

# Navigating the Middle Years with Self-Control



This guide was produced for Toronto families and those working with children in the middle years (6 – 12).



POWERED BY THE MINDS AT CHILD DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE



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The Middle Years Resource Guide was created by Child Development Institute as a “snapshot” to help parents and caregivers better understand the changing lives of their 6 – 12 year olds and some of the challenges they may be facing during this critical developmental stage.

Though certainly not exhaustive, this brief guide highlights the importance of the middle years, self-control and red flags for early intervention. It provides parents with helpful tips for supporting their children and dealing with problem behaviours within the home. It also contains useful information and links to services and community resources offered in the City of Toronto, including the SNAP® program.



## WHAT ARE THE MIDDLE YEARS?

Children ages 6 to 12 are considered to be in their “middle years.”

During this formative period, children become increasingly independent as they explore the world around them. At this stage, children spend a lot of time in school, where they are focused on making friends and continuing to learn that actions have consequences – both good and bad. This helps them navigate their world and become better problem-solvers and thoughtful decision makers.

As they enter middle childhood, most children are beginning to learn how to manage their impulses, understand their emotions and master their behaviour.

The knowledge and skills children gain during these middle years will continue to form the base of their intellectual, emotional and social growth for the rest of their lives.

However, this period is also where we can start to see behaviour problems taking root. Some children have more difficulty mastering their impulses, following rules or behaving in socially appropriate ways.

Behaviour problems that are not addressed early on can hinder a child’s social and academic development and cause stress for both children and their families.

Fortunately, children are still developing during this crucial stage, and positive parenting strategies can go a long way to ensure their healthy, prosocial development. With the brain still “under construction” during the middle years, it can be remoulded by experiences that positively influence these problem behaviours before they become fixed.

*Enter self-control...*

## SELF-CONTROL: THE HEART OF THE MATTER

**SELF-CONTROL** refers to the ability to control our desires (“I want it”), emotions (“I’m mad”) and impulses (“I’m grabbing it”), especially in difficult situations.

**SELF-CONTROL** is key to a child’s happy and healthy prosocial development, and is one of the best predictors of academic and professional success. It is also “the heart of the matter” for those who struggle with behaviour problems. However, with children’s brains still developing during the middle years, this is a great time for strengthening self-control skills.

Emotion regulation is a type of self-control that is important to a child’s healthy development. It refers to the ability to monitor, assess and modify our emotional reactions to accomplish our goals. Learning this skill is especially important during the middle years, as a child’s ability to form emotional connections at school, at home and in the community increases greatly during this time.

“Childhood self-control predicts physical health, substance dependence, personal finance and criminal offending outcomes.” – Moffit et al. 2010

“Parents can act as positive, long-term, dependable role-models for successful self-control.” – Duckworth, Gendler and Gross, 2014.





## Important red flags in your child's behaviour:

- Problems with family relationships.
- Physically aggressive.
- Verbally aggressive.
- Lack of self-control/problem-solving skills.
- Difficulty making and keeping healthy peer relationships.
- Anxious.
- Sad or depressed.
- Withdrawn.
- Vandalizing and/or damaging property.
- Defiant behaviour.
- Stealing.
- Bullying others.
- Irritability and/or inattention.



# EARLY DETECTION AND INTERVENTION

Research has shown that there are seven years of warning—from age 7 to 14—before a child's problematic behaviour can lead to serious offences.

Behaviour problems that go unaddressed can get in the way of normal child development. We can hope that children will grow out of these issues, but leaving them unaddressed can lead to more serious antisocial behaviour problems, including anything from bullying, aggression and rule-breaking to criminal activity.

Without early intervention, these children may never have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

However, with early detection and intervention, children can receive help sooner. By teaching children important emotion-regulation, self-control and problem-solving skills during the critical middle years, we can prevent serious problems later in life.

These issues are often difficult for children to understand and manage, and can create daily challenges at home, at school, with their peers and in their community. If you notice one or more of the red flags above in your child's behaviour, you may consider getting help.



## LEARN SELF-CONTROL WITH SNAP

For parents who require additional support, programs such as SNAP® can help.

