

# five to thrive

The things you do every day that help your child's growing brain



an introduction for parents-to-be



# Your baby's brain is amazing...

The brain is not like any other part of the body. Nearly all the cells of the brain are in place from about half way through pregnancy – between eighty and a hundred billion of them. But these cells only begin to work as they connect together. And brain cells connect best when people connect. Five to Thrive describes what parents do to connect to their babies:

**Respond** • **Cuddle** • **Relax** • **Play** • **Talk**

During pregnancy, everything the mother experiences, the baby experiences. The food and drink that nourishes you, nourishes your baby, providing the building blocks for every one of those billions of cells. Loving relationships that give you emotional nurture feed the growing brain of your baby, beginning to make the connections that get the brain working, setting the foundations for social relationships for life.

Experiences that challenge you, times when life is difficult, build patterns in the brain for surviving and thriving – for you, and for your baby, and for your child throughout their life. And experiences that bring you pleasure, times when life is wonderful, build patterns in the brain for joy in living – for you, and for your baby, and for your child throughout their life.

So what happens to your baby shapes their brain. And the most important thing that happens to your baby is you! Everything you do, and everything you experience, will spark connections in your baby's brain, turning connections into pathways that your child will be able to use again.

Our bodies work better when we eat good food. Our brains work better when we have access to other people who do five simple things that feed the brain and help it to function:

**Respond • Engage • Relax • Play • Talk**

These are our daily building blocks for a healthy brain. A healthy brain helps people to be happy in themselves, to make friends, to enjoy family life, to learn, and to support the brain function of other people so that they can also enjoy all these benefits. Every day brings many opportunities to give and receive this healthy nourishment.

Adults are able to connect with other people without touching them, with this connecting sequence happening at the speed that brains work – which is very fast indeed! Although it happens so quickly, noticing this sequence helps us to improve in connecting to other people.

But babies are not able to connect to other people across a distance. They need to be close to an adult to feel safe, and all humans need to feel safe for our brains to work well. So when we think about what babies need to build healthy brains, our five building blocks become Five to Thrive:

**Respond • Cuddle • Relax • Play • Talk**



## Your baby's brain is already developing... with your help

respond

*“ My brain works better when you respond to me. You are my world. When you feel happy, my growing brain discovers happiness. When you face challenges, my brain grows stronger. When you notice me moving around and respond to me, I feel how safe it is to be connected to you. And through you other people can respond to me as well, and they can also help my brain to grow. ”*



cuddle

*“ My brain works better when you cuddle me. Touch is my first connection with the world outside my skin – my brain is built on touch. I love it when I feel you hold or stroke me. It means I can connect to you in a new way – it's my first experience of a hug! When other people touch you, I also connect to them, and my brain gets ready for relationships. Loving touch helps my brain to grow. ”*



relax

*“ My brain works better when you relax with me. The chemicals your body produces when you are relaxed make a pattern in my brain for being able to relax, and to produce those important chemicals myself one day. Even after I am born I won't be able to do this for myself – I will still need to connect to you to settle me. So practising relaxing with me now really helps! ”*



play

*“ My brain works better when you play with me. Playfulness builds patterns in my brain that one day will help me make sense of the world. I will learn through play. When you are playful, my growing brain discovers how to be alert and connected. When you sing, or dance, or are playful with other people, the right side of your brain is active. Your active brain helps my brain to grow. ”*



talk

*“ My brain works better when you talk to me. I can hear now, and I love your voice. When you talk to me, or sing to me, or read to me, my brain is getting ready to talk and sing and read one day. When I am born I will already recognise the voices I am hearing now, especially those I hear every day. Angry voices scare me, but kind voices and loving words help my brain to grow. ”*



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## about five to thrive

The 'Five to Thrive' resources provide an accessible way to approach daily living with babies and young children, and can help parents and carers to understand the importance of bonding behaviours in promoting healthy brain development.

For more information visit [www.fivetothrive.org.uk](http://www.fivetothrive.org.uk)

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