



## **EARLY CHILDHOOD BRAIN DEVELOPMENT**

After your child is born, their brain continues to develop. Your child's brain is a work in progress. It is shaped by all the experiences your child encounters throughout each day by using their senses-what your child sees, hears, smells, touches and tastes. What your child is exposed to during the early years shapes their brain development.

From birth to age six are particularly important years for brain development. In the first year your child's brain doubles in size. By age three their brain is twice as active as an adult's. In fact, by the age of six, your child's brain is 90% developed! During these years billions of brain cells make connections. How strong these connections are depends on their early experiences. Our brains work on the motto "Use it or lose it".

Parents, family members, caregivers and community can make a huge difference in early brain growth. Babies and young children learn best through warm, loving caregiving. By holding, talking, singing and reading to young children, connections in the brain form – eventually trillions of connections. If a child cannot explore their surroundings, talk to people, be talked to, and experiment with a variety of things, their brain will stop being active.

Some of the things parents and community can do to keep your child's mind active and making connections are:

1. Breastfeed your child if possible. Breast milk is the ideal food for brain development.
2. Watch for what your child needs. If they are ill, hurt or upset, a warm response lets them know they are worthy, loved and important.
3. Protect your child from harm. By using consistent appropriate discipline and setting limits, they will feel less stress and know what is expected of them.
4. Talk, read and sing to your child
5. Encourage safe exploring and playing.
6. Teach your child what they are feeling and words to describe their feelings.
7. Have a predictable schedule so they know what to expect and can count on you.
8. Provide a nutritious diet.
9. Limit television because actively doing something with your child is better for learning.
10. Above all show your child you love them and form attachments with them.

So touch, talk, read, smile, sing, count and play with your child. It will help their brain development and help prepare them for a lifetime of learning.

### References

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American Association of Pediatrics. (2010). *A parent's guide to building resilience in children and teens: Giving your child roots and wings*. Retrieved June 2010 from

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