

Love Grows Brains

A guide for parents to support their
children's healthy brain development



Acknowledgements

The NWT Literacy Council is a not-for-profit organization with a mandate to support literacy development in all official languages of the Northwest Territories. For more information on *Love Grows Brains* or any of our work, please contact:

NWT Literacy Council
Box 761
5122 48th Street
Yellowknife, NT X1A 2N6
(phone) 867 873 9262
(fax) 867 873 2176
(toll free in the NWT) 1-866 599 6758
nwtliteracy@nwtliteracy.ca

With thanks to Marianne Bromley of the NWT Literacy Council,
May, 2009

We are grateful to the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, Government of the Northwest Territories for funding this project through the Early Childhood Development Framework for Action, as well as to the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills, Human Resources and Social Development Canada.



Introduction

Good experiences early in life are good for our children. Parents know this. Now, doctors and scientists can explain why this early care is so important.

We now know that the brain grows more from birth to age three than at any other time in a person's life. The experiences we give our children in their first three years of life lay the foundation for lifelong learning.

This is important information! If we understand what's going on in a young child's brain, we can give the care needed to help the child's brain grow.



About this Booklet

Love Grows Brains explains the connection between early childhood experiences, brain growth, and lifelong learning.

This book is for:

- New parents
- Parents of young children
- Childcare providers
- Grandparents
- Aunties and uncles
- Older brothers and sisters
- Friends
- Anyone who takes care of young children

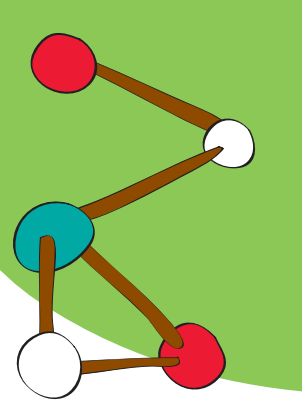
In this book, you will learn how the simple, everyday things you already do with your child, such as cuddling, rocking, and singing, help him throughout his life.

Parenting is a hard job. Don't be afraid to ask for help when you need it. Remember, you need to look after yourself if you want to take good care of your child. Get together with other parents to share your concerns, ideas and support—and have fun with each other and with your children.



Babies are Born Learning

The brain begins forming three weeks after conception, but a baby's brain is not fully developed at birth. The brain needs lots of experiences in order to grow.



The brain grows by making connections between its cells. We are born with about 100 billion brain cells! They are specially designed to connect with each other, to build pathways and networks that allow information to travel through the brain. These connections and pathways help us learn throughout our lives.

At birth, some brain cells are already connected. They control the activities your baby naturally does to survive, such as breathing. Most of a baby's brain cells are more like a mass of unconnected electrical wires; they need to be connected in order to start working. These connections in the brain are not random. They happen because of the experiences your baby has.

Every experience your child has will form connections in the brain.

Baby's Busy Brain

Making connections between brain cells is the work of the baby's brain. During your baby's first three years, her brain is working very hard. **EVERYTHING** your baby sees, hears, touches, tastes, smells, and feels makes a connection in the brain, and helps the brain to develop.

- By age three, your baby's brain has formed **1000 trillion** connections. These connections are pathways for learning.
- By age four, your baby's brain is **90%** developed. Imagine if your baby's body was **90%** developed by age four!

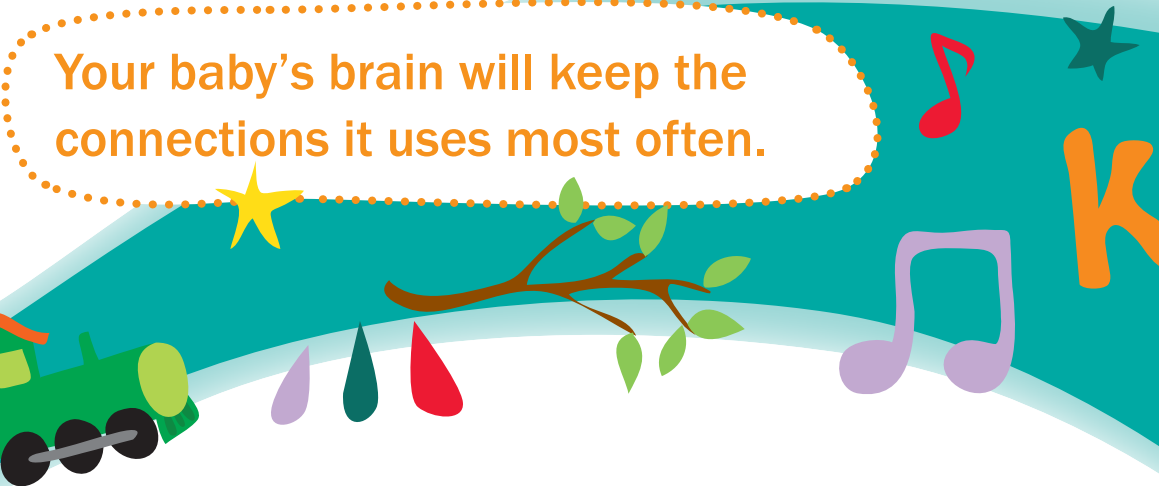


No Two Brains are Alike

No two brains are alike because every baby's life is different. Each child develops individual connections and pathways in the brain to deal with her unique experiences.

Before your baby is three years old, her brain makes many more connections than it will need—just in case. As your child gets older, her brain will get rid of connections it doesn't use much, and strengthen the ones it uses a lot. This way, your child's brain becomes better tuned to its environment.

