

How young children grow and develop



A Good Start

Early Childhood Development

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Based on an original booklet by Jacqui Purnell.

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Introduction

World Vision is a child-focused organisation and is committed to working with partners for the sustained well-being of children within their families and communities, especially the most vulnerable. Children are most vulnerable during their early years. Malnutrition has a long-term impact on young children's development, and diseases and accidents maim and claim the most lives during the early years.

Often the perception of Early Childhood Development (ECD) is the construction of preschools for 3- to 5-year-old children. ECD is much more than this. A focus on ECD ensures that children are healthy and well nourished, have bonded to their primary caregiver(s), are able to interact and communicate well with others and are ready to start school. A focus on ECD lays the foundation for successful development.

Young children spend most of their time with their families, so it is important to support those families who are their main caregivers. Strengthening families will improve the health, safety and general well-being of young children in the long term.

ECD addresses the holistic needs of young children from conception to eight years old.¹ Care of pregnant women is important. Women who are healthy, well nourished and in supportive relationships bear healthier children, giving them a good start to life. The first two years of life are the peak period for brain growth; therefore it is vital to provide families with information about how to stimulate their children and provide physical and emotional care. Supporting caregivers (families and teachers) in nurturing the emotional, spiritual and social needs of young children throughout this period is critical.

ECD programming includes a focus on providing a safe environment for children in both preschool and the home environment. Also, appropriate learning environments at home, in the community, and in preschool provide young children with a good foundation for learning and transition to school.

This booklet has been designed to assist World Vision staff and communities as well as sponsors in supporting countries to be more aware of the needs and rights of young children. Together, we can contribute in supporting children to develop to their full potential.

¹Early childhood is defined in the UN CRC General Comment No. 7 as the period below the age of eight years.



Key areas (domains) of child development

cognitive development – includes the development of a wide variety of thought processes and intellectual abilities including attention, memory, academic problem solving, imagination, creativity and the capacity to communicate through language.

language development is part of cognitive development and is expressed through babbling, pointing and gesturing in infancy; the emergence of first words and sentences in toddlerhood; and an explosion of words between ages 2 and 3 years.

emotional development – includes the development of emotional communication, self-understanding and the ability to manage one's own feelings.

physical development – is defined as a child's rate of growth, fine and gross motor skills, brain development, physical fitness and physical health.

spiritual development – is an inward and outward journey of discovery for children as they grow in awareness of a sense of meaning and purpose in life; connect, empathise with and are influenced by others, especially parents and peers; and begin to explore their understanding of God.

social development – includes the development of relationships with caregivers, siblings and peers, interpersonal skills, friendships, intimate relationships and moral reasoning and behaviour.



Simply sending children to preschool does not meet their overall needs.

