



# Our childhood really does affect our adulthood

by James Spencer  
Southdowns Leisure

**E**vidence from leading researchers suggests we don't inherit our personalities but instead we develop characteristics from childhood experiences, proving that children really are like sponges; impressionable and absorbing information at a vast rate.

Our first two or three years of life are almost impossible to remember - but our earliest experiences, remembered or otherwise, stay with us for life and continue to impact on us well into adulthood.

Unfortunately, negative experiences affect many young adults, according to the National Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC). Calls to their helpline have increased 15% to its highest levels in years, suggesting growing concern over childhood issues like bullying and neglect will affect more adults in the future.

The NSPCC also report that roughly one

in 10 adults have experienced four or more adverse childhood experiences, ranging from physical abuse to emotional neglect. And nearly 51,000 children in the UK are believed to be at risk right now.

But trying to assess how experiences influence us is hard to quantify. Studies by the Child Development Organisation examined how exposure to certain behaviours in those crucial first years affect adult development.

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They found that babies and toddlers raised in supportive, caring and nurturing home environments tended to be better equipped academically and achieved

greater career success as adults. They were also more likely to have better social skills, more able to form fulfilling friendships and relationships 20 or 30 years later.

*"Research suggests that in those early years, the parents' role is to guide and communicate with the child, letting them know, 'I'm here for you when you're upset, whenever you need me. And when you don't need me, I'm your greatest supporter in the wings,'"* says Lee Gaby, a children's psychologist and researcher.

In the US, 300 people took part in an experiment where all the participants were followed from birth until they turned 32. Researchers monitored the

children at home, at school and in various other social situations, observing how they interacted with each other and their parents.

Although not the primary focus, parental behaviour was just one of many influences of the study. They found that academic achievement and wellbeing was directly related to the quality of their home life from age three upwards. They also discovered that a child's psychological make-up also plays its part, with some more sensitive to environmental factors than others.

Interestingly, research established a link between

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children who were especially sensitive and distrustful as babies and teenagers with social anxiety disorders. As a result, certain characteristics may help predict issues in adulthood.

Furthermore, of those diagnosed with a psychological disorder by age 26 years, half had first recognised issues by age 15 years. With this in mind, many adult disorders could be identified as extensions of juvenile difficulties.

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This doesn't mean people can't recover from bad childhood experiences. With early diagnosis, anyone can receive support, such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), lifestyle guidance and alternative remedies such as increased health and wellbeing which is scientifically proven to improve mental health. And, interestingly, there's sufficient evidence suggesting that the very children subjected to adverse experiences are the ones who really flourish under positive, new ones.

Prevention is far better than cure. The simplest solutions are key to a happy, healthy childhood; the building blocks of adulthood. But be realistic; it is impossible to shield your child from all harm or negative experiences - that's life! But we can do a lot to minimise the impact on children and treat life experience as just that; a valuable learning tool.

For example:

- Acknowledge that all experiences can affect a person's future, whether positive or

negative. Childhood forms the adult we become, our personalities and our successes

- Realise that all adult figures play a major role in a child's self-esteem and ability to learn and develop.

- Love is essential. Offer plenty of praise, encouragement, hugs and play, exploring their world of imagination.

- Never criticise.

However, explain what is right and wrong and establish safe, healthy limits, particularly with personal safety.


- Interaction

with other children is crucial for social skills.

- Observe what they are viewing on television and social media.

Well-documented evidence suggests negative, unsuitable influences exist that must be monitored by adults.

- Children need to feel equal, safe and loved. If a child can't understand why they feel different, talk through the reasons why.

Good parenting nurtures happy, contented children into adulthood, which safeguards other children when they grow up into adults and so on. Creating safe, positive environments for children is essential. We all have a responsibility to ensure the protection of children both inside and outside of the home. Children are our future. 

*If you would like to know more about child parenting and wellbeing, visit; [www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk) or if you would like to know more about children's activities visit [www.southdownsleisure.co.uk](http://www.southdownsleisure.co.uk)*



by Jonathan Sawyer  
author of Noodle Kids

# Cooking with kids

**A**melia and I have been cooking with Catcher and Lulu since they were old enough to hold up their heads. Lulu's really into cooking right now. She's the ultimate helper in the kitchen. She'll measure out recipes, set up the cutting board, find the rolling pin, and even empty the dishwasher.

Catcher likes cooking, too, but he's more of a typical kid about it. He's only going to do it if it's a fun project - one that takes less than 15 minutes. I should say he likes the idea of cooking, but his attention span is finite.

That's the first thing to remember when you are cooking with your kids: They are still your kids. They bring their own personalities to the kitchen.

**Tip 1**  
**Cater to your kids' personalities in the kitchen.**

Lulu likes cooking for the family. She loves the steps and process behind making a pan of lasagna to share with everyone. Catcher is more interested in personalizing his own dish. He likes to create his own unique bowl of ramen or a special meatball with exactly the ingredients he likes best.

It was Catcher who inspired the first kids' cooking events I hosted. Whenever he came to work with me, Catcher would call playing in the kitchen 'cook chefn'. Never 'cooking with Dad' or something simple. Always 'cook chefn'. So, that's what we called the cooking events we held. During those first few events, we offered the kids 15 or 20 different pizza toppings - including lots of things they had never tried before - and let them create their own pizzas. It's easy to convince kids to try something new when they have picked it or made it themselves.

**Tip 2**  
**The closer your kids are to the food, the more likely they are to eat it.**

I learned that lesson when we took Catcher and Lulu to meet farmer Lee Jones for the first time. He's a wonderful farmer

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