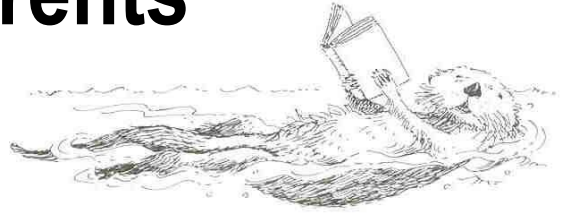


# Early Brain Development: Tips for Parents



Babies' brains continue to grow and develop after they are born. The first five years are a very important time for brain development. What happens during this time shapes the way your child learns, thinks and behaves for the rest of his life. Here are many ways to help your child's brain develop in healthy ways.

## Be warm, loving, and responsive.

- How you bond with your baby in these early years will affect the way his brain works and grows. A secure bond with your child will help him handle the stress of daily life, not just today but in the future.
- Your child learns to trust the world by how you respond to him. React to your child's needs with warmth and care.

## Respond to your child's cues.

- Cues are the sounds and faces that babies make and the ways they move. Cues, such as crying, are how your baby speaks to you. They give clues to what he needs.
- By learning and reading your baby's cues, you will help him form secure bonds with you and others.
- When your child smiles, smile back; when she cries, offer comfort; when she is hungry, feed her.

## Talk, sing, and read to your child.

- Tell stories about daily events.
- Read to your child everyday.
- Sing songs about the people and places your child knows.
- Describe what is going on during daily routines, "See how Daddy brushes his teeth."

## Create routines and rituals.

- Daily routines and rituals help children feel secure. They help children know what to expect and to get ready for the next part of their day.
- Have a routine for naps and bedtime. Try singing a song and closing the curtains at naptime. Before bed, hug all family members and read a story to your child.
- Research shows children with daily routines do better in school.

## Create a safe place for your child to explore and play.

- Babies explore to learn about the world around them. Children learn through playing.
- Remove harmful objects and make safe areas that your baby can explore.
- Be there when your child needs to return to ask you questions or just to feel secure.

## Pick and choose TV shows with care.

- TV can't teach a baby how to talk. They learn by hearing *your* words and making eye contact with you.
- TV viewing for children under two can harm proper brain growth.
- Be involved in your children's TV habits.
- Don't use TV or videos as a babysitter.

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# Early Brain Development

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## **Pick and choose TV shows with care, continued**

- Choose programs with your child and watch with them. Talk about what you watch.
- Limit entertaining through TV, videos, and Internet to 1-2 hours per day.

## **Use discipline to teach and guide.**

- As children explore their world, they need you to set limits.
- Discipline is teaching, not punishing.
- Offer consistent and loving adult guidance.
- Never hit or shake a child. The only thing a child learns from spanking is fear, disgrace and rage.
- Distract and redirect a child when she is doing something you don't like.
- Instead of telling her just what she can't do, tell her what she can do. "It's not okay to jump on the bed, you can jump on the floor or outside instead."
- Notice and tell your child when she is doing something right.

## **Know that each child is unique.**

- Children grow at different rates.
- Parents who learn and respond to a child's cues and clues will raise children with good self-esteem.
- Your attitude toward your child will affect how he feels about himself.
- Give concrete praise. Say, "I like how you put your shoes away" instead of "good boy." This helps a child to see the links between their actions and your response.

## **Choose quality childcare and stay involved.**

- Visit different childcare providers. Observe how staff responds to and cares for the babies and children.
- Seek a provider who responds promptly and with warmth to your baby or child's needs.
- Choose someone who is eager to learn about your child, will give one-on-one time, will play with your child and let her explore.
- Watch your child for cues about the care being given.
- Find a setting that is clean and safe.
- Check references.

## **Take care of yourself.**

- Parents and caregivers need care too.
- When you are tired, busy with other tasks, or depressed, it is harder to meet the needs of young children.
- When you feel overwhelmed, take care of yourself. Reach out and get some help. Swap childcare with a friend. Ask family members, friends, childcare and health care providers and others to help you foster your child's healthy development.

### **For More Information**

- **Your health care provider**
- **Children's Resource Line:**  
**(206) 987-2500 or 1-866-987-2500**  
toll-free Washington, Alaska, Montana, Idaho
- **Check out the Early Learning Web site at**  
[www.earlylearningofwa.org](http://www.earlylearningofwa.org).
- [www.seattlechildrens.org](http://www.seattlechildrens.org)

This handout has been reviewed by clinical staff at Children's Hospital. However, your child's needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your child's health care provider.

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