Environmental Influences on Child Development

The prenatal environment:

• The chemical balance of the mother's body and the presence of conditions or potentially toxic substances that can alter development processes.

• Examples are the mother's use of drugs or alcohol, viral or bacterial diseases, and direct traumatic injury to the fetus.

The physical environment

• The air the child breathes, the nutritional value of food the child eats.

• Exposure to conditions that can lead to disease, accident, or injury, including child abuse and neglect.

The social/cultural environment

• Consists of the norms, values, belief systems and morals.

• Standards of behavior that regulate life in the cultural group in which the child is raised.

The learning environment

• The degree and type of stimulation available in the child's immediate environment.

• Sensory input promotes and shapes cognitive development.

• Stimulation, in adequate quantity and intensity, promotes establishment of, and "shapes," neural pathways in the brain.

The emotional environment

• The nature of the child's interpersonal relationships.

• The degree of nurturance available to the child.

• The emotional environment shapes personality and affects the development of self-esteem, identity, trust, the ability to enter into intimate relationships, and personal resilience.