

Facilitator's Guide



EARLY YEARS
PARTNERSHIP



Playgroup
WA (Inc)

Using this Content

This Brain Box project is a collaboration between the Early Years Partnership and Playgroup WA. The illustrations are by Brenna Quinlan. If you are using this Brain Box content, please acknowledge the source.



We acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we work and live, and recognise their continuing connection to their culture, lands, families and communities. We pay our respects to Aboriginal cultures, and to Elders past, present and emerging.

History

The original Brain Box project was developed through funding by the Department of Education for AEDI Local Champions in 2010, following the first national Australian Early Development Instrument (AEDI) census in 2009. A partnership project between the Shire of Mundaring's Midvale Early Childhood and Parenting Centre, the City of Swan, and the Midland Early Years Action Group (MEYAG) successfully gained this AEDI Local Champions funding. The Foothills Information and Referral Service (FIRS) in partnership with the Foothills Early Years Community Partnership (FEYCP) also gained this funding. These two adjoining early years networks collaborated with the aim of strengthening the implementation of the 'Local Champions' Program across neighbouring regions.

This original Brain Box was developed as a low-tech toolkit for service providers in the early years sector to provide consistent, evidence-based information to families and communities on the importance of early brain/childhood development and how to optimise this development. In 2014, the AEDI program was renamed the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC). In 2020/2021, the Midland Early Years Action Group led a working group, including an original developer and experienced users, to commence reviewing and updating the box, its purpose, and contents.

Late in 2022, the Early Years Partnership (EYP) Armadale West made an approach to assist with redeveloping the resource for use within the EYP communities. Playgroup WA, as a state-wide service and now employing three members of the MEYAG-led working party, was encouraged to apply for EYP community engagement funding to complete a redesign of the Brain Box, develop a corresponding training package and produce a bulk quantity of boxes for use in the EYP communities.

This project was completed in August 2023.

The Early Years Partnership

The Early Years Partnership is a 10 year partnership between the State Government, Telethon Kids Institute and the Minderoo Foundation. They aim to work differently with communities to improve the development, health and learning of children from conception to four years and to create lasting change.

Playgroup WA

Playgroup WA is the peak body for playgroups in Western Australia and has been supporting, servicing and establishing playgroups throughout Western Australia for over 50 years. Their role is to support parents and caregivers, communities and organisations interested in operating or working with playgroups to create positive experiences wherever they live and whatever their circumstances.

Table of Contents



What is a Brain Box?	5
How to Use	6
Key Activities	6
Tips for the Facilitator	7
Message One – Brain Box Overview	8
Message Two – Strong Foundations	9
Message Three – Child Development – it takes a village to raise a child	10
Message Four – Brain Growth	12
Message Five – Brain Building	14
Message Six – Strong Brains	16
Message Seven – Nurturing Relationships	17
Message Eight – Stress and Protective Factors	18
Message Nine – Serve and Return	19
Message Ten – How Communication Grows	20
Message Eleven – Play is Powerful	21
Message Twelve – Learning Everywhere	22
Brain Box Summary	24
References	25

It's not just families, but also the wider community and service environments that play a role in supporting this development. In fact, healthy communities are instrumental in building healthy brains.

What is a Brain Box?



Brain Boxes help build parents' and communities' capacity to engage with early learning in a fun and interactive way. Brain Boxes were developed to empower parents and caregivers in fostering positive relationships and experiences with their babies from conception onward. They contain easy-to-understand information on brain and child development, making it accessible to everyone and sparking conversations about early learning.

Creating positive relationships, environments and experiences from an early age can lead to optimal brain development.

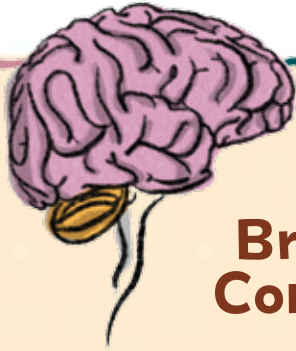
Purpose

The period from conception to age five is very important for a child's lifelong learning, health, and behaviour. In Western Australia, the 2021 Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) found that one in five children were considered developmentally vulnerable by the time they start full-time school. Despite a lot of investment from all levels of government, the AEDC revealed that progress in children's development had only slightly improved, and in some areas, it had hit a plateau or was even declining – especially in disadvantaged communities.

Studies reveal that there's no one-size-fits-all solution for improving a child's development. Instead, a range of approaches tailored to the unique needs of the child and their community is necessary.

Enter the Brain Box – a handy tool designed to help Early Years 'Brain Box Facilitators' provide accurate, consistent, and critical information to parents and other community members. With the Brain Box, parents can learn about the importance of the first 1000 days of a child's life, the significance of early brain development, and everyday activities that can help build strong brains. Plus, it encourages dialogue around the idea that children thrive when their parents have the support they need right from the start.

The Brain Box is packed with extensive research on brain and child development, broken down into easily digestible sections that focus on early development, responsive relationships, stress, protective factors, and play and learning ideas. The goal is to emphasize what parents, caregivers and communities can do to optimise early brain and child development.



Brain Box Contents

- 1 x Brain Box Facilitator's Guide
- 1 x newborn brain model (400g)
- 1 x three year old brain model (1100g)
- 1 x adult brain model (1300g)
- 1 x Brain Box USB with PowerPoint and other digital resources
- 1 x set of A3 laminated posters
- 1 x Brain Box flip chart and bag

Talk, read, sing, play
15 minutes every day!



How to Use

The Brain Boxes are perfect for working one-on-one, with groups or at events to deliver engaging and interactive presentations. When you receive the Brain Box, we'll give you guidance on how to use its contents to run information sessions for parents, caregivers, and community and early years professionals.