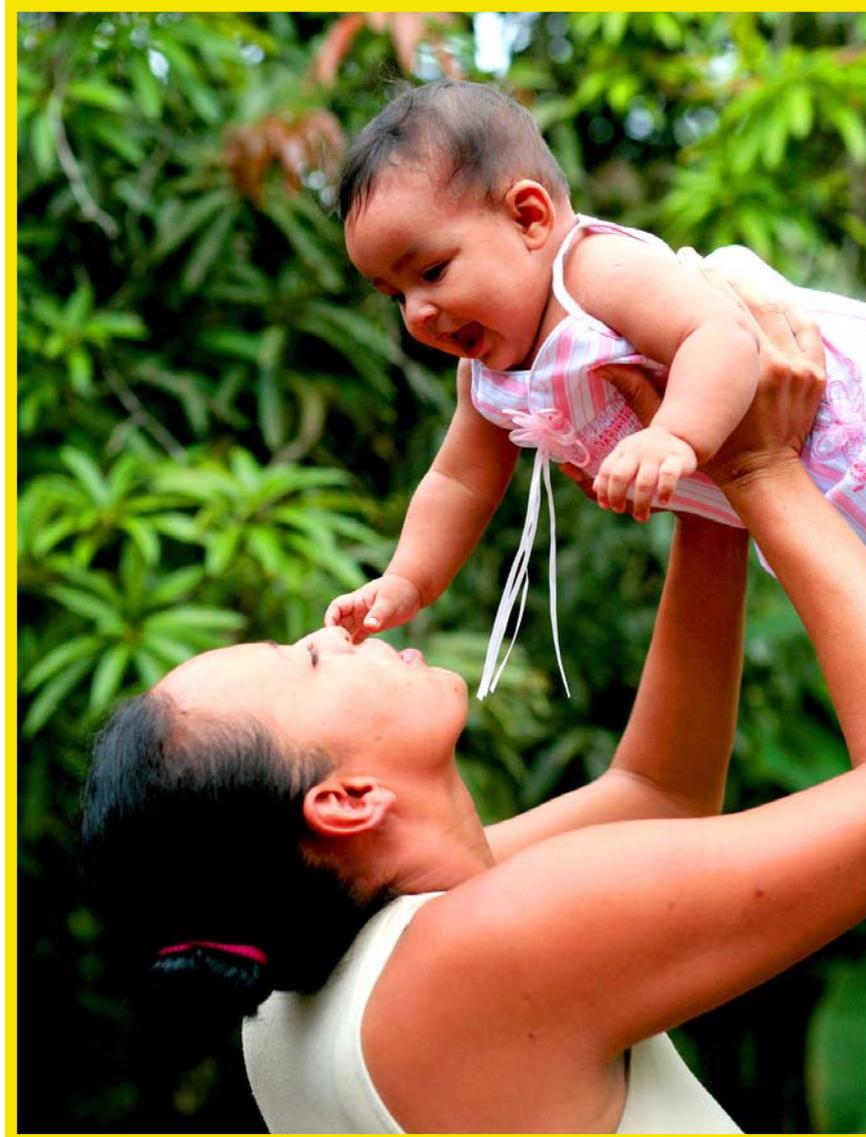


Why are the early years so critical?

- Early childhood is a time of special importance in terms of the cognitive, physical, emotional spiritual, and social development affecting a child's overall well-being. Early childhood development provides a foundation for healthier and better educated nations.
- These years are marked by extremely rapid development of the brain and other key biological and psychosocial systems. The young child's optimal development depends on a nurturing and stimulating physical and social environment.
- What children experience before they turn five years old affects later stages of development. For example, many adult physical and mental health problems have their roots in the early years. To improve the health, the prosperity and the quality of life of their populations, it is critical for societies to invest in their children's early development.²
- Experiences in early childhood shape a child's ability to read, write and become a confident, competent person. Each aspect of development (cognitive, physical, social, emotional and spiritual) is dependent on the others. For example, a child's level of nutrition (physical development) before starting school affects how well a child learns (cognitive development) once the child is in school.

² Nadeau, S., Kataoka, N., Valerio, A., Neuman, M., and Elder, L. (2010) *Investing in Young Children: An ECD Guide for Policy Dialogue and Project Preparation*. World Bank (pages 7 and 10).

Child rights start from birth, not when children start attending school.





Child rights in early childhood

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted in 1989, firmly established child-specific needs and rights. It requires that states act in the best interests of the child. For the first time in many societies, children, including the very young, are to be respected as persons in their own right. Young children should be recognized as active members of families, communities and societies, with their own needs, interests and opinions.

Many agencies and governments acknowledge the critical role of ECD as a human and economic investment with a high return to society. This marks a shift away from beliefs that regard early childhood mainly as a period when a young child automatically grows with minimal interventions until reaching the more 'valued' stages of attending school and reaching adulthood.

To fulfil their rights, young children have particular requirements for physical nurture, emotional care and sensitive guidance, as well as time and space for social play, exploration and learning. They need to be registered at birth and enjoy loving parents or caregivers who protect them and provide for all their needs. Communities need to organize to promote children's well-being and hold governments to account for the provision of essential services and social protection entitlements for their children.

