy; able to enjoy school, and is comfortable being left at school by caregivers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Could be worried, unhappy, nervous, sad or excessively shy, indecisive; and can be upset when left at school
Aggressive behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> does not use aggression as means of solving a conflict, does not have temper tantrums, and are not mean to others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> gets into physical fights, kicks or bites others, takes other people's things, is disobedient or has temper tantrums
Hyperactivity & inattention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> able to concentrate, settle to chosen activities, wait their turn, and most of the time think before doing something 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> restless, distractible, impulsive; they fidget and have difficulty settling to activities

Understanding the Early Years (UEY) Initiative has been studying readiness to learn in Niagara Falls since 2001, using the Early Development Instrument (EDI).

The EDI is a population-based measure in the form of a teacher-completed checklist implemented at the Senior Kindergarten level. The EDI takes a broad, developmental approach to readiness, placing the importance of emotional maturity on par with academic and cognitive abilities.

Five EDI Domains:

- Physical Health and Well-being;
- Emotional Maturity;
- Social Competence;
- Language and Cognitive Development; and
- Communication skills and General Knowledge

However, understanding the transition-to-school process and children's early experiences in school requires moving beyond traditional academic and cognitive definitions of readiness to include components of child development that are less obviously related to academic success. One of these components is emotional maturity.

Important factors for emotional maturity in terms of school readiness include:

- The ability to defer instant gratification
- Persistence in repetitive but necessary tasks; and
- The ability to cope with small failures and upsets without tears or anger that might affect continued concentration and prevent children from learning from their mistakes.

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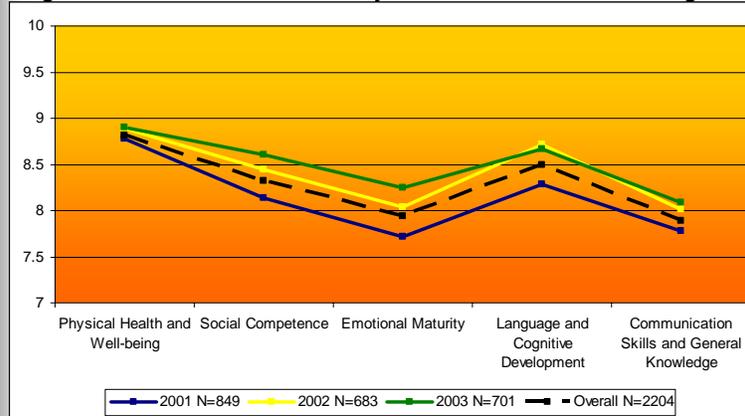
EMOTIONAL MATURITY IN NIAGARA FALLS' CHILDREN

The 2003 EDI results in Niagara Falls showed that:

- 23% of Senior Kindergarten children were not emotionally ready for school;
- 17% lacked pro-social or helping behaviours; and,
- 13% showed signs of hyperactivity and inattention including: restlessness; difficulty settling at activities; and distractible, impulsive and fidgeting behaviours

While it should be noted that these figures are the result of teacher assessment and are not diagnostic, teachers reported similarly low scores in emotional maturity when the EDI was implemented in 2001.

Niagara Falls EDI Mean Scores by Domain for Senior Kindergarten, 2001-2003



Over the past three years, a pattern has emerged in Niagara Falls. Overall, children in Niagara Falls scored relatively low on two of the five EDI domains, Emotional Maturity and Communication & General Knowledge and relatively high on Physical Health & Well-being, Social Competence and Language & Cognitive Development.

Furthermore, results of the 2001 National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY) Community Study showed that parental report on children's hyperactive behaviour in Niagara Falls was one and half the times the national norm. Despite the fact that parental ratings of children's behaviour indicated that the children of Niagara Falls exhibited fewer behaviour problems compared with national norms. Children's behavioural outcomes were assessed in terms of three factors: family background, family processes and community factors.

The relationship between family background, and family and community factors to behavioural outcomes showed that positive parenting was by far the most important factor explaining the outcomes, followed by the mother's mental health, and community social capital.

So what does this mean for our children? While these results, in and of themselves, should not be cause for alarm; they should also not be ignored. Children who are ready for school emotionally have self-confidence and a positive approach to new experiences. Emotionally mature children can, for the most part, balance a curiosity about the world and an eagerness to try new experiences with an age appropriate ability to reflect before acting. In contrast, children who are not emotionally ready may lack self-confidence and spend time and energy dealing with the fear of failure. If they are fearful and reluctant to try new activities, children may miss out on learning opportunities. On the other hand, children who are too impulsive may fail to perceive all aspects of a task, and as a result, not fully understand what is required of them. Furthermore, behaviour problems upon entry to school tend to persist throughout the schooling years and are a risk factor for low school achievement and disaffection from school

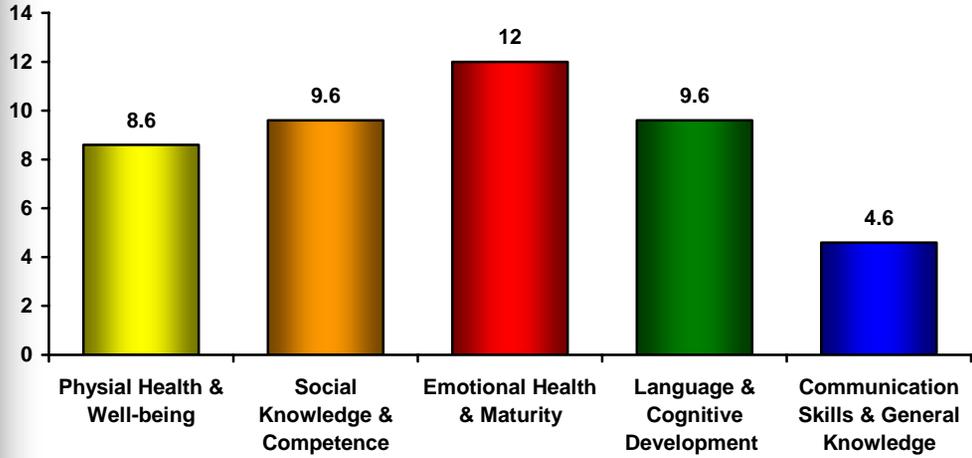
National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY) Community Study gathers detailed information about how children's family, friends and community influence their physical, behavioural and learning development.

Relationship between child's readiness to learn and family background

Family Background	Children's Outcomes Behavioural
Family Income (\$10 000 units)	1.00
Mother's Education (years)	1.02
Father's Education (years)	1.03
Mother Not Working Outside the Home	0.97
Father Not Working Outside the Home	0.68
Single-Parent Family	0.75
Number of Brothers and Sisters	0.96
Family Processes	
Positive Parenting Practices	2.08
Engagement in Learning Activities	0.98
Family Functioning	1.05
Maternal Mental Health	1.24
Community Factors	
Social Support	0.94
Neighbourhood Quality	1.00
Safe Neighbourhood	1.03
Social Capital	1.08
Use of Resources	0.98
Residential Stability	1.02

For further information on UEY in Niagara or across the country, please contact:
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Percentage of children with low scores on the Early Development Instrument in Niagara Falls



Percentage of children with low scores on the cognitive and behavioural measures (Niagara Falls)

