

Tips for Parents of Young Children



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Parenting.
Give it time.
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Your child's brain is amazing!

Your child's brain begins to grow before birth. During the first three years it will grow the most. By age three 90% of their brain will be developed.



How does your baby's brain develop?

Your baby's brain is made up of different areas that control everything they do from hearing and walking to problem-solving and how they feel. Each area of the brain has millions of brain cells, or neurons which are connected to each other by synapses.

At birth your baby has 100 billion brain cells but few connections (synapses) between these cells. It is your love, affection and closeness that help wire up the connections.

In your baby's first years of life, connections develop at an extremely fast pace. From birth to age two your child will form 700 new connections per second!

As these connections build your child will develop skills like holding a toy, crawling, taking a first step and saying their first words.

What does your baby's brain need to develop well?

Your child needs you to help their brain grow well. You don't need to do anything complicated or have expensive toys.

Your baby's developing brain needs:

- **Love and attention** – When you respond to your baby in a loving and consistent way, you can help their brain connections to be made. Try to respond to your baby when they cry. They will learn that the world is safe, and will feel secure.

- **Positive experiences** – When a baby babbles, cries or smiles and you respond with eye contact, a smile, a song, words or a cuddle this helps build connections in the brain. This back and forth contact helps build healthy brain connections which help your child develop well.
- **Fun activities** – Time spent playing gives your baby new experiences which ‘feed’ their brain! This is better than time spent watching TV and using tablets. Talking, reading and singing are all fun and easy ways to help your baby’s brain to grow.
- **A safe, calm and loving home** – When you are relaxed, your baby is more likely to feel calm too. The part of the brain which helps your child control or calm feelings like anger is not well developed before the age of three. Your baby is not old enough to do things on purpose or control their actions. When your baby is upset or distressed they need you to help them calm down.
- **Things kept the same as much as possible** – Find a routine that works for your family.
- **Good food** – Breast milk gives your baby the best start. Whether you breastfeed or use formula, feeding is a great time for brain-building – make eye contact, sing, smile and have a cuddle. As your baby grows, be sure to offer them a healthy diet. This helps their brain grow.

You’re the most important part of your child’s life

- Your emotional well-being has a big affect on the emotional state of your child’s brain. Finding ways to relax and manage your stress can help. Getting a break may help you cope with everything.
- The quality of your relationship with your partner is very important whether parenting together or co parenting apart. Healthy communication between you and your partner can reduce stress in your family.

Nobody gets it right all the time

It may help to talk things over with family or friends. If you are worried about feeling stressed, low or depressed talk with your health visitor or GP. Your local **Family Information Service** will have information about services in your area – contact them on 0300 123 7777.

For more helpful tips on your child’s development and on positive parenting techniques, visit: **gov.wales/giveittime**