

The background of the slide features abstract, overlapping geometric shapes in various shades of green, ranging from light lime to dark forest green. These shapes are primarily located on the left and right sides of the slide, framing the central text.

# Creating Awareness: 2<sup>nd</sup> year and 3<sup>rd</sup> year Nursing students at UNB

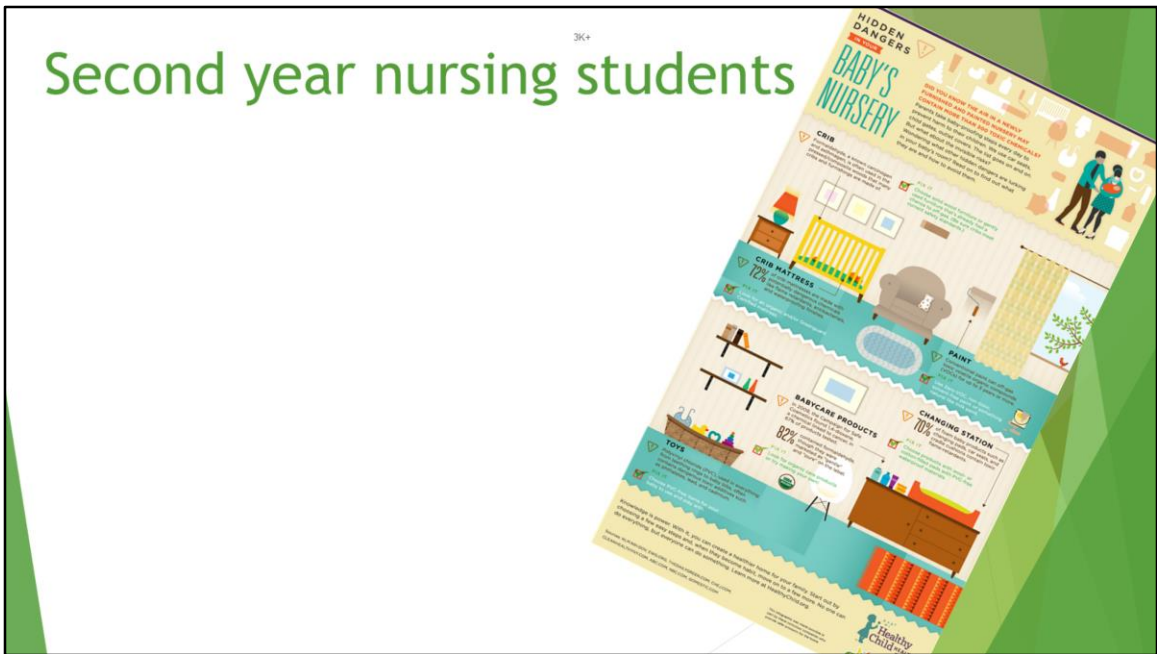
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## The lack of awareness



I was sitting down at a family dinner when “organic food” came up in discussion. At my home, any topic is up for discussion at the table. My mother in law announced to everyone at the dinner table “I always new that organic anything was a crock. I don’t understand why everyone would pay so much more for food that really has no more nutrition value the then other foods”. As I was explaining to her about the chemicals and pesticide used in other store bought foods and the effects that they can cause, it was clear that she never considered this to be important. This discussion with my mother in law reinforced to me the lack of awareness with the public in general about the effects of toxins in our environment; how “in the name of making things better, last longer, less work”, we are potentially harming generations of human beings. I feel lucky to work in my position as a nursing instructor with the Faculty Nursing. I can help create awareness with nursing students so that they too can pass on the information they have learned, to know when to ask questions, and look at the research.

