



**UNDERSTANDING WHAT MATTERS TO PARENTS IN PROMOTING  
THEIR CHILDREN'S HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT  
Summary Report**

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As more children are cared for in child care centres, there has been a surge in interest regarding what variables are most important to parents when they make child care decisions for their young children (Rose & Elicker, 2008). Some studies have reported that practical factors such as location, cost and hours are more important to parents in determining their child care choices than quality-related child care characteristics, such as curriculum, child/staff ratio, training of teachers and teacher's sensitivity (e.g. Johansen, Leibowitz & Waite, 1996; Peyton, Jacobs, O'Brien & Roy, 2001). Other studies have reported parents citing curriculum (Bogat & Gensheimer, 1986) and a "friendly atmosphere" (Long, Wilson, Kutnik & Telford, 1996) as important in their child care decision-making.

The current study looked at child care factors that are important to parents whose children attend Mothercraft child care centres. Programs at Mothercraft are grounded in the following three theoretical frameworks – developmental theory, attachment theory and relational theory. The current study looked at whether parents whose children are enrolled at Mothercraft value child care factors that align with these three foundational theories. Specifically, the study looked at whether parents value practical factors or more quality-related factors in making decisions regarding their children's child care arrangements. A further goal of the study was to examine whether parents perceive attachment to be an important contributor to healthy child development. Finally, the study also assessed parents' perception of the importance of research collaboration between child care centres and developmental researchers as well as the importance of child care centres serving as training facilities for early childhood educators in training.

Results of the study showed that parents whose children attend Mothercraft centres value quality-related factors such as educated and trained staff and warmth of staff more than practical factors such as location and hours of the centres. Furthermore, within quality-related factors, parents value emotion-focused factors such as warmth of staff more than academic factors such as curriculum at this stage of development. Parents also value such emotion-focused qualities in their children's teachers. At this stage in children's development, they clearly value teacher qualities such as being loving, sensitive and attentive to children, encouraging confidence and instilling a love of learning in children more than qualities such as building good lesson plans. The current study also found that parents highly valued the encouragement of confidence in children. In their responses to open-ended survey items, parents specified that they felt that a sense of

confidence would allow children to grow in all aspects of development – social, emotional, physical and cognitive. Furthermore, 92.6% of sampled parents felt that attachment relationships were important for children’s healthy development and that it was through attachment relationships that children built confidence. Parents also seemed to appreciate the importance of collaboration between developmental researchers and child care centres in promoting healthy child development. Overall, across all three centres, 87.2% of parents reported that they were very satisfied with the services they received from Mothercraft. The following is a selection of quotes from parents:

*“Excellent, warm and loving environment. My son does not struggle with time away from my husband and I – he is confident and expressive. This has a great deal to do with his relationships with his teachers. They are consistent and attentive to his needs. Have an interest in knowing us as a family so we can intertwine our child rearing and approaches, so my son has a consistent approach between home and day care”. (Mother from Brookfield Place)*

*I have been at Mothercraft with 3 children over 10 years. Low turnover, a loving and nurturing staff and incredible food have given us the confidence & trust to leave our children with Mothercraft. (Father from Eaton Centre)*

*The service and care we have received from Mothercraft has always been exceptional. The teachers have a fantastic rapport with the children & parents & they treat the children with the utmost respect. It is obvious that your employees enjoy their work & their working environment. Both of our children have been cared for in the best possible way. We believe that their self-esteem and self-confidence as well as their ability to interact with both children and adults are directly related to the care & education that they received at Mothercraft. (Mother from Robertson House)*

The findings from this study suggest that Mothercraft parents have a fairly coherent view and deep understanding of the critical characteristics of quality child care. Parents go beyond practical factors and are concerned about quality-related factors which will fulfill children’s developmental needs and prepare them for school. Furthermore, parents in this study clearly understand the importance of attachment relationships. These findings indicate that parents’ attitudes and perceptions regarding factors important for healthy child development align very well with Mothercraft’s founding principles.

#### References

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