SNAP (Stop Now And Plan) is a proven model that teaches children struggling with behaviour problems, and their parents, how to make better choices “in the moment.” By teaching children and parents how to effectively regulate their emotions, use self-control and solve problems, SNAP helps them to stop, think and find solutions that will make their problems smaller, not bigger.

Developed over the past 30 years by Toronto's Child Development Institute (CDI), SNAP is an award-winning program designed specifically for both boys and girls. It has now been adopted across Canada and around the world for use at home, at school and in the community. SNAP helps children to better understand their emotions and impulses and teaches them how to self-regulate. It also helps parents to strengthen their parenting skills and support their children's healthy development.

CLICK TO WATCH:  
What to expect



### Research shows that SNAP:

- Increases emotion-regulation, self-control and problem-solving skills.
- Reduces aggression, bullying, anxiety, depression and antisocial behaviour.
- Increases social competency and prosocial behaviour.
- Improves academic experience by decreasing behavioural issues at school.
- Increases effective parenting skills.
- Connects children and parents to community-based resources.

# WHO SHOULD ATTEND SNAP?

SNAP is for boys and girls ages 6 to 11 who are experiencing a range of externalizing issues such as aggression, rule breaking and bullying. Often these behaviours exist alongside internalizing issues such as anxiety, isolation and depression.

Take note of the red flags on page 4 – if your child is experiencing any of these issues or problem behaviours, SNAP can help.

Research has shown that the most effective treatment for behavioural problems is a combination of:

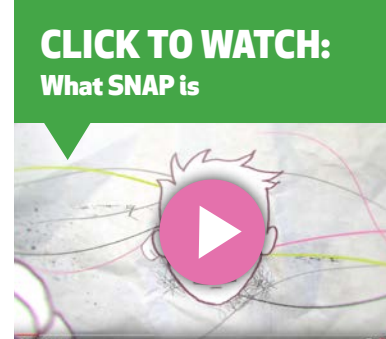
## Child-focused cognitive behavioural therapy

Focusing on the connection between a child's thoughts, feelings and actions.



## Parent management training

Focusing on teaching parents how to effectively manage their child's behaviours.



SNAP works with both children and parents. It has been shown to **reduce** childhood aggression while **increasing** emotion regulation, self-control, problem-solving and social skills. SNAP has also been shown to improve effective parent management skills and enhance a child's academic experience by decreasing problematic behaviours.

# THE SNAP STRATEGY

The SNAP strategy is simple and works for children, parents and teachers alike.

Over the course of 13 weeks, children attend either SNAP Boys or SNAP Girls groups while their parents attend SNAP parenting sessions.\* Through role-plays, home practice assignments and joint family sessions, both children and parents learn how to deal with difficult situations by:

STOP

Stopping themselves (e.g., by counting to 10 or taking a deep breath) as soon as their body begins to react (e.g., throbbing head, tension, feeling hot). We call these reactions body cues.

NOW AND

Identifying any hard thoughts (e.g., “he’s doing that to make me mad”) and replacing them with helpful/realistic coping statements, or cool thoughts (e.g., “I can handle this”).

PLAN

Picking a plan that meets these three criteria: 1) makes the problem smaller instead of bigger, 2) doesn’t hurt anyone or anything, and 3) makes them feel okay.

CLICK TO WATCH:  
How to use the SNAP Strategy



A key aspect of the SNAP technique is helping children to identify triggers (what makes them angry, frustrated, sad or worried) and make the connection between their body cues, thoughts, feelings and actions.

By following these steps, children and parents become more aware of their emotions, triggers and impulses and, in turn, learn how to slow down, regain their composure, challenge their hard thoughts and come up with positive plans.

*\*SNAP Groups is the core service of SNAP programming. Based on need, other SNAP services are also available, such as: individual/family counselling, school support, community connections and SNAP Youth Leadership.*

## SNAP WORKS!

What if we told you that SNAP can actually “reset” a child’s brain in just 13 weeks?

Well, it’s true.

