

Ease Your Mind and Learn What Your Baby Wants You to Know!

By Deborah McNelis
M.Ed. Founder, Brain Insights

~ ~ ~

Smashwords Edition

Copyright © 2017 Deborah McNelis – Brain Insights

All rights reserved, including the right to reproduce this guide or portions thereof in any form whatsoever.

Smashwords Edition, License Notes

This ebook is licensed for your personal enjoyment only. This ebook may not be re-sold or given away to other people. If you would like to share this book with another person, please purchase an additional copy for each recipient. If you're reading this book and did not purchase it, or it was not purchased for your use only, then please return to Smashwords.com and purchase your own copy. Thank you for respecting the hard work of this author.

Table of Contents

Introduction

The Brain Is Experience Dependent

Creating Positive Experiences in Every Day Life

Warm Responsive Care

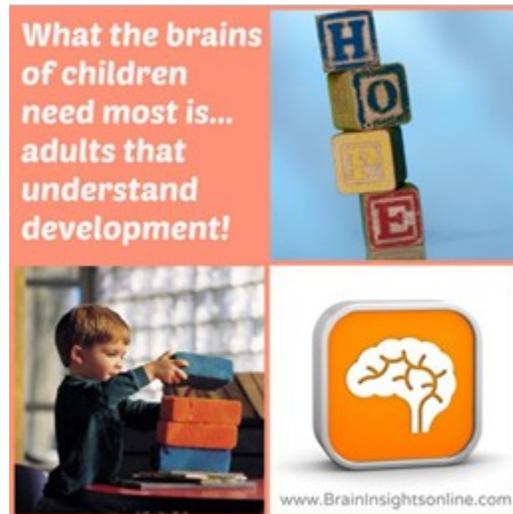
Direct Interactive Language

Play in a Safe and Healthy Environment

Reducing Overstimulation and Creating Calm for Brains

Summary: Easing Your Mind

Introduction



Your baby's brain is far from being fully developed at birth. It amazingly continues to develop until about the age of 25. It is extremely valuable to realize that the early months and years are critical to the way in which your baby's brain will develop. This important time contributes greatly to well-being in life.

The term "brain development" refers to much more than influencing how smart your child will be. It is referring to the actual physical growth that takes place in the brain. The first 3 years of your baby's life are the time for the most rapid brain growth which influences not only learning, but relationships, self-perception and overall health as well.

Recent research findings estimate that the brain of your baby may be developing connections at a rate of 1 million per second. The wonderful news is, because you are informed and caring, this provides you with the wonderful opportunity to have a very positive influence on this development.

The Brain Is Experience Dependent

A growing brain is influenced of course by genetics, but additionally the types of experiences your baby has makes an incredible difference. In the absence of experiences, a brain will not grow. It is dependent on experiences to make the connections between the estimated 100 billion brain cells your baby had at birth. The experiences your baby has in the first few months and years creates needed connections between brain cells and as a result forms an important basic foundation for continued development and learning.



Nutrition, sleep, regular routines, physical activity, direct interactive language, play, feelings of safety and predictable nurturing experiences with you and other caring adults influences the way in which brain pathways are created. These optimal experiences directly contribute to a brain that is healthy, ready to get along with others, and is eager for continuous learning.

However, constant exposure to stress, limited stimulation, poor nutrition, chaos and lack of a consistent nurturing relationship all create a brain that is “wired” in a way that leads to emotional, learning and health problems. A growing brain will adapt to the type of environment and experiences that it is exposed to most frequently.

A brain will adapt to a negative environment just as easily as it will adapt to a positive environment. This adaptation happens through a "use it or lose it" process. The connections that are frequently used through repeated experiences are retained and become stronger. Other connections that are not used often will be pruned or eliminated. So, of course it is most advantageous to repeat the most positive experiences. If the positive experiences are repeated most often the brain will develop in ways that will more likely lead to your baby optimally developing the highest functioning brain areas. Understanding this creates a valuable awareness that can create a comforting confidence for you.

To Adults:

We just want to be
understood, want to
feel safe, want to play
and want to be loved!
That's all!

