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EARLY BRAIN DEVELOPMENT



The First Year and a Half

- Recent research on brain development in infants suggests that brain development in the first 18 months of life is crucial. During this time, critical connections between neural circuits in the brain will or will not be made, based primarily on the external environment in which the child is raised.
- This means a baby's early experiences are of significant importance to the healthy development of the brain as it relates to language, math, music, logic and emotions.
- Parents and caregivers play a vital role in providing the appropriate experiences to help shape the brain's structure.

The Responsibility of Parents and Caregivers

- Contrary to what you might think, you don't have to be a brain scientist to stimulate a baby's brain. Simple things like sorting socks by color, playing with blocks and beads, and playing "peek-a-boo" will all help enhance a baby's cognitive, motor and language development. Exposing babies to foreign languages will also help them to learn these languages more easily as adults.
- Parents and caregivers can help contribute to a baby's emotional wellbeing by building strong relationships with them. Responding to their needs and holding and cuddling them often will help infants develop feelings of safety and security, which will help them form secure attachments as they get older. Babies treated this way tend to be more curious, have better coping skills, and succeed later in life both socially and academically.
- Babies learn by using their senses. Offering opportunities such as talking, smiling, rocking, and touching help stimulate the baby's brain to release hormones necessary for growth.
- Responding to a baby's cues is just as important as offering an opportunity that will stimulate a baby's response. Most

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importantly, parents and caregivers need to respond in a sensitive manner. Comforting a baby that is crying; smiling at a baby that is smiling, and feeding a baby that is hungry are all appropriate ways to ensure secure attachments. Remember, you can never spoil a baby with too much attention.

WEIGHING IN ON BACKPACKS

I should have suspected a problem when we had to buy a bigger backpack this year to accommodate my daughter's *required* two-inch, three-ring binder for fifth grade. She came off the bus looking like the hunchback of Notre Dame. I practically fell over backward after freeing her from her heavy load.

As many parents do, I've read about backpack safety, but with increasing schoolwork, extracurricular activities, and looking forward to a busy summer, what can we do about the overstuffed backpack? Here are some ideas:

- When you're shopping for a backpack, find one that's lightweight. Sometimes the ones that look the most rugged are heavier than they have to be.
- If your school allows them, a pack with wheels might be the answer, just make sure it fits in your child's locker.
- If your child is carrying hardcover books to and from school, buy a paperback version for reading at school and keep the hardcover one at home.
- Weigh your child's pack. Doctors and Occupational Therapists recommend that children do not carry backpacks weighing more than 15% of their body weight. If the pack exceeds that weight, have them take a large book out and carry it separately.
- Rearrange the stuff! Load the heaviest items closest to your child's back; arrange other materials so they won't slide around.
- Ensure that your child always wears the backpack straps over both shoulders. Carrying the pack on one shoulder tends to lean children to one side, causing the spine to curve.
- Make sure the pack fits your child properly. Adjust the straps so that the bottom of the pack rests in the curve of his or her lower back.

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Kids will be carrying this heavy load through high school and college. Help your kids use precautions now to save them from back pain later.

STUDY STRATEGIES FOR SCHOOL SUCCESS

Editor's note: spring semester and final exams can be a demanding time. These study strategies are fundamental for all ages.

1. Beat procrastination! Teach your child, by example, not to put off tasks.
2. Instead of denying your child privileges for not studying, offer him rewards or incentives for getting his schoolwork done.
3. Get organized! Ensure that your grade-schooler has separate sections in her notebook for notes, homework, and graded materials for each class.
4. Make sure he's taking notes in class—not only for information, but because it will help him see how much time his teacher spends on a subject area.

A Family Resource and Referral Program Care Consultant can assist you with your work/life needs at 1-800-809-4996.

5. After class or in the evenings, encourage your child to write a review of key ideas from each class.
6. Teach your child to be an active reader who outlines and annotates her textbooks. If she is not allowed to write in her books have her keep these notes in a special notebook.
7. Encourage him to read through textbook sections before they're reviewed in class.
8. When studying for a test, suggest that your child arrange class and reading notes chronologically to ensure she's studying the appropriate material.
9. Help him create "fact sheets" of key ideas and terms scattered randomly on a page. If he can recall details in random order, they're stored in his brain.
10. A combination of memorization and concept comprehension will yield the longest-lasting and most complete knowledge.

