



## Brain Development & the Environment

***Nurturing environments help to shape the developing brain.***

*The foundation for healthy brain development starts prenatally and is influenced by genes, experiences and the child's environment. Positive caring relationships and healthy, stimulating environments help to shape the developing brain and influence gene expression with positive outcomes seen through to adulthood.*



### Take it Further...

#### Learn about it...

Brain development and the environment (p.8 EYMH Common Message Paper)

---

Building the foundation of the brain's architecture starts before birth and continues throughout early childhood.

Babies are born with an innate drive to explore their environment and seek proximity to their caregivers.

Healthy development occurs when infants have caregivers who respond to their cues (e.g. babbling, crying) in positive caring ways.

This '[serve and return](#)' process leads to the development of basic brain circuits, upon which more intricate circuits are built.

Sensitive periods in brain development occur in the early years. These 'periods' are dependent on the presence or absence of social experiences which can have significant, lifelong impact on healthy development.

Take a deeper dive.

Watch the following video:

[HOW BRAINS ARE BUILT: CORE STORY OF BRAIN DEVELOPMENT](#)

#### Talk about it...

Tell caregivers and colleagues about brain development and the environment

---

Nurturing environments:

- Provide children with healthy, nutritious food.
- Are safe and free of chemical toxins.
- Are full of positive caring relationships that promote positive social interactions.
- Have caregivers that use behaviour management strategies that are; non-hurtful, age appropriate and promote the social-emotional development of young children.

The following video illustrates the important role positive social interactions with caregivers have on a child's healthy brain development:

Take a deeper dive. Watch the following video:

[Still Face Experiment: Dr. Edward Tronick](#)

## Try it... Move from knowledge to practise

---

Encourage caregivers to create nurturing environments by:

- Understanding and responding sensitively to their [child's cues](#).
- Providing comfort and reassurance when their child is scared, hungry, tired, angry or sick.
- Developing routines that promote predictability and security.
- Using the [Looksee Checklist](#) (NDDS) to:
  - learn about and track their child's development,
  - form realistic expectations of their child,
  - identify age appropriate activities.
- Modelling healthy relationships and conflict management.
- Learning [stress management techniques](#) and modelling self-care so that they are better able to be emotionally present with their child.

Introduce caregivers to the [Developmental Asset](#) framework and the many supportive activities that promote nurturing environments and experiences.

Encourage caregivers to sign up for the free [Daily Vroom App](#) to learn how to make the most of everyday moments. Learn more about the Daily Vroom App at: [Become a Brain Builder today with the Daily Vroom App!](#)

Review ['Making the Most of Playtime'](#) for further ideas on how families can create nurturing environments for infants/young children.

Refer families to their local EarlyON Child and Family Centre, YMCA, Parks & Recreation Centre and/or library for programs and services that provide stimulating activities for infants/young children and their families.

Encourage caregivers to consider participating in parenting education programs to learn about strategies that promote positive behaviour and how to manage challenging behaviour.



---

For more detailed information go to [Social-Emotional Development in the Early Years: A Common Message Paper \(2nd. Ed.\)](#), published by the Halton Early Years Mental Health Committee (EYMHC) to provide professionals with common messages on early social-emotional development.

EYMH Committee members:  
Halton Region Health Department  
Halton Region Social and Community Services  
Reach Out Centre for Kids (ROCK)  
Halton Children's Aid Society

ErinoakKids Centre for Treatment and Development  
EarlyON Child & Family Centres  
Community Living Burlington

Our Kids Network (OKN) and EYMHC work in partnership to manage the [Early Years Mental Health Toolkit](#) on the OKN website.