



NEWS RELEASE

Chair: Steve McCabe MP Co-Chair: Baroness Floella Benjamin OBE. Vice-Chairs: Julie Elliott MP, Dame Diana Johnson MP, Lord McColl of Dulwich, Adam Holloway MP

Formal details of the Group on the Parliamentary website are available

at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmhallparty/191105/fit-and-healthy-childhood.htm>

‘ONLY CONNECT’ – TOUCH IS AS CENTRAL TO CHILD DEVELOPMENT AS NUTRITION SAYS NEW REPORT

Embargo: 1 pm Tuesday 14 July 2020

‘**Wellbeing and Nurture: Physical and Emotional Security in Childhood**’ is published by the APPG on A Fit and Healthy Childhood as the UK emerges from lockdown into the ‘new norm’ after Covid-19.

The ‘social starvation’ approach to child development in Ceausescu’s infamous Romanian orphanages left permanent damage to the children in adulthood.

Now emergent neuro-scientific evidence shows that nurturing touch is an essential pre-requisite of the physical and emotional security that children need in order to grow and flourish.

APPG Chair, **Steve McCabe MP** said:

‘The physical and emotional wellbeing of children matters so much because our future society depends on it.

We have all undergone devastating experiences of social isolation during the pandemic, but the priority now is to look forward. Years of the ‘me’ society’ could not save us from Covid-19.

Now, acting together, we must optimise the emotional and physical wellbeing of every child so that we re-learn how to look out for each other. By teaching children to connect, we will create families and communities that will be strong and healthy.’

The report was sponsored by **Liverpool John Moore’s University** and contains research by **Professor Francis McGlone** who said:

‘Neuro-scientists have recently discovered a population of touch sensitive nerves in the skin that respond optimally to a gentle caress and that during the early years of development play a critical role in brain development. We now have the evidence that a lack of caring touch in early life has lifelong adverse consequences on mental health.’

The Report recommends that:

- Emotional Health and Wellbeing is incorporated into Initial Training and Continued Professional Development for all health and education professionals involved in care and advice to children and their parents/carers
- There is an immediate strategy to combat the adverse impact on the mental health of children and young people of social isolation beyond the pandemic. Services offering face to face contact and related activities should be commissioned especially in rural and other isolated communities



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- Positive touch work to become an established part of the school curriculum; possibly as a component of PSHE
- All therapeutic practitioners (and those who work therapeutically with children in other contexts) to be registered by a Government Approved Professional Standards Accredited Register
- Department for Education through Ofsted to compile and cascade a compendium of best practice models and evaluations of affective touch strategies for classroom use
- Re-modelling of training systems for officials and carers working with children in care to better educate them in appropriate touch and thus improve their practice
- The four Children's Commissioners to be involved in drawing up a set of agreed UK indicators for Emotional Health and Wellbeing to be incorporated into all statutory children's developmental health assessment programmes
- Ensure that Sure Start Centres are integral to a new social isolation reduction strategy because they have the capacity to offer early intervention in a variety of locations (not exclusively more built up areas).

APPG Lead Author, **Helen Clark** added:

'These recommendations are just some of the ways in which this Report argues that new ways of approaching child development and wellbeing can contribute to the re-making of society, bringing unity and community in place of division and isolation.'

'We hope that it will be helpful in informing decision-making and commend it to policymakers.'

ENDS

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