



Parenting Tips

Parents Are A Child's First Teacher

Believe it or not, preparing a child for school starts the day you bring them home from the hospital. The term “school readiness” has become a hot topic in recent years — creating a flurry of media interest, “how to” guide books, websites, scholarly debates, and academic research. Fortunately, the best things you can do for your child to prepare them for school are also the simplest and most natural.

Forming A Secure Attachment

The best way to start preparing a child for life and interactions outside of the home is by building a healthy secure attachment bond with your infant. A secure bond provides your baby with an optimal foundation for life: eagerness to learn, healthy self-awareness, trust and consideration for others. It provides a secure base from which the baby is able to explore the outside world, trusting that you as a parent will be there to support them. For example, children with secure attachments are more readily able to adjust to life at school as they are used to consistent routines such as those established at home. In addition, if a child feels safe and loved, they are more likely to feel confident about themselves and to make friends and develop secure relationships with others, creating a better school experience.

Children learn best through their everyday experiences with the people they love and trust, and when the learning is fun. These interactions serve as modelling behaviour's and create the basis for learning over the course of a child's life. Building a secure attachment fosters a child's ability to learn to communicate their feelings. As you and your child bond, they instinctively



learn how to establish a healthy sense of self and how to be in a loving, empathetic relationship.

Research has shown that secure attachments lead to positive self-esteem, independence, enduring relationships, empathy, compassion and resiliency later in life.

Attachment and Brain Development

During the first 3 years of life, a child's brain is developing at an astonishing rate. By age 3, the brain has reached 80% of its adult size, and key areas of brain wiring peak during this period. Developmental experiences in the earliest years determine the organizational and functional status of the mature brain. With this said it is critical during this time to focus on quality caretaking and building a strong and healthy attachment. Deprivation of critical bonding experiences during development may be the most destructive, yet least understood area of child maltreatment.

The first 3 years of life represent a critical period in which specific sensory experiences is required for optimal organization and development of the brain. Therefore, abnormal environmental cues or interactions with a caregiver, develop atypical patterns of neural activity during critical and sensitive periods and can result in poor organization and compromised function. Unresponsive caregiving can therefore lead to an increase in alarm reactions and hyperarousal in a child which can then alter chemical wiring leading to the development of neurobehavioral problems. Secure bonding and attachment cause the parts of your baby's brain responsible for interaction, communication and relationships to grow and develop. It helps a child learn how to cope with adversity. During times of distress, our bodies activate a variety of physiological responses to stress.



Research has illustrated that chronic, unrelenting stress in early childhood, without the supportive aspect of a secure attachment to a caregiver can be toxic to a developing brain. In examining child brain development from a bio developmental perspective, we know that secure bonding is critical in the first few years of a child's life. These first few years are when the foundational brain wiring is taking place and, therefore, stable, secure children are more likely to develop the neural circuits associated with complex reasoning. Therefore, by fostering healthy early positive interactions, a child's physiological systems and responses develop healthy and adaptive patterns.

Developing a secure attachment bond with your child builds the foundation for their ability to interact with others in healthy and adaptive ways throughout their lifetime.

Practical Implications

Given all of this information, what does this mean for parents and how can they foster early brain development and secure attachment? One of the most fundamental interactions you as a parent can provide is emotional sensitivity toward your child. This is illustrated through appropriate emotional expression and reception to your child's needs. The following strategies have been illustrated to foster secure attachment bonding: respectful eye contact and body language, calming, soothing and nurturing responses, physical proximity and touching, careful, deliberate listening, calming behaviors and respectful verbal language.

Parents should experience ease and spontaneity in words and movements when interacting with their child. In addition, they should feel comfortable



complimenting their child and show affection and appreciation. They should be congruent with their words and their actions, meaning there should be harmony between them. And, lastly, they should remain calm and harmonious during times of increased stress.

Touch, Talk, Read, Play

Everyday interactions of parents and caregivers that they have with their young children to create a nurturing environment that prepares babies to learn once they enter school. Parents should learn ways to touch, talk, read and play with their children with purpose and care to maximize these moments of loving learning. Some examples are:

Offer laps to sit in and hands to hold, hugs for comfort and tucking-in kisses at night. Make running errands an educational experience by engaging children with talk, describing the sights they drive past in the car, or naming the vegetables as they browse the grocery store.

Reading to children is known to be great, but it doesn't always have to come in the form of story time with a picture book. Look around for words in our busy modern world and you'll see them everywhere, and kids see them just like us.

Playing with young children is fun, but as synapses pop to life in a baby's expanding brain, young children are doing as much learning as they are laughing.

"Touch, Talk, Read, Play" is seen as a way to reintroduce good habits to people who lack them simply by lack of exposure. Positive parent interactions are directly linked to childhood adjustment and later achievements.