

THE NEURO NURTURING® GUIDE



Providing you with the fundamentals,
insights and information you need to
assist in the healthy brain
development of children



As a special bonus we have also
included for you 10 awesome
Interaction Ideas from our various
Neuro-Nurturing Interaction Packets!

NEURO-NURTURING BASICS

You have the incredibly wonderful opportunity to positively influence the way a child's brain develops and that is because most of brain growth happens AFTER birth.

The term "brain development" refers to much more than influencing how smart a child will be. It is referring to the *actual physical growth* that takes place in the brain.

The early months and years of life are the time for the most rapid brain growth which will influence not only learning, but relationships, self-perception and overall physical and mental health as well.

Children are born with about 85 billion brain cells. Those brain cells need to make connections with each other. When this happens the brain creates (neural) pathways for learning and skills for functioning in life. The child's brain is dependent on experiences to make these essential connections happen. And amazingly they happen at a rate of about 1 million/second! *Wow!*

The critical connections won't be made if there is a lack of experience and you get to provide the experiences needed. But what are the best experiences? The wonderful news is, research has determined what is most beneficial in many areas of development. This can ease your mind, because it isn't just theory, it is science that provides this invaluable understanding. It removes some of the guess work for you.

And when positive experiences are frequent in a child's life, this strengthens the developing brain pathways.

We have made it as easy as possible for you to learn and implement what the research has found! With the Circle of Potential Model, (shared below) you can easily see what children need for optimal development. The term we use for optimal development is, Neuro-Nurturing@.

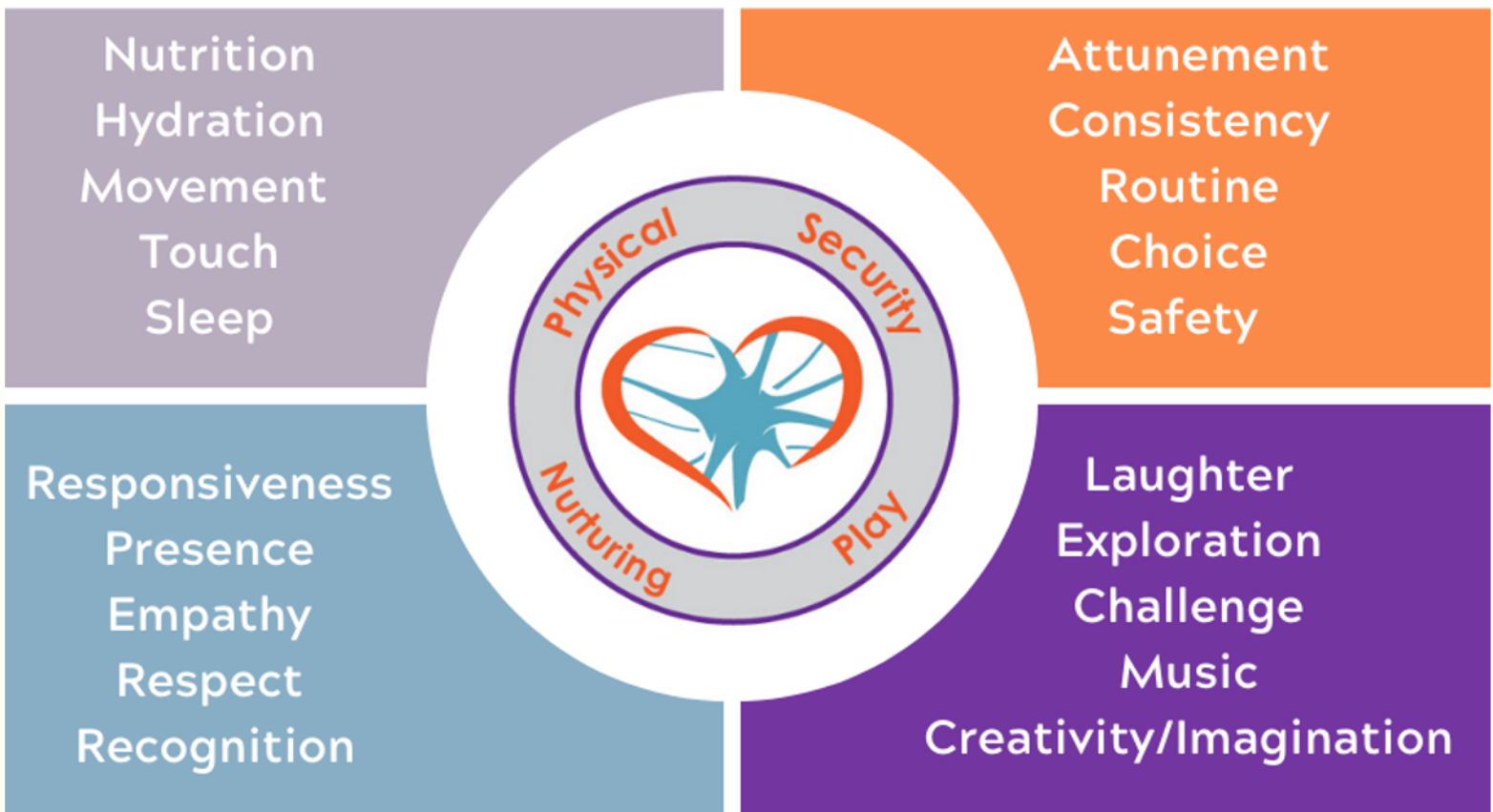
Here are the 4 basic elements to optimal development that make providing the best experiences far less overwhelming. The next section of the guide will include explanations of each of these elements and also, simple ideas you can actually use in everyday life!

