

# Parenting Together

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## Children's Brain Development and Health

### Early Brain Development and Health

The early years of a child's life are very important for later health and development. During their early years, young children's brains make 1 million new neural connections every second! At birth, an infant's brain is about 30% of the weight of an adult's brain. By two, it is 70% of an adult's brain and 90% by age five. That means a significant amount of brain development is happening during those first five years.

Even though the brain continues to develop and change into adulthood, the early years help build the foundation for future learning, health, and life success. How the brain develops depends on many external, non-gene related factors, including:

- **Proper nutrition starting in pregnancy (healthful foods and folic acid)**
- **Exposure to toxins or infections**
- **The child's experiences with other people and the world**

Nurturing and responsive relationships with parents and caregivers is the key to supporting healthy brain development. There are many things parents and caregivers can do to support healthy brain development, beginning before birth and continuing throughout a child's life.



### The Importance of Early Childhood Experiences for Brain Development

Children are born ready to learn! In many ways, they depend on parents, family members, and other caregivers as their first teachers to learn and develop the skills needed to manage their emotions and behaviors, make good decisions, develop critical thinking, and to lead healthy lives.

How the brain grows is strongly affected by experiences with other people and the world, in general. Children grow and learn best in a safe environment where they have adults they can trust and rely on to be there for them, respond sensitively to their emotions and needs, and provide opportunities for play, exploration, learning, and fun.

Parents and other caregivers can support healthy brain growth in everyday ways by:

- describing what you see around you and sharing your inner thoughts out loud
- having conversations with your child and making space for their babbles, coos, and words
- playing games like "I Spy" that require children to think about the world around them, while building their vocabulary
- singing songs and reading stories, even before children are able to understand the words you use



## Protecting Children's Brains from Stress

Stress is a normal part of life. Children can experience stress in many ways, such as when meeting new people or visiting new places. When children have caregivers they trust who help them manage their stress, stress can be positive and help them learn and grow. Exposure to more serious stress and trauma can have long-term negative effects on the brain and body when children do not have supportive relationships to help them talk about their feelings and problem-solve.

The good news is, spending time with people we care about and who care about us, releases hormones that actually heal the damaging impacts of stress. So keep your child's brain and body healthy through hugs, cuddles, talking, playing, and give your child's brain the best possible start!



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## The Book Nook

Reading to your child is one of the best things you can do to promote their healthy brain development.

We hope you can enjoy some of our monthly books picks with your little one(s)!

*The Thingamabob*  
by Il Sung Na

*Press Here*  
by Hervé Tullet

*All Around the World / Todo el mundo*  
by Elizabeth Gordon Scanlon

*The Carpenter*  
By Bruna Barros

*Daddy, Me, and the Magic Hour*  
by Laura Krauss

*Near Far*  
by Silvia Borando

Because children's brains are still growing, they are especially vulnerable to traumatic head injuries, infections, or toxins, such as lead. Ensuring that parents and caregivers have access to healthy foods and places to live and play that are healthy and safe for their child can help them provide more nurturing care.



For more information on brain development, check out this article:  
<http://www.urbanchildinstitute.org/why-0-3/baby-and-brain>

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## References

Baby's Brain Begins Now: Conception to Age 3

<http://www.urbanchildinstitute.org/why-0-3/baby-and-brain>

The Growing Brain: From Birth to 5 Years Old, A Training Curriculum for Early Childhood

<https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/1831-the-growing-brain-from-birth-to-5-years-old-a-training-curriculum-for-early-childhood-professionals>

Early Brain Development and Health

<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/childdevelopment/early-brain-development.html>

Brain Architecture

<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/brain-architecture/>

