



# Family and Consumer Sciences Extension

## —*Early Brain Development 2004*

*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 2004 *Kids Count* Data Book, 18% of Georgia children are growing up in poverty, and 13% have no health insurance. 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 and later in life.

### ***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 networks of brain connections for language, social skills, and many other abilities.
- 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 child care professionals to teach how to enhance brain development.
- Provide educational programs and resources to parents and caregivers on promoting early brain development.

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

- 13,458 hours of early brain development education were provided to 3,845 child care providers and parents. Of the program participants, 68% were low-income, at-risk clients.
- Media efforts have been undertaken to increase awareness: 24 newsletter articles have been sent to 4,173 readers; 7 newspaper columns have gone to a circulation of almost 151,000; and 16 exhibits reached out to 2,694 care givers.

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

- Ninety-five percent of the child care providers who participated in the Early Brain Development training workshops said that the workshop helped them learn early brain development concepts and ways of nurturing developing brain.
- The comparison of pre and post-test data confirmed that the child care providers who completed the training significantly improved their early brain development knowledge. Participants' mean knowledge test scores improved from 75% to 81%.
- Those who participated in Early Brain Development workshops 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 intended to expose children to new experiences regularly; to play music and sing songs with children; and 63% planned to encourage parents to breastfeed infants.

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