



Family and Consumer Sciences Extension

—*Early Brain Development 2005*

Learning for Life

The University of Georgia Cooperative Extension

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 2005 *Kids Count* data book, 41% of Georgia children are growing up in low-income families; 9% are growing up in extreme poverty; and 14% have no health insurance. Georgia's poverty rate is higher than the national average. 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 provide educational experiences for young children that enhance early brain development.
- Provide educational programs and resources to parents and caregivers on supporting early brain development through play, nurturing and enriching experiences.

Extension's Contribution to Solving the Problem

- More than 12,150 hours of early brain development education were provided to 7,380 child care providers, educators and parents. Of the program participants, 46% were low-income, at-risk clients.
- Media efforts have been undertaken to increase awareness among target groups: 20 newsletter articles have been sent to 3,027 readers; 33 newspaper columns have gone to a circulation of 405,900 readers; 5 television shows have targeted 400,000 viewers and 8 exhibits reached out to 2,640 Georgians.

Impact on Georgians

- Of the child care providers and parents who participated in *Early Brain Development* child care training programs, 93% said that the programs helped them learn early brain development concepts and ways of nurturing the developing brain.
- Those who participated in *Early Brain Development* educational programs said that they intend to follow recommended early brain development practices. For example, 89% planned to play music and sing songs with children; 97% planned to read books to children beginning in early infancy; 100% planned to hug and cuddle children often; 93% planned to expose children to new experiences regularly; 91% planned to protect infants from long-term stresses; and 88% planned to encourage parents to breastfeed infants.

Contact

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