## Second year nursing students



I work primarily with 2<sup>nd</sup> year nursing students in maternal child health. During their maternity clinical practicum, both in the fall and winter term, they complete 4 prenatal visits with families and then spend the rest of their time on the maternity unit at the DECH. Although students design their prenatal presentations to the needs of their family, I always make sure there is some component of awareness about environmental risk factors. Often, we sneak this in by discussing how parents prepare the nursery, what kind of paint do they use, flooring, the age of the home and the risk of renovations and dust during pregnancy. Often parents want to learn more about toddlers and what to expect from siblings etc.... Students take advantage of this opportunity by discussing what cleaning chemicals should be avoided and the possible exposure to chemicals and pesticides used outside the home as the child explores. When discussing food preparation, making homemade baby food provides another opportunity to discuss why it is important to wash fruit and vegetables or to limit some fish because of the instance of mercury. We focus on simple changes parents can make to lower the environmental risks in and around the home for the pregnant mother and the family.

<http://www.healthychild.org/>

## Third year nursing students



This year, I have an opportunity to work with 3<sup>rd</sup> year nursing students. We are piloting a new format to make sure all nursing students have a positive pediatric experience. Each week 3-4 nursing students will spend 3 days on the Pediatric unit at the DECH. During that time, we are focusing on growth and development, oxygenation and gas exchange, and fluid and electrolyte balance. In addition, I have prepared a reading with guiding questions about environmental risk factors that may be contributing to the health of the family. I chose “Playing it safe: Service provider strategies to reduce environmental risks to preconception, prenatal, and child health”, because not only does it provide an introduction to some of the toxin exposures we face in our day to day lives and around home, but it also speaks to how the Determinants of Health play a role in the health outcomes of families, concerns that can last for generations. In addition, this article identifies that some of these topics can be sensitive for families. Students need to take a gentle and sensitive approaches when discussing environmental concerns with families. Nurses need to recognize the importance of partnering with families to help them problem solve and find solutions that are doable while keeping the Determinants of Health in mind.

As part of a post conference or as clinical preparation, we will be watching a YouTube video called “Little things matter: The impact of Toxins on the Developing Brain”. This

video complements the readings students have to complete by reinforcing why the prenatal period and young children are the most susceptible to the effects continuous exposure to toxins in their environment.

It is vital that nursing students understand the growing concerns and effects of toxins in and around a home environment, and examine through a critical lens where children –grow, live, learn, and play.



## What if we had time... Think leadership

Unfortunately, I only have 3<sup>rd</sup> year nursing students for 3 days, so I am limited of what I can expect from them.

However, I want them to think ahead, think bigger and upwards regarding how they can have more influence and be leaders.

On our last day during post conference, we will play a game of “What if we had time.... Think leadership”, keeping in mind what they have learned from their readings and the video.

Each student the night before will think of a strategy how they could create awareness about environmental risk factors with families, communities, and government.

During our last post conference, students will then go around the group and each student will share their idea,

We will then go around the group a second time, but this time each student must add to an idea from another student.

We will go around for a last time. Students can either continue with the same student’s idea, add to their own, or add to another student’s idea

We then summarize each idea and identify what will their idea need to be successful and what might be some challenges when putting their ideas to practice.

## Learning outcomes



My aim is for nursing students to:

- achieve an understanding regarding toxins in our everyday environment and that the prenatal stage and young children are the most susceptible to toxin exposure because of the rapid growth and development changes that occur.
- link the Determinants of Health to environmental risk factors and how some families have limited options.
- start discussions with families about their home environment and how they might partner with families to problem solve solutions in order to reduce or eliminate toxin exposure.
- examine their roles as student nurses and how they can be leaders with families, communities, and government in regards to policy and standards.
- To understand the importance of research and to consider what collaborations are required to achieve goals for a safe environment for children.
- <http://www.healthychild.org/>

## A safe environment for children is everyone's concern!

How can we help reduce environmental toxin exposure to children?

By learning about it...

By talking about it...

By starting to make changes in our everyday environment...

By making informed choices...

By working together...

I want nursing students to look at health promotion and prevention for children with a wide lens, and to encourage environmental risks assessments to be routine for each nurse working within maternal child health. The health of each child is a worldwide responsibility. Nurses can take leadership roles by initiating changes and promoting awareness so that children can grow, live, learn, and play in the safest environments possible.



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