

Parenting Now!™

A GROUP-BASED POSITIVE PARENTING CURRICULUM

SESSION FOUR:

Communication

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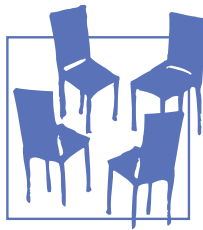
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Legend of icons and text styles

Icons in the left margins provide a quick visual outline of the presentation method you will be using.

Activity Type Icons



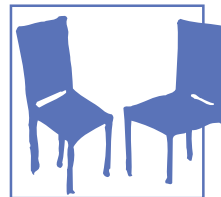
**WHOLE GROUP
PRESENTATION
DISCUSSION**



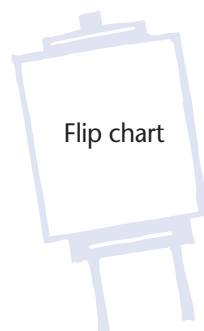
HOME ACTIVITY



ACTIVITY



**SMALL GROUP
ACTIVITY**



Text Styles

The written curriculum is designed to be easy to read. Typesetting styles help you navigate through the material.

Agenda items →

7. What Are Our Parenting Expectations?

Special notes →

Note: Either of these discussion questions could be the basis of an entire session. Use your best judgment about how much material and how much time is appropriate for the members of your class.

Spoken directly to participants →

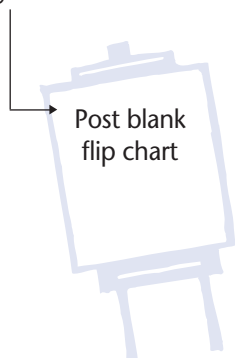
What were some of your expectations of parenting? Where did you get them? How do those expectations compare with your experiences so far?

What are some things you remember being told about what parenting would be like? Who told you those things? Do you find them to be true?

Instructions for group leader →

Summarize by acknowledging that our fantasies, expectations, and images presented by the media are very different from actual day-to-day life.

Physical action to take



Key Concepts

- ▶ Parents' interaction with their young child affects the child's brain development.
- ▶ Listening is as important as talking and often harder to do.
- ▶ How we talk and listen to our children influences how well our message gets across, how our children learn to communicate, and how our children feel about themselves.

Goals

By the end of this session parents will:

1. Learn several ways in which they can encourage their child's brain development.
2. Be aware of their own and others' nonverbal messages.
3. Understand the importance of good listening as part of effective communication.
4. Learn and be able to demonstrate good listening skills.
5. Learn the basics of good communication with their children.

Be Flexible and Adjust as Needed.

Each session gives only an example of an agenda. It is crucial for you as group leader to tailor the agenda, pace, and style to the needs of the particular group of parents with whom you are working. The sessions are intended for a fast-paced, two-hour time frame. Find the balance between allowing the class enough time for discussion, and covering sufficient material. Each session may contain more material than you can comfortably use in that time.

Think about:

- Are there too many activities to carry out realistically in one class? If so, do less.
- What style of presentation will work best with the parents in the class? Adjust the style to the group.
- Individualize. Adapt each session to suit the group's needs.

Get prepared before the day of class!

Supplies

- Nametags
- Flip chart
- Colored markers

Special Items

- Materials for a Resource Table—include books and newsletters, announcements of events, and information on community resources and activities

Refreshments

- Plates, cups, and napkins
- Coffee, tea, juice, cocoa, and water
- Snacks for both parents and children (fruit, cheese and crackers, chips and salsa, vegetables, dip, cookies, muffins, bite-size pizza)

Review the agenda for this module.

Revise your agenda as necessary.

Prepare the following flip-chart sheets (See Appendix, page 17):

Agenda
Ways We Communicate (blank)
Recipe for Good Listening
Communicate Acceptance (blank)
Communication (blank)
Summary

Bring the Group Agreements and The Four Questions flip-chart sheets.

Bring copies of parent handouts for today's and previous sessions.

Prepare the following parent handouts for Session Four (see Handouts, pages 18–22):

She Was Born
The Brain
A Child's Brain
Recipe for Good Listening
Summary: Communication

Review the Home Activity from last session.

Phone any parents who missed the last class.

Then, before parents arrive for class:

Arrange the room with chairs in a semicircle so parents can see both the flip chart and each other.

Set up the Resource Table.

