



A monthly publication provided by your child's school in recognition of your role as a partner in education.

Resources for Families

How parents can help their child's brain develop properly

The most important influence on school success isn't homework, a particular curriculum or even the teacher. Researchers have found evidence that the biggest predictor of achievement in school – and in life – is experience in infancy and toddlerhood.

“Early experiences affect the development of brain architecture, which provides the foundation for all future learning, behavior, and health. Just as a weak foundation compromises the quality and strength of a house, adverse experiences early in life can impair brain architecture, with negative effects lasting into adulthood.” <http://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/brain-architecture/>

Babies are born with twice as many brain cells and synapses than adults have. Early experiences help shape the brain and preserve the cells and synapses. The surplus connections are pruned away in childhood and adolescence. <http://bit.ly/2azMygo> In other words, our brain follows the use-it-or-lose-it rule as it develops.

Parents are the first teachers

Parents have been talking to their babies for generations without understanding the long-term benefits of the communication. Creating positive feelings for young children and engaging in regular interactions will help brain development in young children.

You might not think baby talk and nonsensical books like Dr. Seuss can actually help your child. But what sounds like nonsense is important for your child's development. Babies learn social skills, communication patterns and vocabulary from chatter by their caregivers and exposure to books.

“Research shows that what kids learn in their first few years of life – and in their day-to-day conversations

with parents – can have lasting effects on their future success and health. Simple things like encouraging early math, reading, and language skills can lead to higher grades, a better chance of staying in school and going to college, fewer teen pregnancies, improved mental health, and even a longer life.”

<https://newsinhealth.nih.gov/issue/aug2016/Capsule2>

Brain-building activities

Relationships are essential for brain development. Activities that help shape the brain are most effective when they come from an adult who is significant to the child. Parents can find ideas for activities for infants and young children from many reputable science-based organizations; however, most parents naturally understand how to talk to their babies.

Communication skills: Serve and return

Two-way communication is an essential experience where young children reach out to adults with babbling, facial expressions and gestures. Adults respond in the same way. <http://bit.ly/2awdG57>

Building language skills

A language-rich environment makes a big difference in a child's ability to speak, read and write. Follow these tips to help your child develop early language skills.

Talking and language

Look at your child and talk to, with and around him or her during everyday activities around the house or on outings.

- Speak in your native language often.
- Pause to give your child a chance to respond in baby speak, and later in words and phrases.
- Encourage family and friends to model conversation by talking to each other while around your child.



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Reading and literacy

Read books to your child daily, starting at birth. Let children pick their own books at the library when they are old enough.

- Point to text and pictures while reading. Let your child touch the pages.
- Talk about what happened in the story and what might happen.
- Ask questions that start with who, what, when, why or how. Give your child a chance to answer with sounds or words.

<http://bit.ly/2aznb14>

For more information about supporting your child's early learning and development:

- Everyday Ways to Support Your Baby's and Toddler's Early Learning
<http://bit.ly/2aS9YCh>
- Getting Ready for School Begins at Birth: How to help your child learn in the early years
<http://bit.ly/2aS9ImZ>
- Healthy Baby, Healthy Brain – resources for parents: www.healthybabyhealthybrain.ca/
- Your baby's brain: How parents can support healthy development:
http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/your_babys_brain

Maintain a healthy, low-stress environment for your child

To build a healthy brain, babies need a stable home environment with routines. Scientists stress the importance of regular bedtime, a healthy diet and minimal screen time on televisions and devices.

Just as positive interactions can build brain connections, stressful interactions can limit them. Prolonged stress can have a long-term impact on brain development.

Extensive research on the biology of stress now shows that healthy development can be derailed by excessive or prolonged activation of stress response

systems in the body and brain. Such toxic stress can have damaging effects on learning, behaviour and health across the lifespan. <http://bit.ly/2awkr6U>

“Even very young infants can experience stress when the places they live in feel unsafe, or are frightening. ‘Toxic’ stress – which is much more serious than short-lived, everyday stress – is caused by persistent problems like extreme marital conflict, poverty, abuse, neglect, being exposed to violence, having a parent who misuses drugs or alcohol, or having a parent with an untreated mental illness. Toxic stress is harmful to your baby's developing brain. It can lead to physical, learning and emotional problems in childhood, and these problems can carry on right into adulthood.”

http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/your_babys_brain

If you are concerned about toxic stress in your baby's environment, visit with your child's doctor or reach out to another community source for support.