In the Brain Box, you'll find this Brain Box Facilitator's Guide, the three brains, a set of posters, and a USB with a PowerPoint presentation that covers the same information as the posters. There is also the option to use a separate A3 flipchart, provided in a Brain Box bag. These options provide you with choices for how to tailor your presentation.

In this Brain Box Facilitator's Guide, you will find key messages, each with facilitator content. This guide also includes specific activities to help facilitate interaction, as well as references to further information if you want to find out more about the subject matter. The activities are optional and can be tailored to your group. However, the main activity of introducing the brain models, referred to in Message Four – Brain Growth, is essential.

Please remember to use an Acknowledgement of Country that resonates with your audience.

Key Activities

This project aims to encourage parents and caregivers to engage in four key activities: Talking, Reading, Singing and Playing with their young children. These activities are simple yet essential to promote optimal child development. By helping parents and caregivers understand the importance of these activities, we can increase their frequency and prevent potential developmental issues in young children.

Do ...

- Raise awareness that several factors play a part in brain and child development, including the broader community and environment (such as access to support and local services or economic and social policies).
- Explain why brain and child development is important, with the aim of helping the audience understand.
- Tailor your language and terminology to each audience. For example, other early years professionals may wish to learn more about early years concepts, so introducing and explaining new terminology may be appropriate to use in your facilitation. Or you may have an audience that mostly speaks English as a second language, in which case you can adapt the language of the content to focus on delivering the key messages and learning new practical activities, and less so on learning new terminology.

Avoid ...

- Blaming and shaming pregnant women and parents for not knowing about healthy brain development practices/activities and placing the responsibility of child development solely on them.
- Communicating in a way that may feel judgemental or “telling” your audience what to do, which can lead to people switching off or ignoring the message.
- Using technical or sector-specific jargon for all audiences.

Tips for the Facilitator

Drawing on previous experiences of former “Local Champions” and the latest frameworks for communicating about early childhood development in Australia, to the left are some tips to consider when delivering Brain Box content.

Communication

If you wish to learn more about how to communicate about early childhood development, visit www.telethonkids.org.au/projects/HPER/core-story/

Note: Throughout this resource, we use the word caregiver, but feel free to use parent or caregiver interchangeably depending on your audience.

Thank You

We want to extend a big thank you to all the Brain Box facilitators planning to use the Brain Boxes to promote the importance of a child’s early years to parents, caregivers, communities and early years professionals. Through collaboration, we can improve outcomes for young children. Your support is greatly appreciated.



Brain Box Overview

Facilitator Content

Overview of the session

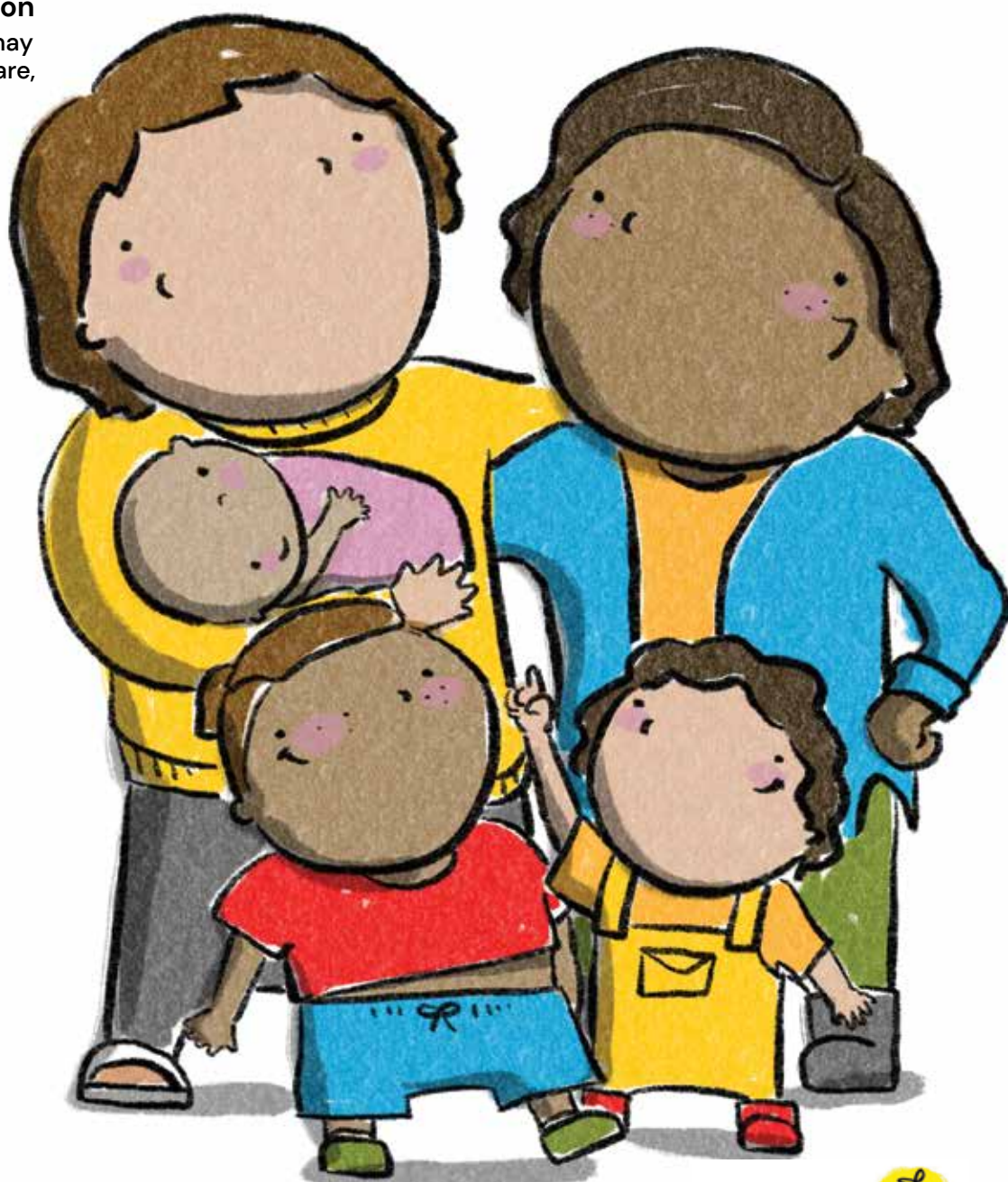
Let your participants know what the session is about. This will depend on the audience and the reason you are meeting.