- Providing for Physical Needs
- Providing Security
- Providing Nurturing
- Providing Play





Creating Great Connections Model





THE FOUR ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS



PLAY

Play is the way the body helps the brain develop skills. It also is the way a child learns about the world. Lots of interaction, movement and exploration using multiple senses helps the brain form connections that contribute to brain growth in many different brain areas.

Curiosity, imagination and problem-solving abilities are all enhanced through experimental play. Children just naturally want to explore, spin, pretend, run, pour, skip, create, imagine, pound, throw, squish, hop, sing, and figure out the world. They are doing exactly what their growing brain needs. Understanding adults just need to provide plenty of wonderful opportunities for this to occur, then not get in the way, but provide responsive and caring support when needed.

Dramatic play and pretending are correlated with developing self-regulation abilities. Rough and tumble play also enhances the highest functioning, “thinking areas” of the brain. Additionally, lots of outdoor play and time in nature provides numerous and extremely positive influences such as, increased focus and attention span and reduction of stress.

Combining music with play helps advance brain connections for hearing sounds, language development, understanding speech and reading skills. Learning to play an instrument in the early years has even been shown to help develop math skills.



THE FOUR ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

NURTURING

Supportive and present relationships have been found to be one of the most impactful aspects contributing to the overall healthy development of children.

Consistent, predictable and nurturing responses to needs beginning at birth is essential. Responding to expressed needs does not “spoil” a baby. In fact, responding to the needs that are communicated, is exactly what a baby does need.

Research demonstrates that establishing a secure attachment and on-going relationships of respect, empathy and support can have an extremely positive impact on a child’s brain developing with the ability to:

- form healthy relationships with others
- delay gratification
- problem solve
- have more patience
- calm down from excitement
- have a longer attention span
- have an increased capacity for empathy
- feel less anxiety
- have greater skills in communicating emotions in healthy ways
- have more confidence and a positive self-perception
- be less fearful
- have more willingness to explore and learn

When children are respected and recognized for who they are, they develop a vital sense of self-worth.



THE FOUR ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

SECURITY

A developing brain requires a calm presence when stressed, regular routines, choices, attuned adults, safe environments and consistency in order to feel secure.

Brains are constantly in an anticipation and prediction mode due to the priority of safety; leading the brain to unconsciously focus attention on the environment and the people in it for safety and trust.