Love,

The Children

Creating Positive Experiences in Every Day Life

Warm Responsive Care

Children's primary need is to know they are loved. This is only learned through consistent nurturing interactions with primary caregivers.



Generally learning what to expect reduces stress in the brain. A consistently nurturing response to expressed needs is essential.

Responding to expressed needs does not “spoil” your baby. In fact, responding to the needs that are communicated, is exactly what your baby does need.

Research demonstrates that establishing a secure attachment that results from predictable nurturing responsiveness to expressed needs, can have an impact on a child's brain developing with abilities to:

- form healthy relationships with others
- delay gratification
- problem solve
- have more patience
- to calm down from excitement
- have a longer attention span

- have an increased capacity for empathy
- feel less anxiety
- have greater skills in communicating emotions in healthy ways
- have more confidence and a positive self-perception
- be less fearful
- have more willingness to explore and learn

Brain Development Activity and Insight

WHAT DO I LIKE?

Notice what I like and respond to. Try to tune in to the level of activity I seem to need. If I seem active, do a more playful activity. When I want to be calm, read a story or sing a lullaby to me.

Brain Insight

My brain is not developed enough to adjust to different activity levels easily on my own. I need you to match your behavior to my needs.

Direct Interactive Language

It is essential that children experience direct language in their everyday life. Since the brain is dependent on experience, connections are made based on the vocabulary and interactive language heard during everyday life beginning in infancy.



Research has shown that when parents spoke to their infants often, children learned almost 300 more words by age two than did children whose parents rarely spoke to them. Exposure to language through screens does not provide benefits. Children need to interact directly with others. Babies need to hear people talk to them about what they are seeing and experiencing throughout the day for their brains to fully develop language skills.

Reading offers numerous benefits for a developing brain. When a child is read to, cells in the brain are triggered within seconds. Some existing connections in the brain are strengthened while new connections are formed. This helps create a more defined and complex wiring of the brain that will benefit a child throughout life.

The time spent cuddling while reading is also very important. This closeness helps the brain make valuable connections contributing to healthy emotional development. It is ideal to begin sharing books with infants. A love of books begins when children are exposed to reading early.

Since the brain learns through repetition, children love having favorite books read or songs sung again and again. This all leads to strong language skills.

Brain Development Activity and Insight

I CAN COMMUNICATE

In addition to using real words when you talk with me, also imitate my attempts to communicate with you. Repeat back to me the sounds I make. Let's have a fun conversation.

Brain Insight

It is very important for my brain to know that I can interact with you even without using words. I learn a lot when you give me a turn to "talk" and you respond to me.

Play in a Safe and Healthy Environment

*A safe environment for a child to explore contributes to a very well developed brain.
Play is simply essential.*



Play is the way the body helps the brain develop skills. It also is the way a child learns about the world. Lots of interaction, movement and exploration using multiple senses helps the brain form connections that contribute to brain growth in numerous brain areas.

Curiosity, imagination and problem-solving abilities are all enhanced through experimental play. Dramatic play and pretending are correlated with developing self-regulation abilities. Rough and tumble play also enhances the highest functioning, “thinking areas” of the brain. Additionally, lots of outdoor play and time in nature provides numerous positive influences for the brain.

Early learning environments that are appropriate for a child’s development provide opportunities to learn through movement, play and hands-on exploration. Through this type of learning, children test new knowledge in a relaxed setting and then naturally relate it to existing knowledge and store the new information. Children just naturally want to explore, spin, pretend, run, pour, skip, create, imagine, pound, throw, squish, hop, sing, and figure out the world. They are doing exactly what their growing brain needs. Understanding adults simply need to provide plenty of wonderful opportunities for this to occur, then not get in the way and give caring support when needed.

Brain Development Activity and Insight

THROWING FUN

Roll up pairs of socks for me to throw into a laundry basket. Clap, laugh and make fun exciting sounds as we play together.

Brain Insight

I do not need fancy toys for my brain to develop. Just having a chance to play with you with things around the house helps me learn about the world and adds to my brain growth.

Reducing Overstimulation and Creating Calm for Brains

A brain requires little stress and regular routines to feel safe and relaxed. Sleep and calm times are also necessary for a healthy brain.