A child rights framework is an important tool for guiding ECD policy, planning and establishing monitoring frameworks and assessing progress in meeting obligations to young children at different levels – family, community, local institutions, district, provincial, national and international.



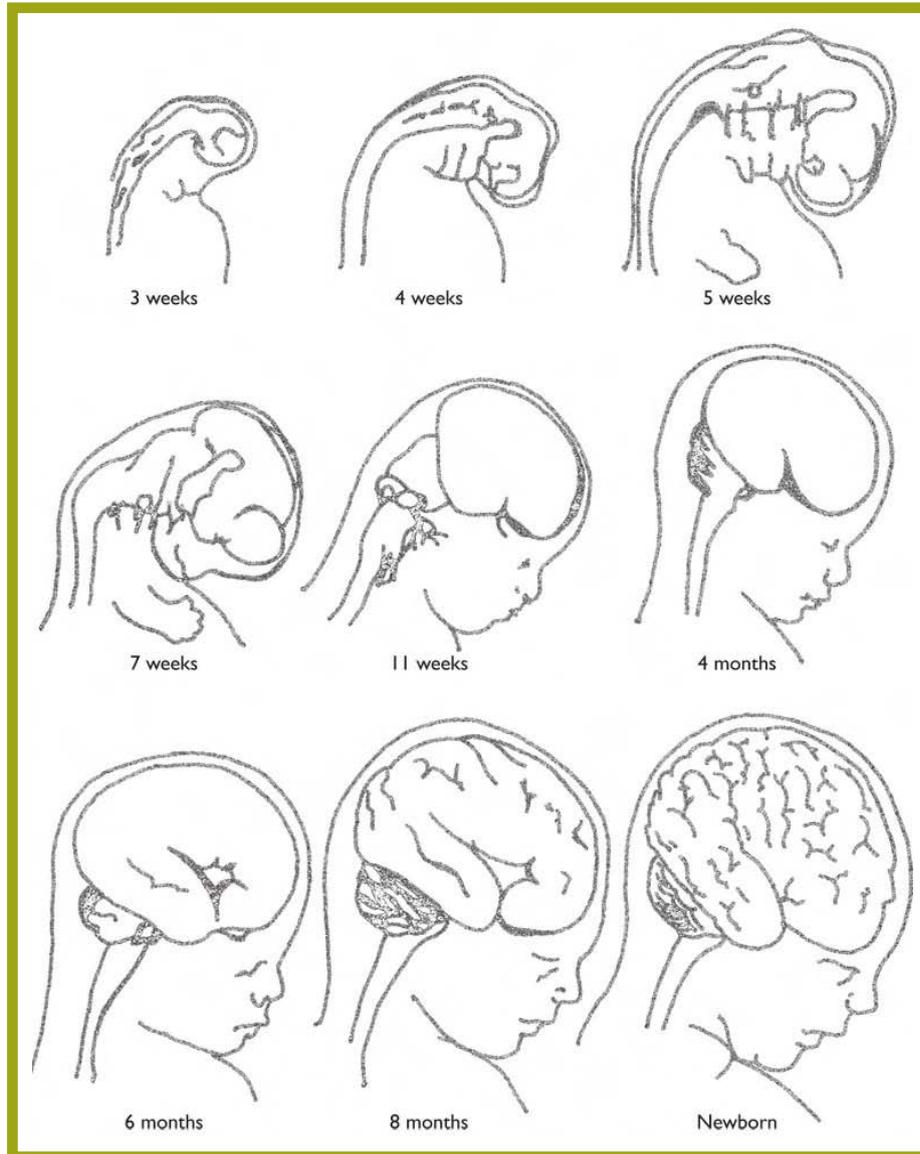
The years between conception and eight years old are the foundations for future success in a child's life.



How do young children develop?

