

Healthy Brain Development Established In Baby's First Three Years

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LEESPORT (Berks Co.) — "Talk to your baby," is advice parents of newborns often hear.

But too many parents feel silly talking to a baby. Parenting makes them uncomfortable because they haven't observe parent-child interactions or because they do not realize the importance of connecting with a newborn from the earliest moments.

Studies show that 90 percent of brain development occurs in the first three years of life. Healthy brain development is dependent on healthy connections between parents and child. Children who have established a firm attachment to at least one parent or caregiver will do better throughout life.

For this reason the first three years of a baby's life will impact him or her forever. A child's emotional development and ability to cope later in life is dependent upon the interaction between parent and child during infancy.

For the important job of parenting, many parents are unpre-

pared. Although parenting courses are available, it's difficult to convince parents of the need to participate in classes.

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania wants to provide tools to help parents raise healthy, loving children right from the beginning. A comprehensive set of resources has been established with the national "I Am Your Child" Foundation. A set of six videos is available free to each parent with a child under three years of age. The videos provide information, resources, and parenting tips about child development, health, nutrition, safety, discipline, and literacy.

Too often parents believe they must provide their child with lots of toys and things to help them grow intellectually. But research shows that time and eye contact, not things, are what children need.

The first video in the set helps parents understand why the first years of life are so important for a child's healthy development. The video provides a wide range of recommendations to help parents promote healthy development.

But the videos don't simply offer suggestions such as "Talk to your baby," but shows parents and caregivers interacting with babies.

Babies are ready to make contact with people right from the beginning, but definitely prefer their own parents. The video showed a newborn placed between a mother and a stranger, who both talk at the same time. Invariably, the baby turns toward the sound of his or her mother's voice. The same experiment was done with a father and stranger. Again, the baby's head turned toward the sound of the father's voice.

Touching, stroking, massaging, and cuddling a baby stimulates the brain.

Talking with a baby encourages a child to talk earlier and more often. It isn't that parents need to be saying something profound. Simply describe what you are doing while working or when diapering, dressing, and feeding.

Use the whole world as a classroom. Name things you see along the way when traveling in the car. Talk about items while placing them in your shopping cart. Explain the difference between big and small, heavy and light. Demonstrate inside and outside, up and down.

Toddlers love when you sing silly songs and make up your own verses.

Reading should be interactive. You do not need to finish the book or read every page. Keep it short and simple. Don't worry about your baby skipping pages when turning pages of the book, or tearing pages or trying to put the book in their mouth. The video explains that this behavior is normal for that age group. The purpose of reading to babies is to encourage them to develop a love for books and reading.

Use different voices and expressions when reading to children. Ask them questions about the pictures and the story.

"Don't push or overwhelm a child by correcting a child in the proper way to hold a book or turn the pages. Stop an activity when your baby shows a lack of interest or is tired.

Cues to watch in a baby can help a parent to discern whether or not a child is tired or over stimulated.

Children learn by repetition. Create routines and rituals, especially at mealtimes and bedtimes. Routines provide a sense of security for children.

Provide a safe, colorful, stimulating environment where your baby is safe to explore and learn.

Discipline teaches limits with love. The purpose of discipline is to help your child learn to discipline his or herself. The video provides examples of disciplining. To stop young children from a harmful activity, often the only thing that is needed is to redirect their attention or remove them from a situation.

Relax. Enjoy your baby.

Even parents who know the basics of child caring can learn from the videos. It's like any job, the more you learn, the better parent you'll be.

The videos provide useful information, resources, and parenting tips about child development, health and nutrition, safety, discipline, and literacy.

Mothers who have babies in the hospital are sent a letter from the governor offering them a free set of the videos. If you did not receive a letter and qualify for the free set, call 1-800-9860.



It's never too early to begin reading to your baby. During the first months and years of life, a child's experiences with language and literacy form the basis for his or her later success as readers and learners.



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Whenever you change your baby's clothes, spend a few extra minutes talking to her or him while making eye contact.

Kids Need Time And Attention

STATE COLLEGE (Centre Co.) — The life of a working parent can be hectic and stressful; trying to balance family and work. Children can experience stress from busy schedules, holiday events, and even from the things they see on television.

Children need time and attention to teach them the skills necessary to cope with exciting and stressful situations.

Parents and child care providers can help children by:

- Spending "one-one-one" time daily with your child;
- Talking about his/her feelings;
- Keeping routines and schedules the same;
- Praising the child for something well done;

- Doing play activities with clay, water, and sand;
- Using art, music, puppets, pretend play, and writing as ways to express feelings;
- Making sure children understand what you expect of them;

• Taking time to laugh together;

• Having children help with cooking;

• Making sure there is enough time each day for playing and reading.

Caregivers can receive free materials and information by contacting the Penn State Cooperative Extension Better Kid Care office at 1-800-452-9108 or by visiting www.betterkidcare.psu.edu.

Safe And Sound Kids

STATE COLLEGE (Centre Co.) — Children need to be "safe and sound" while parents are at work. When looking for a child care provider, check the following to help determine if the environment is safe:

- Home or center is bright and clean, including eating areas, bathrooms, and diaper changing areas;
- Children are instructed to wash their hands before meals, when handling food, and after bathroom or diapering routines;
- Toys and play equipment are well suited for the age of your child and in good condition;
- Electrical outlets are equipped with safety covers;
- There are enough adults to supervise the children. Additional supervisors are needed with young children;
- Outdoor play area is fenced;
- Outdoor play equipment is not rusty or have sharp edges;
- Arts and crafts materials are non-toxic;
- Cleaning materials and medication are stored separately in locked cabinets in the original or a labeled container;
- Emergency numbers are posted near the telephone;
- Smoke alarms are operational;
- First-aid kit is not accessible to children;
- Fire drills are scheduled as required;
- Formal written policies are in place for allowing your child to leave with someone other than a parent or guardian if necessary.

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