

# Brain Development for Children

Early life experiences have a great impact on children's brain development. Our goal as leaders is to help parents use simple interactions with their children to build a healthy brain.

## KEY POINTS

- **The most important period for a child's brain development is from the time of conception to ages 2-3.** In this period, the brain develops faster than at any other time. These early years are when it's most important to help the child's brain develop properly so he or she can have a strong foundation for success in life.
- **The brain develops by making many physical connections,** or pathways, between the cells in the brain. These connections make the brain work. Brain connections are developed through children's senses—as they see, touch, hear, play, and interact with people.
- **For strong brain development, children need to have good nutrition.** They also need loving, responsive relationships, back-and-forth interactions with people, and chances to play and explore their world. Parents can do “brain-building” activities such as these:



### LOVE AND ATTENTION

- Show interest in your child. Make eye contact and smile often.
- Hold, cuddle, and kiss your child.
- Notice and help when your child is hungry, tired, hurt, or sad.
- Show your love often.

### TALK

- Talk to your child starting at birth.
- Have two-way interaction with your baby by repeating sounds he or she makes.
- Speak slowly and with expression.
- Talk about what your child is seeing or doing. Name things.
- Read books or show pictures.

### PLAY

- Give your child safe and interesting things to play with and explore.
  - Safe, clean household items such as cups, spoons, and containers can be used for play.
  - Play games together with back-and-forth interaction, such as “peek-a-boo” or rolling a ball.
  - Let the child follow his or her own curiosity and interests in play.
  - Find safe places to play outside.
- **Brain-building activities can be done during the regular routines of the day**— for instance, while getting the child dressed, at mealtime, when going places, and at bedtime. An extra benefit to these activities is that bonds of support, trust, and love are strengthened.

## Questions to Prayerfully Consider

- Who in my unit may be especially good at sharing these ideas with others?
- Are there families under stress or affected by depression who could use some support as they interact with their children? How could we help?



### Inspiration from the Scriptures

*In Alma 37:6 we learn that "by small and simple things are great things brought to pass." In early childhood, parents help children's developing minds grow through simple acts such as giving affection and playing together. This is a great way to be build a foundation for life.*

## WHAT CAN WE DO?

Consider these ideas and others as you counsel together and pray for guidance.

### Leaders

- Organize a **class or activity for families** with young children. For example, give ideas for inexpensive or no-cost toys or games to play. Parents also learn by noticing good things other parents do.
- When **assigning ministering brothers and sisters**, keep in mind who might be most helpful to a family with young children.
- Make sure the Primary nursery has a variety of safe, colorful toys. Let children hear and sing good, uplifting music.
- Look for **additional information** on child development to share with parents who are interested. Government or educational agencies and doctors may be good sources. See examples at the bottom of this page.

### Ministering Brothers and Sisters

- If you feel it is appropriate, **share the tip sheet "Brain Development"** with families who may be interested.

Share the **"Healthy Brain Development"** handout with members.

#### Healthy Brain Development for Children

*The most important period for a child's brain development is from the time of conception to ages 2-3. A child's relationships and everyday experiences help shape the brain's development. Responsive parenting, two-way interactions, and chances to learn through play are key.*

##### HERE ARE SOME THINGS YOU CAN DO:

###### LOVE

- Show interest in your child.
- Make eye contact and smile often.
- Hold, cuddle, and kiss your child.
- Notice and help when your child is hungry, tired, hurt, or sad.
- Show your love often.

###### TALK

- Talk to your child starting at birth.
- Have two-way interaction with your baby by repeating sounds he or she makes.
- Speak slowly and with expression.
- Talk about what your child is seeing or doing. Name things.
- Read books or show pictures.

###### PLAY

- Give your child safe and interesting things for play and exploration.
- Safe, clean household items like caps, spoons, and containers can be used for play.
- Play games together with back-and-forth interaction, like covering and then uncovering your face ("peek-a-boo") or rolling a ball.
- Let the child follow their own curiosity and interests in play.
- Find safe places to play outside.

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Learn more about brain development and other ways to improve child nutrition: [ChildNutrition.ChurchofJesusChrist.org](https://ChildNutrition.ChurchofJesusChrist.org)

