

# CNMI BRAIN BUILDERS NEWSLETTER



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October

at a  
**GLANCE**



On October 31, 2023, CNMI Brain Builders spooktacularly participated in the Halloween Spooky Fest at the Tanapag Youth Center. The event was a thrilling collaboration with our community partners and an enchanting treat for the attending children. With candy galore and smiles all around, this Halloween event was an unforgettable one for everyone involved.

"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."



**HALLOWEEN**

# Halloween 2023



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Did you know that, even before birth, babies already recognize the sounds and rhythms of all the languages they have been exposed to? Almost immediately and throughout their first years, they watch and listen to the people around them intently. By the time they are three years old, most children can speak in sentences, talk about stories or events from the past, and understand much of what others say to them. The ability to communicate is a very important skill for later school success. In school, children will need to understand what a teacher is saying, express their own ideas, and learn how to read and write.



Early language develops in the context of relationships with caring and nurturing adults who respond to babies' and toddlers' attempts at communication and help them make meaning of the world. Language and literacy skills develop simultaneously. Neither one can develop separately. Although language and literacy involve different skills, they are related!

### **Here are some more ways adults can support emerging language and literacy:**

- Respond to infants' coos, gestures, and body movements. These are the beginnings of conversation!
- Add descriptions to the words children say. If a toddler points and says, "truck," you might extend this by saying, "Yes, that is a garbage truck emptying our dumpster," or "I think you hear the sirens of the fire truck."
- Talk directly to children from early infancy. Talk about:
  - a. things you are doing ("I'm making a sandwich. First I'll get out the bread . . .");
  - b. things you see and hear ("Look at that car driving by! Can you hear it?"); and
  - c. things the child is experiencing ("Your hands got all wet when you touched the fence. The fence was wet.").
- Read books together from the start. When reading, make it a conversation! Even though a young infant cannot speak, she is paying attention to how you ask questions, the picture you point to, and your delight in sharing the experience with her.
- Point out examples of written words that have meaning to toddlers, such as their name.

Through responsive relationships with family, parents, teachers, family child care providers, and home visitors, children can get all the tools they need to communicate with the world.

# BRILLIANT BILINGUAL BABIES



## Halloween Photos



Babies are remarkably good at learning languages in their first year of life. A solid foundation in a child's home language is key to later language success. Learning more than one language has many benefits

### WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY?

- Home language is the foundation. It is important for babies to hear lots of rich language in their first year of life. It does not matter what language is a child's first language. A strong foundation in children's home language enables other language learning later on. □
- When assessed across all the languages they know, studies show that bilingual and monolingual children learn at the same pace. In other words, children who are learning more than one language hit milestones such as learning vocabulary, combining words, and forming sentences at the same times as children learning one language. □
- Learning more than one language has brainy benefits. When listening to language sounds, bilingual children have higher activity in the prefrontal cortex area of the brain. This area is important for cognitive skills like working memory, directing attention, and impulse inhibition. Other studies show that bilingual children are better at thinking flexibly. These skills can lead to improved mental health and academic outcomes later in life.

### WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

- You might notice that children learning more than one language are a diverse group. Some children learn two languages from birth. Others learn a home language and begin learning a second language in school. No two bilingual children have the same story!
- You can use cultural practices as a way to support home language growth. For infants, tell stories and sing songs in your home language. Notice how infants respond to whatever language or languages are familiar. □

- Be on the lookout for children's attempts to communicate with you. Infants will use mostly nonverbal methods, like pointing and gestures. Toddlers may not have the English abilities of some of their peers yet, but this does not mean they have learning delays. How can you tell that they are communicating? □
- Older children who are bilingual will sometimes use both languages in the same sentence. This is called code mixing and it is a sign of language mastery! This tells us that children are using whatever language resources they have to communicate.

### TRY THIS!

- **CONNECT** - It's never too early to help your child build their cultural identity. What brings your family together – birthdays, weekly dinners, or celebrations? Involve your infant and toddler in these events. Let your child meet other people who speak your home language.
- **HAVE A CONVERSATION** - When you speak to your infant, pause to let them respond. Then respond back to them. Keep the cycle going! This back-and-forth interaction becomes a little conversation. As children get older, encourage them to communicate, no matter what language they use.
- **MODEL LANGUAGE** - Infants need to hear language to learn language. Speak to your infant in whatever language you feel most comfortable. Use full sentences and real words, but vary your pitch to keep infants interested. As they hear language, they are getting ready to speak.
- **PRACTICE PROBLEM SOLVING** - Solving problems is an important skill for children of all ages. Children who are bilingual often find more creative solutions to problems. How does your infant get a toy that is out of reach? Do they use another toy to pull it closer? Allow your infant to solve some problems by themselves. You can always help if they become upset or frustrated.

"BRILLIANT BILINGUAL BABIES." HEAD START EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING & KNOWLEDGE CENTER, ECLKC.OHS.ACF.HHS.GOV/PUBLICATION/BRILLIANT-BILINGUAL-BABIES.



Featured Researcher:  
Dr. Anne Fernald



Professor of  
Human Biology,  
Josephine  
Knotts Knowles,  
Stanford  
University

**“Babies are born  
ready to learn, but  
only with our support  
will they achieve their  
potential”**

## Back and Forth Beats

Ages 0-2



Does your child clap their hands or bang objects on top of the table at mealtime? When they clap or tap, copy their rhythm. Then add on to it. What do they do? Have a back and forth "conversation" with the beats.

## See what your child is learning

Brainy Background

When you go back and forth with beats, you're helping your child begin to understand how to communicate with others. You're also supporting their life skills such as memory, focus, and self-control.

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

**vroom**

**#vroomtip  
of the  
month**

**Congratulations to the winners of CNMI Brain Builders September Contest!**



Amaleene Ramos



Vannesa Abella



Charytie Castro

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