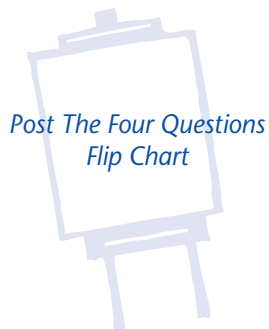
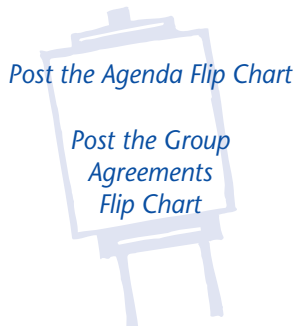
Set up the refreshments.

Agenda

1. Welcome/Announcements/Parent Pick
2. Review Last Session
3. Overview of Communication Session
4. Nonverbal Communication
5. Listening
6. Recipe for Good Listening
7. Break
8. Recipe Continued
9. Session Review
10. Home Activity
11. Close



Let's start the class!



1. Welcome/Announcements/Parent Pick

Let's try a Parent Pick to start out with. Here is the scenario:

You have had a long and action-packed day at work. You come home and need to make dinner quickly in order to get your 6-year-old to soccer practice on time. Your 4-year-old is trying to tell you something about her day as you are rushing to make dinner. She gets louder and louder as you are trying to work and then starts crying for a snack. What do you do?

What are you trying to teach? What values apply here?

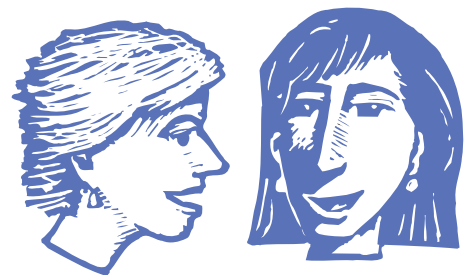
Take solutions through The Four Questions. Some possible answers may be to make a date to listen after dinner, stop for a moment and give full attention, redirect, remove her from the kitchen, give her a snack.

What are all of these solutions teaching?

2. Review Last Session

Last week we talked about ways of thinking about discipline and a Starter Set of prevention tools in discipline.

You had three assignments for the week. Who used The Four Questions at least once during the week? How did it go? Who practiced giving positive attention to your child? What did you do and what did you notice about the experience? Who carried out a Special Time Activity? How about the Nurturing Activity for yourself? Did anything get in the way of being able to do this? How can that change?



How did people remind themselves to do the homework?

This week you will continue to use these tools and try some others as well.

3. Overview of Communication Session

Today we are going to talk about a different kind of prevention tool: good communication. Why do you think we would even consider communication skills as a prevention tool?

After parents respond, you can reinforce what they've said and add that good communication helps to prevent many problems that can come about through misunderstanding or not feeling understood. It is a tool that will help us with our children and every other relationship in our lives.

When we have developed good communication with our children from infancy, they will be more likely to talk with us as they grow older and their problems become more complicated. We will also have a helpful tool to use when problems do come up.

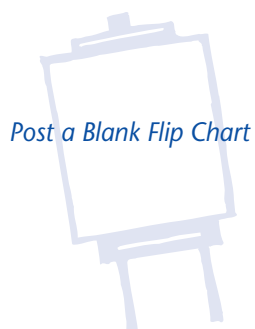
Communication is the foundation of our relationships. Positive communication skills help us with all of our relationships. Learning to communicate positively and effectively takes practice. Like parenting, effective communication is not an ability that comes naturally. And, like positive parenting, it's worth the effort to learn and practice.

What are some ways we communicate?

Write parent responses on the flip chart.

They are:

- Nonverbal
- Listening
- Verbal



Post a Blank Flip Chart



**WHOLE GROUP
PRESENTATION
DISCUSSION**

4. Nonverbal Communication

At times it is easy to forget that communication starts with the messages we send with our bodies and facial expressions. **About 90% of an emotional message is nonverbal.** We convey a tremendous amount of information without saying a word.

Sometimes our nonverbal communication sends a different message than the words we use. Think about a time when the words someone used and their nonverbal communication told you two different things.

Ask the group for other examples. What were their feelings about the experience?

- When we give positive attention or any message to our children, the ways that we hold our bodies, smile and show affection are at least as important as the words we use.
- **It is important to take the time to read and respond to our infants' and young children's nonverbal communication.** That is part of connecting and getting in tune with them.
- One of the most important things you can do as a parent is to be “in tune” with your child. This connection creates the foundation for many of your future interactions and your future relationship.