Facilitator introduction

Introduce yourself. You may like to mention who you are, where you are from and why you are a Brain Box facilitator.

Remember

Acknowledgement of Country and any housekeeping information.



Message Two

Strong Foundations

Facilitator Content

- Genetics gives the first map for brain development, but it's everyday experiences and relationships that shape a child's brain.
- For children to reach their full potential, they need a healthy and safe early environment with lots of chances to grow, learn and develop. The early years are super important for shaping who we become.
- We know that babies and children do best when their parents have support, starting even before they're born!
- When babies and young children are taken good care of, and they have strong, loving relationships with their parents and caregivers, they grow, learn, and deal better with stress.



EARLY EXPERIENCES
+ RELATIONSHIPS

Activity – Nature v Nurture

Who believes nature, your genetic makeup, plays the biggest role in influencing who you are?
Who believes nurture, or the experiences of a child, has the bigger influence? Who thinks both?

While genetics provides the initial map or blueprint for brain development, it is everyday experiences and relationships that shape a child's brain.



SHAPE BRAIN
DEVELOPMENT



SET THE FOUNDATIONS
FOR A CHILD'S LIFE

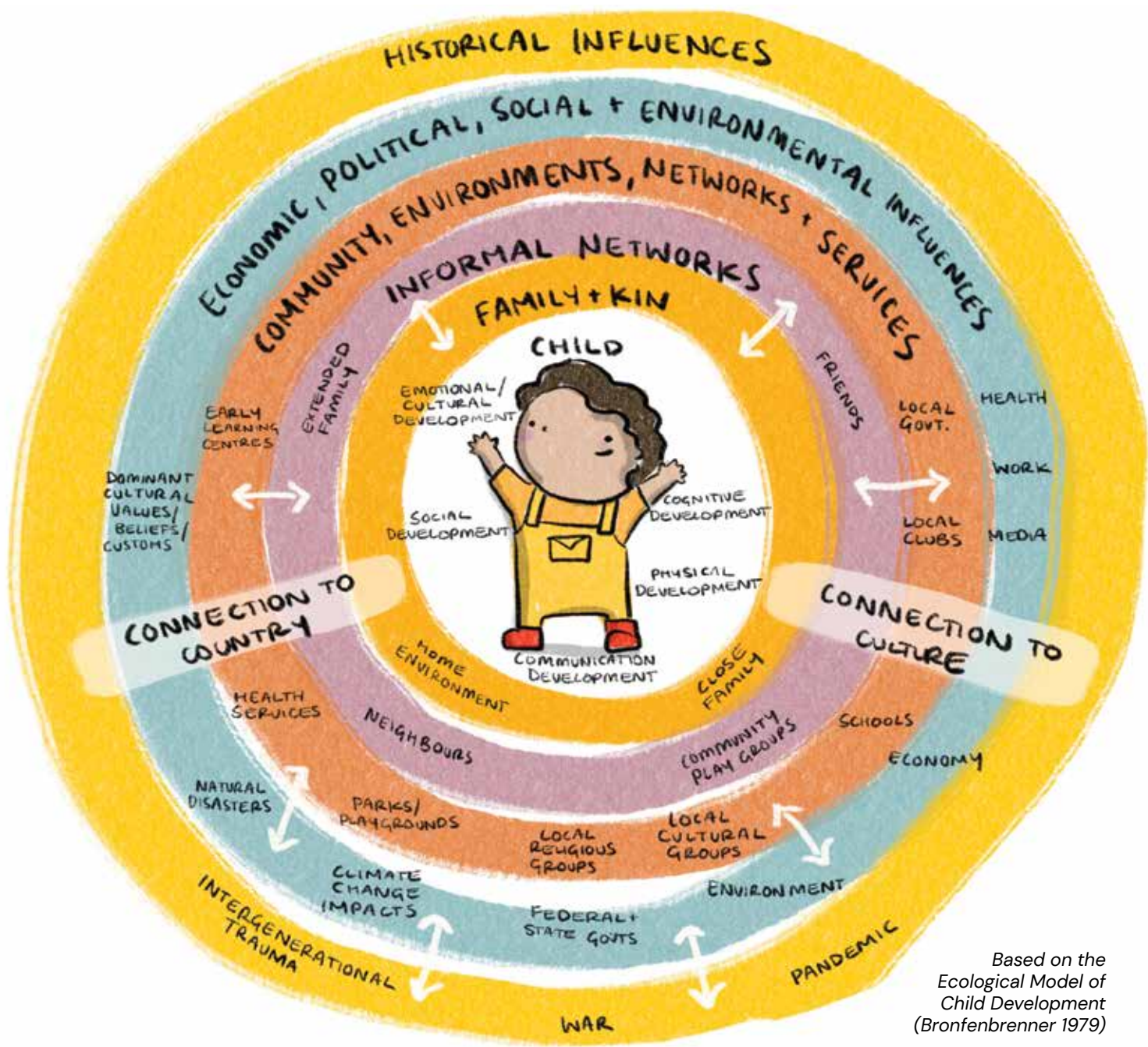
Further Information

Australian Childhood Foundation, (n.d) *An important message for the babies*. Australia. Retrieved from <https://professional.childhood.org.au>

