

Beyond Medicine: Reach Out and Read + Brain Development



CAROLINAS

BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

Critical brain development happens during the first 5 years of life. The first thousand days of life have a profound impact on brain development, helping ensure positive long-term health and educational outcomes.

The brain develops over time, from the bottom up. There are billions of connections across different areas of the brain. A brain's architecture does not grow in isolation; it is developed by interactions with both genes and experiences. Nurturing relationships in the early years are critical, as this time is the most active period for establishing neural connections in the brain. The environment where one lives and grows, and the exchanges that take place with people in the environment shape the capacities that emerge in the early years.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE PROVIDER?

Primary care providers have unparalleled access to families with young children, and foster healthy child development by providing preventive care that promotes safe, stable, and nurturing parent-child relationships. The primary care provider is an essential support system for families. Counseling and anticipatory guidance are of prime importance to providing excellent, patient-centered primary care. Through Reach Out and Read, providers target behaviors like reading, talking, singing, cuddling, and bonding that are important to early brain development.

Primary care providers collaborate with parents and caregivers to improve early childhood outcomes; assist families in recognizing and encouraging foundational skills; advocate for whole-child development; screen children and families; educate families; and partner with local resources. Providers promote optimal brain development and empower parents to read aloud daily to their children, as a simple and effective way of fostering nurturing, language-rich family interactions that support brain development and provide a foundation for all future learning, behavior, health, and success.

HOW REACH OUT AND READ CAN HELP PROVIDERS?

Reach Out and Read is a valuable tool for providers and families. Home libraries are built with new developmentally-appropriate books. Books effectively increase maternal knowledge of anticipatory guidance material and encourage social and emotional bonding between parents and children. Serve and return experiences increase which support the health development of children.

Critical brain development in the first 5 years of life builds trust, resilience, problem-solving, and other markers of emotional well-being. Every time a parent or caregiver snuggles with a child on their lap to read a book, a message is sent to the child that they are loved and will be okay. The more an infant and child gets the same, nurturing response, the stronger the brain pathways develop that establish trust. Reading to babies and young children is the foundation for building a child's language and it helps strengthen those parts of the brain.

Nothing is as important to brain development than relationships.

RECOMMENDED VIDEO: <http://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/brain-architecture/>

To learn more about the value of Reach Out and Read in Pediatric Primary Care, please visit www.rorcarolinas.org.

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