



Your Young Child's Brain: How Does it Develop?

The brain grows and changes a lot during early childhood (0-6 years). As a young child grows, brain connections become stronger. These connections help the brain's different parts communicate with each other and with the rest of the body.

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How can I make a difference in my young child's brain development?

Because there is so much growth in the brain during early childhood, parents and caregivers have an opportunity to influence brain development in good ways and in bad ways.

Just as parents and caregivers feed their children healthy foods so that their bodies can grow and develop to their fullest potential, parents and caregivers can also provide healthy experiences so that their children's brains develop to their fullest. A child's brain develops in a "use-dependent" fashion. This means that experiences in early childhood shape the way the brain grows, works, and communicates. The more stimulating and loving experiences a child is provided with, the more influence these experiences will have on the child's brain development.

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How can I help my child's brain develop?

- Love my child no matter what (unconditional love)
- Learn how to behave in a way that will promote secure attachment
- Provide safe, appropriate touch through cuddling, hugging, holding, feeding, and rocking
- Respond to my child's needs in a consistent and sensitive manner
- Create routines for day-to-day activities
- Provide consistent care
- Provide new experiences and environments to safely explore
- Be a safe haven that my child can return to after exploring
- Follow and respond to my child's cues regarding when to play and learn and when to be calm and restful
- Praise my child, being specific about what the praise is for and why
- Set boundaries and rules and reinforce these in a calm, kind, and respectful way
- Encourage play, movement, sounds, and songs