



Building healthy
communities

MORE THAN ONE-THIRD OF PARENTS IN SOUTHERN ONTARIO SAY THEIR YOUNG CHILDREN ARE BEHIND IN ONE OR MORE KEY EARLY DEVELOPMENT AREAS, NEW YMCA REPORT FINDS

Competing priorities named biggest child-raising challenge

TORONTO: A new YMCA study reveals 37% of Southern Ontario parents with children under six describe their kids as behind in one or more key developmental areas – social, emotional, cognitive, language and physical. When asked about the challenges in raising young children, competing priorities that limit them from spending quality time with their kids was at the top of the list.

“Parents place a high priority on all areas of early childhood development, but the competing demands they face are prohibiting them from recognizing if their child is behind,” said Linda Cottés, Senior Vice President, Child and Family Development, YMCA of Greater Toronto. “Regardless of age or income, parents across the board reported challenges in their ability to foster their child’s development, serving as a real wake up call for the need for better support.”

The research revealed parents experienced the following challenges when it comes to raising their children:

- 67% of parents reported it’s hard to find enough quality time with their kids
- 70% would like more information about services and programs for pre-school-aged children
- 59% are unsure what information is best for their kids
- 20% were uncertain about what developmental milestones they should look for in the first five years

The report is the first of several the Y will commission in an effort to gain a better understanding of parents’ needs in raising healthy children. The initial research focused on parents with children 0-5 years old because these years are crucial to the healthy development of young people.

“The first five years of development are critical to a young person’s health. Without opportunities for healthy development, children are at risk for falling behind,” said Dr. Olaf Kraus de Camargo, Associate Professor, Department of Pediatrics, McMaster University. “Right now, many parents are unsure of the steps they need to take to raise healthy kids, and with better support they will feel more confident.”

The new insights gained from the study will provide an opportunity for policy makers, educators, charities and parents to work closer together to foster healthy early childhood development.

“We know that every dollar invested in early childhood education generates at least two dollars in the form of reduced social, healthcare, special education and criminal justice costs and increased future earnings and tax revenues,” said Jennifer Holmes Weier, Vice President of YMCA Regional

Development. “The most expensive approach is to ignore the issue and leave parents and children to struggle on their own.”

The new study of parents’ concerns, coupled with other existing studies on early childhood development and the YMCA’s knowledge of children’s needs, enables the charity to fine tune the programs it offers to better help young families.

“The Y is there to support families. Parents can’t do it on their own,” said Jim Commerford, President and CEO at YMCA of Hamilton, Burlington, Brantford. “On June 1, YMCAs across Canada are opening their doors for free to the community to celebrate Healthy Kids Day. It’s a chance for parents to connect, learn about healthy habits, and get the whole family active together under one roof.”

The YMCA CALL TO ACTION:

To provincial and municipal governments:

- Improve access to affordable programs and services, as well as quality child care. Continue with reforms to the legislative and regulatory environment for child care.
- Implement the curriculum framework for child care and tie program funding to quality measures.

To teachers, early childhood educators and volunteers:

- Proactively exchange information on a child’s development with their families on a regular basis, and actively link families to community resources such as the Y, Ontario Early Years and Family/Parenting centres where they can connect as parents and access resources.

To parents:

- Don’t be afraid to ask for support. Ask questions about your childcare provider’s program curriculum and ensure that it promotes continuous learning and development. Ask them for regular reports on your child’s progress.
- Carve out family time. Seek out local programs and resources at community centres like your local YMCA.

About the YMCA of Greater Toronto

For well over a century we've provided leadership and worked with partners solving complex social problems to create real, measurable outcomes that have strengthened the social health and fabric of communities. As a charity, the YMCA offers a variety of programs responding to the needs of the community, including education and training, employment and immigrant services, family and youth services, health and fitness programs, childcare and camps. Serving the population of the GTA, Durham, Peel, York, Halton Regions and Dufferin County, last year the YMCA connected with more than 489,000 people across 334 locations. www.ymcagta.org

About the YMCA of Hamilton, Burlington, Brantford

As a charitable organization, the YMCA of Hamilton/Burlington/Brantford serves over 190,000 men, women and children living in Hamilton, Burlington, Flamborough, Brantford and Brant County. The YMCA nurtures people's potential and helps build healthy communities through programming that includes: health, fitness and recreation, child care, day and residential camping, outdoor education, employment training, newcomer services, academic assistance, community outreach, leadership development and volunteerism.

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METHODOLOGY

The YMCA of Greater Toronto and Hamilton, Burlington, Brantford poll was conducted using a mixed methodology of online and telephone interviewing by Nielsen. The study was conducted from February 13 to March 12, 2014 with 650 parents/guardians of children between the ages of 0 to 5. The telephone portion of the study collected 150 responses with Hamilton, Burlington, Brantford parents/guardians of children 0-5, a sample of this size is considered accurate +/- 8%, 19 times out of 20. The online component was a standard panel survey among a random sample of GTA panel members who are parents/guardians of children 0-5, if this were a probability sample it would have a margin of error of +/-4.4%, 19 times out of 20.