Royal Foundation Centre for *Early Childhood*. (2023). *Early Childhood Science Explained: Building Social Connections – YouTube*, Milton Keynes, UK, Retrieved from YouTube

Message Three

Child Development - it takes a village to raise a child



Based on the Ecological Model of Child Development (Bronfenbrenner 1979)

Facilitator Content

- Child development is how children grow and become competent physically, socially, emotionally and intellectually. It includes learning to communicate and think, to become the physical child, social child, emotional child, cultural child, talking child and cognitive child (or the thinking/reading/writing child). All these areas of development are interrelated and impact each other.
- Many factors influence early brain and childhood development. It's not just nature or nurture that influences child development, but a combination of both.
- Optimal early brain and childhood development depend on positive early relationships, environments and experiences. Family, community and service delivery environments all interact to support optimal development.
- Broader systemic influences, such as economic conditions, housing policy, industrial relations, and broad social norms and attitudes, all affect the built and natural environment, community environments, and relationships.
- We call it the *Ecological Model of Child Development* – You may know it as 'It takes a village to raise a child!'
- Healthy communities build healthy brains and optimal child development. Supporting parents and families, and providing safe harbours when families face life's challenges, builds healthy brains and helps children thrive. It really does take a village to raise a child!
- Supporting the development and learning of babies, toddlers, and young children paves the way for good physical and mental health, learning and wellbeing throughout life. Supporting early childhood development leads to good health and wellbeing in the present and the future.



Children grow and develop in a number of different relationship systems.



Supporting early childhood development leads to good health and wellbeing in the present and the future.

Further Information

Moore, T.G., Arefadib, N., Deery, A., Keyes, M. & West, S. (2017). *The First Thousand Days: An Evidence Paper – Summary*. Parkville, Victoria: Centre for Community Child Health, Murdoch Children's Research Institute

Brain Growth



Facilitator Content

- Our brains grow and change based on what we experience and how we interact with others. It all starts when we're just tiny fetuses and continues until we're in our mid to late 20s. When we're born, our brains only weigh about 400g and have around 100 million neurons that mostly aren't connected to each other yet. Neurons are like special brain cells that send and receive information through electrical and chemical signals.
- By the time we are three years old, our brains have grown to about 1100g and have formed about 1000 trillion connections between neurons called synapses. These connections make up the basic framework of our brain. It's amazing how much our brains grow during those first few years of life. We gain 700g in just three years! After that, we only gain another 200g as we grow into adulthood. The average adult brain weighs about 1300g and has around 500 trillion neuron connections.
- The early years of brain development are super important because they lay the foundation for everything that comes after – learning, health and wellbeing. And even after those early years, our brains keep changing and adapting throughout our whole lives.



Brains are built over time based on relationships and experiences.



Activity – Brains

Equipment (provided in Brain Box)

- Three “brains” made from stockings and salt that weigh the same as the average weight of:
 1. Full-term newborn baby brain = 400g
 2. 3 year old child brain = 1100g
 3. Adult brain = 1300g

Steps

- Explain that these three shapes represent the brain at three different stages of life.
- Pass the smallest “brain” (400g) around the circle, giving everyone a chance to feel the weight of it. Ask them to guess the age of this size brain.
- Now pass the middle sized “brain” (1100g) around the circle. Ask participants what age they think the brain is when it weighs this much. Let everyone have a guess without giving away the answer yet.
- Now pass the largest of the “brains” (1300g) around the circle, so everyone can feel its weight.

Answers

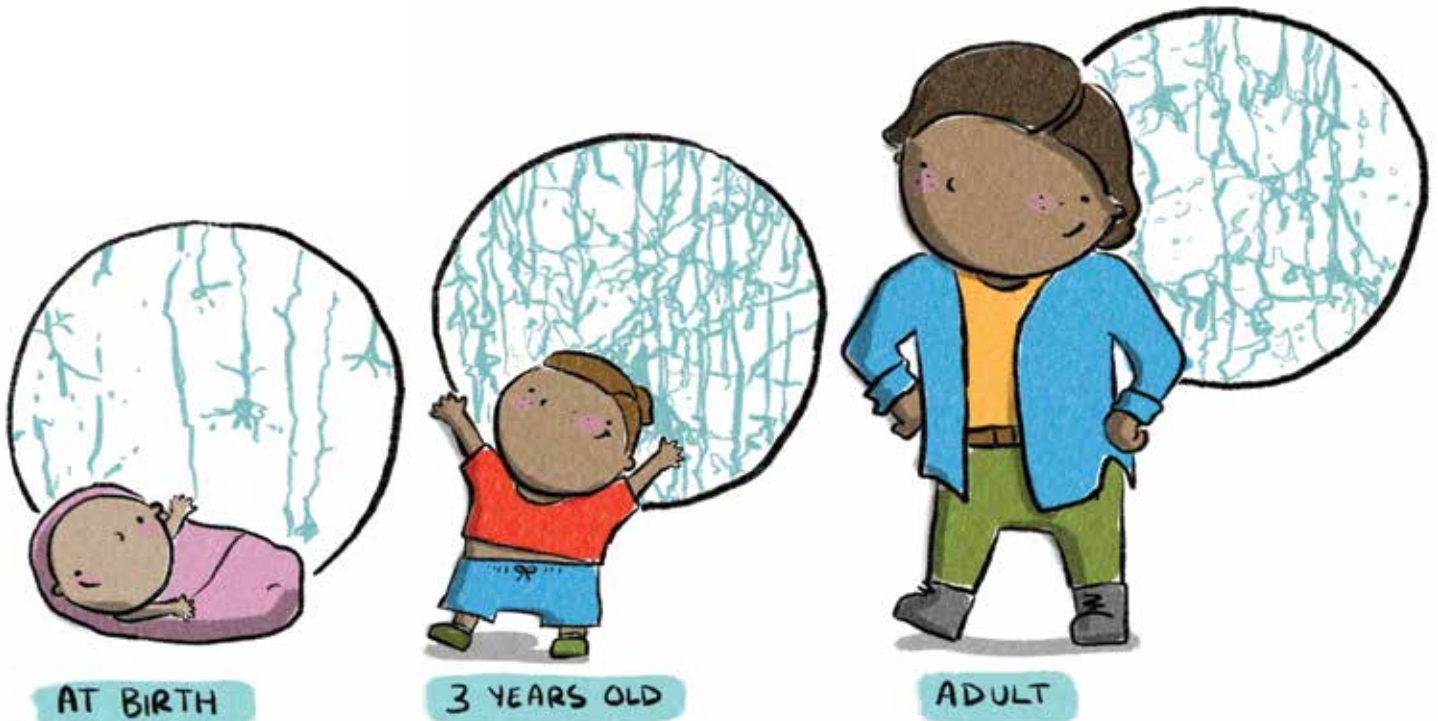
- The smallest brain is the weight of the average full-term newborn brain.
- The middle size brain is the weight of the average three-year-old brain.
- The largest brain is the weight of an average adult’s brain once it reaches 25 years of age. This is when a brain becomes fully developed.