Brains are constantly in an anticipation and prediction mode due to the priority of safety. So, the brain primarily focuses attention on the environment and the people in it for safety and trust. When babies are in a busy environment filled with a lot going on and several things for the brain to monitor, notice and keep track of at the same time, this requires a lot of attention. It takes a great amount of brain energy and creates stress. This all can result in difficulty with attention span, memory and less self-control. With regular routines and lack of chaos the brain can relax a bit. When things are calm and there is not as much happening at a fast pace, this allows the brain a chance to replenish itself.

A young growing brain isn't developed enough to control the many "big emotions" that young children feel. The very last area of the brain to complete development helps an individual to be able to deal with strong emotions. This only occurs when a child has the predictable experience of supportive relationships. When this last area of the brain becomes mature it can take control and regulate the stress response areas of the brain. But, until this brain area matures, emotional outbursts are called, "out of control" behavior. This is because it actually is out of a young child's control.

So, as difficult as it may be sometimes, it is essential that the adults in a child's life use their own mature brain to stay calm and help the child through big emotions. It is very calming and helpful to social-emotional development, when adults recognize and then verbalize the child's feelings. This role modeling and calming experience when repeated consistently will ultimately contribute to the child's brain learning to self-regulate.

Brain Development Activity and Insight

TELLING YOU I NEED YOU

When I am lonely, scared, frustrated or bored, I will let you know by crying. I need you to comfort me. I do not know how to handle it all on my own.

Brain Insight

If I am left crying without comfort from you, in my brain it will feel the same as being physically hurt.

Sleep enhances how well the brain functions. Learning and memory skills are much better as a result of sleep. Having enough sleep also contributes to a more positive mood and healthier eating. When the brain lacks the sleep it needs, brain systems become out of balance. Recent studies are showing that sleep is important for making changes and organizing brain connections. As a result, it is becoming better known that sleep plays a critical role in brain development for infants and young children.

Creating a regular and calming routine before bedtime is invaluable. To help children's brains prepare for sleep:

- Provide calm activities like reading a book, giving a massage, taking a warm bath, or listening to soothing music as part of the bedtime routine.
- Eliminate watching television or using other electronics with bright lights prior to bedtime routines.
- Provide "brain calming" (age appropriate) foods as a bedtime snack and before brushing teeth, such as warm milk, a banana, toast with almond butter, or oatmeal.

Brain Development Activity and Insight

NAPTME PLEASE

Give me the opportunity to get enough sleep each day. Providing a regular routine for a nap at about the same time each day makes it most likely that I will get the sleep my growing brain needs.

Brain Insight

Sleep is critical to my brain development. It helps keep my brain systems in balance.

Summary: Easing Your Mind

Understanding more about what contributes most positively to the development of your baby can help increase your confidence and ultimately ease your own mind.



It is comforting to know that brain science has taken some of the guess work out of parenting concerns. As a result, it makes parenting a bit easier. Knowing that you do not need to push your baby to learn at young ages can reduce stress on you as a parent. Realizing that optimal learning, physical skills and social emotional development just naturally occurs when you make the opportunities for play and interaction available in a nurturing and safe environment. Knowing that responding to the needs your baby communicates allows you to follow your instincts to comfort your baby. With this understanding, you can relax and enjoy fun together and simply know those special times you are providing are invaluable to your baby's brain development!

Deborah McNelis, M.Ed

Deborah is overjoyed with the response to her passion to create awareness of the critical importance of optimal early brain development. She is an author, international speaker, educator and parent. As a Brain Development Specialist and founder of Brain Insights LLC, Deborah has developed the unique [Brain Development Series and Naturally Developing Young Brains activity packets](#) in both English and Spanish. She has also published [Transitions for Infants & Toddlers](#) and [Transitions for Preschoolers](#) brain packets in collaboration with Redleaf Press. Additionally, her Love Your Baby brain packet is included in the [Kaplan New Parent Kit](#). She has been seen in several national publications, heard on radio interviews and webinars worldwide and receives rave reviews for her engaging and insightful [presentations and keynotes](#). Her enthusiasm is considered to be contagious.

www.BrainInsightsonline.com