

How can I help my child's brain develop?

Parents and caregivers are the number one influence on a child. Here are just a few of the many ways you can encourage healthy brain development, even before your child gets to school:



Create nurturing relationships

The connections and relationships that children have with their caregivers form the foundation of brain development. A child who living in an environment with supportive relationships and consistent routines is more likely to have better cognitive, social, and emotional development.



Tips: Look for opportunities to build trusting relationships by sharing books, telling stories, singing songs, and talking with your child.



Learn to play, and play to learn

When children play, they learn about the world around them. Playing helps children develop the three core life skills needed to thrive in today's world: critical thinking, complex problem-solving, and creativity.



Help your child develop their executive functions

Before they can learn on their own, children need to be taught how to learn and manage their behaviour. Adults can support this through meaningful interactions and direct instruction!



Tip: Encourage your child to be reflective. Show them what reflection sounds and looks like, too! This will help them become more self-aware and able to recognize and eventually regulate their thoughts, feelings, and behaviour.

Keep track of their development and seek help if you are concerned

It can be hard to know whether your child is on track developmentally or not. The best way to find out is to check with professionals. Early intervention is the key to addressing developmental issues and helping a child achieve their full potential.

Check out www.earlyyearsnurturingbda.org, a free resource which helps parents recognise areas of concern and indicates helpful goals that caregivers should strive towards. Browse our list of evidence-based research, international best practises and local service providers that you can contact for any questions you may have about your child's development.

For more ways you can support a child's healthy development, visit earlyyearsnurturingbda.org



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Early Childhood Development: An Introduction for Parents & Caregivers



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How do babies' brains work?

During the first few years of life, a baby's brain is forming billions of cells called neurons. These neurons appear in different parts of the brain that are responsible for different things, like movement, emotions, language, and more.

When these neurons connect and communicate with each other, they create synapses. These carry signals and messages between the different parts of the brain, which is how we are able to function.

The more a synapse is used, the stronger it gets and the faster it can connect to other areas of the brain. For example, the more a child does math calculations, the faster their brain gets at doing math. The reverse is also true: if a synapse goes unused, it weakens, and the brain gets slower at that particular activity or skill.



Key takeaway: The more you use a synapse, the faster and better it becomes at connecting to other areas of the brain. The brain sees that it needs those circuit connections and makes them stronger and more efficient. As a result, they work better the next time you need them!

Why is the zero to three period so important for brain development?

The first three years of a child's life are the most sensitive time for the brain. During this time, children have the greatest capacity for learning and adapting. There are a few key reasons for this:

1. Rapid neuron growth: At this age, the brain is rapidly forming billions of neurons – and building over one million connections between them per second. This is how children learn and adapt: the more connections there are between neurons and the more they're used, the better the brain gets at learning. After this period, neuron growth slows down considerably: a two-year-old's brain has 50% more synapses than an adult's brain!

2. Neuroplasticity: This is what we call the brain's flexibility when it comes to adapting to new experiences and learning. As we get older, the brain becomes less flexible, and it becomes harder (but not impossible) to change these pathways. During the zero to three period, the brain is more flexible, adaptable, and capable of learning than it ever will be again.

Key takeaway: In this 0-3 phase, the brain goes through rapid neuronal growth. These neuron connections are growing so fast that the brain is forming over one million of these neuron connections every second. That's why this is the best time to help children develop and use these connections as much as possible!

3. Executive Functions (EFs): EFs help us manage our own behaviour and learning. For children, important examples include the ability to control themselves, keep information in their brains and think about multiple things at the same time. From the ages of 0-3, children need adult support to properly develop these skills. With the right support, children will grow to be better at controlling their behaviour, making good choices, and managing their own learning.

4. Growth Mindsets: A mindset is what we believe about our own intelligence and ability to learn. Children with GROWTH MINDSETS believe that everyone can learn, grow, and improve their abilities through hard work, patience, and self-compassion! These types of children seek out challenges, and usually end up doing better in school than those with fixed mindsets. Children with FIXED MINDSETS believe their intelligence levels cannot be changed, no matter what they do. Because of this, they might avoid challenges, which harms their development. Helping children develop healthy mindsets from a young age will positively impact their motivation, learning, self-control, and future success.

Growth Mindset



Children with a growth mindset know that abilities can grow with effort

Fixed Mindset



Children with a fixed mindset think that abilities cannot change.