

OC SAFE  
FROM THE  
START

# A Guide to Your Young Child's Healthy Brain Development

## Parent Workbook



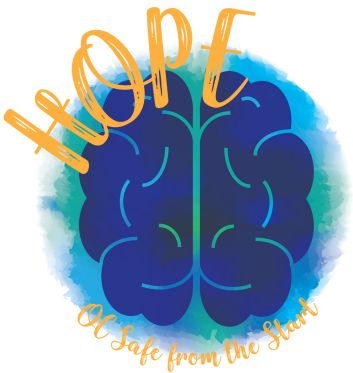
Funded by: OC Health Care Agency (HCA), Mental Health and Recovery Services, Mental Health Services Act/Prop. 63



Authored by:  
Rose Hedegard, MPA  
Mary Frances Marlin, MSN,  
RN, PHN

**Dear Parent/Guardian,**

**Your young child brings a time of wonder and the beginning of a journey with so many questions. This workbook is about HOPE. It will answer your questions and help you be the best parent you can be. Together, you can thrive. Each stage brings its new challenges and discoveries with opportunities for personal growth. Let's begin the journey of a lifetime!**



**This workbook belongs  
to:**

---

# Table of Contents

Brain Development .....	4
Early Childhood Development .....	6
Anger Management .....	8
Self-Regulation .....	10
Communication .....	12
Setting Limits .....	14
Message to Parent .....	16
References .....	17
Suggested Websites .....	18



# BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

## Your young child's brain development...

A young child is defined as birth to age 5. There is no greater period of change in our lives than in the first few months of life. That is why we are writing this workbook. Every parent needs to know how the young child's brain and body develop (see chart on next page). As you read on, the amazing brain will be explained. Hour by hour, new growth takes place, new connections are formed, and patterns develop that mirror your young child's experience in his/her environment.

Your young child's brain is underdeveloped at birth. It needs experiences to help it develop. The brain makes a blueprint of every experience your young child has. Your young child learns these experiences through sight, sound, touch, and play.

Experiences during this early vulnerable period of life are critical to shaping the ability to form close and emotionally healthy relationships (Perry, 2001).

Your young child's brain is like a sponge. The younger your child is, the more information he/she can absorb.

Your growing young child needs positive, repetitive, predictable experiences in his/her life for healthy brain development. Your young child's brain develops well when it is surrounded by a calm environment. You can create that calm environment for your young child.

