

Helping your baby's brain to grow: 5 a day for parenting

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The human brain is amazing.....

Nearly all the cells in your baby's brain are present when they are born but they are not working yet. They start working when connections are made between cells in response to what they experience. Babies need adults to soothe and stimulate them in order to build their brains and develop loving secure attachments. Their brain is a social organ, it works best when it is linked into other brains through interaction.

Neuroscience shows that what happens to us shapes our brains.

The **Five to Thrive** Approach describes five everyday things that **you can do together with your baby** to build connections, feed and nurture their growing brain and develop strong, positive relationships with them.

Anything which your baby does is to get a response from you, if you do not respond it can feel very scary for them. It takes time to tune into your baby and learn how they communicate. When you look at your baby they are interested in your face. Hearing your voice and being close to you helps them feel safe.

Adapted from Five to Thrive, Kate Cairns Associates, 2014


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RESPOND:CUDDLE:RELAX:PLAY:TALK

These are the five things which we know are most helpful in developing healthy brains. Responding to your baby when they give you a signal, cuddling them or providing physical comfort, relaxing when you are with them, playing with them and talking to/ with them. **These are like your babies five a day, their brain needs you to do these things to grow healthily.**

Babies are very small and helpless. They need a lot from parents and other adults. But there is a lot they can do too, even from birth! This video shows how ready our babies are to interact and what happens when they are not responded to. Click [here](#) to view. 

Babies do not just need us to make sure they are well fed and help them learn how to sleep. They also need us to play and talk to grow their brains, give them comfort when they cry, understand their personalities, manage our own stress and worries, and help them feel safe and loved.

DID YOU KNOW?

In the first year your baby's brain will double in size. From 0-3 years your baby's brain is growing as fast as it ever will.



RESPOND: CUDDLE: RELAX: PLAY: TALK

RESPOND

Copy the sounds or facial expressions that your baby makes and watch how they react.

Help them to see something they seem interested in.

Pass your baby objects they are interested in, especially if brightly coloured, or have interesting shapes, textures or sounds.

Try to guess what your baby's crying means and respond by meeting their need for warmth and comfort, food, a nappy change or sleep.

Crying is not only an indication of 'upset', it is the only noise babies know how to make which will get your attention, could they be singing or talking to you?

In order for their whole brain to be working babies need your full attention. If you are also watching TV, texting or talking on the phone their brain will not be fully active.

The good news: **By being responsive you will feel happier and so will your baby.** Interaction that matches their needs releases happy chemicals (endorphins and oxytocin) in you and your baby, these provide the best environment for brain growth.

DID YOU KNOW?

When soothed babies develop a pattern in their brain which links soothing activity and feeling physically relaxed—this is the basis for stress regulation for life

CUDDLE

When you are close to your baby, your bodies begin to work together, your baby will feel safe and your relationship will grow. **If you feel calm your baby will too** as their heart will start beating in harmony with yours. Closeness, comfort and soothing fills babies bodies with chemicals which means as they grow up they will feel comfortable with safe people. Connections build in their brain meaning, in time, they will learn how to control their bodies and emotions.

Cuddle as often as you like—**babies cannot have too much contact or be spoiled.**

Try all sorts of touch—stroking, patting, holding, feeding, massage, tickling, hair brushing, finger games (Round and round the garden).

Babies need touch that soothes (cuddles) and touch that stimulates (tickles).



RELAX

Create relaxing spaces for your baby to be in—soft lighting, warmth and gentle sounds help.

Sing or hum if you or your baby are getting stressed—this helps you relax and is soothing, singing is better than shouting.

Spend time soaking up your baby, their warmth, sounds, smells and sights—forget things you need to get done or things which have made you angry/upset.

Make sure you do things which help you relax too—look after yourself so you can look after your baby.

