BRIGHT STARTS
Early Childhood Shines at Child Saving Institute!
Bright Starts from the Beginning

Child Saving Institute has long known the importance of early childhood. For many years we’ve been focused on the healthy bond between child and caregivers, and helping parents understand the importance of providing what their children need developmentally. We are also committed to quality early childhood education—not only academic learning and cognitive development, but also the social and emotional development of little ones.

Extended studies and brain research is now validating what skilled early childhood teachers have been practicing for years. During early childhood (0-5 years of age) the brain undergoes rapid development and a child’s basic emotional, social, cognitive and gross-motor functioning take shape. During this time you see rapid changes in such things as impulse control and trust in relationships with others. We now know that properly nurturing this rapid growth period can have a significant impact on a child’s success for the remainder of his life.

One well-known longitudinal study (HighScope Perry Preschool Study) tracked over 100 children born into poverty from ages 3 to 4 years old until the age of 40. The study found those children who had access to quality early childhood education had higher earnings, were more likely to have graduated from school and had committed fewer crimes than those who did not attend preschool. This study opened the doors for the general public to understand the financial value of early childhood education.

The research is growing rapidly and is now getting the attention of academics, politicians and employers. And here at Child Saving Institute, we couldn’t be more delighted because this signals great things for the kids of our community. On the federal level, the research is sparking the call for quality pre-school education for all. Nebraska senators are advancing initiatives to increase the quality of early childhood education and the availability of early childhood education for families, particularly those children growing up in poverty. Business leaders are recognizing the impact early childhood education has on their future employee base. Special initiatives and public campaigns are working to educate the general public and the early childhood workforce of the future.

We are so glad you are with us on this journey to improve outcomes for our kids and that you understand what happens during childhood MATTERS!

Learning How to Parent

Every parent wishes at some time or another that there was a definitive manual for the wonderful, exhilarating, and frustrating-yet-magical world of parenting. Throw in youth or lack of support, and the challenges rise exponentially. That’s where Family Support Specialist Maggie Funkhouser comes in. She teaches parenting classes at Child Saving Institute.

With CSI’s focus on early childhood development and attachment, Maggie hopes to spread the news of bonding and fun with parents struggling to develop the skills they need to best nurture their children. The five-week class for parents of children from infancy to age four covers everything from infant brain development to the critical windows for language, and physical and social development. It also covers car seat safety, diapering and dressing, toilet training, discipline and praise, communication and parental self care. (There is another parenting class for families with older children.)

Kimberly, age 20, is not only a student at UNO, but she is also the proud mother of two-year-old Yoltzen. (Pronounced Yult-ZEEN, it is Aztec for “little heart.”) She and her former partner are both taking the course—a recommendation of mediation. “We’re no longer together, but we are committed to working together to do what’s best for Yoltzen,” Kimberly explains. “I came in here and thought I was a good parent, but I’ve learned so much.”

Funkhouser agreed that the class is full of helpful information. In fact, she had arrived that evening with a bevy of colorful handmade toys for the parents to learn to make from everyday items around their homes. She also noted the class wasn’t just her teaching, but that the students readily shared their own successful tips and cautionary failures, allowing all the parents to learn from each other.

“I would really recommend this course to other young parents,” Kimberly said, as moms and dads began to enter the classroom. “You can come in here thinking you know everything, but as you go along, you realize there are always new things out there to learn and do to help you better parent your child.”
The Very Best Start

When 22-year-old Kate brought her newborn, Arianna, into the Children’s Physician’s Pediatric Clinic where Maggie Neujahr serves in Child Saving Institute’s Pediatric Social Work program, Maggie was afraid the young mother wouldn’t be able to properly care for her baby. Many first-time moms feel overwhelmed with questions and fears, Maggie explains, but single-parent Kate was alone, struggled with anxiety and depression, was estranged from her own mother, and terrified.

