

Why Early Years Matters

The Detrimental Cost of Inadequate Investment and What Is Urgently Needed

All children deserve to have the best life chances, irrespective of family income or any other conditional factor, and it is therefore necessary, to strive for every child's right to this.

Early years and education settings play an important role in tackling the growing attainment gap by providing direct support for children and developing partnerships with parents. However, addressing the huge challenge of inequality can't rest solely on their shoulders. It requires multiagency support and investment. There is a well-established powerful argument for investing significantly in the early years: children who have a good start in life are more likely to secure higher paid jobs as adults and will as a result make higher tax contributions. This can, in turn, decrease reliance on social security payments, health services, and special educational provision, helping to save money in the long term.



The Royal Foundation's Centre for Early Childhood estimates that in England, the cost of not investing in the start of life is £16.13 billion per year. This is the cost for remedial steps to address issues that arise from not investing in early childhood, such as more children in care, or experiencing long and short term mental and physical health issues. To put this amount into perspective, this [Big Change Starts Small report \(2021\)](#) highlights this financial 'cost' could be viewed as almost five times the total annual spend on early education and childcare entitlements.

The figures are stark with health inequalities too. The [Marmot Review \(2010\)](#) highlighted that health and social inequalities stem from the levels of opportunity within communities, where people's chances of leading a flourishing life (including better health) depend on their social and economic circumstances. The [Marmot Review 10 Years On \(2020\)](#) noted that in England, over the last decade, widening health inequalities continue to reinforce that opportunities are worsening particularly in communities with higher social and economic disadvantage. There is considerable evidence from education, health, justice and economic experts that a good foundation in the early years makes a difference through adolescence and into adulthood and even gives the next generation a better start, ultimately saving money in the long term.

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Working towards a reduction, and ultimately an eradication, of child poverty requires getting more money directly and quickly to families that need it, together with the following steps to reform early education and childcare provision in the UK:

- Sustained local and national government-level commitment to policy that enables true fairness in opportunity, including proportionate investment and allocation of funding across multiple sectors; early years, education, social care, health, housing and social security. Children should have a greater sense of security, where child poverty is seen as something that is worth tackling, and that can be overcome. Save the Children makes the case for introducing a 'child lock'. This is an example of how the UK government can take a significant step towards this vision of [securing children's futures](#).
- Specific and significant investment for accessible high quality early education and care provision so that it can be delivered consistently to meet all families' needs. The [Early Years and Childcare Coalition](#) proposes plans for how to do this in England. Its [manifesto](#) draws on the views of parents as well as a broad representation of organisations from across the Early Years sector including Save the Children UK.
- A focus on partnerships with parents and sharing how to enhance their babies' and children's early learning and development, through supporting positive parent-child interactions and enriching the home learning environment regardless of circumstances and the restrictions that poverty brings.
- Support and further positive influencing of public attitude towards early childhood and the importance of babies' and children's earliest experiences, championed by the voices of parents and carers experiencing poverty, to widen understanding of what helps all families, babies and young children to flourish and thrive.

