

Brain Development

When we think about how to support our babies' development, we usually consider the basics: keeping them comfortable, safe and healthy and ensuring they sleep well and get enough to eat.

But what about building our babies' brains?

Your Baby's Development Begins With Their Brain

A child's earliest experiences are key to building the physical structure of the brain. In fact, brain connections grow fastest in the first 3 months of life. And while every child develops at their own pace, a healthy brain supports development in all areas. This means that doing what you can to support healthy brain development in the first days, months and years of your child's life can help them enjoy a lifetime of good overall health.



KEY TAKEAWAY

Early experiences play a big role in shaping your baby's brain. And strong brain development supports your baby's growth in all other areas.



DID YOU KNOW?

The Canadian Paediatric Society recommends no screen time for children under the age of 2. See [Toddler's First Steps](#) for more information about screen time.

How Can You Build Your Baby's Brain?

By communicating with your baby, you can help build their brain. Experts call these brain-building moments between a child and parent or caregiver "serve and return" interactions.

What are "serve and return" interactions?

Paying attention and responding with warmth, support and enthusiasm to what your child communicates. Imagine a tennis game between a parent or caregiver and a child. But instead of hitting a ball back and forth across a net, they send and get different types of communication, such as touch, sounds, words, smiles and eye contact. By reading the little cues your baby gives you and responding in a consistent way, you're building attachment which, in turn, builds your child's ability to learn and grow.

Serve and return interactions help build a solid foundation for your baby's brain – and support all future development. Serve and return interactions also build attachment (see [Developing Attachment](#)) between you and your baby.

On their own, these moments may feel short and unimportant. But a lot of serve and return interactions throughout the early years help build new connections in your child's brain and encourage them to learn.

Each positive interaction is another brick in a healthy foundation for all of your baby's later development. Together, they set them up for success in everything from learning to read to dealing with stress to forming healthy relationships.



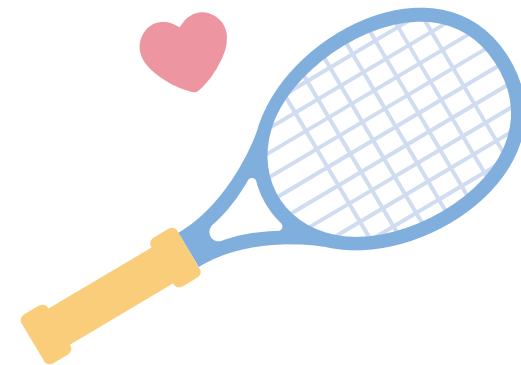
TRY THIS

Put aside your cell phone when you're around your baby so that you can focus on them.



DID YOU KNOW?

You can't spoil your baby by giving them too much attention. Your baby isn't being bad when they cry or get upset. They're just telling you that they need something. For ideas on how to deal with intense crying, see [Crying](#).





HOW TO Use serve and return interactions

- Pay a lot of attention to your baby and watch for their cues.
- Take note of what interests them, whether it's a bright colour, a fluffy dog or a spinning wheel.
- Talk to them regularly. Chat about what you're doing, what they see and what gets their attention.
- Cuddle and comfort them when they cry or are upset.
- Smile back when they smile.
- Coo back when they coo.
- Make lots of eye contact.
- Sing songs.
- Play simple games like peek-a-boo.
- Read to your baby and respond to what interests them on the page.
- Say the name of an object when your baby looks at it.
- Hold them, touch them and cuddle them skin-to-skin.



See the **Brain Builder** boxes throughout this book for more ideas on how to support your baby's brain development through everyday activities.