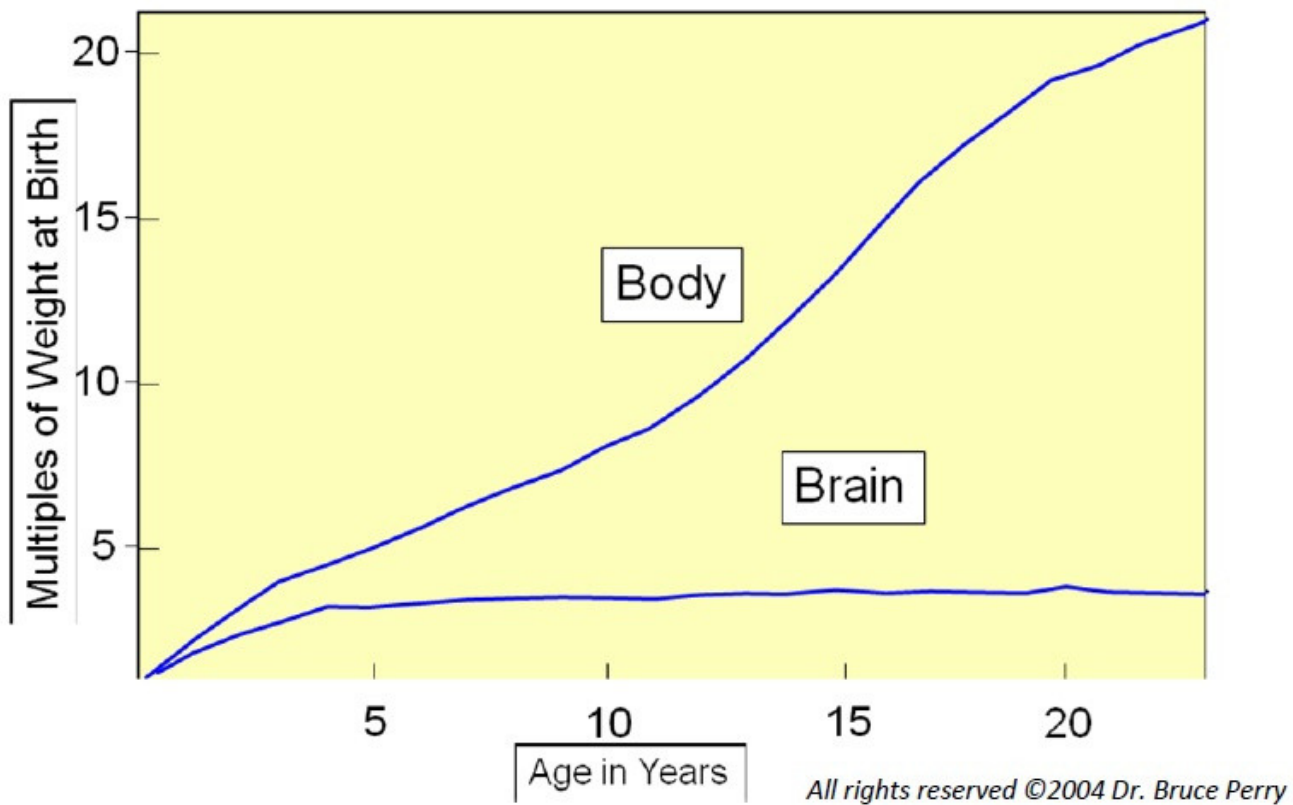
If your young child experiences fear or exposure to domestic violence, his/her brain development may be negatively affected.

If the exposure to violence is repeated, your young child's brain will not develop normally. This message is one of the most important messages in this workbook.

*"During the first three years of life, the human brain develops to 90 percent of adult size and puts in place the majority of systems and structures that will be responsible for all future emotional, behavioral, social and physiological functioning during the rest of life."*

Dr. Bruce Perry

# Brain Growth vs. Body Growth



This graph clearly shows us how our bodies continue to grow as we mature to adulthood. It also shows us how brain growth levels off before the age of five.

That is why the first five years of your young child's life are so important for healthy brain development. You are the most important person in your young child's life during these first five years. You can help his/her brain develop normally during these important years.

What if your young child were to be exposed to violence? Now that you know more about early childhood brain development, what are two things you could do to improve your young child's home environment?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_



# Early Childhood Development

## What is attachment?

Attachment is a special bond between one person and another.

“In most cases, the mother’s behaviors bring pleasure, soothing, and nourishment to the infant and the infant’s behaviors bring satisfaction to the mother. This reciprocal positive feedback loop is where attachment develops” (Perry, 2001).

## What is bonding?

Bonding is the process of forming and building this emotional attachment between your baby and you. Each positive connection between your child, their environment, and you results in new learning. Skin-to-skin contact is encouraged, because it soothes and helps you and your young child bond.



Touch your young child. Young children learn through touch. Soothing touch makes them feel safe and secure.

## Ways to bond with young children:

- Hold them
- Rock them
- Sing to them
- Feed them
- Kiss them
- Look into their eyes

Respond quickly to your young child’s cries. You cannot spoil your young child. Hold your young child while you are feeding them. Do not prop a bottle.

Sing to your young child or play soothing music. You do not have to be a good singer.

## Responsive Caring:

Group care can be a place where all children, caregivers, and parents form deep, meaningful, and satisfying relationships that support both the family and the full development of the children (Lally, Torres & Phelps, 2003).

Any form of child care should be in harmony with what goes on at home, following the form and style of what is familiar to the child.