Follow-up questions

- Were you surprised by this? Why?
- Why is this important?

Message Five

Brain Building



Facilitator Content

- When a baby is born, they have most of the neurons that they will have for the rest of their life. But it is the connections between these neurons that really make the brain work.
- Brain connections are developed through a child's everyday experiences, such as positive interactions with parents and caregivers, and using their senses to engage with the world. Simple neural connections and skills are formed first, followed by more complex circuits and skills.
- The more often an experience is repeated, the stronger the connections become. Connections that are used more often become stronger and more permanent, creating rapid pathways for neural signals to pass through the brain. Early and frequent experiences are essential for building a strong foundation for neural connections.
- During adolescence, the brain goes through another phase of change, pruning back weaker and less used connections to become more efficient. By adulthood, a person has about half the neural connections they had at three years of age.
- Research has shown that the brain continues to change and develop throughout life, making new brain cells and modifying neural connections to better cope with new circumstances. However, interventions are much slower to make changes and require more effort as children get older and into adulthood.
- Early experiences shape how the brain is built, with a strong foundation in the early years increasing the likelihood of positive outcomes, and a weak foundation increasing the chances of later difficulties.

Brain development begins shortly after conception and continues into our mid to late-20s.

A newborn baby has most of the neurons they'll have for the rest of their life. What really makes the brain work are the connections between those brain cells and the early years are a crucial time for making those connections.

Activity – Neural Connections

- In this activity, participants stand in a circle, with each person representing a neuron.
- The facilitator holds the end of a ball of string and throws it to another person (neuron) in the circle, calling out a positive memory from when they were a child that could help grow healthy neural connections in a baby's brain.
- The person who catches the string then throws it to another person in the circle, continuing to call out positive experiences.
- Everyone keeps hold of the string while throwing the ball to the next person.

At the end of the exercise, the participants can see all the "neural pathways" that have been created by the string, representing the positive experiences that a baby could have to promote healthy neural connections.

Note: If you are concerned that participants may not have positive experiences they wish to share, you can also offer the option of calling out a general positive experience to build healthy neural connections.

Further Information

Alberta Family Wellness Initiative, (2017) *How a child's brain develops through early experiences*. Alberta, Canada. Retrieved from <https://youtu.be/hMyDFYskZSU>

Alberta Family Wellness Initiative, (2018) *Brain Story Concepts: Learning Cards*, Alberta, Canada. Retrieved from <https://www.albertafamilywellness.org/resources/doc/brain-story-concepts-learning-cards>

Baker, S. (2017). *Brain development in early childhood* [CoLab Evidence Report]. Retrieved from <https://cdn.brighttomorrows.org.au/content/uploads/2019/10/25082438/Colab-Brain-Development-Evidence-Report.pdf>

Royal Foundation Centre for Early Childhood. (2023). *Early Childhood Science Explained: Building Social Connections* – YouTube, Milton Keynes, UK, Retrieved from YouTube <https://youtube.com/watch?v=TVNIDJbzAUM>

Centre on the Developing Child at Harvard University. (2011). *Experiences Build Brain Architecture*. Retrieved from YouTube <https://youtu.be/VNNsN9Ijkw>

