

# Childhood Development Parent Workshop

HANDOUT 1:

## THE BUSY BRAIN: FROM BIRTH TO THREE

### What We Know

- Babies begin to learn from the moment they are born.
- At birth, the baby's brain is still developing. Most of the brain cells are not connected - or wired together - until after birth.
- Early experiences-such as the love and care a baby receives-play a big role in how the brain cells get wired together.
- Children's brains are “busier” in the first three years of life than they will ever be again.

### What This Means for Your Child

The first three years have a lasting impact on how well children relate to others and how easily they learn:

- Loving care in the early years will help your baby become a caring person.
- Family members can do a lot to improve a child's ability to learn.
- The earlier that vision and hearing problems are detected, the more effectively they can be addressed.
- The more words you say to your child in the first three years, the more you will help build your child's vocabulary.
- It is easier to learn certain skills and positive attitudes early in life than it will ever be again - though it is never too late to learn.

### What You Can Do to Help Your Child *Social and Emotional Development*

- You can't “spoil” a baby. Respond promptly to your baby's needs for food, sleep, and comfort.
- Hold and cuddle your baby frequently. This kind of physical contact helps your baby's emotional growth.
- Listen to your baby's signals. When your baby feels like playing, blow gently on the tummy, sing happy songs, play patty-cake. When your baby turns away, it may just signal a need for quiet time or that she is ready for a nap.
- Help your toddler understand his feelings. When your child gets angry say, “You're angry because he or she took your toy away.”
- Include your toddler in simple chores such as sorting the laundry or putting napkins on the table. This will help your child feel proud of his or her abilities.

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## Language Development

- Talk with your child about everyday activities. Even with a newborn you can say, “It's time to change your diaper” or “Now it's time for a bath.”
- With babies, repeat or imitate their babbling or attempts to speak.
- With toddlers, label or name various objects around the house.
- Read to your child every day. Start by talking about the pictures in books. As children get older, encourage them to ask questions or predict what will happen next. After reading, talk about the story.

## Overall Learning Development

- Provide varied experiences. Even a simple walk to the park can be a learning experience.
- Provide opportunities for your child to develop problem-solving skills, such as through simple three-piece puzzles.
- Turn off the TV. Babies and toddlers learn from interacting with you in conversations and in play. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no TV for children from birth to two years old.
- Play with your children and enjoy them!

## Health and Safety

- Have your baby screened for hearing and vision problems during the first six months.
- Don't let your baby be around smoking. Smoking increases the risk of respiratory and ear infections.
- Use car safety seats that are specifically designed for infants and toddlers.
- Put your baby to sleep on his or her back or side in the crib with a firm, flat mattress and no soft bedding underneath.
- Hold your baby when feeding with a bottle to prevent choking and to make your baby feel secure and loved.
- Most babies learn to reach, sit, stand, and walk when they are ready. If your child is a month or two “late” according to the standard timetable, there is probably no cause for concern. But you can help your baby develop these skills by baby-proofing your home and providing a safe environment to explore.

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HANDOUT 2:

## THE BUSY BRAIN: FROM THREE TO FIVE

### What We Know

- A preschool-age child's brain is twice as active as an adult's.
- The brain reaches its full size by age five.
- The part of the brain that affects self-control, planning, and judgment is the slowest part of the brain to develop. It does not function fully until about age six or seven.
- Early experiences have a lasting impact on a child's emotional and intellectual development

### What This Means for Your Child

Your child is “ripe” for learning.

- A preschool-age child picks up new words like a sponge. This is also the period when children, just from listening to others, pick up the basic structure of grammar.
- Between the ages of three and five, children start to understand the difference between “make believe” and “real”.
- They also start to understand - and care about - other people's feelings.

### Your Child Is Not a Miniature Adult

- There's a reason why a three-year-old cannot sit still long or follow adult reasoning dependably: the preschool age child frequently acts immaturely because the part of the brain that affects self-control is still developing.
- Preschool children do not yet have the judgment necessary to protect themselves from accidents. They need help from adults to keep safe.
- Preschool children rapidly develop language and other skills that are important for reading, but they do this better through play than through formal instruction.
- Talk to your child about feelings. Encourage your child to begin to notice the feelings of other children.
- Consider your child's learning style. Support the quiet child in trying something new, such as tossing a ball on the playground or inviting a friend to play. Encourage the very active child to display her or his own artwork or pictures that he or she likes.

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## Language Development

- Use daily routines as opportunities to talk with your child-while shopping, preparing meals, or in the car.
- Get a library card for your children, and help them to pick out books that interest them. Read to your children and ask them to tell you the story.
- Sing songs together and encourage your child to make up new words or verses for favorite tunes.

## Overall Learning Development

- Help build your child's memory: ask questions about past events and experiences, such as what he or she made at school that day.
- Practice remembering and carrying out a set of instructions, such as washing hands, brushing teeth, and finding a bedtime story.
- On a walk encourage your child to find three different kinds of leaves or bugs.
- Help your child measure ingredients for a cooking project.

## Health and Safety

- Keep the following items out of your child's reach or in a locked cabinet: medicines, soaps, detergents, bleach, plastic bags, and insecticides. Post the number for your local poison control center and emergency number (911) nearby.
- Practice crossing the street with your child, and make sure that a helmet is worn when your child rides a bicycle.
- Watch your child carefully when near water. Children love to play in water, but they can easily drown in a few inches of water in a bath tub, toilet bowl, or wading pool.
- Don't allow your child to be around smoking. Smoking increases the risk of respiratory and ear infections.
- The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends a vision test at age three.