Spending time in the bush or in the city, hearing stories or watching television, hearing Slavey or Inuktitut or Russian or English—the connections that the brain makes and keeps depend on what your baby sees, hears, touches, tastes, smells, and feels *most often*.



Your baby's brain will keep the connections it uses most often.

Safe, Secure and Loved

When a baby feels safe, secure, and loved, all her senses are open to the world, and her brain grows. That is why it is so important to make sure your baby has the care and attention she needs to feel safe, secure, and loved—with her family, and with anyone who looks after her.

The first three years are important, but it's never too late for loving care! The brain will keep growing and changing when new and positive things happen.

When your baby feels safe, secure and loved, her brain will thrive.

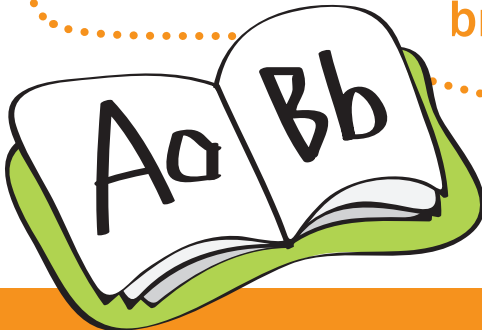


A Message from Your Baby

My brain grows when...

- I feel safe and loved.
- I see, hear, touch, taste, and smell many different things.
- You hold, cuddle, and rock me.
- You talk to me and sing me songs.
- You tell me stories and read books to me (especially the same ones over and over!).
- You smile at me.
- You take care of me when I cry.
- We have a daily routine, so that I know what to expect.
- I have safe and interesting toys to play with (they don't have to be fancy or expensive).

Simple Activities that you already do with your baby are helping her brain to grow.

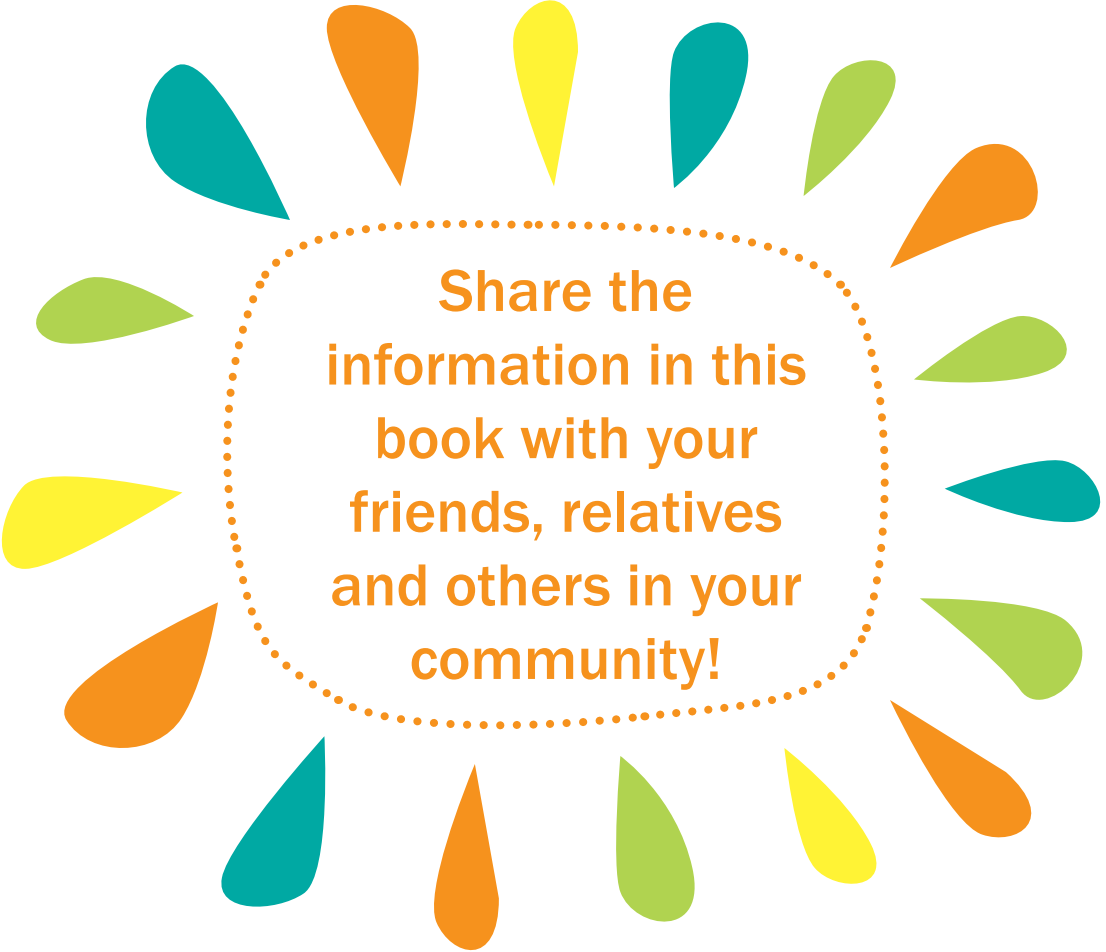


A Message from Your Baby

Did you know?

- Playing is my job. I love to play and I need to play. Play lets me explore and learn about my world.
- I especially like it when you play with me.
- I understand language long before I can talk. I learn language faster if I hear a lot of words. Talk to me a lot!





Share the
information in this
book with your
friends, relatives
and others in your
community!



NWT Literacy Council