- Before building a permanent house it is necessary to lay the foundation to support the entire structure – we do not begin building a house at the second floor. Before a child enters primary school, a similar foundation must be laid.
- Change and growth occur more rapidly in the first five years of life than at any other time in a child's life.
- Children's skills for moving, thinking, feeling and interacting with adults, peers and their environment develop rapidly during these first five years of life.
- Children learn from birth, and in the early years children acquire the fundamental skills that are critical to the success of their future education and indeed the rest of their lives.
- Within their families and communities, young children need to be supported in the development of physical, mental, spiritual, emotional and social abilities that will enable them to thrive.
- Understanding how a child develops and why the early years of a child's life are important is critical for understanding the concept of ECD.
- On the next page are two figures: Figure 1 shows the stages of brain development from three weeks of age in the womb to newborn at birth.

The best way to encourage brain development is to provide young children with continual positive interaction with people and things and to ensure good nutrition.





How does a young child's brain grow and develop?

- Brain growth begins during pregnancy, with the most rapid period of growth taking place during the first five years of life – the first two years being the most critical.
- At birth the brain already contains most of its billions of cells. During the first two years of life these cells become organised into systems for thinking, remembering and feeling.
- Brain cells link to a complex message system. As things are seen, heard, felt or tasted, messages are sent from one brain cell to another. These messages activate the cells, enabling them to make connections with the cells around them, causing the brain to grow. The brain needs to be stimulated from birth with colours, shapes, forms, sounds and movements for the connections to be made.
- The quality of experiences provided for children in the first five years lays the foundation for later learning and social skills.
- If babies and young children are not well nourished, stimulated and loved, brain abnormalities can occur that cause developmental delays in cognitive and emotional functioning.
- How the brain develops not only impacts a child's ability to learn but also affects physical, social and emotional development. Brain development in the early years is one of the key reasons for investing in programmes for very young children.



The developmental needs of young children

	conception to 1 year old	1 to 3 years old
physical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Pregnant mother ensures regular health checks, balanced diet, and rest and avoids addictive substances. ■ Adults ensure exclusive breastfeeding up to 6 months, then supplemental food and monthly weight gain. ■ Adults ensure child receives regular vaccinations, and a clean, safe environment where child can explore. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Adults provide continual supervision of young children. ■ Child has opportunities to play (develops coordination skills). ■ Child has safe environment, protected from accidents and injuries.
cognitive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Child needs a stimulating environment (e.g. things to smell, taste, hear and feel). ■ Child has opportunities to explore objects (e.g. bang, shake). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Child has opportunities to explore problem-solving toys (e.g. stacking and sorting building blocks).
language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Adults talk to children. ■ Child has opportunities to hear stories, to be read to and to be sung to. ■ Child has opportunities to imitate sounds. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Child has opportunities to be listened to by an adult and talked to by an adult.
social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Child has daily opportunities to interact and play with a variety of objects and people – siblings and family. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Child has opportunities to play with other children. ■ Child has opportunities to develop independence (e.g. to learn to feed and dress oneself).
emotional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Child has an adult with whom to form an attachment – opportunities to be hugged, sung to, rocked, smiled at, laughed with. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Adults provide simple explanation about appropriate behaviour. ■ Adults provide rules (e.g. avoid dangerous places).
spiritual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Child has opportunities to experience the love and connection of nurturing caregivers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Child has opportunities to experience the love and connection of nurturing caregivers.

	3 to 5 years old	5 to 7 years old
physical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child has outlet for increased balance and coordination skills to gain confidence to hop, tiptoe, gallop and climb higher. Adults promote oral health and proper hygiene and ensure safe environment to prevent accident or injury. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adults promote daily brushing of teeth and proper hygiene. Adults ensure deworming.
cognitive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adults encourage free drawing and counting as good preparation for formal learning later. Child has opportunities to work simple puzzles to learn numbers, shapes, colours and sizes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child has opportunities to learn through games and fun activities. Child has opportunities to explore and play.
language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adults respond to children's questions and satisfy their curiosity. Adults correct mistakes by being examples. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adults tell stories to build language and thinking skills. Child has opportunities to receive new information, participate in discussions and express him or herself. Child has opportunities to ask questions.
social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adults encourage independence. Child has opportunities to be creative in pretend play. Child has opportunities to learn cooperation, sharing and taking turns. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child has opportunities to play with other children. Child has opportunities to develop independence (e.g. to learn to feed and dress oneself).
emotional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adults praise and acknowledge child's efforts. Adults are understanding when child is frustrated. Adults ignore child's mistakes and reinforce correct answers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adults prepare child for life outside of the home by building confidence.
spiritual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child has opportunities to experience the love and connection of nurturing caregivers. Adults model positive values and behaviours. Adults encourage child's exploration of transcendence and a sense of wonder and awe about the world. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child has opportunities to experience the love and connection of nurturing caregivers. Adults model positive values and behaviours. Adults encourage child's exploration of transcendence and a sense of wonder and awe about the world.



