# How the family structure can impact a child’s overall health

**Source: Karishmma V Mangal, Educationist**

The family’s role in developing these various indicators of a child’s health, especially during formative years, is crucial. The eventual progress of children into successful adults is largely attributed to their innate talent, the educational institutes they have passed out from as well as their propensity to work hard. However, the contribution of one’s family structure on the overall health of a child is often understated.

Health does not only mean physical health. In this context, health includes other aspects such as emotional, social and cognitive. The family’s role in developing these various indicators of a child’s health, especially during formative years, is crucial.

**Emotional health**

A range of emotions such as empathy, trust, compassion, comfort and confidence are developed in an infant due to its bond with the caregiver. As children grow they learn to communicate emotions in a healthy way by primarily observing their family members. By doing things together, family members enhance the emotional development among children. In such families the chances of children experiencing emotional distress are low.

Over time, such children tend to have higher EQ. Several studies have shown that having a higher emotional quotient improves one’s chances of acquiring professional success and enjoying interpersonal relationships.

**Social health**

Children who have a congenial environment at home tend to develop strong social relationships as they grow. Earlier it used to be believed that strong social skills develop naturally. However, the idea that social skills have to be learned is gradually gaining recognition. A positive and vocal family bond plays an important role in enhancing a child’s social behaviour. Social skills can also be taught by family members. When they encourage good behaviour, the same is reinforced among children.

As a child interacts with different family members, they pick up nuances of how individuals across age groups and gender behave. The child not only ends up interacting properly with other adults but also is able to be friendly with other children.

It has also been hypothesized that children imitate what they observes in their immediate environment. Children exposed to better child care, access to essential services, recreational opportunities and high-quality education end up with better developmental outcomes.

**Physical health**

Motor skills among children are developed during early childhood. Encouragement by parents and other family members play a key role in an infant learning to walk and run. Even activities like holding a spoon, pushing objects, etc, help the child develop confidence.

A family that is progressive and is economically stable would also understand the importance of a balanced and holistic diet. According to the latest figures provided by the National Health Survey, 36 per cent of Indian children are underweight and 38 per cent are stunted. The lack of proper nutrients in a child’s diet can have long term consequences. For instance, protein deficiency not only affects physical growth but also cognitive development.

**Cognitive health**

Children who engage in good social relationships tend to perform well in academics. Residential stability produces children who are likely to attend school a higher number of times as compared to those from less stable homes.

Children separated from parents or family undergoes neurological damage which can last a lifetime. Such children may score lower in IQ tests, their fight or flight system would be permanently broken and they wouldn’t respond to stressful situations. Unfortunately, unlike other parts of the body, most cells in the brain find it unable to regenerate. Separating the caregiver and care receiver harms the most primal bond between two human beings.

In a household with a child, the latter’s wellbeing must be paramount. Older family members must realize that if there are shortcomings across any of the different health indicators written above, the effects of the same could be felt even when the child grows into an adult. Parents and other family members must take cognizance and work towards plugging any gaps in the family structure that could have an adverse effect on the child’s development. All these factors will play a crucial role in enabling the comprehensive development of a child.