



**FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
REMARKS TO THE SOCIETY OF RESEARCH IN CHILD DEVELOPMENT
WASHINGTON, DC
APRIL 3, 1997**

Thank you, Dr. Elder. And thanks to 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 of the connection between research, public policy and people's every day lives.

Many years ago, when I was in law school, I had the chance to study children at the Yale Child Study Center in New Haven. I was privileged to work with one of the pioneers in the field of infant behavior, Dr. Sally Provence. And today I still have vivid memories of the gentle and subtle ways that Dr. Provence would elicit information from parents and help them establish better patterns of relating to their children.

Later on, in my work with children's organizations such as the Carnegie Council on Children, I watched many dedicated men and women work to apply current scientific knowledge and research in the public policy arena. All of these experiences reinforced my belief in the mutuality of research and policy. We simply can't have one without the other.

One need only look at the progress we have made -- and how we have made it -- in areas affecting children to appreciate the connection. Could we have lowered the rate of infant mortality, eradicated childhood diseases like measles and polio, or developed and released new drugs and therapies without a nexus between medical science and policy?

Could we have protected children from the hazards of lead, tobacco and illegal drugs without basic research? The research that you and your colleagues do every day has enhanced our teaching methods for children with learning disabilities and outlined the benefits of educational television programming. It has given us new tools for devising care and services for infants, toddlers and adolescents; and has helped us strengthen Head Start and other childhood programs.

In short: Science needs social policy. And social policy needs science.

I have seen this for myself in a program called Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters -- or HIPPY -- which, as many of you know, began in Israel and we later brought to Arkansas. Using the latest research on child development, the program took mothers from our state who lacked confidence in their own academic skills and trained them to teach their preschool children. Not only did their children become better prepared for kindergarten, the mothers were motivated to learn on their own.

These are but a few of the ways that your efforts as researchers have improved 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 for providing this opportunity to showcase some of the latest advances in children's research. I know your work will continue to inform scientists, decision-makers, child care providers and individual parents as we seek to create more promising conditions for the growth and development of our children.

Let me also say that, for this reason alone, we cannot renege on the federal government's historic support of basic research. All too often, skeptics wonder why the government should invest in research instead of leaving it to the private sector. Yet we know that government support is essential to the kind of progress I have just mentioned -- both in the scientific and public policy arenas.

This is particularly so when it comes to children. The federal government contributes more than 90 percent of the funding for children's research in this country. Since 1993, funding for children's research has increased by 23 percent -- and I think we all appreciate the fruits of that investment. Without federal support, we simply would not be where we are today in terms of our understanding of child development.

And one more thing: As unfashionable as it these days to suggest that government has any virtues at all, I believe that government can be instrumental in adopting policies shaped by scientific knowledge. I also believe it can help people to 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 child, reading to a child, singing and talking to a child, has an impact on that child's well-being. What our parents, grandparents and the vast majority of us didn't know until recently is just how great an impact those activities have on actual brain development.

Clearly, this is a very exciting step in our understanding of how children grow in the earliest years. But the information is essentially useless if parents, caregivers, teachers, doctors, lawmakers and others who have an impact on children don't have any clue about what to do with it.

As many of you 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 these extraordinary breakthroughs and explore how we can translate them into our everyday actions and activities involving 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.

We also have to be vigilant about how the information is used. For all the good ideas that new research brings, it is always subject to manipulation and misinterpretation. One of my great fears is that parents who are doing their best to raise children -- often under difficult circumstances -- will feel more guilt and anxiety because they aren't sure if they are doing everything that the research is telling them to do.

I am reminded of a man I know who became so obsessed with reading two books to his son every night that he raced through the material without ever giving the child a chance to look at the pictures or ask questions about the story. Instead of loving, nurturing, stimulating experience, it became a tense obligation for them both.

The President and I also want to be clear that, as exciting as the new discoveries about early brain development are, the early years are not the only important time in a child's life. We know from reading the various Carnegie Reports, Starting Points, 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.

It will do our children little good if we only care about promoting cognitive development until age three, and then pretend that all the learning is over and done with. To fully understand a child's evolution, we must explore the dynamics of development during each stage of life, from birth through adolescence and on to adulthood.

You are also aware that, as much as new findings about the brain are clarifying certain aspects of child development, they are also bound to raise questions about activities within our own families and the institutions we charge with caring for our children.

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 kids and read to them all day. Some parents may even begin to second-guess their 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? It means that all children need love, attention, stimulation and discipline no matter what setting they are in: whether it is with their own parents, babysitters, caregivers, pre-school teachers, neighbors or relatives. I have seen examples over the years of parents who work full-time and still manage to give their children boundless love and support. And I have seen parents who stay at 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 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 confuse parents on these very sensitive issues, we will help them use the new research in ways that are sensible and appropriate to their own family circumstances.

I know that among those participating in this conference are many established veterans of children's research, as well as some who are just embarking on careers. To those 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. To those 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 -- and indeed of all humanity. Just as your work has inspired me, it can open new vistas for people everywhere. 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.

This is the moment to intensify our commitment to understand child development as deeply as possible -- and to use emerging knowledge for the benefit of all our children.

Thank you very much.

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