



Family and Consumer Sciences Extension

Early Brain Development 2007

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 childhood.
- The early childhood years are an important sensitive period for brain development. The connections made in the brain during the first few years of life form a crucial foundation for later learning and development.
- According to the *2007 Kids Count Data Book*, 42% of Georgia children are growing up in low-income families; 9% are growing up in extreme poverty; and 12% 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. Children who grow up in poverty tend to enter school less ready to learn, have more learning problems in school, are less likely to finish school, and tend to have more adjustment problems later in life.

Research-based Solutions

- Although brain development continues throughout life, the brain is primed to make important connections for language, relationships, and other crucial abilities during early childhood. During these windows of opportunity, children need nurturing relationships, positive environments, and enriching experiences in order to develop the networks of brain connections that will enable them to succeed.
- The care that a young child receives from parents, grandparents, child care providers, and other significant adults affects early brain development. Children who grow up in a safe, secure environment and receive warm, responsive, consistent care are more likely to make the brain connections they need to have a positive self-concept, be successful in school, and relate well to others.

Extension's Role

- As a co-leader of the Georgia Better Brains for Babies (BBB) initiative, Extension collaborates to develop and disseminate educational materials and web-based information on early brain development. Extension plays a crucial role as a primary content specialist on early brain development for Better Brains for Babies. Through this collaboration, Extension staff co-teach train-the-trainer workshops at least annually to prepare a wide variety of trainers to educate Georgians about early brain development.
- Extension creates community awareness of the importance of early brain development by providing educational programs and distributing print and web-based materials on brain development to a variety of groups and individuals including parents, grandparents, foster parents, teachers, health care professionals, and community leaders.
- Extension maintains and updates the Better Brains for Babies website, with help from other BBB collaborators.
- Extension professionals train child care providers to provide educational experiences for young children that enhance early brain development. Information about brain development is a regular part of many Extension training sessions for child care providers.

Extension's Contribution to Solving the Problem

- Extension professionals provided more than 1,943 hours of early brain development education to 1,243 child care providers, educators and parents.
- The Better Brains for Babies website, supported and maintained by Extension, received an average of

9,822 hits per month in 2007. Visitors to the site were most likely to view basic information on early brain development.

Impact on Georgians

- Ninety-two percent (91%) of child care providers who attended an *Early Brain Development* program indicated that the program was helpful.
- The vast majority of child care providers trained on early brain development concepts indicated they plan to follow recommended early brain development practices. For example, 100% of those surveyed plan to play music and sing songs with children; 100% plan to protect infants from long-term stresses; 97% plan to expose children to new experiences regularly; 96% plan to read books to children beginning in early infancy; 92% plan to respond to infants every time they cry; and 77% plan to encourage parents to breastfeed infants.

Contact

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