



Note: Timeframe given is the “sensitive period” when that part of the brain is growing and developing *the most*. The brain grows and changes throughout our lifetimes, so your child will benefit by all these kinds of stimulation throughout life.

(Brain illustration: Macmillan Cancer Support 2012. Text by Janelle Durham, MSW. GoodDaysWithKids.com)

Brain Development—How you can help.

Brain Stem—Eating, Breathing, Digestion, Self-Preservation

During pregnancy: reduce stress, minimize alcohol and tobacco. Maximize healthy diet, including omega-3 fats.

After birth: Help your child feel safe, emotionally and physically. If a child is frightened or stressed, the brain goes into survival mode (brain stem function), and can't learn complex big ideas. When a child feels safe and happy, the child can learn anything.

Cerebellum—Balance & Coordination

Let them move! A lot! In lots of different ways. Take your child to the playground and swing, slide, and spin. Let them climb trees and rocks. Let them run, throw, jump, kick. Dance together. Swim. Try gymnastics, martial arts, and sports of all kinds.

Occipital Lobe—Vision

Provide interesting things to look at. Play games where the child follows things with his/her eyes. Roll balls, throw balls. Look at pictures and small items up close. Play "I spy" and "where's waldo" and games where they search for visual differences. Make sure your child has plenty of outdoor time to develop distance vision.

Parietal Lobe—Touch

Carry your child, touch your child, hold hands, hug, massage, wrestle.

Give your child lots of objects to hold and manipulate. Let them touch soft things, rough things, slimy things, etc.

Let your child explore the world hands-on—pulling, pushing, pouring, picking up, dropping, turning, twisting, opening, closing.

Parietal Lobe—Language

Talk, sing, and read to your child. Listen to your child and respond to their sounds and words.

Read the same stories, sing the same songs, or say the same prayers or poems over and over so your child learns to memorize.

Follow your child's attention and talk about what they are focused on in the moment—what they are looking at or doing.

Temporal Lobe—Hearing

Expose your child to a wide variety of sounds. Also, be sure there are quiet times when this system can rest.

Listen to music, play music, let your child experiment with instruments / noisemaking.

Play games where you practice being loud/quiet, clap a rhythm and have child repeat it, do call and response songs.

Limbic System—Emotions

Show unconditional love. Experience joy with your child. Respond in consistent ways.

Talk to your child about emotions. Teach vocabulary to understand how they feel. Teach appropriate ways to express emotions.

Frontal Lobe—Concrete Thinking

Help your child notice patterns. ("After we _____, we always _____") Have your child sort and categorize objects.

Encourage problem-solving. Let your child be frustrated sometimes as they figure something out.

In your child's elementary school years (age 5—12) work on reading, writing, and math.

Prefrontal Cortex—Judgment and Decision Making

Give choices (when your child is calm... they can't make choices when stressed or upset).

Talk to your child about plans. Let them make plans.

Help your child break down big tasks into little steps.

Give your child some freedom to try out their ideas, and learn from their mistakes.