

Your BABY'S BRAIN...

THE IMPORTANCE OF BRAIN DEVELOPMENT IN THE FIRST FIVE YEARS AND HOW PARENTS CAN BE EMPOWERED TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR IT!

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I am in the market for a new desktop computer but I keep putting it off because as exciting as it is to have a newer and faster piece of technology, I know it is a lot of work to download all the essential software I need to make it functional for me. When the new computer gets unpacked and set up, I really can't use it yet. I have so many programs I use on a regular basis and without them; the computer would be of no benefit to me.

When I think about this daunting task of downloading all that essential information to a new computer, it reminds me of our newborn babies and all the information they will learn in just the first few years of life. They are so much like that brand new computer, as they come to us with a brain that is like a hard drive with no software downloaded yet... and without the right programs, they just won't be as functional or as successful as they could be!

Just what do we mean by all that? Well, it helps to understand a bit about the brain and how it develops in our little ones.

and YOU!



BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

Anyone who has seen a child grow from newborn to toddler knows how quickly it happens and how extreme the changes are! These radical changes aren't just with their physical development, however!

The brain is the only organ, at birth, that isn't fully developed. The brain, unlike our other organs, has a lot of work to do after birth compared to organs like our heart, lungs, liver and stomach. They all function exactly the same way they do the day we are born until the day we die. Our brains, however, start life much like that computer does...as a blank slate waiting for life to introduce to them the necessary skills, learning and experiences that will form their cognitive, social, character and physical traits.

Just like physical growth, the most rapid brain changes and developments happen in the first five years of life. During no other time will our bodies or our minds change as much or be able to take in as much learning. In fact, humans learn more in the first five years than from the rest of our years combined! That is mind boggling, isn't it?

So, as we think about the importance of brain development in the first five years, we also have to ask ourselves, who is going to be responsible for downloading all this software to our children? You!

It may sound daunting, but in reality, healthy brain development can be done successfully by parents! We have all we need to give our children what they need.



UNCONDITIONAL LOVE: Loving our children is key to giving them the encouragement and safety they need to be successful. Loving on our children can be the most important thing we do. Children who feel the love of their parents through safety, nourishment, consistent routines, encouragement and discipline have less stress than those who don't. Stress, even in babies, is linked to delays in brain development.

COMMUNICATION: From the moment our children are born, we must be engaging them in communication, even before they can recognize any words. Language is a large component towards healthy brain development and in fact, studies have shown that the crucial difference for success in life boils down to the number of words a child hears from a parent early in life.

INTERACTIVE PLAY: A child who is engaged in play based learning has the ability to be exposed to all the essential skills and knowledge that they need to learn in the first five years of life. No technique, other than interactive play, can expose children to all that they need to know. Play based learning is so much more than placing a toy in front of a child as the toy is really just a catalyst to all that can be learned during play. Adults should be communicating, sharing enthusiasm and taking advantage of teachable moments within the playtime. Children can initiate what they want to learn and adults can follow their lead!



So many essential skills are developed through play and it is through this kind of learning that babies, toddlers and preschoolers can develop healthy brains for success later in life. We all want our children to be independent, successful and intelligent. Play based interaction is the only method proven to continuously give our children all they need during those essential first five years, so why wouldn't we get down on the floor with our children and play alongside them?

These skills, when taught in meaningful contexts in safe, supportive environment, are believed to be able to set a strong foundation for success later in life. This early stage in life is prime for teaching children the following:

- Motor Skills
- Communication
- Expressive and receptive language
- Social Skills
- Emotional stability
- Empathy
- Love
- Delayed Gratification
- Adaptability
- Behavior Management
- Tactile and Sensory development
- Visual discrimination and abilities
- Abstract thinking
- Symbolism
- Following directions
- Winning vs losing
- Short term and long term memory
- Attention and focus
- Persistence
- Follow through
- Cause and effect
- Thinking ahead
- Independence
- Self Help skills
- Hand-Eye coordination
- Cognitive Skills
- Coping skills
- Imagination

See that? Although brain development during the first five years is essential for later success, all parents have the ability and skills necessary to do it!

Carrie Lupoli is an educational and parenting consultant. She owns and operates educational and parenting centers in both Singapore and in the United States. A spokesperson for Mattel Fisher Price in South East Asia, Carrie speaks regularly to parents about the importance of meaningful engagement with children through play. She also serves as the "Chief Mum" for a family of parenting websites (www.mumcentre.com). Carrie and her husband are raising two elementary age fashionistas, Grace and Ellie, and a rambunctious puppy named Raleigh.

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