Emotional support for mothers is important for the overall well-being of mother and child.



How do we promote young children's good nutrition and health?

- Ensure that pregnant and lactating women receive good nutrition, prenatal and postnatal care, and emotional support from their families.
- Improve the quality of care and positive interaction between children and their caregivers and families.
- Promote breastfeeding and complementary feeding. These prevent illness and promote healthy development and emotional attachment.
- Support families to know when and how to feed their children nutritious food, use proper hygiene, sanitation and oral care, apply home-based treatment of diarrhea and respiratory diseases, promote care-seeking behaviour for life-threatening illnesses, as well as timing for vaccinations.
- Link food security and agricultural development projects to improved nutrition outcomes in children under five years old and pregnant mothers.
- Promote the use of supplementary micronutrients such as zinc, iodine, iron and vitamins.
- Improve access to latrines and safe water, and encourage deworming.
- Identify and promote the consumption of locally available food items.
- Promote adult literacy, gender equity and opportunities for women to gain access to information, employment or income-generation activities.
- Train health workers to understand children's rights and the unique health and nutrition needs of young children that begin at conception and continue during pregnancy and up to two years of age.



Children's learning begins at home.



Playing is learning for young children

- Play is a young child's natural way to learn, to explore her or his environment, and to interact with others. Play is necessary for a child's successful growth and development.
- Play offers ways of trying new ideas, expressing emotions and solving problems.
- Play offers opportunities for young children to learn how to share, empathise with others and cooperate.
- Children who play with friends and have opportunities to explore their environment at home and at preschool have more enthusiasm for learning and will succeed better at school.
- Young children do not need expensive toys to learn. Young children can play with items at home and in the natural environment including pots, cups, seeds, pebbles, leaves, water and sand.
- Children with disabilities learn through play in the same way as other children.
- Children learn to copy and develop new skills, especially when playing with their families, peers and other caregivers. Children learn by interacting with them through discussions, actions and shared interests.



Preschools can provide opportunities for families to discuss ways to support their children's development.



How do young children benefit from preschool and other ECD services?

Preschool and other ECD services provide children with the opportunity to:

- Play freely and be active to develop coordination skills and strengthen muscles.
- Enjoy playing with their friends to learn social skills such as cooperation and sharing, responsibility and respect.
- Learn primarily through play without undue emphasis on rote memorisation and learning the 3 Rs (Reading, wRiting, and aRithmetic).
- Spend time in a safe environment.
- Develop the fine motor skills needed before they learn to write, such as free drawing, cutting and pasting, threading beads, putting puzzles together and building with blocks.
- Develop the language and communication skills, especially in their mother tongue, needed before they learn to read, such as singing, listening to stories, and talking.
- Develop mathematical concepts by playing with water, sand, blocks and appropriate local materials.
- Learn about their own culture and traditions, including dancing, singing, and playing instruments.
- Be affirmed by caregivers and teachers to build confidence and self-esteem.
- Eat nutritious food.
- Be ready to transition successfully to primary school.

Loving and affirming relationships with all family members provide children with the foundations for well-being.





