

BRAIN DEVELOPMENT: GAMES FOR LEARNING

The early years of a child's life are a critical time for brain development. What happens—or doesn't happen—during this time makes a big difference in the child's later life. As a parent you can do many things to help your child's brain develop optimally. Simple things like playing and talking with your baby make connections between brain cells. Below is some information about brain growth along with suggestions of "brain boosting" games and activities for you to help your child be ready and excited to learn.

Safety and Security

Before your baby is ready to learn, he must trust that he is safe and secure. Respond to your infant's cries and try to figure out what he or she needs. A baby feels stress when caregivers do not respond to him. Stress can slow brain development.



Nutrition

- Nutrition begins before birth. Eating healthy foods and avoiding alcohol and drugs during pregnancy will lay a good foundation for your baby's developing brain.
- Breastfeed your baby. Breastfed babies receive nutrition that was made just for their growing needs. Breastmilk has the perfect amounts of the right fats, proteins and other nutrients.
- When your baby begins eating solids, make it a multisensory experience. Talk about the colors, textures, scents, and tastes of the foods your child eats.

Vision

During the first two to four months, the brain pathways for babies' vision are being laid rapidly.

- Provide your baby with bright, colorful objects to view. Slowly move the objects so your baby can follow them with his or her eyes. Talk to your baby about what he or she is viewing.
- Simple black and white objects are also very appealing to young babies. Create your own patterns with markers on blank cards.

If you need additional information, contact the Family Health Line at 1-800-451-BABY (2229)

Language

Children whose parents talk to them frequently have better language skills and vocabularies than children of parents who seldom talk to them.

- Talk to your baby a lot (even before he or she is born). Don't worry if he understands your words, this will come with time.
- Read aloud to your child. Start with simple cloth or cardboard books that your child can hold. As your child grows older, involve him or her more in the selection of books. Let your child "read" to you.
- Do not substitute television or radio for your words. Language with eye contact and interaction is what helps your child's brain grow.

Touch

Stimulate your baby's sense of touch.

- Provide different textures for your baby to feel. Help your baby touch the surfaces and objects. Talk to your baby about what he or she is feeling: warm, soft, fuzzy, rough, cold.
- Show your baby how different actions feel: touch, pat, swing hands, hold hands. Name the actions.

Child Care

To ensure healthy development, babies need sensitive, loving care and stimulating experiences. Choose a child care provider who will interact warmly with your baby one-on-one. Look for:

- a safe, clean environment
- a low baby-to-adult ratio
- a provider who understands how children grow and develop
- a rich variety of age-appropriate toys



If you have concerns about your child's development, ask your healthcare provider. Children with delays do best when they receive help early.

Excerpted with permission from the University of Georgia. Bales, D. (1998). Building Baby's Brain: The Basics. Athens, GA: University of Georgia, College of Family and Consumer Sciences



Healthy Start Coalition of Miami-Dade
701 S.W. 27th Avenue, Suite 1401, Miami, FL 33135
Tel (305) 541-0210 ▪ Fax (305) 541-0213
www.hscmd.org