

WHO IS RUNNING THE PROJECT?

- A team from the University of Oxford's Psychiatry Department. We are a part of the Child and Adolescent Psychiatry research group.



WHAT ARE WE AIMING TO DO AND WHY?

- We are aiming to educate the next generation of caregivers on the importance of early years brain development. By 'early years' we mean the years from the start of pregnancy to the age of 5.
- When we say 'caregiver' we mean any person who is involved in looking after a child aged 0 – 5. This includes parents, carers, siblings, other relatives, neighbours, key workers and more.
- The first 1001 days (pregnancy and the first two years of a child's life) is a critically important period for development.
- This period significantly influences a child's long-term health, well-being, learning and earnings potential.
- It provides the foundation for children's emerging emotional wellbeing, resilience and adaptability.



WHAT WILL MY CHILD BE LEARNING ABOUT?

BRAIN DEVELOPMENT IN THE EARLY YEARS

- The human brain is developing fastest in **pregnancy and the first two years** of a child's life.
- **New connections** between neurons (brain cells) form very quickly in the early years, and both a child's **genes** and their **everyday experiences** affect how this growth happens.
- The brain is 'plastic', meaning its structure changes based on experiences. This is called '**neuroplasticity**'.
- The brain is most sensitive to experiences in the **early years** (0 – 5) and **adolescence** (11 – 25).



CAREGIVERS AND THE EARLY YEARS

- **Caregivers** are a young child's main influencer of day-to-day experiences. They create the 'environment' that the child's brain is so sensitive to.
- There are **several things a caregiver can do** to increase the chances of healthy brain development and have a positive impact on future outcomes. Some examples are:
 - Caregivers should notice a child's cues and actions and respond in a way that matches the child's level of energy and emotions, taking turns and inviting them into a 'conversation'.
 - Caregivers should let children explore and play independently in a safe environment.
 - Caregivers should use 'baby talk' when talking to a young child, simplifying their language and talking in a sing-song tone while exaggerating their facial expressions.
 - Caregivers should extend play through suggestions that match the child's interests.



BRAIN DEVELOPMENT THROUGHOUT LIFE

- A combination of research from **social science and medical science** informs what we know about development in the early years and the impact this has on later life.
- This research tells us that the early years are important for a wide range of outcomes, including both **mental and physical health**.
- This does **not** mean that the early years are **deterministic** – in other words, a child's outcomes are not set in stone.
- The brain is also very sensitive in adolescence (ages 11 – 25).
- While the early years are especially important, supportive relationships and the development of executive function skills (like short term memory, planning ahead, flexible thinking and coping with frustration) **can improve resilience at any age**.
- Resilience is impacted by a **wide range of factors** such as their genes, the number of difficult situations they experience, their access to a safe learning environment, and the number of people that support them.



- The [*Oxford Brain Story*](#)
- BBC Education's [*Tiny Happy People*](#)
- UNICEF [*brain development*](#)
- [*Brain matters*](#)
- The NHS's [*Healthier Together*](#)



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