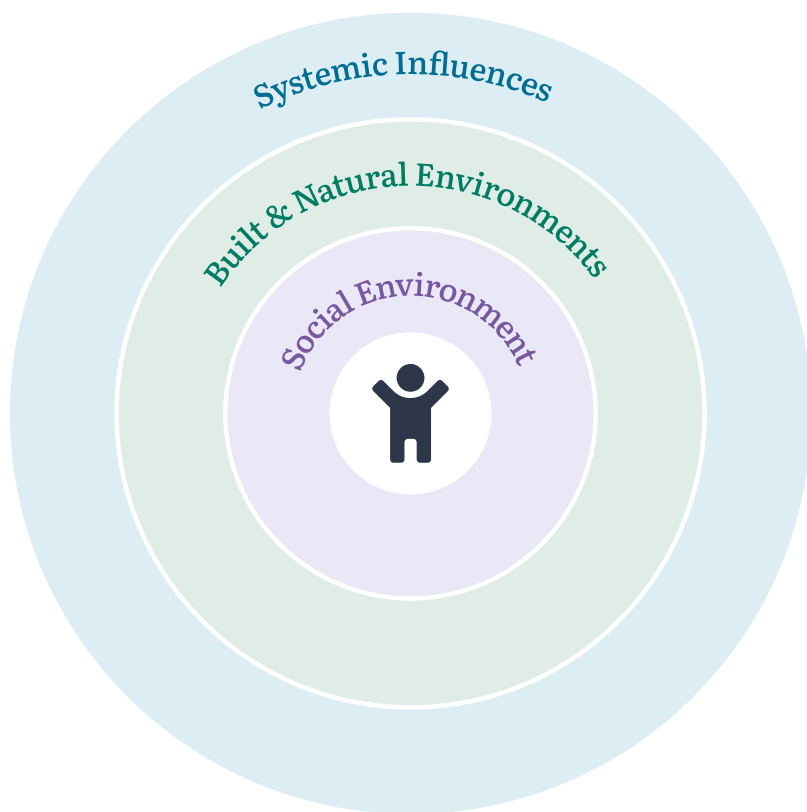


Place Matters: What Surrounds Us Shapes Us

How the environment we create shapes the foundations of early childhood development

A wide range of conditions in the places where children live, grow, play, and learn can get “under the skin” and affect their developing brains and other biological systems. Beginning before birth, these environmental conditions shape how children develop, which shapes their lifelong physical and mental health.



The built and natural environments, and the systemic factors that shape those environments—such as the policies that influence where people are able to live and how resources are distributed—interact with each other and with a child’s social environment in deeply interconnected ways. Every environment is infused with a combination of influences, which can have positive and negative impacts on health and development. Knowing this, it’s important to recognize that levels of exposure to risk and access to opportunity are not distributed equally. **In short, place matters.**



Social Environment

The presence or absence of key influences in a child's social environment plays an important role in their development.



Responsive relationships



Significant stress and adversity



Caregiver well-being



Social connectedness



Community supports



Faith and cultural traditions



Built & Natural Environments

The accessibility and exposure to various influences in a child's built and natural environments shape their development directly, by influencing their developing biological systems, and indirectly, by interacting with their environment of relationships.



Air quality and temperature



Clean water supply



Safe green space



Safe, healthy housing



Exposure to toxins and hazards



Economic opportunities



Nutritious food



Neighborhood infrastructure



Systemic Influences

Broader systemic influences such as the ones listed here shape children's development directly, while also shaping their environment of relationships and their built and natural environments.



Current and historic public policies



Systemic racism



Structural inequities



Intergenerational poverty



Healthcare system disparities



Access to quality childcare and education

All communities have aspects of their built and natural environments that have been designed through decisions made over time and can be re-designed to support healthy development.

Working together across various policy domains beyond the early childhood sector—including areas like urban planning, environmental protection, and anti-discrimination policies—we can re-shape environmental influences with a science-informed lens so that all children can grow up in homes and neighborhoods free of hazards and rich with opportunity.