
THE THREE Cs

The Three Cs: Critical Ingredients for Healthy Child and Youth Development

Research and community wisdom converge to point the way to essential experiences that allow children and youth to grow up to be caring, responsible adults. Even in the face of high-risk conditions, these "three Cs" can serve as important protective factors that enable children to rise above risk. So where are the opportunities for children to experience these three Cs at each stage of their development? And what can each of us do in our own families, communities, and workplaces to ensure that all children have enough of the three Cs to see them through?

CONNECTION

Research shows that the number one protective factor in a child's life is enduring connections to caring, supportive adults. These essential connections begin in the earliest days of a child's life, ideally in the context of the family where strong, secure attachments to parents and other sensitive, responsive caregivers lay the foundation for later development. As children move into the school years, connections to teachers and other caring adults, and also to peers, become increasingly important, allowing children to feel a sense of belonging not only in the family, but in the larger community as well.

These connections provide the context for building lifelong social skills and for focusing attention and energy into academic learning and the development of special interests and talents. Even as children become teens with increasing autonomy and responsibility for self, strong connections to parents and other caring adults continue to be the touchstone from which young people spread their wings and practice the roles that will carry them through to a healthy, satisfying adult life.

COMPETENCE

At each stage of development a child needs to experience what it means to be effective, to influence what happens, to handle the challenges of day to day life, and to discover what it means to do something well. A baby has her first experience of competence when her cries and sighs and babbles are effective in drawing adults to her to offer comfort or stimulation. Gradually, the child who has been comforted by others develops the ability to calm herself and to regulate feelings and impulses -- a central feature of social-emotional competence.

Beyond infancy, from the toddler years through the teens, young people are most likely to thrive when others teach, coach, facilitate and model positive social skills and coping strategies. And they shine when, regardless of their innate ability, they are helped to develop at least one domain of competence, be it the arts, sports, or academics. True confidence and self-worth are grounded not in superficial praise, but in real experiences of mastery and accomplishment. Especially for young children,

these critical experiences of competence happen most often in the context of relationships with caring, supportive adults.

CONTRIBUTION

Building on connection and competence, the third C captures the importance of engaging children in ways that allow them to discover what they can contribute to the wellbeing of their family and community. From the toddler who gently pats mom's back when she doesn't feel well or the preschooler who does his part to clean up after free play, to the fourth grader who reads to the kindergartner or the high school student who launches a conflict resolution program, young people need to be allowed, encouraged and supported in identifying and using their unique qualities and skills for the common good.

At each stage of life, children need to be valued as full participants in -- and contributors to -- the communities in which they live and grow.

Marti Erickson, Ph.D.
www.goodenoughmoms.com
©2003

THE THREE Cs:

STRATEGIES FOR PARENTS OF CHILDREN AGES BIRTH – 4

PROTECTIVE FACTORS	PARENTS' ROLES
Connection	<p>Respond sensitively and predictably to your baby's needs for comfort and assurance</p> <p>Follow the baby's lead in play and interaction</p> <p>Enlist other caring, sensitive adults to be a part of the child's life and to care for the child when you are away</p> <p>Help your toddler learn to use words to express feelings</p> <p>Encourage your preschool child to think about how others feel</p>
Competence	<p>Provide just enough help that the child can complete a task successfully</p> <p>Recognize the child's efforts even when he or she doesn't succeed</p> <p>Give the child choices within a range of safe, healthy options</p> <p>Set clear and reasonable limits and enforce those limits firmly, without anger</p> <p>Model and teach the child basic rules of getting along (e.g. take turns, share, be gentle, use words)</p>
Contribution	<p>Let the child see you and other adults cooperating and contributing to your community</p> <p>Engage the child in helping you with simple household tasks; make clean-up a routine part of moving from one activity to another</p> <p>Select preschool, Sunday school or a childcare setting that teaches and expects cooperation and helpfulness</p>

**THE THREE Cs:
STRATEGIES FOR PARENTS OF CHILDREN AGES 5 – 11**

PROTECTIVE FACTORS	PARENTS' ROLES
Connection	<p>Spend time with the child: listen, follow, guide, play</p> <p>Facilitate connection with other adults and peers: link; advocate; “coach” social skills</p> <p>Teach and model empathy, seeing through another’s eyes</p>
Competence	<p>Provide a platform for autonomy and mastery: “just enough” help and encouragement</p> <p>Model and coach the child in social competence (e.g. how to make and keep friends, seek and offer help, respect differences, and resolve conflicts)</p> <p>Identify and nurture the development of domains of competence (e.g., the arts, sports, academics, special interests)</p>
Contribution	<p>Engage the child in planning and decision-making with the family (e.g. meals, activities, trips, budgeting, solving problems)</p> <p>Expect the child to contribute to the work of the household</p> <p>Model and engage the child in contributing to the community</p> <p>Explicitly teach the values of giving and service</p>

THE THREE Cs

STRATEGIES FOR PARENTS OF CHILDREN AGES 12 – 18

PROTECTIVE FACTORS	PARENTS' ROLES
Connection	<p>Spend time with the child: listen, guide, enjoy</p> <p>Schedule family times</p> <p>Support and encourage positive connection with other adults and peers at school and in the community</p> <p>Be a sounding board for good decision-making about activities and relationships</p> <p>Build a parent network to develop and implement shared rules and guidelines</p>
Competence	<p>Provide a platform for autonomy and mastery</p> <p>Model and coach the child in social competence (e.g., how to build close relationships, seek and offer help, respect differences, resolve conflicts, maintain healthy boundaries and resist negative peer pressure)</p> <p>Support and encourage the ongoing development of domains of competence (the arts, sports, academics, career-focused skills, and other special interests)</p>
Contribution	<p>Engage the child in planning and decision-making with the family (e.g. meals, activities, trips, budgeting, solving problems)</p> <p>Expect the child to contribute to the work of the household</p> <p>Model and engage the child in contributing to the community</p> <p>Explicitly teach the values of giving and service</p>

Marti Erickson, Ph.D.
www.goodenoughmoms.com
©2003