

Early education important to the developing child
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The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) is sponsoring the 40th annual “Week of the Young Child,” April 10-16, 2011. The purpose of this week is to draw attention to the needs of young children and recognize that early childhood programs are an excellent way to help meet those needs.

The theme for this week is “Early Years are the Learning Years,” which is appropriate because young children are always growing, developing, thinking and learning. We now know that the first few years of life are extremely important for children’s brain development. Without early opportunities to explore, learn and discover, children may be less ready and able to learn later on. Child care providers play an important role in supporting and nurturing young children’s learning.

The idea of getting children “school-ready” or “ready to learn” is still important, but high-quality child care programs recognize that even from birth young children are already learning – and at rapid pace. Early learning does not wait for elementary school. The experiences of each child stimulate the brain to develop thousands of connections in the first few years of life. It’s important to make those early learning experiences as enriching as possible in order to support the developing brain.

There are many different factors to look for in choosing a high-quality child care program. First, the program should provide a well-planned curriculum with a variety of hands-on activities throughout the day. Children have opportunities to learn individually, from each other and in small groups. The early childhood environment is rich with toys, books and objects that allow children to learn through exploration and discovery.

Early learning activities in high-quality child care programs are appropriate for children’s ages, development, culture and interests, and help them learn or practice important skills. Many different kinds of activities help children learn and grow, including art, dramatic play, music, outdoor play, math, science and literature.

Early childhood education not only gives children a jump-start on education for their kindergarten and elementary years, but also provides many additional benefits. Early education has significant impacts on behavioral, social and emotional functioning and has also been related to future physical health.

The information above came from www.eXtension.org which provides objective and research-based information and learning opportunities that help people improve their lives. eXtension is an educational partnership of 74 universities in the United States.

For more information about the 4-H program or other youth development issues, contact the Oconee County Cooperative Extension Office at (706) 769-3946 or stop by our office located behind the Oconee County Courthouse.