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PLANNING AHEAD FOR CAREGIVING

More and more working people have caregiving responsibilities—and often they have little time to prepare for this new role. This may include dealing with anything from health problems and issues of independence to the high cost of caregiving, both personally and financially. **A little preparation can help you keep the most options open for you and your family members.**

Some of the issues that arise in caregiving don't have straightforward, easy solutions. There are ways to make the best of changing circumstances—being prepared can make all the difference! Here are some ways that caregivers can plan ahead:

Learn About Insurance Coverage

Medicare does not cover all needs that an individual will have. It does not cover medications, dentures, eyeglasses, or extended nursing home care. Find out what else can be put in place to cover these items.

Learn About Legal Options

There are many legal "tools" available to support the person you care for. However, each tool has restrictions regarding when and how it can be used. Planning for legal needs ensures that you and your loved one will have the most flexibility.

Learn About the Community Support System

Be prepared to deal with the bureaucracies involved in community services. This is no easy task for a working individual. It may involve letter writing and frustrating delays.

Support services may include:

- *Meal programs*
- *Transportation*
- *Money management*
- *Homemaking*
- *Counseling services*
- *Legal information*
- *Personal care assistance*
- *Telephone reassurance*
- *Companionship*



Take advantage of your Family Resource and Referral program to do the legwork for you.

Be an Organized Caregiver

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Use a special notebook to record to whom you speak and when. You can refer to that conversation whenever needed. Always get names of people you speak with and record the date and content of the conversation.

Set up a “Just-in-Case” File

Gather together all the critical information on the person for whom you provide care, and keep it together in a file—birth certificate, insurance cards, etc. In an emergency, you will not be searching everywhere for the information.

Care for the Caregiver

Caregiving is a difficult job. Be sure you know your stress indicators and have a plan in place to provide some stress relief. Ask for help when you need it and accept it when it’s offered. Be sure to do something for yourself on a daily basis to keep yourself energized—for yourself and the person you care for.

SUMMER CAMP OPEN HOUSE: Asking the right questions

Visiting a summer camp’s open house can be a great way to learn about the staff and the facilities. Even if you can’t visit, questions about a variety of aspects of the camp can help you draw a detailed portrait of the programs you are considering for your child this summer. This list is just a “jump start”. Call Work|Life Benefits for a tip sheet with a full list of questions.

Curriculum

- What is the structure of the program? What is the daily schedule like? Do children choose activities?
- Are there special field trips planned? If so, what are the staffing arrangements?

Approach

- What happens if a child is not ready to participate in an activity? Are there other choices?
- What is the parent visitation policy?

Staff

- What is training and background of the staff? Are there prerequisites such as age, CPR, first aid training, etc.?

- Do counselor-to-child ratios support special attention for younger or less extroverted children?

Facilities

- Can kids store their belongings or do they carry them with them all day?
- Are there indoor facilities in case of bad weather?

Health and safety

- Where do children begin and end their days? How is the head count maintained? Is there a sign-out procedure?
- What are the rules and limitations regarding mildly ill children?

THE TOP 10 SAT TEST-DAY TIPS

Let the Countdown Begin...

10. Have info, and ready to go!

Take some time the night before to pack a “test-ready” bag containing the following: Admission ticket, valid form of photo identification, several No. 2 pencils, calculator with fresh batteries, and a high energy snack to satisfy your brain.

9. Don't cram

You've studied the content and perfected your test-taking skills. So what else is there to do? Get a good night's sleep prior to the big day. A well-rested person is calm, confident, and ready!

8. Dress in layers

The climate in test centers can vary from sauna-like to frigid. Be prepared for both extremes and everything in-between. You need to be comfortable to do your best.

7. Arrive early

Scope out your test location prior to test day so you know exactly where you're going and how long it takes to get there.

6. The clock is ticking

The hardest questions are worth the same number of points as the easy ones. So, if a question is confusing or too time-consuming, don't lose your cool. Just keep moving on, and go back to the question at the end if you have time.

5. Don't look

Bottom line - you're not going to know which questions are experimental. So, do your best on every question.

4. Easiest to hardest

On SAT, obvious choices early in a set are more likely to be correct than obvious answers near the end of a set. Pay attention to where you are in a section.

3. Guess aggressively

If you don't know an answer, don't leave the question blank or guess randomly. Eliminate the choices you know are wrong, then make an educated guess.

2. Be alert and very careful

Pay attention when you are filling in your answers. Make sure you're on the right numbers.

1. Take a deep breath and...

calm yourself. Your attitude and outlook are crucial to your performance. Be confident and your test will go smoothly.