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PRESERVATION**

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

April 3, 1997

REMARKS BY THE FIRST LADY
TO THE SOCIETY FOR RESEARCH IN CHILD DEVELOPMENT
The Sheraton Washington

MRS. CLINTON: -- I want to thank Dr. Elder and thank all of you for the expertise and leadership you bring to the field of child development. The work you do is vitally important, not only in promoting a greater understanding of our children and how they develop but in strengthening our understanding and the connection between research, public policy, and people's everyday lives.

I've had a chance to look through the book that has been produced for this biannual conference -- and I know you haven't been in Washington, D.C., since, I believe, the 1930s -- but given the number of topics and presenters, it seems like you are more than making up for the fact that you have not been here for some time. The range of topics that you are addressing and the research that you are discussing touches on every aspect of children and families and the environments in which they grow and develop.

Many years ago, it seems to me now, when I was in law school, I had the chance to study children at the Yale Child Study Center in New Haven, Connecticut. I was privileged to work with many experts in the field of psychiatry and psychology and development and social work and medicine. And I was particularly privileged to work with one of the pioneers in the field of infant behavior, Dr. Sally Provence. I still have vivid memories of the gentle and subtle ways that Dr. Provence would elicit information from parents and infants to help establish better patterns of relating to children. And I would stand sometimes behind the one-way mirror, watching her work, thinking to myself, how can we know so much about these babies? How can we draw from their gestures and their patterns of relationships such lessons? That was before I myself was a mother.

Later on in the work that I have done with children's organizations, such as the Carnegie Council on Children and others, I have been interested in watching how experts, such as yourselves, have applied the knowledge that you have learned from research to public policy, and that has become one of my abiding interests. How do we take what you have developed through research and apply it in the public policy arena? I think that that is a question that certainly should be on the minds of anyone who takes seriously Dr. Elder's challenge about the

state of children in our country. We have made a lot of progress in many areas.

Certainly, if you look at the progress that has been made in infant mortality -- eradicating childhood diseases like measles or polio, developing and releasing new drugs and therapies, making it better known to the general public what are the conditions of child rearing that are more likely than not to benefit a child's development -- one can see a very clear nexus between medical science and research and policy. I don't know that we could have made as much progress in our understanding of certain hazards that affect the lives of children -- whether those hazards be lead or tobacco or alcohol or illegal drugs -- without basic research. We are also beginning to understand how violence is a public health epidemic, and the steps that need to be taken to try to protect our children from it.

In so many areas the research that you and your colleagues do every day enhances our teaching methods for children with learning disabilities; outlines the benefits of everything from educational television programming to friendship to nutrition; gives us new tools for devising care and services for infants, toddlers, young children, adolescents; helps us strengthen programs, whether they be child care or Head Start or school programs, aimed at providing better conditions toward a child's development.

In short, science and research need social policy. And social policy needs science and research, and needs scientists and researchers. There has to be a relationship so that the work that you do and that you report at this conference doesn't just stay in a room like this but is able to inform public debate far beyond these walls.

I have seen for myself in the programs that I've worked with how using the benefits of science and research can make a difference. Dr. Elder mentioned one program that I've been involved with called the Home Instruction Program for Pre-School Youngsters -- the acronym HIPPY -- which I always get a kick out of saying. (Laughter.) Some of you may know that it's a program which started with research at Hebrew University in Israel. And using data from research on immigrants to Israel who were exposed to many of the same social conditions as those who had lived there longer but were not progressing as well in school, researchers devised a program to begin to work with the parents of such youngsters to increase the confidence of parents, primarily mothers, in their capacity to be their child's first teacher, to begin to lay the foundation for the acquisition of academic skills. And in country after country we've seen that programs like this, if properly administered, can make a difference not only in the preparation of a child but in the increased competence of a parent.

There are many such efforts that we could mention that researchers have devised that have helped to improve the quality of life for our children, our families and our communities. So I thank you and commend you for building on the rich legacy of the SRCD and providing this opportunity to showcase some of the latest advances in children's research. What I hope is that this work will continue to inform scientists, decision-makers, child care providers, individual parents as we seek to create more promising conditions for the growth and development of our children.

We do face many challenges. On the one hand, there have been advances and greater understanding in how a child develops. On the other hand, we know that, given the necessary prerequisites for healthy development, we are falling short in many respects, in many communities. And we must have a united effort that involves every level of society in addressing the needs of children and putting to use the information that we have.

I think it's especially important that we continue with the federal government's historic support of basic research. (Applause.) All too often skeptics wonder why the government should invest in research instead of leaving research to the private sector. Yet we know that government support is essential to the kind of progress that we have already made and that we must continue to make on behalf of children, both in the scientific and public policy arenas.

