



# building children's **BRAINS:**

Young children's brains are developing at an astounding rate. Interactions with caregivers and the world around them help children build critical brain connections that promote future learning.

## ► **the developing brain needs:**

**Healthy relationships:** Early relationships help wire the brain to form trusting relationships, to love and to feel safe and secure.

**Positive experiences:** Verbal and physical experiences help the brain develop new connections.

**Consistent and secure environment:** The brain develops gradually in response to experiences and the environment.

## ► **the prenatal period through age 5 is a critical window:**

During this time period, **children's brains are growing fastest** and they are constantly downloading information from the environment around them.

**It is possible to build basic brain connections later** in a child's life, but it requires far more work and is much more difficult.

## ► **When children are in a neglectful, chaotic environment without warm caregivers and adequate stimulation, the impacts can be powerful:**

- Chronic stress can actually **slow brain development**, especially the development of the frontal lobes, the part of the brain responsible for judgment, impulse control and reading social cues from others.

- Children in poverty have **significantly different brains** than other children, with smaller and less developed brain areas.

- By age 4, children in poverty hear 30 million **fewer words** than their higher income peers, impacting their readiness for school.

- When children worry about survival, they **can't focus** on academics, friendships and other key parts of a successful childhood.

**BRAINS CAN BE  
CHANGED FOR  
THE BETTER!**

**Ways to support developing brains and build secure relationships include:**

- 1.** Hold and touch young children gently
- 2.** Talk, sing and read books or play pat-a-cake
- 3.** Follow a child's lead and respond to vocalizations
- 4.** Use routines such as diapering and feeding as one-on-one time to interact individually
- 5.** Acknowledge and mirror children's emotions and help them learn words to describe their feelings

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