

The brain is an amazing and complex organ, controlling all of our bodily functions, emotions, motor skills, speech, and thinking skills. The first several years of a child's life is the most critical time for the brain to develop. By the time a child reaches three years of age the brain has grown to 80% of its adult size and 90% by the time they enter kindergarten. Windows of opportunity are open wide during these years for many skills, including language development, fine and gross motor skills and processing and dealing with emotions. We can think of the brain as a tower of blocks. We start with a solid base and work up. Without a strong foundation the upper levels are unable to be very strong. The foundation of our brain is being formed in the first five years of a child's life.

What causes our brains to grow and develop are the brain cells or neurons. The neurons grow and connect with each other when a child is experiencing interesting stimuli, love and when basic needs are met. Without all of these the connections are not being made, therefore causing a stunting of brain growth. Children need new experiences along with repeated ones. This causes new connections to be made along with the strengthening of these connections, which will eventually transfer into long term memory. The brain does a "pruning" process, which actually gets rid of connections that were made but are not being used. When a child is repeatedly in toxic stressful situations a stress hormone called cortisol is created. Cortisol acts like a grease and covers the neurons. Small bits of cortisol are normal, but repeated exposure causes the neurons to become slippery and cannot connect to each other.

The brain is considered "plastic" or formable. When a child is born the brain is wired and ready for learning. The child can learn any type of language along with any type of behaviors and skills, negative or positive. Play is the work of the young child and aides in their ability to make and keep brain connections. Allow the child to explore, discover and create. Provide infants with stimulating visuals along with loving touch. The mobile child needs a safe place to be able to move around and touch things. Engaging your child in pretend play and following their lead is an excellent way to form connections in the brain and also with each other. Remember, childhood only happens once, PLAY!

For more information or to request a presentation contact Amy Culverhouse
amy.greatstartparents@live.com.