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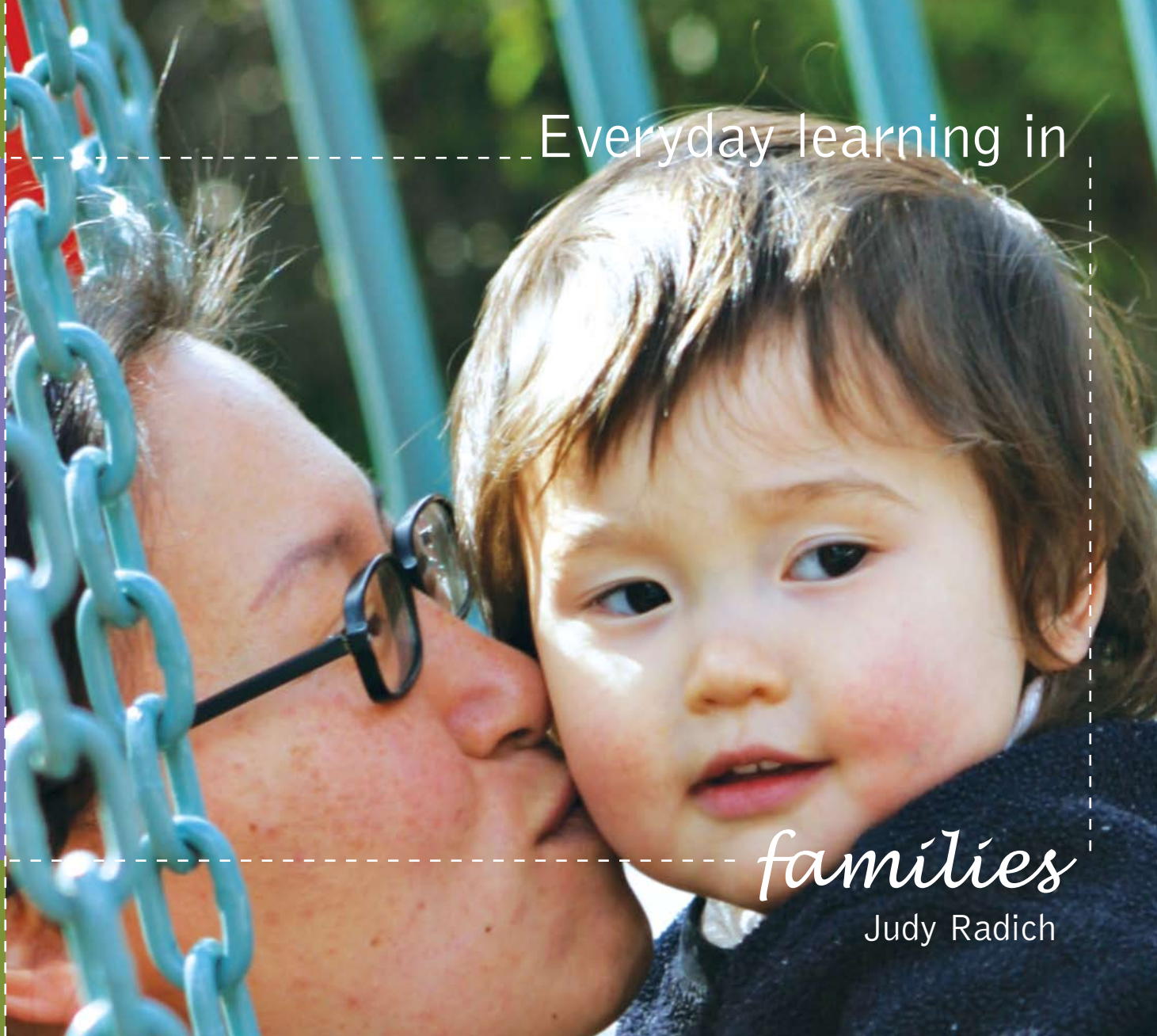
About babies
toddlers and
preschoolers



Everyday learning in

families

Judy Radich





About the author

Judy Radich

Judy Radich is an early childhood educator with over 20 years' experience working with young children and their families—both in New Zealand preschools and in long day care in Australia, a position she currently holds. Recently she was responsible for implementing a four-year parenting program within the long day care setting. She is an active member of Early Childhood Australia, a past National President and currently a member of the Publications Committee. She continues to be a member of a number of national committees, advocating for young children and their families and the services they use and need. She is the parent of four adult children.