Message Six

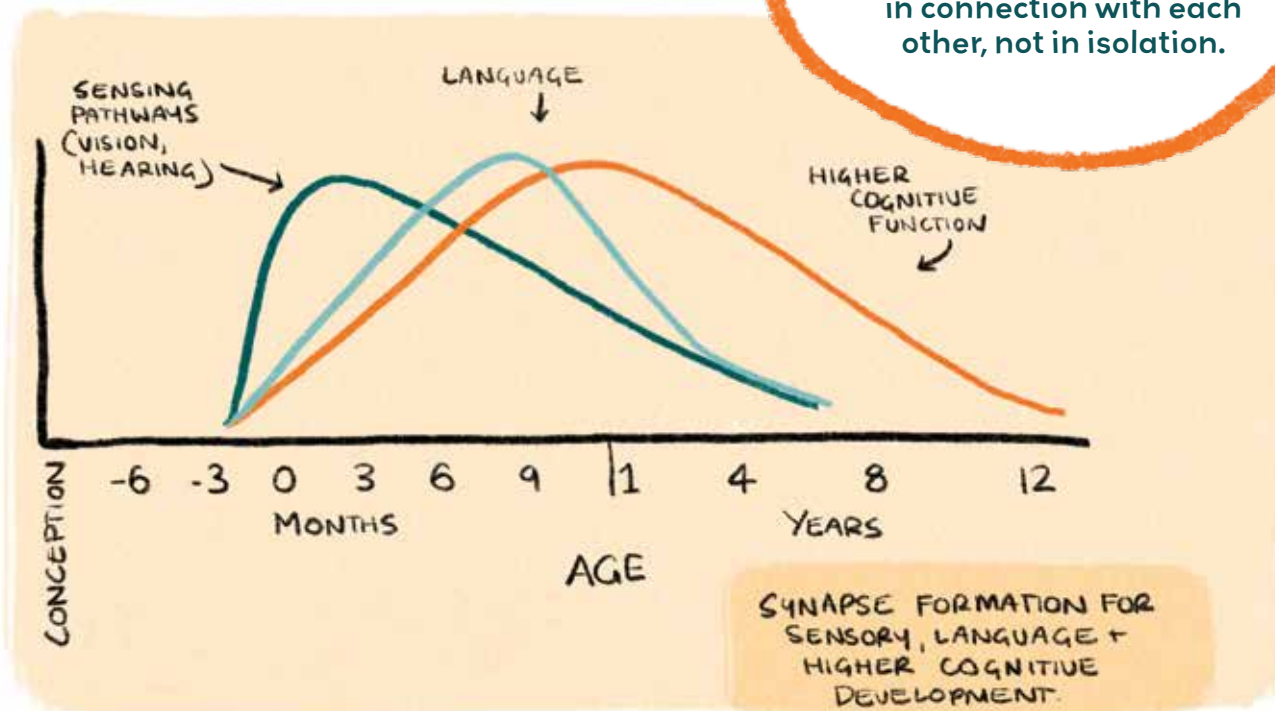
Strong Brains

We now know that the major influence on the developing brain is interaction between child and parents, caregivers, family and community.

Facilitator Content

- When we are babies, our brains start building from the basics and gradually add more complex skills. It's important to remember that different parts of our brains work together, not by themselves.
- Each part of our brain is responsible for different things, like seeing or hearing.
- Different sets of connections grow at different times and in a specific order. The basic sensory pathways, like seeing and hearing, start developing a few months before we're born and peak at around three months old.
- Language pathways, for talking and understanding language, start developing at least from birth and peak at around 9-10 months old. Before we can develop strong language pathways, we need to have our vision and hearing pathways working properly.
- Higher-level memory and thinking, reading, writing, and problem-solving, develop pathways and peak between 1-4 years old. This process takes longer and happens gradually.
- We now know that the most important thing for a baby's brain development is how much they interact with their parents, caregivers, family and community.

Brains are built from the simplest circuits to the more complex, whereby skills build on skills in the very early years of life. But remember, the different regions of our brains develop in connection with each other, not in isolation.



Synapse formation for sensory, language and higher cognitive development
By C. Nelson in *From Neurons to Neighbourhoods* (2000)

Nurturing Relationships

Facilitator Content

- Children develop in the context of relationships, which begins in pregnancy and continues from the moment they are born through forming connections with their caregivers.
- These relationships are essential for the healthy development and wellbeing of children and their families.
- When caregivers focus on building a positive foundation of relationships, children thrive both now and in the future.
- Our responses to babies shape their emotional experiences and teach them how to regulate (manage) and express their feelings.
- If someone responds kindly and appropriately to a baby when they cry, the baby learns that they matter, that they can rely on their caregiver to help them when they are upset, and how difficult emotions can be worked through.
- Children develop within a network of relationships that involve family members and other important adults in their lives, including neighbours, friends, grandparents, extended family members and early childhood professionals.

Further Information

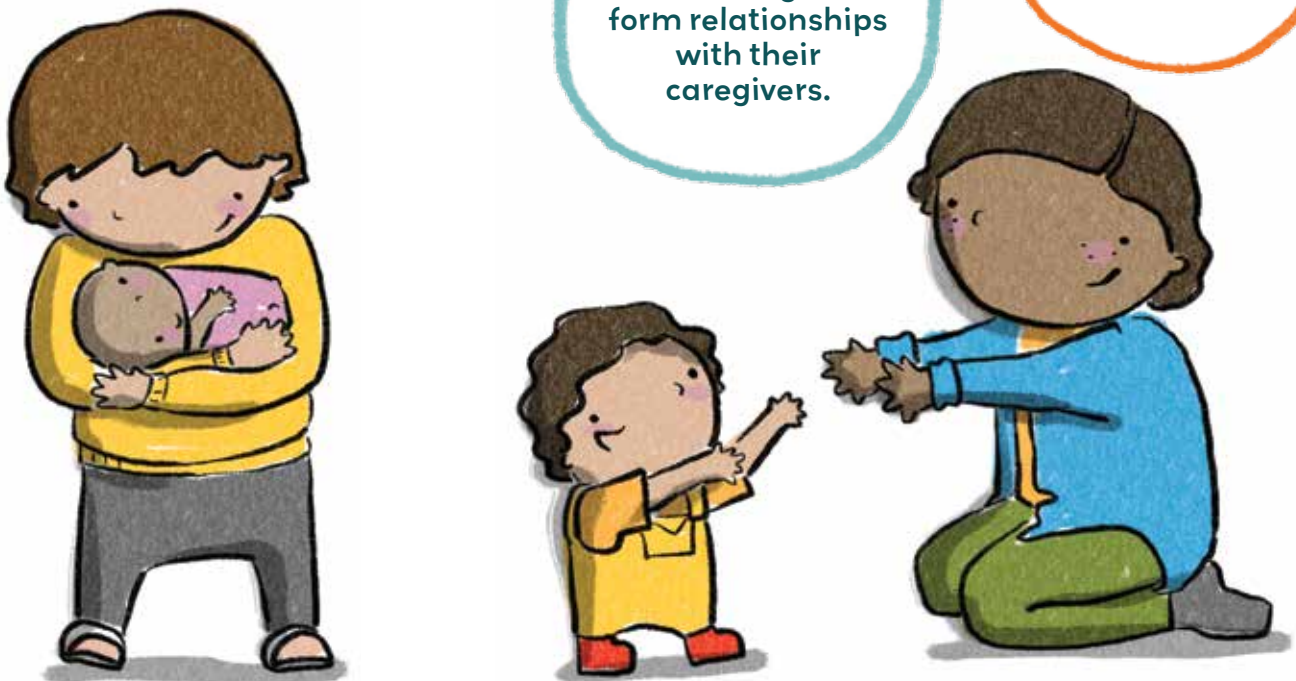
These foundational relationships between caregivers and children are important for the wellbeing of both parties. The two-way nature of these relationships affects the health and wellbeing of both the child and caregiver in both the short and long term. In healthy early relationships, adults and children learn to synchronise with each other, which supports the child's development and strengthens the bond between them.