When children are in a busy environment filled with a lot going on (several things for the brain to monitor, notice, and keep track of at the same time) this requires a great amount of attention. It drains brain energy and creates stress. This can result in difficulty with attention span, memory and less self-control.

With regular routines and lack of chaos the brain can relax a bit. When things are calm and there is not as much happening at a fast pace, this allows the brain a chance to replenish itself.

A young growing brain isn't developed enough to control the many "big emotions" that young children feel. The very last area of the brain to complete development helps an individual to be able to deal with strong emotions. This only occurs when a child has the predictable experience of supportive relationships. When this last area of the brain becomes mature it can take control and regulate the stress response areas of the brain.

Until this brain area matures, emotional outbursts are called, "out of control" behavior. This is because, it actually is out of a young child's control.

It is essential that the adults in a child's life use their own mature brain to stay calm and help the child through big emotions. It is very calming and helpful to social-emotional development, when adults recognize and then verbalize the child's feelings. This role modeling and calming experience when repeated consistently will ultimately contribute to the child's brain feeling more secure and will lead to learning to self-regulate.



THE FOUR ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

PHYSICAL NEEDS

Sleep, nutrition, physical activity, touch and hydration directly affects the way the brain functions.

Nutrition goes beyond the body, it directly affects the way a child's brain functions. When children have well balanced meals and nutritious snacks, behavior and learning are improved.

A breakfast that includes adequate amounts of protein provides the brain with what it needs. Stress hormones are reduced and "feel good" chemicals are released. This increases the ability to pay attention, improves activity levels, and creates more positive moods.

Moods, behavior and learning are also directly affected by sleep. Learning and memory skills are far better as a result of sleep. Having enough sleep also contributes to healthier eating. When the brain lacks the sleep it needs brain systems become out of balance. Brains become more easily agitated when sleep deprived. Recent studies are showing that sleep is important for making changes and organizing the brain. As a result it is becoming better known that sleep plays a critical role in brain development in infants and young children.

One of the easiest and most effective ways to stimulate growth and development of brain connections is through physical movement. When a child is involved in a physical experience all senses are engaged and the brain makes extremely valuable connections. Through repetition of these experiences the connections become stronger. The running, jumping and climbing that children naturally love easily provides the essential skills for a healthy growing brain that will be most ready for greater learning.

Beautifully, nurturing touch and hugs are found to have an incredibly positive impact on developing brains as well. Stress can be reduced and the nervous system can be calmed. Feel good chemicals are released as a result of hugging.

FOUR NEEDS OF CHILDREN



Respond Lovingly &
Predictably to These
For Optimal Childhood
Brain Development

NURTURING

Responsiveness
Presence
Empathy
Respect
Recognition



PLAY

Laughter
Creativity/Imagination
Exploration
Experimentation/Challenge
Music

SECURITY

Attunement
Consistency
Routines
Choice
Safety



PHYSICAL NEEDS



Nutrition
Hydration
Movement
Touch
Sleep



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Next up: Your BONUS 10 Neuro-Nurturing Interaction Ideas!



From our unique line of Neuro-Nurturing Interaction Packets

Our products include packets from birth through age five, Spanish language versions, versions designed especially for early childhood educators, and even a version to encourage interactions in or with nature.

All packets have straightforward and easy ideas that can be incorporated into your everyday interactions with children.

They are written in the voice of a child asking you to do these interactions with them and they will even describe to you why this helps their development on the back of each card!



From: Love Your Baby

Loving Me Calms Me

Realize that loving me does NOT spoil me. Show the love you feel for me through all of the interactions we have together.

Why it helps

Taking care of my needs does not "spoil" me. Comforting me when I need you helps me learn to trust that you will respond to my needs. I will be calmer as my brain learns I can expect you to take care of me.



From:

Help Me Thrive While I'm Five

Under Construction

Provide a variety of empty containers for me to build creative structures. Examples to use: empty cereal boxes, oatmeal boxes, powdered protein drink containers, soup cans, coffee cans, etc. I may want to cover the containers with paper and draw windows and doors on the buildings I create.