The role of parents and family

- Parents and families carry the main responsibility for the care and nurture of their children. Positive long-term impact on young children's growth and development requires supportive caregivers and families.
- Communities and families need to provide particular support for the emotional and physical needs of mothers as they care for their young children.
- Fathers and other male members of the family have an important role in directly caring, showing affection to and acceptance of their young children.
- ECD projects encourage the formation of self-help and savings groups and opportunities for income generation among caregivers to provide for children's basic needs.
- Caregiver contribution and participation is critical to effective ECD projects.
- ECD projects encourage parents and caregivers to speak with their children, listen to them, show affection frequently, read to them, affirm them and discipline them in a positive way that encourages good choices and alternative ways to manage their behaviour and emotions.
- Caregivers should encourage children to use their imagination and explore, while supporting them to make good choices at an early age.
- ECD projects also ensure that caregivers, especially mothers, receive entitlements to government cash transfers or other child-welfare benefits which can be invested in food, clothing and education for young children.



Caregivers, community leaders and parents are all responsible for keeping children safe.

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How do we keep young children safe?

- Encourage caregivers (parents, preschool teachers and families) of young children to provide safe play areas wherever young children are cared for – in their homes and communities.
- Engage parent education groups to provide opportunities for families to discuss accident prevention in the home, such as how to prevent falls, drowning and burns caused by fires in the home.
- Provide preschool teachers with guidance and standards for how to create a safe environment and disaster preparedness for children while at preschool.
- Provide caregivers with opportunities to discuss positive, nonviolent methods of disciplining young children and protecting them from violence and abuse.
- Create awareness about child protection issues among caregivers and community members, and strengthen systems in the community and society to protect all children, especially young children, from physical, emotional and sexual abuse.
- Consider other ways of protecting children, such as ensuring safe access to clean water, sanitation and immunisation, and registering children at birth.



Nurture children's spirituality through safe, loving relationships and positive role models.



How do we nurture the spiritual development of young children?

- The spiritual dimension of children’s development shapes their relationships, identity, values, beliefs, sense of purpose, resilience and hope. In turn, young children’s spirituality can contribute to deepening adults’ spirituality.
- Caring adults can nurture a child’s spirituality by:
 - Encouraging a space where children can explore and develop an awareness and understanding of their own spirituality and of God
 - Promoting a sense of mystery, wonder and awe
 - Helping them find meaning, insight or connectedness with people and the environment
 - Being consistent with actions and words to model positive values and beliefs.
- Parents and caregivers can pray with their children and for their children.
- ECD projects can provide opportunities for parents to discuss positive traditions, while identifying harmful practices that impact children’s spiritual development.
- Caregivers should build relationships of trust in a safe, loving home and community.



ECD services and preschools support young children's overall development.

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World Vision's approach to working with young children

World Vision's understanding of optimal child development is expressed through four aspirations for child well-being and their related outcomes:

1. Enjoy good health
2. Educated for life
3. Experience love of God and neighbour
4. Cared for, protected and participating.

To contribute towards those outcomes, World Vision collaborates with partners and communities through integrated programming approaches that focus on child well-being. Programming approaches include the following:

- Community-based transformational development programmes focusing on the sustained well-being and rights of children within their families and communities, especially the most vulnerable
- Advocacy at the local, national and global levels that addresses child rights and unjust systems and structures
- Humanitarian and Emergencies Affairs (HEA) to provide immediate relief in times of emergency disaster, recognising that pregnant women and children are the most vulnerable in emergency situations

