CNMI BRAIN BUILDERS NEWSLETTER

AUGUST 2023 | ISSUE 08

August at a GLANCE

On August 05, 2023, a total of 13 participants completed the Brain Builders Training. The training topics included brain basics, brain and cognitive development, and what the Science of Early Learning tells us about when and how children learn. This training series was facilitated by the Science of Early Learning Coordinator, Ms. Melissa Palacios.

Parents from Pure Love I & II and RE&Q participated in Mind in the Making Training Series. They completed Life Skill 4: Making Connections on August 19, 2023. This training was facilitated by Ms. Rayanna Fitial, Science of Early Learning Administrative Assistant.

"All children in the CNMI will be safe, healthy, and thriving members of a culturally diverse community. Their families will have access to the high quality supports they need to achieve their potential."

CNMI BRAIN BUILDERS

BUILDING THE BRAIN

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WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY?

In the first five years of life, children's brains grow faster than they ever will again. Every time we learn something new, our brains make new physical connections between the brain cells, or neurons, in our brains. If you learn something new as you read this, your brain will be physically different than it was when you started reading! Children's brains are built to learn new things. *Scientists estimate that between birth and age 3, children's brains make 1 million new neural connections per second.* While adults can learn new things too, it may take longer or require more practice. For example, it is much harder for an adult to learn a second or third language than it is for a child. Children learn so much so quickly that their brains make more connections than they need. Between ages 2 and 3, children's brains have twice as many connections in their brains as the brains of adults.

As children continue to grow and learn, their brains remove the extra connections that they don't need. This process is called **pruning**. Children's early experiences determine which connections remain and grow stronger. The more often a child has an experience, the stronger those connections become. Through this process, our earliest experiences shape the brain's physical development. Think about experiences with a broad lens. It's not just about the books we read, it's about the people, places, languages, and traditions that surround us. These fundamental early experiences build our brains and our identities. **Relationships are the most important factors in brain development.** You don't need fancy toys, gadgets, or programs. Children build their brains in the context of supportive, responsive relationships.

**Retrieved from Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center (2021). Supporting Early Brain Development: Building the Brain.*

SUPPORTING EARLY BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

Past Event Photos

Our brains are like gardens that we nurture over the course of our lifetime. What we nurture and what we practice determine which connections in our brains blossom and grow strong. In our earliest years, we need extra support to grow a healthy brain. Caring relationships, child centered interactions, and responsive care are keys to nurturing healthy brain development.

Support brain development. Following children's leads, offering choices, and encouraging their interests are keys to supporting brain development. Children learn so much by exploring their interests with a supportive adult. Talking about this concept with parents is a great way to boost children's learning at home. During home visits, work with parents to help them support, but not dominate, an activity their child is doing.

Modify spaces. Make modifications to spaces so that children are able to explore their interests as fully as possible. For children with disabilities or suspected delays, home visitors can help families modify spaces in their homes so that children can more easily participate. For example, create open floor spaces and pathways so a child can move easily throughout the home.

Focus on child-centered social interactions. Young children recognize when they are part of the conversation or activities. Make space and take time to let children respond and build on the interaction, through language or actions. Home visitors can help families include children in tasks that they do regularly.

Create predictable routines for children. Consistent, regular experiences help children feel more secure. Infants and toddlers love to do things again and again. This repetition helps them learn. Home visitors can look for opportunities to help caregivers build and improve their family routines to support consistency. For example, if a child often struggles with nap time, you might suggest signaling nap time with a favorite calming song, or a predictable cozy, quiet time that includes reading from a selection of favorite books.

Help young children regulate their emotions through responsive care. Providing extra regulatory support, like holding toddlers to help them calm down, is key. Children under 5 don't have the neural networks in place to control their impulses or fully regulate their emotions. Helping children regulate their emotions allows them to learn skills to self-soothe later. They also learn that they can depend on adults when they are feeling overwhelmed, frustrated, and upset. These early relationships are fundamental to healthy brain development.

*RETRIEVED FROM EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING & KNOWLEDGE CENTER (2021). SUPPORTING EARLY BRAIN DEVELOPMENT: BUILDING THE BRAIN.

Featured Researcher: Jack P. Shonkoff, M.D.

Founding Director, Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University

"What adults can do for children is very basic and simple: provide a sense of safety and security, provide opportunities to play, engage in an interactive way —serve and return interaction—and your child will get through this just fine."

It Fits

Ages 1-2

Do you have some old boxes or measuring cups that can fit together, one inside the other? Offer them to your child and encourage them to try out different size combinations: Which items fit inside the others? Talk about what they're doing and comment on how hard they're working.

vroom

See what your child is learning

Brainy Background

These are great objects for your child to explore math concepts like size and shape, while also testing out science ideas about how things work. When your child is engaged and interested, they're more likely to pay attention and stick with an activity.

For more activities like these, check out the free Vroom mobile app!

#vroomtip of the month

Congratulations to the winners of CNMI Brain Builders July Contest!

Evelyn Drilon

Rowena Valladolid Coloma

Juvy De Antonio Doroga-Balleta

Lhet Relata

Join our growing CNMI Brain Builders Facebook Page!

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