Another way

Provide milk and water bottle caps for me to create designs.

Why it helps

My brain benefits from play best when I am given the time and the opportunity to let my imagination go.



From:
Naturally Developing Young Brains

Sorting & Patterns

Let's find some rocks or shells. Help me sort them by size, shape, texture, or color. Then we can count them and even line them up or make patterns with them.

Do More: Make shapes and designs with the collected items.

Why it helps

My brain learns best when using real things.

Counting and making patterns with real objects helps the brain make connections for basic math skills. I don't learn this from just saying numbers in order.



From:

Play With Me While I'm Three

Notice All of the Good

Pay attention to all of my good behaviors and all of the things I am learning.

When you notice the positive things I do, make sure you let me know. You can tell me you saw me doing something or you can give me a hug, smile, or thumbs up.

Why it helps

My brain tunes into emotions in my environment very quickly. Shouting and commands make more connections in my brain areas that respond to stress. Loving, caring and fun interactions creates more positive brain connections for well-being in life.



From:

Let's Learn More While I'm Four

Pick Up

Make cleaning up a game.

Give me directions to follow. For example: Say, "Put the game on the shelf and take 5 hops back." Or say, "Put the book in the basket, turn around three times, and skip to me."

Why it helps

Remembering instructions in order is important for me to learn. It is usually easiest to remember the last thing you tell me. I need a fun way to practice remembering more than one instruction in my short term memory.



From: More to do While I'm Two

Loving Connections

I am very busy at this age and want to explore and learn everything I can. I also need you! It is very important that you allow me to explore and do what I can on my own. I need you to be available for hugs when I need comforting.

Why it helps

My brain will adapt to whatever my world provides for me. For my brain to develop best and the healthiest way, I need to have fun, interesting, loving experiences built into each day.



From:

Balanced Stimulation for Infants and Toddlers

Music Time

Play a variety of appropriate music at different times during the day. It can be used to calm me or excite me. Music can grab my attention to engage brain activity and encourage movement. Be cautious: when music is played constantly or loudly, it's too overstimulating to my brain

Why it helps

My brain naturally responds to music. Moving rhythmically will likely lead to me smiling and exploring more. It can positively influence my mood if the right type of music is used at appropriate times.



From:
Fun While I'm One

Which One

Using two matching containers, let me watch you hide an item under one. Let me lift the container to find it. Repeat the game several times. Switch the container you hide the object under. My interest will be peaked when I see it in a new place

Why it helps

My brain has about 85 to 100 billion brain cells that become connected from repeated experiences.



From: Transitions for Preschoolers

Help Me Focus

When it is clean up time, it helps me be successful if you give me small, specific tasks. It is also more fun. For example: say, "Can you find all of the red pieces and put them in the box?" Or, "Look for all the square shapes and put them on this shelf."

Why it helps

My brain is still learning to focus my vision on specific things and tune out the rest. Breaking large tasks into smaller ones narrows my attention and helps develop this skill.



From: Transitions for Infants and Toddlers

Allow Me to Finish

Avoid interrupting me when I am engaged in an activity. I will be much more cooperative when I am no longer intently focused on something.

Why it helps

Changing attention requires a lot of focus. It is a difficult task for my young brain to switch easily.

Where to Find Additional Information and Other Helpful Resources:



The home of all things Neuro-Nurturing
and provider of this FREE guide:

www.braininsightsonline.com




DEBORAH McNELIS, M.Ed

The creator of the term Neuro-Nurturing,
the founder of BrainInsights, LLC, and an
enthusiastic international presenter.

Find out how to bring her to your training
or event:

www.deborahmcnelis.com

*The brain is without doubt our most fascinating organ.
Parents, educators and society as a whole have a
tremendous power to shape
the wrinkly universe inside each child's head and with it,
the kind of person he or she will turn out to be.
We owe it to our children to help them grow
the best brains possible.*
—L. Eliot (1999)



Thank you for making a positive impact in
the lives of children,

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If you are interested in sharing more of this information
or contents of this guide please contact
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