

So What is Brain Development?

September 2009

Parenting *Rules!*

Building a Child's Brain

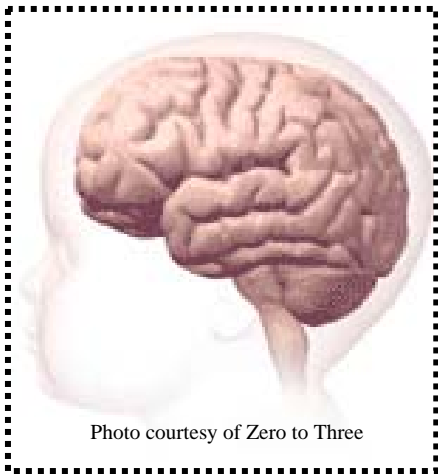


Photo courtesy of Zero to Three

Children grow more in their first three years than in any other time of their lives.

By age three most children have quadrupled their weight. They can speak in complete sentences and have already formed important relationships. But by far the most important development has been the one you cannot see; the development of his/her brain.

The human brain begins to develop before birth and will continue to grow and develop well into adulthood. The first three years of a child's life is when the most important growth takes place. It is the foundation upon which all other development will build upon.

Early childhood experiences have a major influence on the formation of the connections within the brain. In early childhood the child's brain is highly impressionable which helps them to soak up new information like a sponge.

On the negative side, the brain of a young child is vulnerable to negative situations such as neglect, abuse, malnutrition and stressful situations.

Parents and caregivers have the most influence on the development of a child's brain. Building a strong foundation within the child's brain very early on increases the chances of positive outcomes in the long run.

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Feeding Your Child's Brain

A child's diet plays a very important role in the development of their brain. During the first two years of life the brain is most affected by the quality of nutrition.

While breast milk offers the best source of nutrients for babies, formula containing iron can also support healthy brain development through the child's first year.

Children need a diet high in fat during their first two years. Whole cows milk can be introduced after the child's first birthday to provide the fat and protein necessary to support their developing brains.

After age two, with the advice and guidance of their child's doctor, parents should introduce a lower fat, balanced diet that will support healthy growth and encourage good eating habits into adulthood.



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The Learning Process



Since young children's brains are developing at a rapid rate, they need a **variety of learning experiences**. Through active interaction with parents, caregivers and other children they learn vocabulary, how to form relationships and problem solving skills.

While television, computers and video games can be a fun form of entertainment for children, it is important for parents to limit the amount of time their children spend doing these activities. A study conducted at Seattle Children's Research Institute found that television viewing can actually hinder a child's ability to learn vocabulary and interact with others. Watching television and videos is a passive, one way learning experience.

When it comes to putting your child in front of the television Dr. Dimitri Christakis at Seattle Children's Research Institute advises, *"If you absolutely need a break to take a shower or make dinner, then the risks are quite low. But if you are doing it because you think it's actually good for your child's brain, then you need to rethink that, because there is no evidence of benefit and certainly a risk of harm at high viewing levels."*

- Time Magazine March 3, 2009

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Strengthening Your Child's Brain

Parents and caregivers have a big impact on the healthy development of their children's brains.

Here are some things you can do to nurture your child's development:

Age 0-6 months

- Talk to your baby
- Sing and read to your baby
- Hold and touch your baby often
- Provide a stimulating environment

Age 6 – 12 months

- Imitate sounds that your baby makes
- Play simple games, like peek-a-boo
- Continue to do all those things you did with your child at age 0-6 months

Age 12 -24 months

- Read and sing to your baby
- Ask your child for hugs and kisses
- Play with large puzzles and blocks
- Encourage your child to move around a "baby safe" room
- Have your child pick out pictures in a book

Age 3 – 4 years

- Set limits on behavior and explain why they are necessary
- Read to your child and ask him/her simple questions about the story
- Use appropriate words to describe people, places and things
- Encourage your child to sort and match objects
- Teach your child songs
- Talk about the sequence of events, tell what comes next



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Resources for Parents

ZERO TO THREE

National Center for Infants, Toddlers and Families
2000 M St. NW, Suite 200 Washington, DC 20036
202-638-1144 www.zerotothree.org

KIDS FIRST, Inc.

5 Richmond Square Providence, RI 02906
401-751-4503 www.kidsfirstri.org

National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center

10530 Rosehaven St., Suite 400 • Fairfax, VA 22030
800-616-2242 <http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/poptopics/brain.html>

Time Magazine

Study: TV May Inhibit Babies' Language Development
By ALICE PARK Monday, Jun. 01, 2009
www.time.com/time/health/article/0,8599,1902209,00.html?iid=sphere-inline-sidebar

ABOUT PARENTING RULES! E-NEWS...



Prevent Child Abuse
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Please share this information with the
families in your programs. Thank you!