After administering the Edinburgh Postpartum Depression Scale (EPDS) assessment, Maggie knew there was cause for concern. She worked with Kate on her parenting skills, and offered advice and encouragement at every turn—even making home visits to the fragile family. Kate often called herself “stupid,” but Maggie responded, “No, you’re not! You are your daughter’s first teacher and you are a wonderful mother!”

And in fact, she is. With Maggie’s support—and the support of caring folks like you—Kate and baby Arianna are thriving. Kate often calls Maggie to proudly report Arianna’s milestones—and her own. Kate and her mother have reconciled and all three, baby, mom and grandma, are doing better than ever.

Prevention is Key
With your help, three years ago Child Saving Institute created a vital new program to give young children the best possible chance for a healthy and happy start. Our Pediatric Social Work program works in partnership with pediatric clinics serving low-income patients in the community. When mothers bring their babies in for their very first well baby check-up at two weeks, Maggie Neujahr and her fellow mental health professional, Anabel Abuja, are there to offer solutions to problems ranging from postpartum depression to assistance with community resources. And our specialists continue to be there to support those families until the child enters school.

“Prevention is key,” Maggie says passionately. “If we can help these mothers and babies form that critical attachment from the beginning, it will help to insure those kids are ready for Kindergarten. It’s all about building healthy relationships, building trust.” And it doesn’t stop there. If, during that five-year period, the family encounters stressors such as job loss, housing insecurity, financial difficulties, or developmental delays are detected in the child or his siblings, CSI’s Pediatric Social Workers are there to help the family access the help they need.

Supporting moms
Many moms call Maggie within six months of their first meeting—some inquiring about resources and some with good news, like gleefully sharing their success in finding a job! She is often the only support these moms have, and they embrace Maggie’s efforts to help them be good parents.

Maggie not only helps connect her clients to community resources such as WIC (a food assistance program for women, infants and young children), but to other programs offered through Child Saving Institute, like parenting classes, or therapy. If the family has other children in the three- to five-year-old range, she shares information about Head Start, and for teen moms, she helps them place their babies in Early Head Start so they can stay in school and feel reassured their babies are being well cared for.

Ashley Urbanski, Lead Nurse at Children’s Physician Pediatric Clinic, is also pleased with CSI’s Pediatric Social Work Program. “Prior to these services, we were unable to give our mothers the support they needed,” Urbanski says. “The service that our new mothers now receive in the office and outside of the office is phenomenal! Many times new mothers are forgotten because there is such a high focus on the child at the clinic. With this program we are now able to focus on the mother and the baby, which has helped our clinic overall, as well as the quality of care we give.”

“This program touches so many lives—both parents and children—in a positive way. Without the program on site, our patients would not have the resources and support they do now. CSI’s Pediatric Social Work program helps our children get into educational programs, therapy appointments, and home health services that they would never had the chance to get involved in. It has been amazing to see our patients excel in so many areas.”

- Ashley Urbanski, Lead Nurse at Children’s Physician Pediatric Clinic

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Early Childhood Social Workers Maggie Neujahr and Anabel Abuja offer support to moms through CSI’s Pediatric Social Work program.
It’s All About That Base!

One of the many ways Child Saving Institute makes a difference in the lives of young children is through KidSquad. KidSquad focuses on enhancing the skills of teachers so all children in our community can benefit from quality early childhood education.

“It starts with the four B’s,” says Ingrid Thomsen with a smile, “blocks, balls, books and babies.” Blocks help develop cognitive skills and problem solving; balls improve large motor skills; books increase language and literacy; and baby dolls help little ones practice nurturing and relationship building. “It’s not the elementary education model,” she adds. “There are no flash cards or worksheets. It’s about relationship building and learning through play.”

Thomsen, KidSquad Lead Early Childhood Specialist, uses a pyramid model to help teachers access the professional development they need to prepare their young students for Kindergarten. At its base, the pyramid focuses on developing a strong teacher workforce by offering a positive behavior support model. Teachers see first-hand how important it is to build strong relationships with the children in their care.

