



Giving Your Baby a Smart Start

- Dear Parents,
- Neuroscience research tells us that experience wires the brain. Babies are born with only a minimal amount of neurological wiring. They have a little wiring for hearing, some primitive wiring for vision, and some wiring in the low functioning part of the brain called the *cerebellum*. The higher regions of the brain (those used for language, social interactions, self-control, motor control and critical thinking) are not yet wired. The neurons are there and ready to be connected but those connections are dependent on the child's senses to bring information from the child's experiences into the brain.
- It is experience that wires the brain and repetition that strengthens the wiring. By age three, 85% of the foundation of the brain will be wired. By age five, 95% of the foundation of the brain will be wired.



What You Can Do

- Give your baby time to slowly adjust to the outside world. He will use his senses to explore but he can only absorb a small amount of sensory stimulation at one time. Be careful not to over stimulate your child with too much visual clutter and noise or too many choices.
- Develop trust by meeting your baby's needs as soon as possible. Knowing that someone is there to care for her, leads your child to feel safe. Trust is the foundation of emotional intelligence. You cannot "spoil" a baby.
- Talk to your baby even though he doesn't understand your words yet. Talking to him develops his language and will increase his vocabulary when he begins to speak.
- Teach your baby to calm herself by breathing deeply while holding her close. You will find she syncs her breathing to yours.
- Protect your baby from viewing television and computer screens. A baby's brain is busy wiring for a three-dimensional world. Two-dimensional screens hamper this wiring and interfere with the brain's job of wiring for distance vision.
- Expose your baby to bright primary colors. He arrived seeing only black and white. His brain will be wiring for color all throughout the first year of life and fine tuning that wiring for the next few years.
- Encourage your baby to explore cause and effect. Provide a variety of rattles and musical toys, such as busy boxes and jack-in-the-boxes. Show your baby how to shake rattles harder to make louder sounds and how to bang them to make a completely different sound.
- Be fully present with your baby. Spend quality time with your baby each day. The quality of time spent with little ones is far more important than the quantity of time.

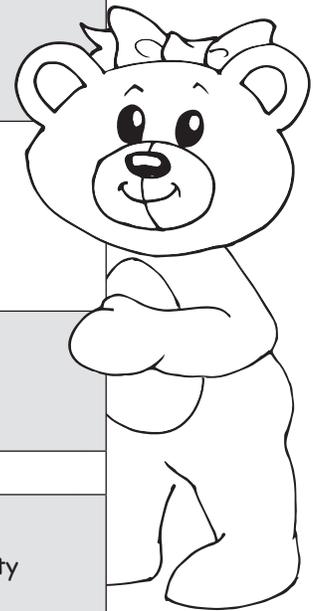


Understanding Windows of Opportunity

Dear Parents,

There are windows of time when the brain is most fertile for wiring and strengthening specific skills. These fertile times are referred to as "windows of opportunity." When positive experiences occur within these fertile windows of opportunity, brain wiring is optimized.

Skills	Wiring Opportunity	Greatest Enhancement
Emotional Intelligence	0 - 48 months	4 years to puberty
Trust	0 -14 months	
Impulse Control	16 - 48 months	
Social Development	0 - 48 months	4 years to puberty
Attachment	0 -12 months	
Independence	18 - 36 months	
Cooperation	24 - 48 months	
Cognitive Development	0 - 48 months	4 years to puberty
Cause and Effect	0 -16 months	
Problem Solving	16 - 48 months	
Physical Development	0 - 24 months	2 years to puberty
Language Development	0 - 24 months	2- 7 years
Early Sounds	4 - 8 months	8 months to puberty
Vocabulary	0 - 24 months	2- 5 years



What You Can Do

- Make sure your child has plenty of positive experiences and interactions in the early years.
- Develop social and emotional intelligence by being available to your child and helping your child understand her emotions. When she shows interest in others, provide opportunities for interactions (play dates, mother's day out, school).
- Expand cognitive skills by encouraging your child to explore his world—to figure out how things work and what causes things to happen.
- Build language by talking, reading and singing to your little one.
- Develop physical skills (motor skills) by giving your child plenty of opportunities to move. Keeping your child restrained, such as in a feeding chair or swing, will inhibit her physical development. Any time your child is awake, she belongs in a safe, open space that encourages movement. As your child becomes mobile, provide safe climbing and scooting apparatus.



Seeing Through Your Baby's Eyes

Dear Parents,

A baby's vision is suited to social interaction right from birth. Babies can focus fairly well on objects that are 9-14 inches away. This is about the distance of your face when you are holding your baby in a cradle position. A baby's ability to see your face plays a primary role in bonding.

A baby's vision at birth is blurry but will steadily improve over the next few months. Babies will begin to distinguish colors between the second and third month of life. Their range of vision will improve to several feet by the end of the second month and, by the third month, they will show interest in people and things across the room. A baby's vision will not be 20/20 until after the first year.

The American Pediatric Association recommends no television, tablets, or computers for children younger than two. Because a baby's brain is wiring for a three-dimensional world, overuse of two-dimensional objects can be confusing to this process.



What You Can Do

- Hold your newborn close to your face when speaking to him. Your baby's favorite thing to look at is your face!
- Provide three-dimensional objects for your child to interact with visually. Limit exposure to technology.
- During your child's first month of life, place objects you want him to see about 10 inches from his face. During the second month, you can place objects a couple of feet away.
- Move objects in front of your child between the second and third month to allow him to practice tracking.
- Surround your child with colorful toys.
- Babies enjoy looking at broad stripes that are alternating light and dark colors. Hang a striped blanket over the side of your baby's crib or place your baby on top of this blanket when he is playing on the floor.
- Choose brightly-colored toys rather than pale-colored toys when selecting new items of interest for your baby.
- Protect your baby's eyes from the sun. Place a shade on car windows. Have your child wear sunglasses if possible.
- Don't expect your baby to be able to stare at you for a long period of time. It takes great muscle control for him to hold your gaze. This ability will usually develop during the first month.