

What can parents do for their child's healthy brain development?

Susan R. Johnson



What can we do to help our children's brains develop?

1. Keep the television turned off as much as possible. One author recommended avoiding television as much as possible for the first 12 years of your child's life and then encouraging your child to always read the book first before seeing the movie. It helps to cover the TV with a cloth or store it away in a closed cabinet or closet. Out of sight really helps the child keep the TV out of mind (Large 1997).

Remember that what we do serves as a role model for our children. We can't really ask our children to stop watching TV if we keep doing it - that will eventually lead to power struggles.

When the television is on, then try to neutralize its damage. Select the programs carefully and watch TV with your child so you can talk about what you see. Keep a light on when the TV is going since that will minimize the effects of the reduced field of vision and provide a different light source for the eyes. Try to sit at least 4 feet from the television and 18 inches from the computer screen. Plan to go outside (to the park, woods, or beach) after viewing television.

2. Read a lot of books to your children (especially ones without a lot of pictures) and tell your children lots of stories. Children love to hear stories about our lives when we were little, or you can make them up. Bedtime and riding in the car provide good opportunities for telling stories. Telling our children stories helps to stimulate their internal picture-making capabilities.

3. Nature! Nature! Nature! Nature is the greatest teacher of patience, delayed gratification, reverence, awe, and observation. The colors are spectacular, and all the senses are stimulated. Many children today think being out in nature is boring because they are so used to the fast-paced, action-packed images on TV (Poplawski 1998). We only truly learn when all our senses are involved and when the information is presented to us in such a way that our higher brain can absorb it. Nature is reality while television is pseudo-reality.



4. Pay close attention to your senses and those of your child. Our environment is noisy and overstimulating to the sense organs. What a child sees, hears, smells, tastes, and touches is extremely important to his or her development. We need to surround our children with what is beautiful, what is good, and what is true. How a child experiences the world has a tremendous influence on how the child perceives the world as a teenager and adult.

5. Have children use their hands, feet, and whole body to perform purposeful activities. All the outdoor activities of running, jumping, climbing, and playing jump rope help develop our children's gross motor skills and myelinate pathways in the higher brain.

Performing household chores, cooking, baking bread, knitting, woodworking, origami, string games, finger games, circle games, painting, drawing, and coloring help develop fine motor skills and also myelinate pathways in the higher brain.

Finally, the future of our children and our society is in the protection and development of our children's minds, hearts, and limbs.



What we are aiming for in the thoughts of our children is best summarized in this fine verse from William Blake's *Auguries of Innocence*:

*To see a world in a grain of sand
and a heaven in a wild flower
hold infinity in the palm of your hand,
and eternity in an hour.*

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