



YELLOW ZONE

From birth to five, young children’s brains are going through an amazing and sensitive period of growth. In fact, 85% of brain development happens during these early years.

Child development is influenced by many factors, including the child’s relationships, experiences and environment. Young children need to feel safe and secure in order to be able to fully develop. Once they feel secure, the magic of everyday moments helps build strong, healthy brains!

A Yellow Zone is an environment that promotes healthy development and well-being through 5 pillars:

Help **Spirituality** **Learn** **Socialize** **Play**

Research demonstrates that these 5 pillars nurture the social, psychological, and emotional aspects of mental health.

Use the information in this guide to create a Yellow Zone, a place where even the smallest of us can flourish.

Help

In safe, kind, nurturing, consistent, and stable relationships children learn that adults can help them. It is through modeling from adult providers/caregivers that children learn to help others. Helping teaches infants and young children empathy towards those around them. Helping develops mastery of tasks, empowerment, strong sense of self, and belonging. Additionally, adults can help children by creating a predictable schedule. It is important to prepare children before a change in their schedule or a transition so they know what to expect. Routine is so important! This can include bed times, meal times, nap times, etc.

Spirituality

It is first through the child's relationship with caregivers that the child develops an understanding of themselves. Caregivers' interactions form how the child perceives and feels about themselves in moment by moment interactions. When a caregiver responds to a child's needs in a kind, safe and consistent manner, the child learns that they are important, loved and will be cared for. Caregivers also provide the foundation for helping the child understand their emotions and become partners in helping the child regulate these emotions. Children do not have the ability to self-regulate and need the caregivers in their life to help them through co-regulation. It is through co-regulation that the foundation is laid for future self-regulation and mindfulness. It is important that the caregiver themselves is regulated when they are helping the child calm down, too.

Learn

The experiences a child has during these early years will shape the architecture of their brain and build the connections that allow them to develop lifelong skills like problem-solving, communication, self control, and relationship building. These skills allow them to survive and thrive within their family, community, and culture. Learning and teaching are not the same thing. Children require environments experiences that foster and encourage learning. Take time to experience the world with your child instead of just "teaching" them the academic skills of naming colors and shapes. While encouraging brain development can include things like colors, letters, and shapes, it is more important for children to experience a huge variety of environments so that all the areas of their brain can get stimulated and grow. Young children learn in a world of motion and sensation.

Socialize

A child's first experience of socialization begins in their relationship with caregivers. The interactions between infant/ young child and caregiver sets the blueprint for future relationships with peers, family and members. Children need to establish basic interactions skills such as cooperative play, gratitude, and empathy in order to learn more advanced ways to interact later in life. It is important to allow a child to stay close to a regulated, caring adult when they need extra time to adjust to an environment. Often children will utilize a 'security or transition object'. It is important that caregivers allow and support children in utilizing their developed strategies to socialize and adjust. Socializing begins to teach cause and effect (for example, If I do ____, adults respond by doing ____).

Play

Play encourages children to use creativity while developing their imagination and physical, cognitive, emotional strength. Children's sensory development is supported through different types of play including child directed and caregiver directed play, as well as, imperative for healthy brain development. Play is a form of communication for children. It is through play, with a regulated caregiver nearby, that children at a very early age engage and interact in the world around them.

Help

Encourage mastery skills. This can include holding their cup while learning independence in a highchair setting, holding a spoon during feeding, cuddling during breast or bottle feeding.

Label their feelings. You are happy, sad, excited, sleepy, etc.

Create a safe environment for exploring. Look at the world through their eyes, such as the crawling space, where a gate may be needed, electrical outlets, etc.

Spirituality

Provide comfort. Give a sense of safety and calm to the child when they cry or seem distressed.

Sing lullabies and rock your child back and fourth.

Comforting physical touch. Give gentle messages to their feet, hands or back.

Snuggle up. Wrap them in their favorite blanket or give them a stuffed animal.

Practicing noticing and naming feelings. Happy, excited, upset, frustrated, sad.

Learn

Exploration. Encourage infants to explore items in different ways through sensory play. This can be done by touching, tasting, banging, stacking, & shaking.

Playtime. Keep it simple, such as hiding a toy under a blanket for the child to find.

Have Conversations. Repeat the sounds and words your child uses and have back-and-forth conversations. It doesn't have to make sense, just allow your child to be heard and responded to! Don't forget to use expression and laughter, too.

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Play

Body: Clap their hands gently together, stretch their arms (crossbody, overhead, out wide), move their legs as if they are riding on a bicycle, sensory motor play (water, sand, paint), tummy time.

Watching: Encourage visual exploration, provide opportunities to watch other children and people.

Interactive: Shake rattles or noise making toys, face-to-face time, bath-time, sing songs together.

Socialize

Interact. Use eye contact, smile often, listen and respond to infant's babbles and coos. Also, describe how you are taking care of the infant such as saying I am washing your hands or I am making a bottle.

Read books. The more stories you read aloud, the more words your child will be exposed to and the better he or she will be able to talk. Use expression to teach a variety of sounds and emotions.

Play games together. They can be as simple as Peek-a-boo or using their favorite toy. If using a toy that you can make noise with, make a pattern with the sounds, take a pause, and repeat the pattern.

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