## Somatosensory Bath

Touch  
Taste  
Smell  
Sound  
Movement

*“Children who are good at self-regulation, good at soothing, don’t cry very much . . . are children who have had incredibly, attentive early care giving.”*

Dr. Bruce Perry

### Remember . . .

Feeling safe and secure helps your young child’s brain develop normally.

What if my young child has not received enough attention? What are two ways I can give my young child more attention?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_





# Anger Management

Before we look at ways to manage aggression and anger, we must understand the following:

Aggression and Anger are not the same.

**Aggression** is an action that often is an attempt to hurt a person or to destroy property.

**Anger** is an emotion that happens when a person experiences frustration or injury.

When young children are aggressive, they will have a more difficult time making friends and socializing.

Anger can be effectively managed by learning how to be assertive and cooperative with others. Younger children will need more help from you to understand how to manage their angry feelings.



If a young child is exposed to adults who do not manage anger well, they will learn to manage anger poorly. The skills that help us manage anger can be learned.

**This is another important message.**

**Aggression and anger might be:**

- A defense to avoid painful feelings,
- Associated with failure,
- Low self-esteem,
- Feelings of isolation and loneliness, or
- Anxiety about situations over which your young child has no control.



When your young child becomes frustrated or angry, step in. Coach them through the moment. Model or role-play appropriate behavior. If your young child is very upset, redirect his/her attention to another activity until he/she calms down.

**Teach and explain.** This can be done through role-play, discussion, or reading a children's book about being angry.

**Are there hidden causes?** Is your young child hungry, tired, sick, jealous, frustrated, bored or scared? If you can identify any of these feelings, discuss them along with the aggressive behavior.

**Do not focus on punishment.** Punishment is not effective when your young child is angry or frustrated. Punishment does not teach your child how to behave appropriately.

Try to change the way you see difficult situations. Instead of seeing them as stressful events, you can see them as opportunities to learn.

### **Remember . . .**

- Use positive self-talk. Tell yourself positive statements such as "It will be okay."
- Take a 5 to 10 minute break.
- Remember, your young child also needs downtime.
- It is important to understand the reason for a young child's anger in order to help him/her manage the anger.

**What if I have modeled feelings of anger in front of my young child?  
What are two positive ways I can manage my anger?**

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_



# SELF-REGULATION



Self-regulation is a strength that becomes a lifelong process. Self-regulation means that your young child notices and can calm or control urges such as hunger and sleep, as well as feelings of frustration, anger, and fear. Self-regulation begins to develop when a caring parent creates positive, repetitive, predictable experiences. It increases as the young child's brain matures.

A daily routine will help your young child feel safe and secure, because he/she knows what to expect.



**“Primary sensations play a major role in providing the patterned, repetitive, sensory stimulation and experiences that help organize the young child’s brain.”**  
**Dr. Bruce Perry**

When your young child cannot self-regulate, he/she will have problems developing friendships and learning how to control his/her behavior.

Children who struggle with self-regulation are more reactive, immature, impressionable, and more easily overwhelmed by threats and violence.

You are a role model for your young child. Your young child learns from watching and listening to you.

*“If you want your child to be kind, then you have to be kind to your child. If you want your child to be good at self-regulation and not lose their temper, you have to not lose your temper.”*

**Dr. Bruce Perry**

## Temperament:

It is important to understand your young child's temperament.

According to Stamm (2007), temperament is a set of inborn, quite stable traits that are hard-wired into your child's brain.

### Types of temperament:

- **The Easy Child:** This child shows regular eating, sleeping, and elimination cycles, a positive approach response to new situations, and can accept frustration with little fuss.
- **The Difficult Child:** This child shows irregular eating, sleeping, and elimination cycles. He/she displays a negative approach response to new situations, such as frequent and loud crying or throwing tantrums when frustrated. Difficult children are slow to adapt to change, and need more time to get used to new food or people.
- **The Slow-to-Warm-Up Child:** This child shows negative responses of mild intensity when exposed to new situations, but slowly comes to accept them with repeated exposure. These children have fairly regular biological routines. Problems with these children vary depending on the other characteristics they show.

(Thomas & Chess, 1977).

### Remember . . .

As a parent, it could be helpful to examine the relationship with your own parents.