Connection or being “in tune” is when we show our babies and our children that we see them, and we let them know we understand their feelings and emotions.

Ask the parents:

What are some ways that babies communicate?

Smiling, crying, fussing, eye contact.

What are some ways that young children communicate without using words?

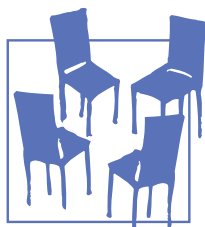
Facial expression, eye contact, walk, gestures.

When do you feel connected and “in tune” with your child?

Allow time for the group to respond.

When we establish this connection with our children at an early age, our relationship with them is closer and we understand each other better. This eliminates much of the misunderstanding that is often part of a difficult interaction with our child. Each child is different and sends his or her own cues or signals that a parent needs to learn. Different cries can signal different problems. Children with disabilities may have subtler cues, and parents need to be more observant and patient.

The nonverbal messages we exchange with our children are just as important as what is said. Keep in mind your tone of voice, gestures, and facial expressions. Reading nonverbal messages is an important part of connection, being “in tune” and managing our children’s behavior.



**WHOLE GROUP
PRESENTATION
DISCUSSION**

5. Listening

When many of us think about the term “communication,” we think about talking. Effective communication involves both expressing ourselves clearly and really listening to others. It is a balance between talking and listening. **Listening is a basic part of communication.**



Sometimes listening is the hardest thing to do when we are trying to communicate with someone. When does this happen? Why is it hard?

Give the class time to respond.

Good listening is challenging because it means that we have to really pay attention to what the other person is saying and resist the impulse to jump in and give advice or share our own ideas. It means not trying to change what we are hearing or make it all better—just to listen. Good listening is not an easy task. It takes effort and skill to become a good listener.

Listening Helps Our Child's Brain to Develop

Listening and responding with attention to our children is one way of fostering early brain development. Stop for a minute and imagine a machine. In order for this machine to work, it needs wires connecting its different parts. This machine is like a human brain. The brain is composed of millions of nerve cells connected to each other by synapses that serve as wiring to connect different areas of the brain. The process of creating and strengthening connections (wiring and re-wiring) between cells goes on constantly. Used pathways become stronger and denser, synapses that are not used become weakened and inactive. Early experiences have a dramatic effect on brain development.

Your infant is born carrying a plan for future brain development. Part of that plan is language development. You, as a parent, can encourage your baby's brain development by interacting with him, both nonverbally and by speaking. Sometimes adults naturally use a simplified version of language with babies, such as babytalk. This type of speech tends to stress the parts of speech that are appropriate for their baby's developmental level and is fine to use. You do not need to fear using babytalk when talking to your infant.

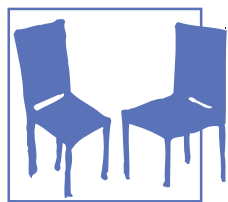
*Pass out She Was Born
Parent Handout.*

Have parent read the She Was Born Handout and comment or discuss.

We now know that we can encourage the growth of connections in our children's brains. Depending on the stimulation it receives, our children's brains will respond by strengthening or weakening nerve pathways. When a child has stimulating exchanges with a parent through nonverbal interaction as well as language, it encourages these connections to become more developed. This handout gives you some ideas on how to help this development in your child. Parents can encourage the use of their baby's brain by some of the suggestions on this sheet. However, a baby does not need to be constantly stimulated in order to have optimal development. Be careful not to overstimulate your child and remember to leave them opportunities to discover sights and sounds on their own.

*Pass out The Brain
Parent Handout.*

As we said before, learning to be a good listener is worth the effort. Listening can be one of our most powerful parenting tools.



SMALL GROUP ACTIVITY

Ask the parents to pair up with a partner. Have one parent share a story about something that happened with his or her child this week. Have the other parent try not to listen.

Come back together. Discuss how the speaker knew he or she was not being listened to, and how it felt.

What kinds of messages do your children get when you show them that you are not listening to them?

Parents may say the following:

Their feelings are not important.

They are not worthwhile people.

They can't solve their own problems.

You don't care.

Good listening happens when one person fully devotes his or her attention to what the other person is saying. A good listener is open to all that the other person is saying, feeling, and experiencing.