Developing relationships between babies and their caregivers are not only important for the child's health, learning, and social-emotional wellbeing, but they also bring immense joy and happiness for both of them.

raisingchildren.net.au, (2022). *Relationships and child development*. Retrieved from <https://raisingchildren.net.au/newborns/development/understanding-development/relationships-development>

Even before birth, babies begin to form relationships with their caregivers.

Children develop in the context of relationships.



Message Eight

Stress and Protective Factors

Facilitator Content

- Stress can either strengthen or weaken the brain depending on the duration and intensity of stress and the presence of caring and responsive adults.
- Some stress is okay, like trying new things or meeting new people, as it builds resilience. Other stress, like a natural disaster or losing someone close, is tolerable when buffered by supportive caregivers. But toxic stress is different.
- Toxic stress occurs when children experience frequent and long-term negative experiences without the support of caring adults to help them cope. Toxic stress disrupts brain development, resulting in long-term physical and mental health problems.
- Toxic stress triggers the body's fight/flight/freeze response, which can become overactive and slow to shut down, causing intense feelings of anxiety, even when not under threat.
- Prolonged exposure to toxic stress can also cause the stress response to become under-reactive, leading to a lack of responsiveness and blunted feelings.
- During a stress response, the part of the brain responsible for executive functions, like problem-solving and impulse control, has less opportunity to develop, resulting in poor focus, analysis and prioritisation skills.
- However, risk is not destiny, and there are ways to counteract toxic stress. Reducing stressors in children's and families' lives, removing roadblocks, building responsive relationships and developing core resilience skills can help mitigate the negative effects of toxic stress.
- Increasing positive influences and experiences and accumulating protective factors can counterbalance stressors and provide children with the best chance for optimal brain and childhood development.

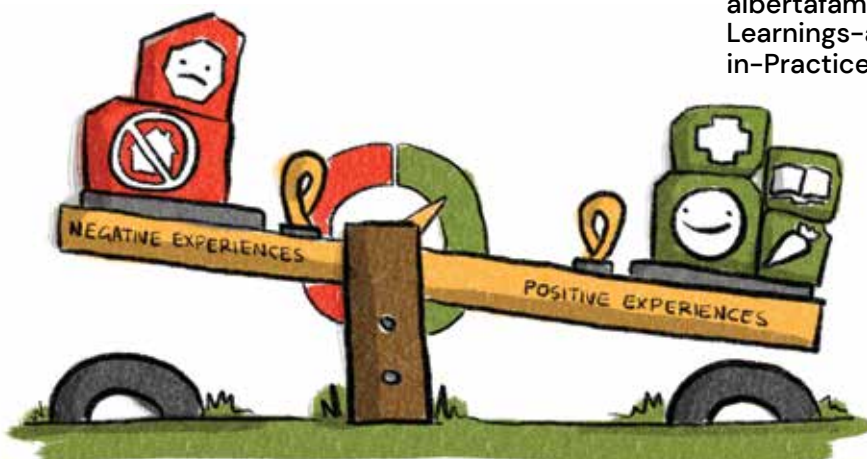
Activity – Brain Development Factors

List positive and negative factors that may impact on a child's brain development.

Further Information

Center on the Developing Child (2005/2014). *Excessive Stress Disrupts the Architecture of the Developing Brain: Working Paper No. 3*. Updated Edition. Retrieved from www.developingchild.harvard.edu

McCann C, Cook, J and Loiseau E, (2021) *Early Learnings About Uses For The Resilience Scale Metaphor In Practice*. Alberta Family Wellness Initiative, Retrieved from <https://www.albertafamilywellness.org/assets/Resources/Early-Learnings-about-the-Resilience-Scale-Metaphor-in-Practice2.pdf>



Increasing positive influences and experiences, accumulating protective factors, can counteract toxic stress and provide a child with the best chance of optimal early brain and childhood development.

Message Nine

Serve and Return

Facilitator Content

- Serve and return refers to the everyday interactions between a baby or child and a parent or caregiver (or another child).
- These interactions build brains, promote connection, develop responsive relationships, and develop communication and language skills, leading to the development of literacy skills.
- When a baby or child sends a signal – like a cry, a body movement, a smile, a gesture, a touch, a sound, a word, or a comment – that is a serve.
- When the adult responds with interest – like making eye contact, smiling back, copying the action or sound, making a comment, naming what they are seeing, feeling, doing or experiencing – that is a return.
- These interactions don't always need words, and they build brains by helping babies develop trusting and secure relationships, cope with stress, manage feelings, and learn new knowledge and skills.
- When a baby serves and no one returns repeatedly, this can impact their brain development, reduce their communication attempts and delay their language development. About a 50% response to their serves is enough to develop a secure base for most babies.
- Serve and return interactions can also help repair the impact of toxic stress or trauma in children.