In a study jointly conducted by The Hospital for Sick Children and the University of Toronto, leading researchers found that as children learn to use SNAP and develop self-control and problem-solving skills, there is increased activity in the regions of the brain responsible for monitoring self-control.

Thirty years of helping children and families has resulted in rigorous SNAP research that has achieved the highest standard of scientific and clinical excellence, with more than 15 years of implementing SNAP around the globe.

We are confident in SNAP and passionate about reaching more children and families in our community.

If you know a child or family who could benefit from SNAP services, please visit our website to learn more about our programs and results.

Toronto-based parents can call our SNAP Central Intake Line directly at 416-654-8989.

[stopnowandplan.com](http://stopnowandplan.com)



“My son has ADD and anger issues. We felt lost and frustrated that we couldn’t seem to break our son’s cycle of explosive, angry outbursts. SNAP provided us with essential tools to help us cope as individuals and as a family. We cannot emphasize enough the hope this program has given our family, especially our son.” – Mother of a SNAP boy

“Without SNAP, I would not be the person I am today.” – SNAP Boy

“I used to always lose my temper and fight with people, but when I came here I learned I didn’t have to get into fights, I could just use SNAP.” – SNAP Girl



# TIPS FOR HEALTHY PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS



## TIPS

➤ Greater success in using these skills will be achieved if you use an approach in which **Specific** child behaviours receive an **Immediate** and **Predictable** response S.I.P.

Raising a child can be both rewarding and challenging. It requires energy, thoughtfulness, patience, humour and love to guide a child who is developing so quickly and changing in so many ways. Parents sometimes “slip-up” in this challenging job—the key is to not get stuck, and use self-control and positive parenting strategies to help guide your child and repair your relationship during difficult times.

If your child struggles with behavioural challenges, the following parenting tips can be used to help avoid and solve problems at home:

- |                        |                                  |
|------------------------|----------------------------------|
| ① Monitoring           | ⑤ Charting Rewards               |
| ② Listening            | ⑥ Time Out                       |
| ③ Encouraging          | ⑦ Problem-Solving with P-A-S-T-E |
| ④ Effective Directions |                                  |


! **Note:** All strategies listed are evidence-based, but this is not an exhaustive list. For more information on these strategies and theoretical models, please see page 18.

# 1

**MONITORING** means always knowing your child's whereabouts.

Here's how:

- Remember the 4 Ws: where, when, what and who.
- Your child asks permission to go out and tells you **WHERE** they're going, **WHEN** they're coming back, **WHAT** they'll be doing and **WHO** they will be with.



Can I go over to Miguel's house?

Yes, but make sure you call when you get there!

**!** **Note:** As a parent, you must decide on the most appropriate course of action based on the situation and your child's age (e.g., for young children, a parent could walk them to their friend's home).

## TIPS


- Keep a list of your child's friends, their addresses and phone numbers and get to know their parents.
- Be sure to praise them for returning home on time.

# 2

**LISTENING** means paying attention to your child when he or she speaks to you.

Here's how:

- **STOP** what you are doing.
- **LOOK** at your child when they speak to you.
- **IDENTIFY** their feelings and respond to them.



There's a girl in my class making fun of me.

Tell me more about it, you seem really upset.

## TIPS

- Avoid nagging, ridiculing and lecturing.
- Use encouraging phrases like "I see" or "tell me more."

# 3

**ENCOURAGING** means catching your child doing something good.

Here's how:

- **RELAX** and think about what your child does well.
- **GO** to where they are.
- **WATCH** them doing something.
- **STATE** what you see.
- **TELL** them how good you feel about what they are doing.
- **PRAISE** your child immediately when they start to do something you want them to do.

## TIPS

- Your children will thrive on your encouragement.



Good job!



**4** **EFFECTIVE DIRECTIONS** means telling your child clearly what you want them to do and when they are to do it.

Here's how:

- Say exactly what you want.
- Give only one direction at a time.
- Look at your child.
- Use a firm voice.



## TIPS

- Use a "start" direction like "if you want to play ball, take it outside."
- Keep calm. Use SNAP to stay in control.
- Praise them when the job is done.
- Think "when...then" – "when you have done your homework, then you can watch TV."
- Disobeying directions should have consistent and predictable consequences such as the removal of a privilege or Time Out. Remember: consequences should be age appropriate; reward charts can help set your child up for success.