When babies are born they have no way to calm themselves down or manage their own reactions. When they feel stressed **they need you to help them by calming down** and relaxing so your heartbeat and breathing slow down and your muscles relax. Stress hormones (adrenaline and cortisol) have an adverse effect on early brain development. Learning to relax when you are with your child is so important, if you can stay calm when they are upset it will help them calm down.





PLAY:

Babies really enjoy playing and stimulation, they need you to make their world interesting. Toys are great but **the best toy in the world for your baby is....you!** Play helps children to make sense of what is going on emotionally and socially. It helps to build connections in their brain that make it possible for them to communicate, think, plan, make sense of the world around them and develop social skills. Play works best when you are on the same level as your child (on the floor together or sitting together at a table).

Follow your child's lead—by joining their game you tell them their decisions and ideas matter.

Play with facial expressions and gestures; stick out your tongue, blow raspberries, smile and take turns with your baby.

Create-with models, dolls, blocks, pieces of paper.

Explore shapes, colours, textures, matching, counting, hiding and giving and taking games build brain patterns that underpin effective thinking.

Look at picture books together.

Physical play builds motor brain function; finger/hand play, balancing games, dancing, crawling, jumping, running, ball play, skipping and climbing.

Encourage pretending games; Who will they be? Where will they go? What will they do there?

Your children will love to have some special time with you no matter how old they are—as they grow older they will need more time to play by themselves and be inventive but play is for fun for both children and adults as it increases the level of happy chemicals (beta endorphins).



DID YOU KNOW?

Children's language development by 2 years is the single most reliable indicator of later success, and that this is directly linked to the words a child hears.

TALK

Copy your baby's sounds and make new ones. Look straight at them, listen and wait for them to respond as their brain is slower than yours.

Try as many rhymes, poems or songs as you can—your baby thinks you are the world's greatest singer!

Talk to them about what they are experiencing—'Can you feel the bumpy toy?' 'Did you see the dog?' 'Your enjoying this walk today.'

Tell your baby what you are doing, about colours, counting steps, the washing.

Read to them regularly— even when they are very young.

Use an encouraging or upbeat tone of voice; repeat special words or phrases at certain times.

Save your 'strict' voice for when you are giving your baby a warning about something dangerous.



Aberdeenshire Council

Educational Psychology Service

Woodhill House

Westburn Road

Aberdeen

AB16 5GJ

Phone: 01569 690542

Email: eps@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

Website:

<https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/as/aberdeenshireeps/>



Twitter@aberdeenshireEP

We value your feedback, please complete our short survey by scanning the QR code.



Further information & resources

 [How brains are build – Alberta Family Wellness Initiative](#)

[‘My baby’s brain’ developed by Hertfordshire Council on YouTube](#)

[Kate Cairns talks about Five to Thrive](#)

[Brains journey to resilience](#)



[Education Scotland link to Solihul free parenting course](#)

[Scottish ParentClub : PlayTalkRead! with your baby](#)

[Highland Council Bumps 2 Bairns](#)

[Dr Suzanne Zeedyk: The Science of Human Connection](#)

[Connected baby Dr Suzanne Zeedyk](#)



[Shortened version of Five to Thrive, Gold Sure Start](#)

[Factsheet about 5 to Thrive](#)

Sabre Tooth Tigers & Teddy Bears: The connected baby guide to understanding attachment by Dr. Suzanne Zeedyk

Pause for thought.....



Here are some of the discoveries scientists have made about babies' capacity for connection:

(adapted from The connected baby by Suzanne Zeedyk)

- ♦ Babies can smile at you as soon as they are born—no, it isn't just wind!
- ♦ Babies are born eager to take part in conversations, to play their part in the turn-taking and confused if you do not respond.
- ♦ As young as 2 months old, babies can tell when parents are about to pick them up and they adjust their bodies to help with that activity.

Our beliefs about babies shape how we treat them. And how we treat babies shapes who they become. So the discoveries that science is making about their built in/innate/hereditary social abilities matter a lot.



When you give your baby five a day you help their brain to grow and give them the very best start for learning for all their life.