You may be able to identify some of the experiences in your childhood that you do not want to repeat with your young child.

What if my young child has trouble calming down? What are two ways I can help my young child calm down?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_



# COMMUNICATION



Parenting is stronger and more enjoyable when a positive parent/child relationship is established.

Good communication is needed to form this positive parent/child relationship.

Talk often with your young child from birth and as he/she grows.

Make eye contact when you talk with your young child. Give him/her your full attention.

Avoid taking a telephone call when your young child has something important to tell you.

Read to your young child. This will help build your young child's language skills. Give your young child privacy. The best communication between you and your young child will occur when others are not around.

Do not embarrass or put your young child on the spot in front of others.

## **Remember . . .**

- In childhood, feelings of anger and sadness are very close to one another. It is important to remember that much of what an adult experiences as sadness is expressed as anger by children.
- Children must know what is expected of them. They learn this through communication. Punishment is never the best way to communicate what we expect of them.
- Punishment can cause your young child to feel angry, resentful, anxious or fearful, which interferes in the development of a good relationship with you.



## **Praising Your Child:**

- Praise your young child for their efforts to communicate.
- Praise shows your young child that his/her behavior is on target. It reinforces self-esteem, and promotes a closer relationship with you and your young child.
- It takes time to change behavior. Children's behavior does not change overnight. Parents must understand that the time it takes for children to change their behavior can be different depending on their age and stage of development.
- Children may need time to practice, guidance from their parents, rewards, and a feeling of safety and security.

**Did you praise  
your young child  
today?  
It is important to  
do this every day.**



## **Ways to Encourage Your Child:**

- “You must feel proud of yourself . . .”
- “You have worked so hard . . .”
- “You are a real problem solver for . . .”

The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Learning

**What if I do not feel comfortable talking with my young child? What are two things I can do to feel more comfortable talking with my young child?**

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_



# SETTING LIMITS



Why is setting limits so important? Limits or boundaries help your young child feel like you care, especially when you share with him/her the reasons why rules are set.

Young children will feel more secure, even though the limit is not enjoyable.

Young children learn better when the rules and expectations are clear.

Consistency is necessary to build healthy boundaries.

If you do not follow the rules, your young child is likely to learn that rules are not important and can be ignored without consequences.

## What do you need for structure?

- Routine actions
- Reasonable limits
- Consistency
- Child involvement

(Stamm, 2007)





Teach your young child that mistakes are wonderful opportunities to learn. Model yourself by using the **Three R's of Recovery** after you make a mistake:

1. **Recognize** your mistake.
2. **Reconcile** and be willing to say, "I'm sorry, I didn't like the way I handled that."
3. **Resolve** to focus on solutions rather than blame.  
(#3 is effective only if you do #1 & #2 first.)

(Nelson, 2006)

## Recognize, Reconcile, Resolve

### Remember . . .

Give your young child fair warning if you expect him/her to stop doing something.

Some children have trouble with abrupt changes.

Follow through. It is as important as setting limits.

When limits are consistent, your young child learns that he/she can trust you to do what you say.

Limits should be age-appropriate.

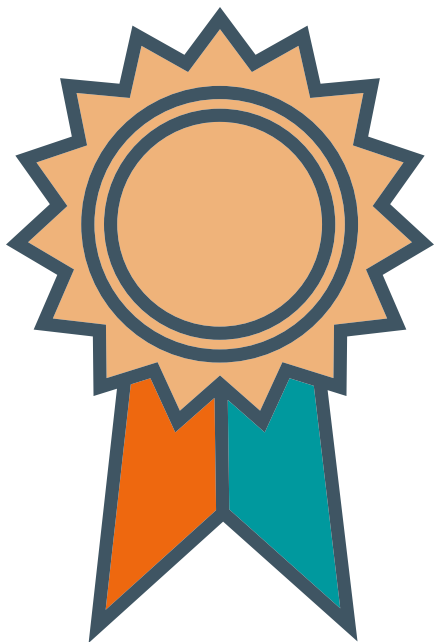
Limits will change as your young child grows.

