

# Y is for Young Brains

## Promoting Young Brain Development Through Relationships, Repetition, and Routines

Did you know that more than one million connections in the brain form every second in the first years of life? These connections are made through interactions and routines experienced within safe and supportive relationships, also known as the [3R's of Early Learning: Relationships, Repetition, and Routines™](#). Each of the 3R's works together to promote brain development and learning. Research shows providing a safe and comfortable space with positive relationships—and repetition within [everyday routines](#)--helps a young child learn and promotes brain development.

### Relationships

Brain development relies on positive and consistent interactions with caregivers during everyday routines and activities. For example, when an infant fusses and receives ongoing comfort from their caregiver, it calms them and helps the infant learn they will be comforted in the future. When this need for calming comfort is met, infants' brains are more open to learning and experiencing new things.

### Relationships Promote Young Brain Development

#### How to Support Brain Development at Each Stage

#### Examples

#### Infants

- Infants need [back-and-forth](#) interaction to strengthen communication with their caregivers.
- Respond appropriately to infants' cues.

When your infant vocalizes a sound, respond by repeating the sound to them in a playful manner. Continue this back and forth interaction until your infant has switched their focus to something else.

#### Toddlers

- Toddlers begin using words with their caregivers to describe their environment.
- During everyday routines, listen to your toddler and respond as they use new words to describe their environment.

During mealtime, take turns describing the names, colors and tastes of the food. For example, if mealtime includes mashed sweet potatoes, you could say, "Take a bite of the sweet potato. What color is it? Is it sweet? Tell me what you want to eat next?"

#### Preschoolers

- Preschoolers begin playing cooperatively with other children.
- Provide opportunities for preschoolers to take turns with one another.

During free play, help children plan how they will play together. For example, when playing in the housekeeping area, help preschoolers plan their roles as they play with one another. Examples of roles may be cooking or sweeping. Encourage them to switch roles after a certain amount of time, so each of them gets a turn to play.

## Repetition

Research shows children learn better when given opportunities to experience the same things in the same environment over and over again. This repetition helps strengthen the brain's development, allowing children to practice a skill or learn new things. Young children often ask for things repeatedly, such as reading a favorite book, playing with a favorite toy or asking for the same favorite food.

### Repetition Promotes Young Brain Development

#### How to Support Brain Development at Each Stage

#### Examples

#### Infants

- Through repetition, infants begin to identify actions and appropriate responses.
- Repeating the same action in the same context helps the infant learn what to do more quickly.

Using stacking or shape sorting toys, encourage and support your infant to use their hands to manipulate the toys. Once they are done sorting or stacking, help them reset the toys and repeat the actions.

#### Toddlers

- Toddlers begin to understand repeated phrases and patterns in [language](#).
- Encourage new words with stories and songs repeatedly.

Throughout the day, sing songs that repeat the same words or phrases over and over (e.g., "The Wheels on the Bus").

#### Preschoolers

- Preschoolers use words to share what they are learning and ask questions for understanding.
- Provide preschoolers with opportunities to learn new things and encourage them to share and ask questions.

Every day while driving in the car, play the same game over and over, such as "I Spy," and ask them questions to help them talk about and describe the things they are seeing.

## Routines

Young children depend on caregivers to provide opportunities for them to develop skills and learn new things. One way to offer those opportunities is through everyday routines and activities. For example, a caregiver may provide a routine, such as reading at bedtime, which helps build caregiver relationships and supports language development.

### Repetition Promotes Young Brain Development

#### How to Support Brain Development at Each Stage

#### Examples

##### Infants

- Infants learn during predictable [everyday routines](#).
- Provide learning opportunities during everyday routines such as changing or bathing.

At the beginning of every changing routine, hold up an infant's shirt so they can see it. Then say, "We're going to put your shirt on. Ready?" each time before lifting their arms and putting it on.

##### Toddlers

- Routines can support toddlers in understanding everyday expectations and changes so they can understand what comes next.

When getting ready during the morning routine, consistently provide cues to let your toddler know which part of the routine will be next. For example, while your toddler is eating breakfast, say, "Once we are done eating, it will be time to go and brush our teeth."

##### Preschoolers

- Providing consistent and flexible routines help preschoolers feel comfortable, know what to expect and learn.

In an early childcare setting, maintain consistent schedules throughout the day but allow children to have choices and flexibility. For example, during scheduled center time, allow preschoolers to choose which center they want to play in first.

## What We And Our Partners Are Doing

The Anita Zucker Center and our collaborators are helping families and practitioners promote young brain development and learning through the 3R's of Early Learning: Relationships, Repetition, Routines™.