

New study: We can change minds—and mindsets—about the value of early childhood ^[1]

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Considering how often we say we care about children in the U.S., one might assume we'd be able to point to stellar statistics on our children's well-being as proof of that value. Unfortunately, we can't do that. According to UNICEF data from a 2020 pre-pandemic study, the U.S. ranks 36th out of 38 wealthy countries in child health outcomes. Pick an outcome—infant mortality, poverty, hunger, child care—by almost any measure, we're lagging behind other rich nations.

A yawning gap exists between what we say about children and what we do for them. The reasons for this disconnect are complicated, but much of it has to do with how children exist—or simply don't exist—in the imagination of the public and policymakers. Philosopher René Descartes's first principle, "I think, therefore I am," pretty much says it all. How we think about our world gives us our reality. As a nation, the way we think about children—or don't consider them at all—is failing our kids.

Fortunately, as stacks of behavioral and brain research have shown, we aren't stuck with the attitudes and values we've inherited: As both individuals and a society, we can change our minds. We can change the lens, reframe the issues and give childhood—particularly early childhood, in our case—the value it deserves.

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