

BEST PRACTICE MODELS

BEST PRACTICE MODELS for Prevention of Mental Disorders

[1] Universal Programs

- a) Safety, housing, food, welfare
- b) Family functioning, parenting and Pro-social functioning (Human Capital)
- c) Education to potential
- d) Reduction of toxic factors
 - i Biological factors
 - ii Psychological and social factors

[1 c] Education to potential

It is clear that the greatest progress in child development occurs in the pre-school years in all domains – cognitive, language, physical and social/emotional. In most families the major part of children’s developmental support and enrichment comes from within family interactions supplemented by experiences outside the family. As the child grows older, more and more of the developmental educational experiences occur in society, in kindergarten, primary and secondary schooling and beyond. Best practice requires that at every stage there will be services in partnership with families to support optimal developmental progress. This means a seamless sequence of developmentally appropriate programs, readily accessible, affordable and user-friendly, which are able to assess needs and respond individually as well as universally.

Although historically in Victoria the kindergarten movement was seen as a holistic child development program within the health domain, in recent years it has been hosted within the state Department of Education and Training domain where the holistic approach has been maintained. The facilities are predominantly provided by local government supplemented by private and non-government agencies.

The Department of Education and Training is also responsible for regulating and monitoring the network of child care facilities provided by private entrepreneurs, municipal and non-government agencies.

The historical evolution of schooling has been from a few private schools for the rich becoming supplemented by free, secular, government-run primary schools gradually enhanced to a state-wide network of primary and secondary schools covering an extended age range up to University entrance level. This system offers a choice of private schooling for those who prefer and can afford it but an option of high quality free, secular education for all children regardless of means.

The inclusion of part-time kindergarten programs has extended the schooling age range downward by one pre-school year. However, this limited additional service is insufficient for working parents whose working hours are not able to meet the drop-off and pick-up requirements of current kindergartens.

Best practice, for all who wish to use it, requires a high-quality child-care service incorporating age-appropriate kindergarten programs seamlessly progressing to primary school entry. Such an extended hours service should be available to any families that choose it, at affordable rates, provided by the state education system in collaboration with local municipalities.

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