Mental health in infancy and early childhood affects social functioning, psychological well-being, and physical health throughout life.

School Readiness, Ages 0-6

In today's society, a lot of emphasis is placed on ensuring that young children are "ready for school". For many, the term "school readiness" refers to intellectual development, e.g., how high a child can count or how many letter he knows. However, the most important indicators for success in the transition to school are in the area of social-emotional development.

The National Conference of State Legislatures (2005) stated that there are seven areas that children must develop before they enter school in order to be successful. These include:

- Developing a sense of curiosity
- Acting with intentionality (making conscious decisions about their actions and acting with intent)
- Having self-control, including being able to control and express their emotions, and being able to manage both their attention and their behaviour
- Having social skills, including the development of empathy and the ability to develop a relationship with other people (both children and adults)
- Being confident, including a belief that they have some control over their world and some experience with successfully completing tasks
- Developing verbal and nonverbal communication skills, including being able to pick up non-verbal clues of other people
- Being able to cooperate, including sharing

Gray, Herberle, and Carter (2012), Rose (2012), Peterson (2013), Powers (2012), RIRO (2012), and Zero to Three (2012) researched evidence-based practices that help develop these core areas. These practices include:

- Give children choices
- Allow children to take the lead in play and interactions
- Develop routines
- Use repetitive actions
- Encourage children's imagination
- Play turn-taking games
- Encourage children to ask for help when they need it
- Nurture curiosity
- Help children keep trying even when they are frustrated
- Turn mistakes into learning opportunities
- Encourage young children to take risks and try new things
- Make children feel like they matter
- Play games that rely on impulse control, like "freeze tag"
- Use reflective and descriptive praise, e.g., "Wow. You were able to sit still through the whole story."
- Label adult emotions
- Support and comfort children
- Encourage children to learn ways to self-soothe
- Teach young children problem solving skills
- Develop a social network around families and children
- Model empathy and help children learn to recognize the perspectives of others
- Create opportunities for very young children to play

Above all, the secure attachment that young children form with their caregiver(s) provides the foundation to "school readiness" (Rose, 2012). Engaged parents allow children to develop a sense of curiosity as they explore the world from within the safety of their parent's love and attention. Through this relationship, children learn that they are valued, important, and a central figure within their caregivers' lives. The development of self-esteem and self-efficacy is aided by caregivers who celebrate their child's successes, set up situations where their child can master tasks, and encourage their child to take risks (RIRO, 2012).

Gray, S., Heberle, A., & Carter, A. (2012). Social-emotional school readiness: How do we ensure that children are ready to learn? *Zero to Three, 13*(1), 4-9.

Peterson, S. (2012). Approaches to learning: Supporting brain development for school success. *Zero to Three, 13*(1), 24-27.

Powers, S. (2012). From research to practice: Strategies for supporting school readiness in programs serving infants and toddlers. *Zero to Three, 13*(1), 37-42.

Reaching In, Reaching Out (2013). *Reaching In Reaching Out (RIRO) Resiliency Training Program*. http://www.reachinginreachingout.com/programs-riro.htm

Rose, T. (2012). School readiness is about more than knowing the A-B-Cs and 1-2-3s. *Zero to Three, 13*(1), 17-23.

Zero to Three. (2012). How child care providers can support early learning. *Zero to Three, 13*(1), 44-45.

Zero to Three. (2009). *Encouraging School Readiness from Birth to 3.* Retrieved February 7, 2014 from http://main.zerotothree.org/site/DocServer/school_readiness_-_intro.pdf?docID=10301&AddInterest=1503
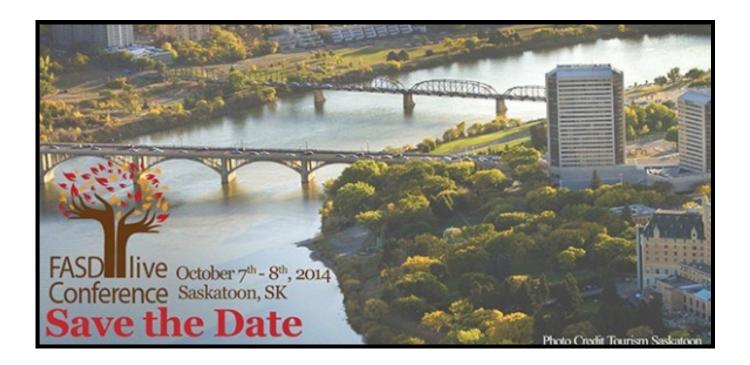
FASD Live Conference October 7th - 8th, 2014 Saskatoon, SK
Save the Date
Photo Credit Tourism Saskatoon

RIRO

Reach In-Reaching Out

A resiliency-promotion project

RIRO workshops are two days in length.

Who will benefit: teachers, early childhood educators, child protection workers, recreation leaders, child care providers, children's mental health workers, and others who work with children.

If interested, please contact Lee Hinton at (306) 651-4318 or lhinton@skprevention.ca.

Please feel free to distribute this information to others. If you or someone you know is interested in the network, please contact Lee Hinton at lhinton@skprevention.ca.