**5** **CHARTING REWARDS** means giving your child incentives to do routines and chores.

Here's how:

- Come to an agreement with your child about their chore and/or routine. Break big routines or chores into small steps.
- Decide on a reward system. Agree on rewards based on the number of points earned.
- Create a chart like the one below, and put a check mark on the day your child does the chore/routine.
- Make sure to follow through with giving your child their earned reward.



## TIPS

- Rewards are more effective than punishments.
- Find rewards that will motivate your child.
- Post the reward chart for all to see.
- Keep rewards relevant and small. Children often choose one-to-one time with you—their parent—as their favourite reward.
- Find ways to reward yourself for effective parenting!

**TIME OUT** means you and your child take a break from each other.

Here's how:

- Tell your child about Time Out when everyone is calm.
- Choose a boring area, but never a place where your child will be scared. Think of a privilege you will remove if your child does not go to Time Out.
- Use Time Out when your child does not follow your directions. Tell them that they have 10 seconds to start doing what you asked.
- If they don't begin, say "that's a Time Out." For every 10 second delay in responding, add an extra minute to a **maximum of your child's age**. If they still don't go to Time Out, move on and remove the privilege.
- Some behaviours like swearing, sassiness, hitting or destroying property should prompt an immediate Time Out.



## TIPS

- Short Time Outs (2 – 3 minutes) are best.
- Using a timer helps to track the Time Out minutes.
- Ignore any of your child's complaints while in Time Out.
- After Time Out, do NOT rehash the incident.
- If your child is experiencing serious behaviour issues and you require assistance, please see the Resource Section for services in your area.

**PROBLEM-SOLVING** means tackling family issues as problems to be solved. P-A-S-T-E is a great way for parents and children to solve problems as they occur.

Here's how:

**P** stands for **PROBLEM**. Identify one problem – be specific.

**A** stands for **ALTERNATIVES**. List possible solutions to the problem.

**S** stands for **SOLUTION**. Agree on a solution or a combination of solutions that you and your child think will work; write it down.

**T** stands for **TRY**. Try out the agreed-upon solution for one week.

**E** stands for **EVALUATE**. After the try out time, evaluate how the solution is working. If it isn't working, go back to the SOLUTION step and choose another one!

## TIPS

- Try to see your child's point of view.
- Take turns giving suggested solutions.
- Summarize the discussion; be brief.



You can play with the video game for 15 minutes, and when the timer goes off, your sister gets a turn.

# RESOURCES FOR PARENTS AND EDUCATORS IN THE CITY OF TORONTO

## Further Reading

### For more information on the middle years:

Cincotta, N.F. (2013). Journey of Middle Childhood: Who Are “Latency”-Aged Children? In S.G. Austrain (Ed.), *Developmental Theories Through the Life Cycle* (pp. 79-132). New York: Columbia University Press.

### For more information on self-control:

Duckworth, A.L., Gendler, T.S. & Gross, J.J. (2014). Self-control in school-age children. *Educational Psychologist* 49(3), 199-217.

Eisenberg, N., Spinrad, T.L. & Eggum, N.D. (2010). Emotion-related self-regulation and its relation to children’s maladjustment. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology* 6, 495-525.

Piquero, A.R., Jennings, W.G., Farrington, D.P., Diamond, B. & Reingle Gonzalez, J.M. (2016). A meta-analysis update on the effectiveness of early self-control improvement programs to improve self-control and reduce delinquency. *Journal of Experimental Criminology* 12(2), 249-264. DOI 10.1007/s11292-016-9257-z.

### For more information on SNAP:

Augimeri, L.K., Walsh, M., Levene, K., Sewell, K. & Rajca, E. (2014). Stop Now And Plan (SNAP) Model. *Encyclopedia of Criminology and Criminal Justice*, 5053-5063. New York, NY: Springer Science – Business Media.