6. Recipe for Good Listening

We have put together the following recipe for good listening that will help you have good interactions with your child, your partner, or other people in your life:

Acknowledge what has been covered already from the pair activity, then go over the following.

- **Decide you're going to listen.** When you consciously decide that you are ready to listen, it helps you become a better listener.
- **Make the time to listen.** Timing is very important, both for you and the person who is sharing information with you. If now is not a good time to devote your attention to this person, make a "listening appointment." Try to make the "listening appointment" as soon as possible during the same day and be sure to always keep your appointment!



- **Use body language that shows you are listening.**
As we have learned when we were discussing nonverbal communication and positive attention, good listening involves paying attention to our body language. What kinds of body language show good listening?

Make eye contact.

Use open body language.

What are some examples of closed body language?

Fold your arms across your chest and partially turn away.

What does open body language look like?

Let class members demonstrate.

Pay attention.

How do we show this?

7. Break

8. Recipe for Good Listening Continued

Activity: Through A Child's Eyes

Do the following exercise **before** you discuss the importance of being on the same level as your child when trying to get a message across. **The goal of this exercise is to give parents the experience of being a small child and to understand the impact of how parents look through the eyes of a child.** It is more effective if you do not tell the parents why you are doing this exercise or what they will get from it. Parents will realize this after they have experienced the activity.

Sometimes it is easy to forget what it is like to be a small child who has to interact with large adults and the effect that has on communication.

Parents often have a hard time taking this exercise seriously and may giggle and laugh. Encourage parents to be serious so they get the most out of the exercise.



ACTIVITY

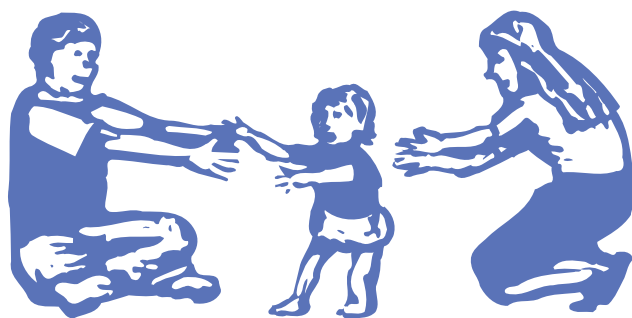
Now let's try an exercise.

- Pair participants up facing one another, with one standing and one sitting on the floor.
- Ask the standing parent to say, "I really care about you" three times, looking down, and smiling.
- The sitting child does the same thing looking up.
- Then the standing parent says "I'm so angry at you!" three times, getting louder each time, looking down at the child on the floor.
- The sitting child responds with the same words looking up.
- Change places and repeat both parts.
- Then ask the pairs to sit side by side and repeat "I'm so angry at you" and "I really care about you" one more time each.

Ask parents to share what their experience was in each position:

- **Standing position saying, "I'm so angry at you!"** Common responses will be: powerful, uncomfortable, in charge, bossy.
- **Standing and listening to your child say, "I'm so angry at you!"** How did it make you feel? Most will say they still felt in charge, annoyed, or amused, but not threatened.
- **Sitting on the floor listening to someone sounding angry from above.** Most parents are amazed at how vulnerable and scared they felt when anger came down at them from a loud voice above.
- **Getting angry up at someone standing over you.** Most will feel that the anger was ineffective.
- **Repeat for saying and hearing "I really care about you."**
- **Side by side.** Most will agree it was more comfortable both hearing and expressing anger and love.

This is a very powerful exercise for most parents and helps them to understand their child's experience from a physical point of view. Ask how the insights gained from this exercise might affect their parenting behavior.



When you want to talk to your child, it is important to speak to her at her level both in the physical sense and in the type of language you use. For example, you might sit on the floor with her or set her up on a counter. Doing this:

- Changes the power dynamics, and
- Sends the message to your child that you are available and want to hear what she says.

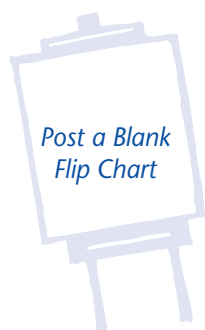


**WHOLE GROUP
PRESENTATION
DISCUSSION**

Other Good Ways to Listen

Let's continue with good ways to listen. The previous ones we discussed mostly had to do with nonverbal communication. Now let's talk about a few ways to encourage communication and practice good listening by talking as well.