This is especially important when we talk about the issues that you are concerned with. The federal government contributes more than 90 percent of the funding for children's research in this country. Since 1993, funding for children's health research has increased by 25 percent from the federal government. And we have seen some fruits already of that investment. Without federal support we simply would not be where we are today in terms of our understanding of child development.

As unfashionable as it is in some quarters today to suggest that government has any virtues at all -- (laughter) -- I believe that government, and in particular the federal government, can be instrumental in funding research that leads to better understanding of children's needs and in adopting policies shaped by that scientific knowledge. I also believe that the government can help people apply your research in practical ways that better their lives.

Research, for example, now confirms what many of our own parents and grandparents knew intuitively all along -- that hugging a baby and reading to a child or singing and talking to a child has an impact on that child's well-being. What our parents and grandparents and the vast majority of us did not know until recently is just how great an impact those activities have on actual brain development. Clearly, the latest research from neuroscience is a very exciting step in our understanding of how children grow in their earliest years.

But the information coming from our laboratories and our clinical studies is essentially useless if parents and caregivers and teachers and doctors and lawmakers and others who have an impact on children don't have any clue about that basic information nor what to do with it.

As some of you may know, the President and I will host a conference at the White House later this month on early childhood development and learning. Our goal is to help spread the word about new research on the development of the brain in the earliest years. And to take this extraordinary information and explore how we translate it into our everyday actions affecting children.

The White House conference will bring together leading neuroscientists, pediatricians, and child development specialists --including some of you in this room -- with child care providers, business and religious leaders and others who are putting this knowledge to practice.

It is an important starting point, a first step. But much work will have to be done to ensure that parents and caregivers who need this information actually get it and know how to make use of it.

I am still constantly surprised, when I speak with people that I meet as I travel around the country about their young infants, how many of them still do not know that reading to an infant, singing to an infant, talking to an infant -- all of that is feeding that young child's development. I still have people say to me, well, why would I talk to him? He can't talk back. And it's not that the person who says that is in any way resistant to helping a child; it's that that is not something that they've ever been told. So we will do our best to tell as many people as possible about why what many of us did because we liked doing it and thought it was good for our children turned out after all to be essential.

But we have to be vigilant about how this information is used, because for all the good ideas that new research brings, it is always subject to manipulation, oversimplification, and misinterpretation. One of my great fears, for example, about this research concerning the brain is that parents who are doing their best to raise children, often under difficult circumstances, will feel even more guilt and anxiety because they aren't sure if they are doing everything that the research should ask them to do.

I am reminded of a man I know who became so obsessed after reading in a popular magazine about how synapses develop that he determined he would read two books to his young son every night -- and he raced through the material without ever giving the child a chance to look at the pictures or ask questions about the story and couldn't understand why his son was not enjoying this experience at all. (Laughter.) And speaking with some of us, as he described what had turned into a forced march toward reading, and we asked him questions about what it was he was hoping to get out of this experience with his son, it became clear that instead of a loving, nurturing, stimulating experience, it had become a tense obligation for them both.

So there is one anecdotal piece of evidence of someone who heard about brain development, applied what he thought would be the appropriate approach, and learned quickly that that is not what we're talking about.

It's very important that, as exciting as new discoveries about early brain development are, that the early years are not seen as the only important time in a child's life. We know, from your research and from reading various reports like the excellent Carnegie Foundation Reports "Starting Points" and "Years of Promise" and "Great Transitions," that children do not exist in a vacuum of time.

Many of you in your own research have shown that children need interaction, engagement, and stimulation every day and every year of their lives, and that they can profit from that. It will do our children little good if we only care about promoting cognitive development until the age of three and then pretend that all learning is over and done with. To fully understand a child's development, we must explore the dynamics of development during each stage of life -- from birth, through adolescence, and on to adulthood. And we should be willing

to invest in young people at every step of their development.

I was reminded of that forcefully during my recent trip to Africa, when I was privileged to spend time with President Mandela on Robben Island, where he had been imprisoned for 27 years. He talked to me about how the political prisoners who were educated would take time to teach prisoners who were not. They would all work in a lime quarry from early in the morning until sundown and, because they were working they had more freedom than when they were in their cells or eating or taking exercise. So they would be using the opportunity of the sand and the quarry to be showing these other prisoners letters, and then to be talking with them about learning. And so many of the prisoners who came into the prison illiterate left literate, including one man who now holds a high position in the government.

Clearly, learning doesn't stop, and all of us have an opportunity to continue to promote learning. And even with our emphasis on early childhood, we need to make clear that all people deserve a chance to learn and develop, and that although we should put more resources and attention on the earliest years, that should not be the only place that we place emphasis. I imagine that there will be some people who upon hearing about the importance of reading and talking to infants and toddlers will wonder whether mothers and fathers should immediately quit their jobs to stay home with their children and read to them all day. Some parents may, I'm sure, begin to second-guess their own personal and professional choices.

