



Mental health in infancy and early childhood affects social functioning, psychological well-being, and physical health throughout life.



The Metlife Zero to Three Podcast Series, **Little Kids, Big Questions**, consists of twelve podcasts and can be found at <http://www.zerotothree.org/about-us/funded-projects/parenting-resources/podcast/>. The podcasts were developed in response to a survey conducted by Zero to Three, asking parents of children three and under what topics they would like to hear more information about. The following article introduces each of the twelve podcasts and highlights important points discussed in each. The podcasts have been developed in interview format and parents who are auditory learners may find them a great resource.

Creating Healthy Connections Nurturing Brain Development From 0-3. Alison Gopnik

Alison Gopnik stresses that from the time children are born they are learning and interacting with their world. Learning in the early years occurs best when parents and caregivers are able to provide a safe environment with many opportunities for the baby to interact and explore. Gopnik stresses that parents do not have to have special learning tools and toys in their home. Both exploratory and pretend play are the best learning tools for young children. Child-led play is also very important.

Tuning On Tuning Out: The Influence of Media on Young Children's Environment. Ellen Wartella

Ellen Wartella examines the difference between passive and active learning. When children play with toy computers, phones or televisions, they are still actively learning. When small children are set in front of a TV and are not able to interact with it, they are passively learning.

Infants who are 18 months old can make sense of what they see on the television and can interact with programming. When watching educational programs, this can help increase young children's problem solving skills. However, parents have to be aware that there are several detriments to watching TV at a young age. Perhaps the most obvious one is that watching TV decreases opportunities for human interaction. As much as possible, it is important that parents actively engage with their children.

As well, many families have televisions playing in the background continually. This can distract children from play and interaction. Loud noises, such as yelling and frightening images, can have a negative impact on children. Wartella recommends that the TV be on for a maximum of 2 hours when a child under the age of 3 is awake.

Our Families, Ourselves: How Our History Influences How We Raise Our Children. Daniel Siegel

Parents often say that they will not parent the way their parents did... but yet find in some ways they still do.

One way to change patterns is to consciously try to parent pro-actively not re-actively. For example, if a child asks for an ice cream cone before dinner, a reactive response might be "Quit whining. You know

you don't get dessert before dinner. Go away and stop bugging me." A proactive response may be "Why don't you help me set the table and after dinner we can cuddle and enjoy a scoop of ice cream together".

Night Night: Talking about Babies, Toddlers and Sleep. Jodi Mindell

Being sleep deprived is difficult for all parents and babies. Putting babies to sleep can be frustrating and hard for parents to handle. Parents' expectations and understanding about children's sleep are often different from what is happening.

It is important for parents to know that there are no set sleep patterns for newborns. They sleep on and off all day and night. Also, there is a high degree of variability between newborns. Perhaps most important to know is that until the age of three months babies do not have the hormones that indicate the difference between night and day. Therefore, they will not be able to regulate to a night time routine.

After a baby reaches three months of age, parents can start to influence their child's sleep patterns. This begins by developing a night time routine. The night time routine should not include using nursing to put the child to sleep. Feed first and then follow a routine. This helps the baby learn how to fall asleep.

Try to put babies to bed awake so that they are learning to put themselves to sleep. Babies wake up two to six times per night. Because of this, babies need to learn to independently put themselves back to sleep.

Early Experiences Count - How Emotional Development Unfolds Starting at Birth. Ross Thompson

Parents sometimes have a difficult time understanding that babies have a wide range of emotions. Not only do babies have emotions, they are also attentive to and sensitive to the feelings of adults that they are attached to. They pick up cues of their caregivers' emotions both verbally and non-verbally.

Caregivers also often expect that by the age of two or three, children should be able to control their emotions. At this young age, a child is not able to do this yet. The parent role is as the modulator and validator. Parents need to be able to stay calm and centered.

Beyond 'Use Your Words!': How Babies Begin to Develop Self Control in the First Three Years. Brenda Jones-Harden

Self-control is the child's ability to regulate his/her emotions and behaviours. What is considered appropriate depends on the situation and this can be difficult for young children to understand. The following also impacts children's ability to self-control: age, temperament, attention, empathy, memory, self-regulation, environmental context, the demands on the child at the moment, and stressful events.

Across Generations: The Role of Grandparents in Young Children's Lives. Barbara Bowman

Grandparents provide unique opportunities for children to experience unconditional love from someone who is not their primary caregiver. Often children are able to connect with their grandparents over activities that are special and not always part of their daily routine. Grandparent-child relationships have to be cultivated. They are not just a given based on family ties.



Prevention Matters 2013: Social Drivers of Childhood Health.

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Feeding Baby and Mind: Nurturing Healthy Eating Habits from the Start. Daniel Kessier

Feeding is more than how much a child eats or what they eat. It is a time to share in a social environment. Ideally, feedings become part of the message "I am loved, I am safe, I am comforted, and my needs will be met". Feeding can also be a teachable moment; helping children learn how to communicate, self-regulate, imitate, and develop fine motor skills.

Feeding needs to be a positive experience for both the caregiver and the child. The feeding relationship begins right away, whether the choice is to breastfeed or bottle feed. Parents need to be supported so they feel comfortable with their decision.

Daddy, Pipi, Papa or Baba: The Influence of Fathers in Young Children's Development. Kyle Pruett

As times have changed, fathers have more expectations placed on them to play an active role from conception of the baby, through childbirth, and the child raising years. Fathers are expected to co-parent. Fathers often feel reluctant to get in there. There is a fear of doing what they do not know. However, more and more fathers are willing to try.

Fathers are more often physically engaging with children than mothers. Fathers also are more likely to carry children facing the world so that they can experience the world. Fathers also often help children learn to manage frustration and problem solve instead of offering to soothe.

There is evidence that babies as old as six months of age react to different parenting styles in positive ways. Real co-parenting is a back and forth...using the skills and styles of both parents. Talking about things that might come up in the toddler years during pregnancy is helpful and can serve as conversation points later when things feel out of control.

Father involvement has been linked to these positive outcomes for the child:

- Less likely to be involved with justice
- Less likely to choose violent problem solving
- Delay in first sexual contact
- Taking initiative
- Staying in school longer
- Higher verbal performance scores
- Girls: more problem solving, analytical, and math skills

Shhh!! It's OK: Coping with Crying Babies and Toddlers. Pamela High

Caregivers need to understand that crying is a baby's first form of communication. This is a way that babies tell their caregiver their needs. Babies hit their peak of crying at one month to three months...right when supports to the mother are decreasing.

Parents need to remember that when they are feeling frustrated or helpless because their baby is crying, it is OK to put the baby down in a safe place for a few minutes and give yourself a break. Never shake a baby. It is important to call in supports if needed.

I Like Me!': Developing Self Esteem in the Early Years. Jersey Pawl

The foundation of self-esteem begins the day that babies are born...within the context of their caregiving relationships. It is very important to let young children have some control in their environment and master tasks. Caregivers have to learn when to give assistance to a child and when to stand back. Limit setting is another way to help children develop self-esteem. Learning to deal with disappointment, sadness and frustration in a safe setting also helps children to build competence.

Please feel free to distribute this information to others. If you or someone you know is interested in the network, please contact Lee Hinton at: lhinton@preventioninstitute.sk.ca.

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