

PARENTS

Eyes on



Your child's brain

Showing you care is smart!



Centre of Excellence
for Early Childhood
Development

STRATEGIC KNOWLEDGE
CLUSTER ON EARLY

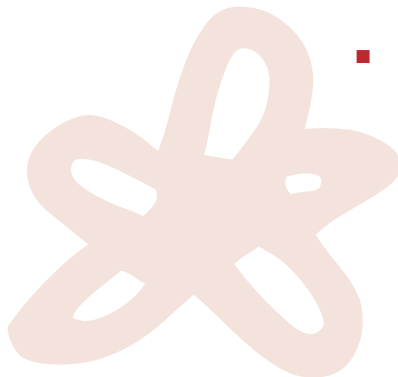
child development



“Early nurturing care can positively influence your child’s health, behaviour and learning later in life.”

What do we know?

- Your child’s brain is very flexible in his early years of life. His brain is sensitive to and shaped by what goes on around him.
- Changes in your child’s brain structure and function can influence his behaviour. As well, learning and life experiences can influence your child’s brain development.
- Your relationship with your child can help to shape his brain. Early nurturing care can positively influence your child’s health, behaviour and learning later in life.
- A nurturing and stable relationship with your child can help his brain develop. This will help your child during his youth and adulthood.
- Our brain is able to recognize danger. It tells our body how to react when we are in danger.
- Children who experience childhood trauma (e.g., abuse, neglect or extreme poverty) often experience severe stress. When stressed, their brain sends a message to their body to release hormones, including one called cortisol. If their body releases too much cortisol, children may develop serious health problems when they get older.
- A supportive, attentive and caring adult can help protect the child from these negative effects and help him handle stress in a healthy way.



Paying attention to...

What can be done?

... interacting with your child. Even your baby wants to interact with you by babbling or making faces at you.

- Play with your child. Be a caring parent to your child. These are things you can do to help your child's brain to develop in a healthy way.

... giving your child rich learning experiences early in life. The parts of your child's brain that control his senses, including sight and hearing, are among the first to develop. The development of these parts of your child's brain can be shaped by his experiences and environment.

- Stimulate your child's senses. Let him experience new sounds, food and objects.

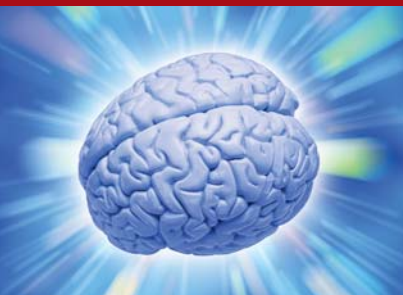
... showing your child that you care for him. Your child will be better able to deal with stressful situations if he trusts you to care for him.

- Be alert to signs that your child is stressed. Be attentive, supportive, and sensitive to his needs and provide a sense of safety.

... making sure your child doesn't have to deal with severe stress too often or for long periods of time.

... getting help for your child if he experiences severe stress early in life. If you get help early, you may be able to prevent or reverse problems associated with early life stress.

- Ask a medical professional for help if you think your child may need therapy and/or medications to help him deal with the negative effects of stress.



Information

This Key Message is a publication of the Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development (CEECD) and the Strategic Knowledge Cluster on Early Child Development (SKC-ECD). These organizations identify and summarize the best scientific work on early childhood development. They disseminate this knowledge to a variety of audiences in formats and languages adapted to their needs.

For a more in-depth understanding of brain development, consult our synthesis and experts' articles (Brain and Importance of Early Childhood Development topics) in the Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development, available free of charge at www.child-encyclopedia.com.

Several funders financially support the CEECD and the SKC-ECD, including the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Université Laval, and private foundations. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the official policies of these organizations.

We are grateful to the Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon, the Margaret & Wallace McCain Family Foundation and the Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research for their financial contributions to produce this Key Message.

Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development

GRIP-Université de Montréal
P.O. Box 6128, Succursale Centre-ville
Montreal, Quebec H3C 3J7
Telephone: 514.343.6111, extension 2541
Fax: 514.343.6962
E-mail: cedje-ceecd@umontreal.ca
Website: www.excellence-earlychildhood.ca

In this document, the masculine form is used merely to simplify the text. No discrimination is intended.



Coordinators:

Lucie Beaupré
Mélanie Joly

Collaborators:

Isabelle Vinet (CPEQ)
Claire Gascon Giarl
Rosanne Aleong

Copy editors:

Valérie Bell
Lana Crossman

Graphic design:

DesJardins Conception Graphique inc.