Here again, a combination of research and common sense ought to be our guide. As we will learn tomorrow from the results of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Study about child care, it does make a difference to the cognitive development of children if they are in a nurturing, stimulating child care environment.

But what does this mean in practice? It means that all children need love, attention, stimulation, and discipline no matter what settings they are in, whether it's with their own parents, babysitters, caregivers, preschool teachers, neighbors, or relatives. I have seen examples, as I'm sure many of you have over the years, of parents who work full-time and sometimes double-time and still manage to give their children the love and support they need for healthy development. And I've seen parents who stay home all day and are uninvolved, inattentive, and emotionally divorced from the children they are raising.

The same can be said for child care. There is a huge chasm of quality among child care providers, from the most nurturing and stimulating caregivers to those who fall far short of the mark.

So I hope that rather than further confusing parents on these sensitive issues, we will help them by using this new research in ways that are sensible and appropriate to their own family circumstances. There is so much we can do together by taking the results of your work, translating it into language that average parents can understand, making sure it is disseminated widely to people who have responsibility for children, and challenging decision-makers in business and government, academia, religion, every aspect of our life together, to apply what we know helps children's development in all that we do.

I know that among those participating in this conference are many established veterans of children's research, as well as some of you who are just embarking on careers. To those of you who have devoted your lifetimes to expanding our understanding of children, we are grateful for your ongoing commitment and for the wisdom and expertise you continue to lend us. And to those of you who are new to the profession, we are encouraged by your decision to commit yourselves to this important field, and we eagerly await your contributions in the years ahead.

The child development research community is making a profound contribution to the future well-being of our country. Just as your work has inspired me and many others who have watched it and followed it from outside the profession, you can't open new vistas for people everywhere. And as you gather to discuss your research in all its rich, technical complexity, please consider too its implications for public policy and the everyday lives of families. It is not always easy to take research and apply it to the public policy arena. And certainly the complexity of what you study and the results that you achieve may not always fit into a sound bite for the nightly TV news.

But I hope that you will continue to search for ways to translate your work into information that is readily available and usable in many different venues. We need that now as much as ever. I think there is a greater attention to the needs of children than there has been. We are embarking in our country on many changes -- welfare reform being but one that I could mention -- that will have profound implications on how children develop. We need your expertise; we need your early warning signals; we need your advice.

And so I would ask you not only to continue your research for the sake of developing the body of knowledge that is available to experts but to do whatever you can to make sure that information is available to all of us. This is, I believe, a moment in time to intensify our commitment to understanding child development as deeply as possible and to use that emerging knowledge to the benefit of all of our children.

It is an exciting time to be studying development with all of the breakthroughs in research that have already occurred and that are on the brink of occurring. And it will be a great test of our political will, of our humanity, of our understanding of how we are all inextricably connected to see whether or not we take what we know works for children and apply it, and that we make sure that it is not just the children of people like us who benefit from the information that is available, but that we work to make society more attentive to the needs of children and parents who might otherwise be left behind.

The two weeks that I just spent in Africa was exhilarating, challenging, exciting, sometimes depressing, but I felt at the end of that trip that it wasn't only in our country or in advanced countries that people were beginning to focus on the next generation in a way that perhaps we hadn't for the last couple of decades. Whether I was in a classroom in Soweto with young boys and girls who were learning English; or in a school in Kampala, Uganda, with 74 eight-year-olds in a classroom because the country has committed itself to increasing school

enrollment, and in the space of less than a year has increased enrollment by more than 2 million; or whether I was in the newest country in Africa, Eritrea, talking with men and women who had spent 30 years fighting for their independence, and hearing how what their doing is investing in education and health care for children -- I felt that there was a commitment to what is really important among many of the people I had a chance to meet.

I feel the same when I travel in our own country: that there are many people who look at what is happening in the economy, who look at the changes that have gone on in the family, who understand the challenges that we are facing socially, and who are committed to making it possible for more children to be productive and successful in their development.

And what we have to do -- those of you who care about the work you have committed yourselves to and those of us who want to translate your work into practical application -- is to be relentless in speaking about and standing up for the needs of children, and doing all we can to take what works and spread it as widely as possible.

As we move toward this new century -- my husband is very fond of saying we do not have a person to waste -- and we must believe that, we must act on it. And you can provide an enormous amount of inspiration and information to make sure that we do.

Thank you for what you're doing on behalf of children. And please make sure that what you know is broadly known so that all the rest of us can try to make sure we leave no child behind. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

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