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*Dedicated to helping children with emotional and behavioral problems,
by developing stronger more positive family relationships*

Child Brain

Our brain is a very important organ. It is the organ that mediates all of our thought, feelings, and behaviors. Our brain starts to develop in utero and is comprised of 100 billion neurons. By age three the brain is 90% of the adult size, but it continues to grow into the system which gives us the capacity to love, create, communicate, and think. This does not mean that by the age of three we have the mental capacity to make decisions or understand consequences. These abilities are learned through experiences.

Research shows that the early years of our childhood are very important in terms of the developing brain. The child is already learning the emotional, behavioral, cognitive and social skills to be used through out their life. The normal development of the brain requires the use of all senses. Children will need to experience touch, sight, smell, sound and movement in order to grow and move through the developmental stages of life.

So how important are the experiences in early childhood to the developing brain? Repetition, consistency, predictability and nurturing all have an important impact on brain development. If the early years in a child's life are nurturing, structured, and enriched then the child has a better chance of becoming an adult who is flexible, responsible, empathetic, and creative. However if the child's early years are chaotic and filled with neglect and violence, then the child will have a greater tendency to become aggressive, remorseless, and impulsive. Children with this chaotic, violent childhood often become anti-social individuals. It is imperative that we pay attention to what a child is experiencing during these early years, because



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once the brain has organized the childhood events; it is very hard to modify the brain.

Childhood experiences create the person we become as an adult; therefore it is important to expose our children to positive experiences at the “right” time. It is important to give our children challenges that are age appropriate. We cannot expect good results if we ask our children do things that are beyond their ability to master. New tasks need to be introduced at a time when the child is capable of handling the challenge. If we ask a child to do something that is beyond their developmental stage, we are setting them up for frustration and a feeling of failure. For example, asking your child to tie their shoe at age two is probably beyond their cognitive ability and their small motor skills.

It is also important to remember that as the child is learning new skills he or she may quickly become frustrated and fatigued. For them, this is a first time experience and it can become stressful. Encouraging them to explore and practice, but only to the point that they feel comfortable. Let them know it is okay to stop and try again later. They do not have to succeed the first time. Keep your own expectations out of the equation. Facilitate a comfort zone for them to stay focused and learn. Give them the opportunity to talk about their frustration, thus allowing them to learn to deal with and tolerate frustration.

Motor skills, emotional skills, and social skills do not always develop at the same rate. Your child may have very good motor skills, but be slower in developing the social or emotional skills. It is important to help them in each domain and not expect the rate of learning to be the same for each.



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Another consideration for the developing brain is how much television your child watches. For every minute a child watches TV, it is a minute lost for creative development. This is not to say that all TV is bad, but it is a caution to be aware of how much time is spent watching TV and what type of shows are being watched.

Fantasy is an important part of childhood development and helps develop the creative side in a child. If a child is never alone with their creative thoughts, then they do not develop the capacity to be creative. If their schedule is so occupied with other activities that they do not have time to experience non-structured play, then they will have little time to stimulate that part of the brain that develops social interactions, abstract thinking, creativity and play. Unfortunately, children are not given the opportunity for fantasy when they never have alone, quiet time.

Providing a calm and predictable environment will help your child develop a sense of safety which will in turn allow them to be curious and develop a desire to try new things. Giving your child an environment rich in sensory experience – the five senses, will stimulate the brain and allow them to learn new information about their world. Be carefully not to over stimulate the child. Too much exposure to any sense, smell, sound, sight, etc. can be overwhelming and halt the learning experiences you are trying to provide. ■

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