How would your young child benefit from healthy limits? What are two things you could do to create healthy limits for your young child?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

# Congratulations



**You have a guide to be the best parent you can be. As your young child grows and develops, your plan should grow and develop with him/her. Remember, when you have a question, you can refer back to this workbook. Enjoy your journey!**

# References

- Arevalo, L., & Grebel, K. (2006). *Talking to parents about violence: facilitator guide*. Costa Mesa, CA: Orange County Department of Education.
- Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning. *Some starters for giving positive feedback and encouragement for effort, thinking, and problem solving*. Retrieved March 20, 2011, from Vanderbilt University, Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning Web site: <http://vanderbilt.edu/csefel>.
- Lally, R.J., Torres, Y.L., & Phelps, P.C. (2003). *Caring for infants and toddlers in groups: developmentally appropriate practice*. Washington, DC: ZERO TO THREE.
- Malmberg, R. (Executive Director/Producer), & Oyler, M. (Producer). (2008). *First impressions: exposure to violence and a child's developing brain*. [DVD]. Sacramento, CA: California Attorney General's Office.
- Nelson, J. (n.d.). *Positive discipline guidelines*. In *PositiveDiscipline.com*. Retrieved June 2010, from <http://www.empoweringpeople.com/files/guidelines.pdf>.
- Perry, B.D. (2001). *Bonding and attachment in maltreated children: consequences of emotional neglect in childhood*. Houston, TX: ChildTrauma Academy. Retrieved March 20, 2011, from <http://centerforchildwelfare.fmhi.usf.edu/kb/ChronicNeglect/ConseqOfChNeglect.pdf>.
- Perry, B.D. (2002). Training series 2: six core strengths for healthy child development. Houston, TX: Child Trauma Academy. Retrieved August 2010, from [http://www.lfcc.on.ca/Perry\\_Six\\_Core\\_Strengths.pdf](http://www.lfcc.on.ca/Perry_Six_Core_Strengths.pdf).
- Perry, B.D. (2004). *Brain growth vs. body growth*. Houston, TX: ChildTrauma Academy.
- Paltin, D., Child Development Institute. (n.d.). *Your baby's brain health, development and environment*. In *ChildDevelopmentInfo.org*. Retrieved August 2010, from <http://www.childdevelopmentinfo.com/parenting/your-babys-brain-health-development-and-environmen.shtml>.
- Stamm, J. (2007). *Bright from the start: the simple, science-backed way to nurture your child's developing mind from birth to age 3*. New York: Gotham Books.
- Thomas, A., & Chess, S. (1977). *Temperament and development*. New York: Brunner/ Mazel Publisher.
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (n.d.). Help your child feel comfortable in social situations. In *Education .com*. Retrieved March 20, 2011, from [http://www.education.com/reference/article/Ref\\_Help\\_Your\\_Child\\_Feel/](http://www.education.com/reference/article/Ref_Help_Your_Child_Feel/).

# Suggested Websites for Additional Learning:

**Center on the Developing Child at Harvard**

**University:** <http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu/>

**Jane Nelson, Ed.D:**

<http://www.positivediscipline.com>

**Linda Chamberlain, Ph.D., MPH:**

<http://www.drindachamberlain.com>

**Laboratories of Cognitive Neuroscience  
at Children's Hospital Boston:**

<http://www.childrenshospital.org/research/brainworks>

**National Scientific Council on the  
Developing Child:**

<http://www.developingchild.net/pubs/wp.html>

**Safe Start Center:**

<http://www.safestartcenter.org>

**The Center on the Social Emotional  
Foundations for Early Learning:**

<http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/>

**The ChildTrauma Academy:**

<http://www.Childtrauma.org>

**Zero-to-Three:**

<http://www.zerotothree.org>



For additional information, please contact:

Christine Laehle at 714.327.1067  
School-Based Violence Prevention Education Services  
Prevention and Early Intervention  
Orange County Department of Education

<http://www.ocde.us/ocsfts> • <http://www.ocde.us/pei>

