



# Family and Consumer Sciences Extension

## —*Early Brain Development 2003*

*Putting Knowledge to Work for Georgia Families*

The University of Georgia

Cooperative Extension Service

### ***The Problem***

- Brain development is not complete at birth. The brain's neurons strengthen and refine their connections based on the child's experiences during the early years of life.
- The brain connections made during the first years of life form a crucial foundation for later learning and relationships.
- According to the *2003 Kids Count*, 14% of Georgia children are growing up in poverty; 12% have no health insurance; and 24% live in neighborhoods with high poverty rates. Children who grow up in such deprived environments are less likely to have the enriching experiences that lead to optimal brain development and are more likely to have difficulty in school.

### ***Research-based Solutions***

- Although brain development continues throughout life, the brain is primed to make certain connections during the period between birth and the early teens. During these windows of opportunity, children need nurturing care and enriching experiences in order to develop particular skills and abilities more easily than at other times.
- The care that a child receives in the first few years of life has important effects on early brain development. Children who grow up in a safe, secure environment and receive warm, responsive care are more likely to have a positive self-concept, to be successful in school and to relate well to others.

### ***Extension's Role***

- Create awareness among parents, caregivers, and community leaders that an enriching environment and nurturing care can help ensure that a child's brain develops to its full potential.
- Train professionals to teach others about ways to enhance brain development.
- Provide educational programs to parents and caregivers on how to promote early brain development.

### ***Extension's Contribution to Solving the Problem***

- Provided 1,976 hours of early brain development education to 985 child care providers and parents.
- Nearly 61% of the program participants were low-income, at-risk clients.
- Media efforts have been undertaken to increase awareness: radio spots have been broadcast to a listening audience of over 365,400; newspaper columns have gone to a circulation of almost 99,900, and television has targeted 19,900 viewers.

### ***Impact on Georgians***

- Nearly 81% of the child care providers who participated in *Early Brain Development* training workshops said that the program helped them to learn early brain development concepts and child care practices.
- Almost 50% of the child care providers who participated in the workshops improved their early brain development knowledge. The mean of the participants' knowledge test score improved from 87% to 92%.

- Those who participated in the *Early Brain Development* training program said that they intend to adopt recommended early brain development child care practices. For example, at the end of the program, all the participants said that they are more likely to read books to children beginning in early infancy; expose children to new experiences regularly; and protect infants from long-term stresses. Almost 95% planned to play music and sing songs with children and 84% planned to expose children to foreign languages whenever possible.

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