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About Early Childhood Australia

Early Childhood Australia actively promotes the provision of high-quality services for all young children from birth to eight years and their families, and supports the important role of parents. Early Childhood Australia is also the national umbrella organisation for children's services and a leading early childhood publisher.

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The most important early learning happens through day-to-day life experiences, and the *Everyday Learning* books are about how parents and carers can make the most of these experiences. What an exciting responsibility it is to be helping build the foundations for the future of young children!

- The first years of life are the foundation for all later growth, development and learning.
- Every experience counts! Babies and young children are learning all the time, with most learning taking place in relationships.
- Research shows that what happens in these years is the key to:
 - being able to relate confidently and effectively with others
 - mental and emotional health
 - educational success.

Babies and young children are learning all the time.

What do babies and young children need, to get the best start for living and learning?

To learn best they need parents and carers (their first teachers) who:

- are warm and caring

- know each baby or child very well and appreciate what is special about them
- take time to understand the child's messages (cues) and to respond to them with encouragement, praise, comfort, independence and rest as needed
- are able to see, share and celebrate the big and small joys and achievements of the children in their care.

Adults provide:

- *responsive and sensitive care*
- *a safe and interesting place to be.*

They follow children's lead by supporting their exploration and the things they like to do.

There is no set list of things to teach babies and young children.

Living is learning and children learn through living. All children and babies have their own abilities and interests. Follow the child's lead.

Watch and listen; provide opportunities; give support; build on each child's strengths. Babies and children also come from family and cultural backgrounds that are part of the way they are and need to be included in their experiences. These books will help you to provide the best start for the children in your care.



Introduction

Given a supportive environment, infants, toddlers and preschoolers are naturally curious, responsive and eager to see and explore their surroundings in their own way and in their own time. When we understand this, there are many ways for us to support their early learning without formal teaching or pressure. This learning through play and exploration will be the foundation for later life skills and understandings about subjects such as reading, writing, mathematics, science and creative arts.

When young children's early learning experiences are positive and supported they are more likely to become engaged learners.

Children's self-discovery occurs earlier when they are guided by an interested and encouraging adult. Their relationships with known and loved adults are at the core of all early learning, whether this is in the home or care outside the home.

Young children are social beings—as they grow and develop, their desire for friendships expands from those with trusted, known adults to those with other children, and then to other adults; so their opportunities for learning are expanding all the time.

'Children's self-discovery occurs earlier when they are guided by an interested and encouraging adult.'

Early relationships and brain development

We know from current research that the early connections in children's brains are dependent on trusting and caring relationships with the important adults in their lives. Early brain development is encouraged through playful interactions.

Babies need a lot of human contact and they need adults who quickly meet all their needs, emotionally and physically, through cuddling, holding, feeding, spending time together, talking, listening and playing—it's that simple.

We need to be clear about what this means in our day-to-day parenting with young children.

'Babies need a lot of human contact, through cuddling, holding, feeding, spending time together, talking, listening and playing.'



As Kathy Walker says in her book, *What's the hurry?* (2007):

'Raising young children is about *nurturing*, not training; *encouraging*, not controlling or forcing; *modelling* and setting appropriate limits; and *rules* at times in a child's life when they are ready and mature enough to understand.'

We do this by watching our children as they go about their day—listening to what they say; responding to their language and behaviour in an interested and understanding way; exposing them to new ideas, experiences and thinking; being nearby and allowing them time to work things out for themselves.

This will build independent, enthusiastic and curious learners.





Everyday learning in families

Many parents worry that their child will be disadvantaged if they don't start structured learning from an early age.

However, it is when children are surrounded by *quality relationships*—whether in the home or in outside care—that they have the best chance of forming a firm foundation for later life skills.

Everyday learning in families outlines how early learning experiences that are positive and supported by an interested and encouraging adult will help children gain these important skills—and more:

- **Happiness** by learning to understand and express their emotions.
- **Confidence** built on the comfort of routines and schedules.
- **Independence** through being encouraged to be curious and playful.
- **Self-esteem** based on the security of loving relationships.
- **Social skills** from learning how to solve problems cooperatively.

Author Judy Radich draws on over 20 years' experience in child care to demonstrate how early learning is encouraged by playful interactions that build on children's natural curiosity and eagerness to explore their surroundings.

Make the most of this critical time by supporting children to become engaged learners—ready to face the challenges the wider world has to offer!

