



# Family and Consumer Sciences Extension

## *Early Brain Development 2006*

### **Learning for Life**

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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 connections made in the brain during the first years of life form a crucial foundation for later learning and relationships.
- According to the *2006 Kids Count Data Book*, 44% of Georgia children are growing up in low-income families; 10% are growing up in extreme poverty; and 13% 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 teen years. 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***

- As a partner in the Better Brains for Babies initiative, collaborate to develop and disseminate training materials, web-based information, and print information on early brain development.
- Create community awareness that an enriching environment and nurturing care can help ensure that a child's brain develops to its full potential by providing training and distributing print and web-based materials on early brain development to a variety of groups and individuals.
- Train childcare professionals to provide educational experiences for young children that enhance early brain development.
- Provide educational programs and resources to parents, caregivers, health care professionals, and community leaders on the importance of supporting early brain development through play, nurturing and enriching experiences.

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

- More than 3,710 hours of early brain development education were provided to 1,411 childcare providers, educators and parents. Of the program participants, 41% were low-income or at-risk clients.
- Media efforts have been undertaken to increase awareness among target groups: 28 newsletter articles have been sent to 5,106 readers; 17 radio spots reached 245,600 listeners; 16 newspaper columns have gone to a circulation of 240,000 readers; 2 television shows have targeted 112,000 viewers and 2 exhibits reached out to 1,025 Georgians.

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

- Ninety-three percent (93%) of the *Early Brain Development* childcare training program evaluations received from participants indicated that the programs were helpful for learning early brain development

concepts and ways of nurturing the developing brain.

- These participants said they intend to follow recommended early brain development practices. For example, 97% planned to play music and sing songs with children; 98% planned to read books to children beginning in early infancy; 93% planned to expose children to new experiences regularly; 92% planned to protect infants from long-term stresses; 81% planned to expose children to foreign languages whenever possible; 98% planned to spend time communicating with children face to face every day; and 67% planned to encourage parents to breastfeed infants.

## ***Contact***

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