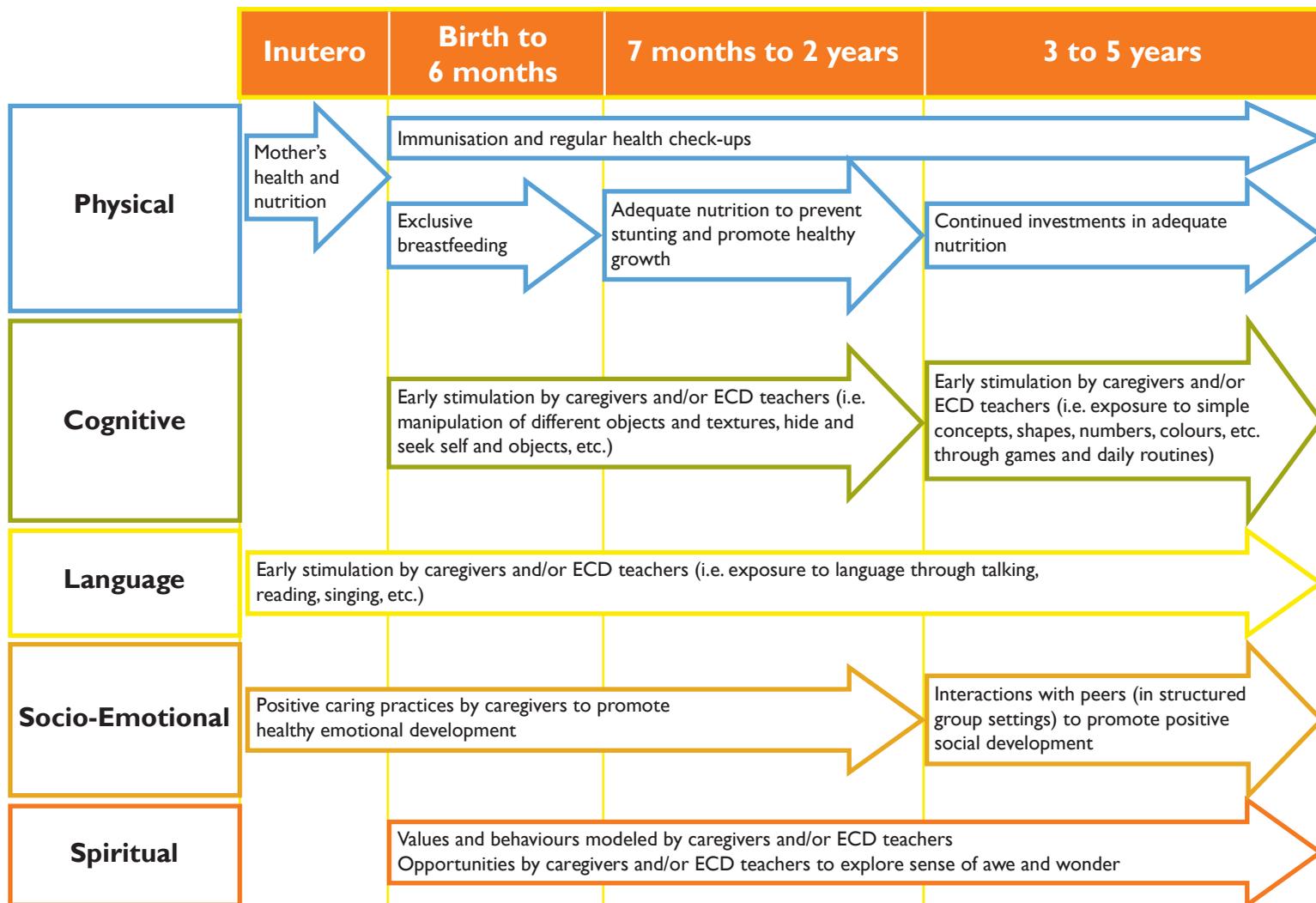


World Vision promotes different approaches to ECD. The choice of approach depends on the priorities and services that communities have for their young children. World Vision partners with community groups, local health providers, non-governmental organisations and governments to develop appropriate responses.

Approaches include the following:

- **Parenting:** Participatory, discussion-based parenting classes that include health, nutrition, stimulation, spiritual development, protection and family relationships
- **Centre-based child care:** Both home-based care, where working caregivers can leave their children in the care of a locally trained caregiver; and early learning centres, which serve as a hub for parenting classes and preschool activities
- **Preschools:** Improvement in the teaching and learning environment of government or local-partner-supported preschools.

Timing matters: *The most important ECD interventions vary with children's age*³



³Adapted from Nadeau, S., Kataoka, N., Valerio, A., Neuman, M., and Elder, L. (2010) *Investing in Young Children: An ECD Guide for Policy Dialogue and Project Preparation*. World Bank (page 11).