- **Allow the speaker to share his or her feelings,** whatever they are. Even though you may not accept the other person's point of view, it's important to accept that this is how he or she is feeling right now. Feelings are neither good nor bad, right nor wrong. Feelings are real for that person.
- **Be responsive,** i.e. nod your head, and vocalize simple sounds like uh-huh or hmmm. You can also summarize what you think the other person is saying, and ask if that is correct. For example: "So what you're saying is... is that right?" "You're telling me that..." "In other words... is that what I'm hearing?" If it's not right, the speaker will help you understand.
- **Ask friendly questions.** Ask questions that will help the speaker to clarify or explore something further. It is important that you do not try to lead the direction of the conversation into what you, rather than the speaker, want to talk about. Be careful not to divert the focus of attention onto the questions or to try to get the speaker to see your point of view through your questions.
- **Communicate acceptance.** How does this happen?



Ask parents to give examples. Write them on the flip chart.

Poor ways to listen

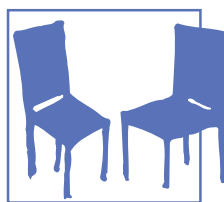
There are times when we are talking to someone and we find ourselves feeling angry or frustrated with their listening. What listening behaviors or responses make you feel mad or frustrated?

Write these on the flip chart. Parents will come up with things like interrupting, lecturing, telling me I'm not right, blaming.

Remember, when you are listening, beware of:

Review what parents have contributed and add any of the following if they were not mentioned: blaming, lecturing, advising, judging, and ridiculing.

Remind parents to be sure their tone of voice is respectful.



SMALL GROUP ACTIVITY

Have the parents go through the listening exercise on page 9 again, except this time practicing good listening techniques. Let both partners experience both roles. When the activity is complete, bring the group back together to discuss the exercise.

How did it feel to talk to someone who was really listening? How hard/easy was it to listen and not give advice, blame, or lecture?



9. Session Review

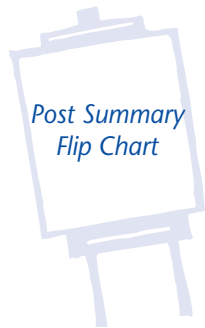
Communication...

- Is the foundation of all relationships.
- Helps us feel heard and understood.
- Is the exchange of messages.
- Involves clear listening and clearly expressing ourselves.
- Is also nonverbal.

Everyone here has engaged in both the positive and negative sides of communication at one time or another. We know what it feels like to be heard and understood and to be spoken to disrespectfully or ignored. We want our children to have good communication in their lives.

The new research on children’s brain development shows that, as parents, being in tune with our children stimulates their brain growth. Much of this is accomplished through good communication and responsiveness to our children. By being in tune with them, we show them that we care about and understand their feelings.

Positive communication skills require a lot of practice throughout our lives. Even “experts” such as teachers and therapists who use these skills on a daily basis can benefit from reminders and practice of these valuable skills. Remember some of the ideas we talked about in class that will remind you to practice these skills. What were they?



Summary: Communication

Remember:

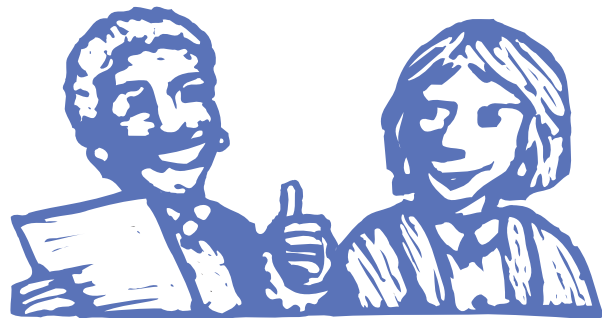
These things will help you in parenting:

- **Using good nonverbal, listening, and verbal skills when communicating.**
- **Connecting with your child by being in tune with his communication.**

These things will get in the way of effective parenting:

- **Feeling that listening to your child is not important.**
- **Not taking the time to develop connection with your child.**

Pass out Recipe for Good Listening, A Child’s Brain and Summary: Communication Parent Handouts.





HOME ACTIVITY

10. Home Activity

Ask parents to review and practice giving positive attention using the listening skills they learned today. Ask them to see if they can notice a difference in how their children talk to them when they as parents use these skills. Ask them to be prepared to share their experiences with the class next week.

Another homework activity for this week is to continue to engage in nurturing activities for parents such as taking a long bath, going for a walk, or writing in a journal.

