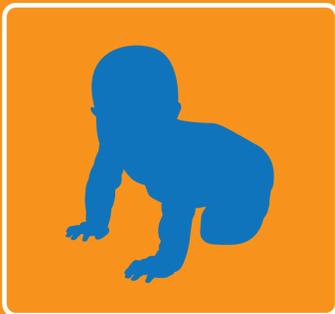


The BRAIN & EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT



Healthy brain development is necessary for healthy early childhood development.

A child's brain develops most rapidly in the first six years of life. Brain development isn't a haphazard process. Each stage sets the foundation for the next one.



Different areas of the brain develop at different rates.

Areas controlling sensory-processing mature first. Areas supporting complex cognition and socio-emotional abilities mature last. In healthy development, the brain's "infrastructure" becomes more complex, supporting the cognitive and socio-emotional skills essential for children to reach their potential. This means positive experiences - like verbal and physical stimulation, nutritious food and a safe environment - all help the brain grow. Negative experiences - poor diet, poor healthcare, the absence of stimulation or loving care - all hurt brain development and impede a child's ability to flourish.



Feeding the Brain

Before birth, mothers need nutritious food, good health care and access to clean water and toilets in order to maximize their health and the health of their baby's developing brain. After birth, children's brains need to be fed, just like their bodies.



The brain is most malleable when children are young. Impact evaluations show us that the right programs give children's brains a boost and promote healthy development.

IN MOZAMBIQUE, poor children enrolled in community preschools saw their cognitive abilities jump and they did better in primary school than children who didn't go to preschool.

IN JAMAICA, stunted children whose mothers were taught how to stimulate them with talk and play did better in school, showed less aggression and 20 years later were earning 25 percent more than peers whose mothers didn't get the same program.

The Strategic Impact Evaluation Fund supports impact evaluation and promotes policy dialogue to build programs that give children the stimulation and support needed for healthy brain development.



IN KENYA, researchers are studying the impact of a program that distributes storybooks to poor households to see whether this helps improve children's readiness to succeed in primary school. *Looking at pictures and reading helps stimulate visual and cognitive development.*



IN BANGLADESH, researchers are studying the impact of a program that gives mothers and fathers information and encouragement on how to improve their children's development by playing, singing and talking to their babies and toddlers. *Playing and singing to young children helps their brains develop and builds positive bonds between parents and their children.*



IN COLOMBIA, a pilot program sought to improve children's brain development by showing caregivers how to stimulate the children using play and talk. The first follow-up survey in 2011 showed that the stimulation led to gains in children's cognitive development and in receptive language skills (which refers to the ability to understand and process what one hears or reads). *Researchers are now doing a two-year follow up to see if the gains have been sustained, which will help policymakers and development experts around the world improve the design of cost-effective and scalable strategies for successful early childhood development programs.*