



Your Baby's Crucial Years

Your baby is unique and very precious. Who he or she will grow up to be depends partly on genes and partly on the way the brain develops and that is massively influenced by how you parent.

At birth a baby's brain is not fully developed, most of the development in fact takes place in the early years after birth. You can think of the first 1001 days; from conception to 2 years as the crucial period. In this time the basic architecture of the brain is being formed and it's on this foundation that future learning, emotional regulation, health and happiness will build. For example a baby that has been soothed and comforted when distressed as a baby is more likely to have better mental health later in life.

During pregnancy:
Brain development begins before birth

- Low stress in pregnancy is a known to help protect baby from physical (such as asthma) and behavioural problems
- Do something every day that makes you happy
- Eat healthily
- Avoid alcohol, drugs and cigarettes as they cross the placenta and can damage the brain of a developing baby



What happens after birth?

At birth you baby will have around 200 billion cells, but only around 15% of them will be 'joined up'. Once the baby is born the brain undergoes a massive wiring with 700 connection being made every second in the brain, all triggered by experience. Every interaction your baby has is 'wiring' the brain, what she or he hears, smells, tastes and feels trigger electrical activity in the brain that for the pathways he or she will use all her life.

Good experiences: Babies that are loved, stimulated, chatted to and played with in a loving caring environment develop health brains which will help them go on to be happy competent adults

Poor quality experiences: A baby who does not get enough care, love attention, stimulation, or where caregivers are inconsistent in their affection may result in a brain that does not grow properly and severely affect a baby's life chances.

Neglect and abuse in this early period have been linked to depression, mental health problems and aggressive behaviour in adulthood.

For a great start:

Baby's don't need gadgets, flashcards or expensive toys.

They need love, to be helped when they are upset, a secure environment and lots of interaction

- Smile, look, love and chat
- Talk, read books and sing to them - nursery rhymes are a super start
- Cuddles, play and care make for a happy baby