

# The Amazing Power of Parenting

Birth to age three years represents a huge opportunity to actively strengthen the basic wiring of the infant's brain. What's surprising is how simple it is to do. Here are 8 things that research shows can bring out their best:

**1. A Back-and-Forth Parenting Style** Immediately after birth, the infant starts learning by seeing, hearing, moving, and feeling. Parents learn, too, about the infant's personality, moods, and the ways to soothe them. The cooing, sing-song, face-to-face "baby talk" that we all do begins a conversation. The baby reacts by looking, listening, smiling, and later, kicking their feet, and making their own sounds. Serve-and-Return triggers brain cells to wire.

**2. A Stimulating Environment** If everything in your world was an unknown, you would study every object to see what it did and what you could do with it. That's what infants do all day. An environment filled with lots of new things will help them learn.

**3. Talk, Talk, Talk, and Praise** Even before they have their own words, babies understand ours. (Watch "The Still Face": <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=apzXGEbZht0>). Words, expressions, and relationships sharpen the infant's social skills. It makes them feel secure. A 3 year old child from a high-talking family has heard millions more encouraging words than one from a low-talking family.

**4. Serve-and-Return with Books** Read to infants. Point, say what pictures show and let the child study it. They will make sounds that later will become words. Look for books that match that interest. Re-reading stories helps memory. Ask them questions as you read to build self-expression. Read magazine covers, signs on the road, labels at the store, or posters.

**5. A Daily Family Routine** A regular routine lowers stress for the whole family. Families with a daily routine find the time to read. Have a regular bed time that allows enough sleep. Have a get-ready-for-bed routine – wash, brush teeth, get on pajamas, and then read together. Have regular times for breakfast, lunch, snacks, naps (or quiet times), and play.

**6. Different Kinds of Play** Play is a great teacher. Jig-saw puzzles teach patience, persistence, and experimentation. Building blocks teach creativity and make-believe. When children pretend together it teaches sharing, compromise, self-control, and communication. Muscle skills need practice. There are 2 kinds: one, where we learn to control our body for crawling, walking, running, skipping, climbing, and jumping, and two, where we learn to move objects around with our fingers, hands, and feet or with a stick, bat, or paddle. Make time for each. If you can do it outside, even better.

**7. Teaching During Stress** Between age 1 and age 3, the emotion and stress centers in the brain expand very fast. This makes the child irritable and easily frustrated easily. So, they often lose self-control and have meltdowns. Try to think, rather than react. "What is my child feeling, and why"? Usually, one of 4 things: tired, hungry, bored, or frustrated. Controlling emotions takes practice. Tantrums are an opportunity to teach them to use words instead of screaming. Lesson number one is learning to calm themselves.

## 8. Relationship-based Discipline

Screaming, threatening, matching fire with fire, or worst of all hitting a child, all cause another burst of emotion. This doesn't teach self-control, it blocks it. Once you and the child are both calm, relax your face and quiet your voice. Sit eye-to-eye. Gentle touch will communicate your connection with them. Ask what happened and why, and then listen. Let the child speak. Acknowledge their feelings. Give them words – "you were angry"; "it wasn't fair". Tell them what was okay and what was not okay about their behavior. "Biting, hitting, or kicking someone is never okay. But you can always use words to say what you feel." Finally, ask them how they should act next time.

Want to know more? See: <http://ohioaap.org/parent-resource-page/>



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