

BACKGROUND

A child's earliest years, from birth to age five, are an extraordinary period of growth and development. Infants begin life totally dependent on adults, and over time develop into young children with abilities to communicate with others and explore the world around them. Human development is so amazingly complex during these years that some have called this period the "magic years" (Selma Fraiberg).

Central to the growth and development of each child is the family – regardless of what that family structure looks like. The term "parent" is used here to include birth parents, adoptive parents, foster parents, and other adults who serve as the primary caregiver to young children. In many Idaho communities, grandparents, aunts, and uncles play a role in raising children and are included as a parent in this context. All learning takes place in the context of the child's relationships with their parents and environment.

While parents are primarily responsible for nurturing and educating children, there are many people and resources available to support parents and their children during these critical early years. Parents receive support as nurturers from family and community members, friends, community programs, medical professionals, teachers, and child care providers.

Fundamental to this support system is the recognition that each child develops individually. Each child has unique individual characteristics and situations.

Over fifty (50) percent of young children in Idaho spend at least part of the day in the care of someone other than their parents.

With the *Idaho Early Learning eGuidelines* to assist caregivers, a shared understanding and consistency can be generated throughout a child's environment.