Further Information

Harvard Centre on the Developing Child (n.d) *A guide to serve and return: How your interaction with children can build brains*. Retrieved from <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/guide/a-guide-to-serve-and-return-how-your-interaction-with-children-can-build-brains/>

Harvard Centre on the Developing Child (n.d) *5 Steps for brain building serve and return*. Retrieved from <https://pediatrics.developingchild.harvard.edu/resource/5-steps-for-brain-building-serve-and-return/>

Alberta Family Wellness Centre (2014) *Brain Story Concepts: Serve and Return*. Retrieved from <https://www.albertafamilywellness.org/resources/video/serve-and-return>

Activity – Serve and Return

What are some serve and return ideas that you could do with a baby or young child?

How Communication Grows



Facilitator Content

- When we interact face to face with babies and young children, paying attention to their body language and sounds, we create many opportunities for serve and return conversations.
- Regular verbal serve and return conversations between caregivers and children, using a variety of different types of words, including action words, naming words and describing words, helps to develop strong language skills.
- Children in environments with responsive conversations tend to learn a wider variety of words and concepts, which leads to better reading and writing skills.
- Remember that children can understand sentences that are one or two words longer than what they use themselves. If a child is only speaking in 1-2 word sentences, they can only follow sentences that are 2-4 words long. Complicated sentences can cause communication frustration, as young children cannot hold them in their minds for long enough to process.
- Adults can adjust and simplify their sentence length to slightly above a child's level, depending on their interest and communication ability, to keep the conversation going.
- The more serve and return interactions a child has, the more their language and social skills grow, strengthening communication pathways.



Message Eleven

Play is Powerful

Facilitator Content

- Play is essential for brain development in young children. Research has shown that play helps to promote the development of neural pathways in the brain, which are important for learning, memory and problem-solving.
- Through play, children learn about themselves and their world, how to manage their bodies, their emotions, their thinking and their relationships.
- During play, children engage in activities that stimulate their brain and promote the growth of new neural connections. For example, playing with blocks can help develop spatial awareness and problem-solving skills, while pretend play, such as acting out experiences with dolls or toy animals or role playing with other children, helps develop language and social skills.
- Play also helps to promote the development of executive function skills, which are important for self-regulation, attention and goal-directed behaviour. Through play, children learn to regulate their emotions, focus their attention and plan their actions.
- The type of play that children engage in can also have an impact on brain development. Research has shown that play that is open-ended and child-directed, such as free play and imaginative play, is particularly beneficial for brain development. They get to test out their ideas about the world and practice mastery of skills. This type of play allows children to explore their environment and use their creativity and imagination, which promotes the development of new neural connections.
- Children thrive when they have lots of opportunities to play in different ways and with different play partners. They need adults to help with this. Adults help children learn and grow when they set the scene for great play ideas or help the child with their own plans. Asking questions or taking on roles in the child's play helps build their confidence, social and language skills. Providing experiences where they can explore, discover different environments and mix with other children, provides the opportunities children need to build bodies and brains through play.

Play is powerful - it builds brains as babies and children learn and develop skills while having fun!



Play is an essential part of learning. Engage children in playful activities that help develop their curiosity, creativity, and problem-solving skills.

Activity – Learning through Play

Ask the group to recall a game or play activity they enjoyed as a child and what skills they thought they learnt then and how they may use them in adult life, or how it helped them in their adult life?

Further Information

The Lego Foundation. (n.d). *Learning through play: What the science says*. Retrieved through <https://learningthroughplay.com/explore-the-research/the-scientific-case-for-learning-through-play>

The Lego Foundation, (n.d). *Why play?* Denmark. Retrieved through <https://learningthroughplay.com/why-play>

Learning Everywhere

Talk, read, sing, play
15 minutes every day!

Children learn best when they feel safe, loved and supported. Create a nurturing environment that promotes positive relationships and a sense of belonging.



Learning can happen anywhere and anytime, not just in traditional educational settings. Encourage children to explore and learn from the world around them.

Facilitator Content

- Having positive experiences and building real-world relationships during a child's early years is crucial for their learning, health and behaviour throughout life, much more than the virtual world can offer.
- A child's positive stimulation comes from using all of their senses and engaging in talking, playing, singing, watching, listening, exploring and experimenting with new things.
- A simple activity like reading a book with a child makes them feel safe, loved and secure, while developing emotional maturity, communication and general knowledge. It also develops their interest in reading and early literacy which supports their cognitive skills. If they share the experience with other children, they are also enhancing their social skills. If they act out parts of the story, draw or make something related to the story, they are developing their physical skills.
- Technology can be a useful tool to enhance learning, but relying on it exclusively can take time away from other activities that are great for development. Balance screen time with other activities that promote physical activity, social interaction and creative expression.

Activity – Learning Everywhere

Learning is everywhere. You can do this activity as a big group, in small groups or with a buddy. Let's talk about how we can help our child develop. Brainstorm ideas for everyday learning:

- Play with your child and follow their lead. This will help them stay engaged and interested in the activity.
- Spend time playing with your child. This doesn't have to be for hour-long chunks - even 15 minutes a day has a positive impact! What fun things are you currently doing with your child?
- Read books, tell stories and sing songs to encourage your child's thinking, talking and imagination.
- Teach your child new words and skills by doing things like gardening, cooking, reading stories, doing tummy time, giving baby massage and doing daily household chores.
- Talk to your child about what you're doing during the day. For example, "We're hanging clothes outside. Can you see the clothes and hear the birds singing?"
- Make sure to give your child outdoor playtime with different textures like grass, sand and leaves. Remember, it's important to develop the **WHOLE** child by balancing all the different areas of development.

Further Information

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Brain Box Summary

It Takes a Village



It's not just families, but also the wider community, that supports healthy child and brain development.

Strong Foundations

While genetics provides the blueprint for a baby's brain development, it's the everyday experiences and relationships that shape a child's brain.



Nurturing Relationships



Children develop in the context of responsive, safe and secure relationships.

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 **BRAIN
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