Farrington, D. P. & Koegl, C. J. (2015). Monetary benefits and costs of the Stop Now And Plan program for boys aged 6 – 11, based on the prevention of later offending. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* 31, 263-287. DOI 10.1007/s10940-014-9240-7 [Published online: 22 November 2014, New York, NY: Springer Science – Business Media].

Burke, J. & Loeber, R. (2014). The effectiveness of the Stop Now and Plan (SNAP) Program for boys at risk for violence and delinquency. *Prevention Science* 16(2), 242-253. DOI 10.1007/s11121-014-0490-2.

### For more information on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy:

Graham, P. & Reynolds, S. (Eds.). (2013) *Cognitive Behaviour Therapy for Children and Families* (3rd ed.). New York: Cambridge University Press.

### For more information on P.A.S.T.E.:

Sacks, D. (Ed.). (2009). *The Canadian Paediatric Society Guide to Caring for Your Child from Birth to Age Five*. Mississauga, ON: John Wiley & Sons Canada, Ltd.

### For more information on Time Out:

Morawska, A. & Sanders, M. (2011). Parental use of time out revisited: A useful or harmful parenting strategy. *Journal of Child and Family Studies* 20, 1-8. DOI 10.1007/s10826-010-9371-x.

### For more information on Social Interactional Learning:

Wiesner, M., Capaldi, D. M. & Patterson, G. R. (2003). Development of antisocial behavior and crime across the life-span from a social interactional perspective: The coercion model. In R. L. Akers & G. F. Jensen (Eds.), *Social learning theory and the explanation of crime: A guide for the new century: Advances in criminological theory* (Vol. 11, pp. 317-337). Piscataway, NJ: Transaction.

## After School Programs

### Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater Toronto

Includes information about Boys and Girls clubs located in the Greater Toronto Area. These clubs provide quality after school and out-of-school programs to children and youth that support their healthy physical, educational and social development.

For more information, visit: [bgcgt.com](http://bgcgt.com).

### City of Toronto: Programs for 6 – 12 Year Olds

Includes program locator, program quality ratings, program information (e.g., ages served, languages spoken by staff, nutrition, transportation, program support), information about the Middle Childhood Matters Coalition, Childcare and Childcare subsidies.

For more information, visit: [toronto.ca](http://toronto.ca) and search “After School Programs,” or dial 311 for City of Toronto services.

### Canadian Active After School Partnership

Includes considerations for parents when choosing an after school program, as well as a list of questions for parents to ask program staff, particularly for children with disabilities.

For more information, visit: [activeafterschool.ca](http://activeafterschool.ca) > “Parents/Guardians.”

## Childcare

### City of Toronto: Childcare Locator

Search for childcare by age category (infant, toddler, preschool, kindergarten and school age) and by postal code, address, intersection or school name.

For more information, visit: [toronto.ca](http://toronto.ca) and search “Childcare Locator,” or dial 311 for City of Toronto services.

### City of Toronto: Information for Families

Includes general information for families about City of Toronto programming, including childcare subsidies, services for children with special needs, information for new immigrant families, etc.

For more information, visit: [toronto.ca](http://toronto.ca) and search “Information for Families,” or dial 311 for City of Toronto services.

## Children’s Mental Health Resources

### Children’s Mental Health Ontario: Find a CMHO Centre in Your Community

Allows families to locate a local accredited children’s mental health centre by entering their postal code. The website below contains contact information for individual children’s mental health centres located near you.

For more information, visit: [kidsmentalhealth.ca](http://kidsmentalhealth.ca) and click “Find a Centre.”

### eMentalHealth.ca: Child and Youth Service Organizations

Helps families to find community organizations and children’s mental health services by service type and location. The website below contains contact information for various local child and youth service organizations.

For more information, visit: [ementalhealth.ca](http://ementalhealth.ca) and search “Child and Youth Service Organizations” within Toronto.

### 211 Toronto: When you don’t know where to turn – find services by topic

A website of over 20,000 community, health, social and related government services. Search for services according to type, location or agency name.

For more information, visit: [211toronto.ca](http://211toronto.ca) or dial 211 or 1-888-340-1001.

