



# **The First Years Last Forever**

**How you can  
make a difference  
in the life of  
your child**





Canadian Institute of Child Health  
Institut canadien de la santé infantile

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# The First Years Last Forever

How you can make a difference in the life of your child

**H**ow do I make a positive difference in the life of my child?

What can I do to promote healthy brain development in my baby? How do I raise a happy, confident, successful learner? How can the first years last forever?



As a parent, you play an important role in shaping the way your baby will learn, think and behave in the future. Research shows that the relationship between you and your child in the early years is a necessary part of healthy brain development.

Here are ten guidelines that encourage and further this brain development:



## **Be warm, loving and responsive**

Children need loving, sensitive care so they feel secure. By holding, rocking, smiling or singing to your child, you are helping to shape future learning and behaviour. Touch is especially important, because holding and stroking stimulates the brain to release the hormones it needs to grow.

**2**

### **Respond to your child's cues and clues**

Because babies cannot use words to express their moods and needs, you must be aware of your baby's sounds, movements, and facial expressions to respond properly. Remember — you can't spoil a baby by responding to his or her needs.



**3**

### **Talk, sing and read to your child**

The parts of the brain that deal with speech and language develop as words are spoken. The more you expose your child to language, the more the brain will grow and develop. Your child's language will grow when he or she hears you talk, sing or read.

**4**

### **Establish routines and rituals**

Daily routines are very comforting to babies and help them learn what to expect from their environment. Children who have safe and predictable experiences with others have also been found to do better in school.

**5**

### **Encourage safe play and adventure**

As babies grow, they begin to explore the world beyond their parents and caregivers. Encourage your child to explore, but be ready when he or she returns to you for security. Remember that play is very important as a learning experience.

**6****Limit TV and electronic games**

Children who learn best in school have families who limit the amount of time they spend in front of TVs and computers. Be careful about the kinds of shows they watch and the electronic games they play. Look at programs with your child and don't let TV become your babysitter.

**7****Use positive discipline as a chance to teach**

As children explore their world, it is important to set consistent limits and provide adult support and guidance. Studies show that positive discipline — which really means to teach — is necessary to your child's healthy development. Useful forms of discipline include saying 'no', providing other choices and giving reasons for your rules. Always remind your child that he or she is loved.

**8****Understand that each child is special**

All children are different and need praise for their successes. Be sensitive to their cues and clues. This will encourage your children to feel positive about themselves.





## **Choose quality child care and be involved**

When you use child care, be sure it is of high quality, and stay involved. Quality child care and other early learning programs can improve your child's learning and social skills. Talk with friends, teachers, and others whose opinion you value when deciding on the best option for your child. Studies have shown that children do better in school when their families have been involved in their preschool care and education. Plan early. Quality child care can take time to find.



## **Take care of yourself**

In order to take care of your child, you must look after yourself. Don't be afraid to reach out and get help! If you feel overwhelmed, depressed, tired, anxious, or angry, ask for assistance. Family, friends, and professionals such as child care providers, public health nurses, family doctors and paediatricians can all help you. And, remember, when you make a mistake, as all parents and caregivers do, you have many opportunities to make up for it.

Current research shows that healthy parent-child relationships have an important influence on the brain development of babies and young children. These guidelines can help you raise healthy, happy children and confident, competent learners.

If you have questions or need further information about the importance of the early years, please see the coordinator of this program.



## **Keep your child happy, healthy and safe**

- Nourish your baby with breast milk, if possible.
- Always put your baby to sleep on his or her back.
- Take your baby for regular check ups and all recommended vaccinations.
- See a doctor or nurse if your baby is ill.
- Make sure the places where your child spends time are safe and child proof.
- When young children ride in cars, be sure they are always in the back seat and strapped securely into a safety seat that is right for their size.
- Provide a smoke-free environment at home and everywhere your child spends time.



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