11. Close

Acknowledge the class for the good work they're doing and wish them a week of good times and good communication.

Appendix Contents

Flip Charts

- Agenda
- Group Agreements
- Ways We Communicate (blank)
- Recipe for Good Listening
- Communicate Acceptance (blank)
- Communication (blank)
- Summary

Parent Handouts

- She Was Born
- The Brain
- A Child's Brain
- Recipe for Good Listening
- Summary: Communication



Flip Charts

Agenda

1. Welcome/Announcements
2. Review Last Session
3. Overview of Communication Session
4. Nonverbal Communication
5. Listening
6. Recipe for Good Listening
7. Break
8. Recipe continued
9. Session Review
10. Home Activity
11. Close

Ways We Communicate (blank)

Recipe for Good Listening

- Decide you're going to listen.
- Make the time to listen.
- Use body language that shows you are listening.
 - Make eye contact.
 - Use open body language.
 - Pay attention.
- Speak to child at her level.
- Allow the speaker to share his or her feelings.
- Be responsive.
- Ask friendly questions.
- Communicate acceptance.

Communicate Acceptance (blank)

Communication...

- Is the foundation of all relationships.
- Helps us feel heard and understood.
- Is the exchange of messages.
- Involves clear listening and clearly expressing ourselves.
- Is also nonverbal.

Summary: Communication

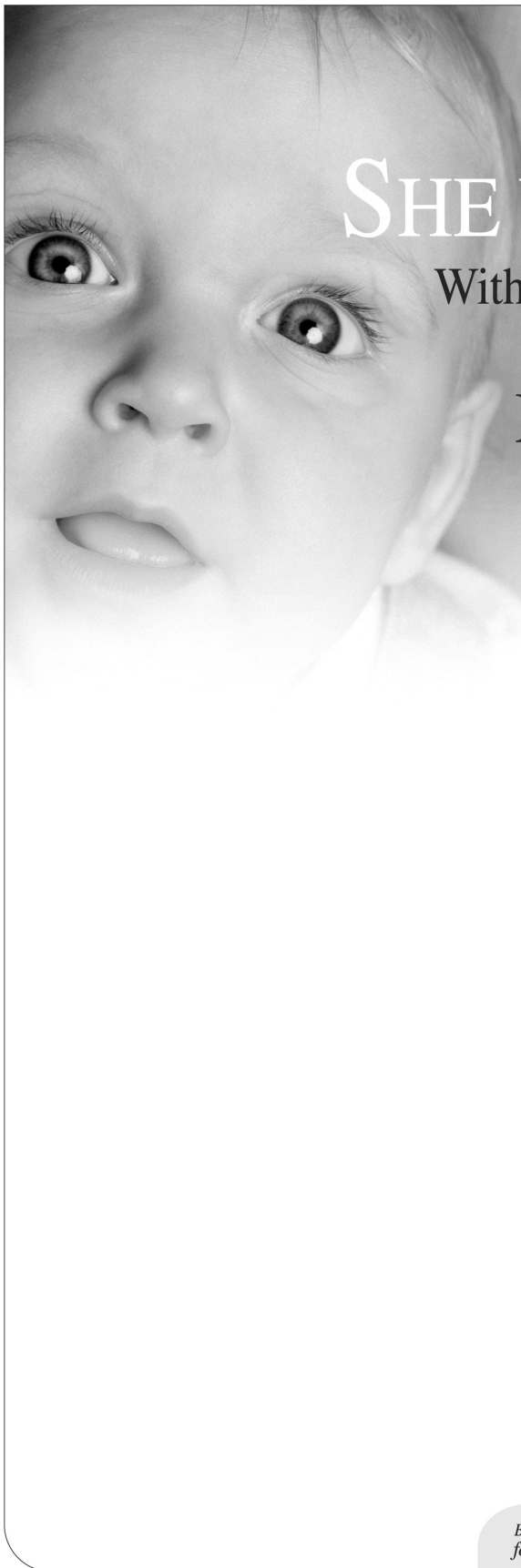
Remember:

These things will help you:

- Using good nonverbal, listening, and verbal skills.
- Connecting with your child by being in tune.

These things will get in the way:

- Feeling that listening to your child is not important.
- Not taking the time to develop connection with your child.




SHE WAS BORN
With as many brain cells
as stars in the
MILKY WAY.

