



Brain Development: The Building Block for Life

Information on brain development is rapidly changing the way parents are raising their children. During the past 10 years, we have discovered that the infant's brain is a work in progress. Children's brain development is related to the experiences they have in their early years. During the first three years of life, there are critical windows that are crucial opportunities for learning. The development process depends on how the genes they are born with (nature) interact with the experiences they have (nurture). Failure to involve children in nurturing, caring environments that provide opportunities for learning will have a profound lifelong impact.

As we learn more about early brain development we are also gaining more insight into the adolescent brain. We know development during the early teen years mirrors the development of the first three years of life. Teens are going through a period of rapid brain development. New research has discovered that from pre-adolescence through the early 20's, the brain undergoes more changes than any other time except immediately after birth. For girls, the growth peaks around the age of 11. For boys, the growth peaks around 12 ½ years of age. The nature of brain development during the teen years creates a continuing need for a nurturing environment.

What Every Child Needs for Healthy Brain Development:

1. **Interaction.** Consistent, long term attention from caring adults increases children's capacity to learn.
2. **Touch.** Holding and cuddling children help their brain grow.
3. **Stable Relationships.** Relationships with parents and other caregivers buffer stress that can harm your child.
4. **Safe, Healthy Environments.** Environments should be free of lead, loud noises, sharp objects and other dangers.
5. **Self-Esteem.** Self-esteem grows with respect, encouragement and positive role models from the beginning.
6. **Quality Care.** Quality care from trained professionals can make the difference when you can't be with your child.
7. **Play.** Play helps children explore their senses and discover how the world works.
8. **Communication.** Talking with your children helps them build verbal skills.
9. **Music.** Music expands children's world, teaches them new skills, and offers parents a fun way to interact with their children.

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