

Children who go to daycare are better behaved, more advanced: study ^[1]

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It's a familiar scene: a parent drops off a screaming child at daycare only to walk away and feel addled with guilt all day long. Not only does the parent worry that their child is traumatized by the separation, but there's also the concern that daycare could expose them to social and physical ills.

But working parents can shake off their guilt now thanks to a French study that found kids who go to centre-based daycare are better behaved and more cognitively advanced than their peers who stay at home with a parent or caregiver.

Researchers at the Sorbonne University in Paris tracked more than 1,400 children from birth to eight years of age and divided them in three groups: those in a centre-based daycare, those with caregivers who look after no more than six children at a time, and those who stayed at home. Parents were asked to rate their children's development at different stages and researchers compared the scores.

What they found was that kids who were in a centre-based daycare for at least one year were "less likely to have high levels of emotional symptoms, peer relationship problems, hyperactivity/inattention and conduct problems." And depending on the quality of the daycare, they also exhibited better cognitive, language and pre-academic skills than the others.

"Access to high-quality childcare in the first years of life may improve children's emotional and cognitive development, prevent later emotional difficulties, and promote prosocial behaviors," Dr. Maria Melchior, one of the study's authors, said to PopSugar.

The study also found that girls and children from a higher socioeconomic demographic reaped more benefits from daycare than boys and children from a low-income background.

"The evidence is clear that high quality, early childhood care is beneficial for children," Dr. Jillian Roberts, founder of Family Sparks and associate professor at the University of Victoria, told Global News. "These programs include not only play and socialization, but also educational and nutritional components from highly-trained early childhood education professionals."

This study works to confirm findings from the U.S. National Institutes of Health that concluded children who were in high-quality daycare centres scored higher on academic measures and cognitive achievement years later when they were in their teens. Researchers also found that they were better behaved than children in lower quality centres.

"High quality child care appears to provide a small boost to academic performance, perhaps by fostering the early acquisition of school readiness skills," said James Griffin of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, the NIH institute that paid for the study.

The one drawback, the study noted, was that children who went to daycare were more prone to impulsiveness and risk-taking at age 15.

Regardless, Roberts says, positive daycare environments allow children to thrive and set them up for success.

"Increasing access to these kinds of programs helps give children the best possible start in life."

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