*During her first three years
her experiences will create
the astonishing circuitry of her brain,
shaping her capacity
to learn, to love, to grow
for the rest of her life.*


*She is a miracle of nature
in need of a miracle of nurture.*

*Comfort her, talk to her, love her
and she will thrive.
Neglect or abuse her
and fear will close her in.*

*Show her she's your star
Because the world you give her now
will one day be the world
she gives to others.*

**CherishEveryChild**
CONVENED BY UNITED WAY OF LANE COUNTY

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Brought to you by  PeaceHealth
for all the children in our community

Parent Handout

The Brain

As parents, we can encourage the growth of connections (or wiring) in our children's brains. Depending on the stimulation it receives, our children's brains will respond by strengthening or weakening neural pathways.



We can do many things to encourage optimal brain development in our children.

- Having a strong and secure bond with our infant is the first and most important primary action a parent can take.
- Spending slow relaxed interaction time with our child creates relationship. A baby will experience expressions on his mother's face, the tone of her voice, the mother's response to his facial expressions and vocal sounds, and the expression of her love and strengthen those connections in the brain to create relationship and security.
- Learning to recognize our baby's cues and respond to them.
- Reading, singing, talking, and playing simple games beginning from a very early age.
- Giving them freedom to explore as safety permits.
- Having a visually stimulating environment.
- Listening to or making music.
- Encouraging direct experience of the environment, touch, and language, while remembering that the developing brain is a very busy place and shouldn't be overstimulated either. Babies are very different in the levels of stimulation they prefer.

Parent Handout

A Child's Brain

Early Experiences

- Babies are born with a plan for future brain development. When a child is born she has over 200 billion nerve cells, but the connections between cells are just starting to be established.
- Experience will shape the way these connections will be made in the brain.
- The time before the age of three is the most rapid and extensive period of brain growth in a human's life.
- These connections between cells are how learning and thinking happen.
- Parents can encourage this brain development by interacting with their babies from the very first day by responding, playing, touching, loving, and giving positive attention to them.
- These connections help your child cope with new experiences and situations.

Abuse and Neglect

- Children raised with neglectful caregivers form fewer connections in their brains and can start school at a disadvantage.
- When children are exposed to trauma and abuse, their fear response is triggered and a higher level of hormones is released in their brains, which can lead to aggressive or violent behavior.
- Children living in a harmful and stressful environment learn to respond aggressively, defensively, or with fear. They often have a more difficult time establishing relationships with others.

The years from birth to six are a crucial window for brain development in a child. Their experiences during these years greatly influence their learning ability, relationships, ability to cope with life situations, sense of self, the establishment of healthy behaviors and responses, as well as developing adequate physical, social, emotional, intellectual, and creative skills.

Parent Handout

Recipe for Good Listening

We have put together the following recipe for good listening that will help you have good interactions with your child, your partner, or other people in your life:

- **Decide you're going to listen.**

When you consciously decide that you are ready to listen, it helps you become a better listener.

- **Make the time to listen.**

Timing is very important, both for you and the person who is sharing information with you. If now is not a good time to devote your attention to this person, make a "listening appointment." Try to make the "listening appointment" as soon as possible during the same day, and be sure to always keep your appointment!

- **Use body language that shows you are listening.**

Make eye contact. Use open body language.. Pay attention.

- **When you want to talk to your child, it is important to speak to her at her level, both in the physical sense and in the type of language you use.**

- **Allow the speaker to share his or her feelings, whatever they are.**

Even though you may not accept the other person's point of view, it's important to accept that this is how he or she is feeling right now. Feelings are neither good nor bad, right nor wrong. Feelings are real for that person.

- **Be responsive.**

Nod your head, and vocalize simple sounds like uh-huh or hmmm. You can also summarize what you think the other person is saying and ask if that is correct.

- **Ask friendly questions.**

Ask questions that will help the speaker to clarify or explore something further. It is important that you do not try to lead the direction of the conversation into what you, rather than the speaker, want to talk about. Be careful not to divert the focus of attention onto the questions or to try to get the speaker to see your point of view through your questions.

- **Communicate acceptance.**



Parent Handout

Summary: Communication

Remember:

These things will help you in parenting:

- Using good nonverbal, listening, and verbal skills when communicating.
- Connecting with your child by being in tune with his communication.

These things will get in the way of effective parenting:

- Feeling that listening to your child is not important.
- Not taking the time to develop a connection with your child.