“KidSquad’s focus is to enhance the skills of teachers in the community,” explains Jana Habrock, Director of Early Childhood Mental Health Services. “When we help teachers with problem-solving and teaching skills, it not only affects one child, but all the children served after that. It helps entire programs.”

“It is a wonderful thing,” Thomsen says enthusiastically. “KidSquad brings the training directly to the teachers in their classrooms—and it’s based on coaching to the teachers’ existing strengths in the classroom.”

Using modeling and coaching, KidSquad helps teachers create positive classroom environments, using techniques like sitting on the floor during circle time instead of sitting in a chair, and making eye contact at the child’s level. She also models child-centered early education, focusing on learning through play.

Typically, a KidSquad Specialist works in a center for six months. KidSquad also provides centers with mini grants to enhance their classroom environments.

Because of gifts like yours, KidSquad is free to eligible licensed child care centers in Douglas and Sarpy Counties that accept Title XX.

Attachment in YOUR Family

Children learn through relationships, explains Jana Habrock, CSI’s Director of Early Childhood Mental Health Services. “Child-mother attachment, child-peer attachment, and child-teacher attachment all have an effect on brain development. This social-emotional development—this ability to maintain relationships—is the basis of all other learning.”

Jana notes that those executive functions necessary to succeed in school—like a child being able to regulate her emotions, follow directions, and set a goal and bring those ideas to fruition—all stem from the child’s relationships since birth.

We asked Jana for three basics tools you can use to help encourage social-emotional skills in the children and grandchildren in your life:

1. **Make a predictable schedule and routine** for your children. The more kids know and understand what’s expected of them and what’s happening next, the more confident they feel, and the less likely they are to act out.

2. **Use the language of emotion** whenever possible to help them recognize emotion in themselves and others. “You look sad.” “That must have been frustrating.” Be sure to recognize the emotions of the characters in the stories you read to them and the movies you watch. “Look how happy the frog is because his friend is safe!” “I bet he was a bit afraid to ride without training wheels.”

3. **Label what you see your kids doing well,** and praise them for making an effort. “Thank you for being kind to your friend.” “I appreciate you putting your shirt in the hamper.”

TIPS FROM OUR EXPERTS

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How YOU Can Help!

Don’t miss out on a moment of the fun and philanthropic opportunities we have planned for you in the coming months! Visit our website, childsaving.org, or call 504-3661 for more information about these events and how you can get involved!

**Cabaret | Saturday, May 9**
Embassy Suites Conference Center | 6 - 9:30 p.m.

You’re invited to our biggest fundraiser of the year—Cabaret 2015—this year themed “It’s a Mad, Mad, Madigan World!” featuring one of the funniest stand-up comics in America—Kathleen Madigan! The fun evening will include cocktails, dinner, and fabulously funny comedy. Attire is casual. Tickets are $175 per person. To purchase tickets or for more information, please visit childsaving.org or call 402-504-3661.

**Omaha Gives! | Wednesday, May 20**
Midnight to midnight | omahagives24.org

On Wednesday, May 20, for 24 hours, you can help raise money for abused and neglected kids by going online to omahagives24.org and designating your donation to Child Saving Institute. Because we know you care about kids, we are encouraging all our closest friends and supporters to donate a minimum of $20 during this 24-hour window.

**Golf Fore Kids | Monday, July 20**
Shadow Ridge Country Club | 11 a.m. Start

Don’t miss this fun Golf Tournament and Par 3 contest featuring great prizes! For more information, contact Cali at cpage@childsaving.org or register online at childsaving.org.

*Leave a legacy for kids!* For more information about including Child Saving Institute in your estate plans, please contact Becky McNeil, Legacy Giving Director at Child Saving Institute: 402.504.3663 or bmcneil@childsaving.org.