### Kids Help Phone

Website includes information for kids related to topics such as bullying, violence and abuse, body image, feelings, the Internet, friends, school, etc. Also includes tools and resources for parents.

For more information, visit: [kidshelpphone.ca](http://kidshelpphone.ca) or dial 1-800-668-6868.

## Health Resources

### Health Care Connect: “Find a Family Doctor or Nurse-Practitioner”

Ontario government website that includes instructions on how to find or change a family doctor or nurse practitioner.

For more information, visit: [ontario.ca](http://ontario.ca) and search “Find a family doctor or nurse practitioner,” or dial 1-800-445-1822.

### College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario

Website is produced by the Canadian Paediatric Society and contains links to multiple resources for newcomer families, including: language programs, health, education, legal matters, housing, recreation, employment and more.

For more information, visit: [cpso.on.ca](http://cpso.on.ca) and follow links to “Public Register Info” > “All Doctors Search.”

### Toronto Central Health Line

Search for health services in Toronto by region and by health topic, including mental health and “children and parenting.”

For more information, visit: [torontocentralhealthline.ca](http://torontocentralhealthline.ca) or dial 416-506-9888.

## Newcomer Families

### Kids New to Canada: “Community Resources Serving Immigrant and Refugee Families”

Website is produced by the Canadian Paediatric Society and contains links to multiple resources for newcomer families, including: language programs, health, education, legal matters, housing, recreation, employment and more.

For more information, visit: [kidsnewtocanada.ca](http://kidsnewtocanada.ca) and click “Find resources for immigrant and refugee families in your community.”

## Nutrition and Food Security

### 211 Toronto

Search for “Food Bank” to find a food bank in your neighbourhood.

For more information, visit: [211toronto.ca](http://211toronto.ca) or dial 211 or 1-888-340-1001.

## Sports and Recreation Programs

### City of Toronto – Sports and Recreation

Includes links to all city programming including sports and recreation, camps, swimming, skating, arts, fitness, and general interest programs.

For more information, visit: [toronto.ca](http://toronto.ca) and search “Sports and Recreation Programs,” or dial 311 for City of Toronto services.

## Special Education

### Toronto District School Board “Special Education Programs”

Website contains information about special education programs within the Toronto District School Board.

For more information, visit: [tdsb.on.ca](http://tdsb.on.ca) and follow links to “High School” > “Special Education” > “Programs” or contact your local school principal for more information.

### Toronto Catholic District School Board “Special Needs Strategy”

Website contains information about Ontario’s Special Needs Strategy. Tabs on the left of the screen contain links to information about TCDSB resources for children with special needs (e.g., autism, speech and language, social work, Section 23, etc.).

For more information, visit: [tcdsb.org](http://tcdsb.org) and follow links to “Programs and Services” > “Special Services” > “Special Needs Strategy” or contact your local school principal for more information.

### French Public School Board Guide for Parents of children with Special Needs (*Enfance en difficulté*)

This resource includes a guide for parents of children with special needs, for the French public school board, “Conseil Scolaire Viamonde.”

For more information, visit: [csviamonde.ca](http://csviamonde.ca) and follow links to “Succès de l’élève” > “Enfance en difficulté” > “Guide des parents” or contact your local school principal for more information.

### French Catholic School Board “Student Services”

Contains information about special needs programs offered through the French Catholic School Board, “Conseil scolaire de district catholique Centre-Sud.”

For more information, visit: [csdccc.edu.on.ca](http://csdccc.edu.on.ca) and follow links to “Services” > “Service à l’élève” or contact your local school principal for more information.



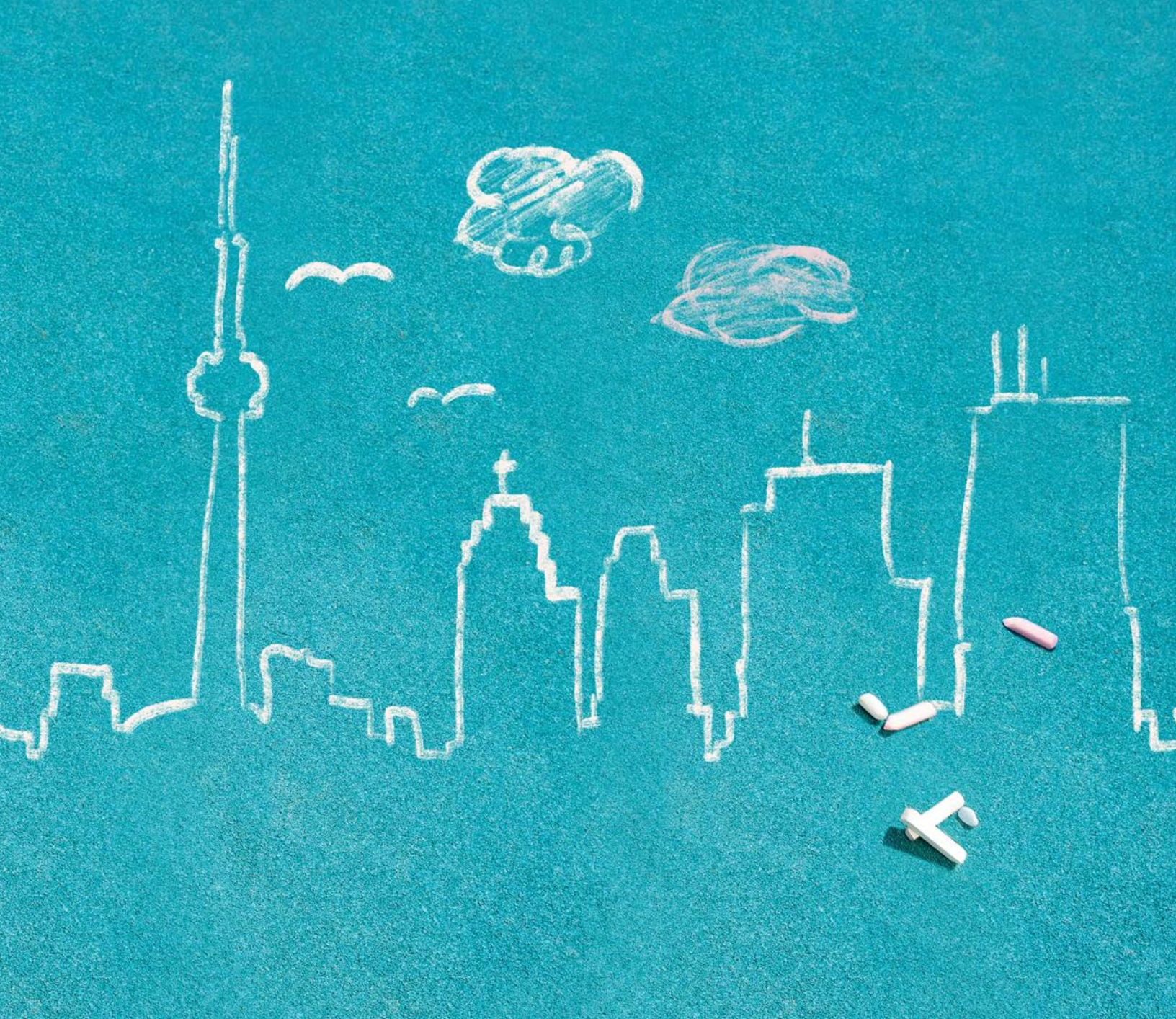
Child Development Institute (CDI) is a leading children’s mental health agency in the City of Toronto offering a range of services to approximately 3,500 children, ages birth – 18, and their families each year. We promote and support the healthy development of children and strengthen the families and communities in which they live.

Our four service streams include: Early Intervention including the SNAP (Stop Now And Plan) program, Family Violence/Shelter Services, Integra programs for children, youth and their families with learning disabilities and mental health issues (LDMH), and Healthy Child Development.



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For more information on our programs, visit [childdevelop.ca](http://childdevelop.ca).



Funded by:



For more information on SNAP services in Toronto,  
call 416-654-8989 or visit [stopnowandplan.com](http://stopnowandplan.com).