Brain Research in Early Childhood:
A Primer for Caregivers and Administrators

Section Four:
Creating Policy Change

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Ideas for Policymakers to Help Develop Healthy Brain Development

- Help develop programs that support and strengthen families.

- Value parents' role in reinforcing the child's self-worth.

- Help parents develop leadership and child-advocacy skills.

- Reinforce successful child-raising skills with current child development and brain development information and monitor children's health needs; and provide referrals for service.

- Support coordination and continuity in services.

- Locate or establish an information and resource center for supporting children and families.

- Produce an information/assistance packet for all new parents describing available resources (e.g., parent education programs and community services).

- Inform families about community services (e.g., free days at the museum and story time at the library).

- Encourage and support flexible, family-friendly work arrangements (e.g., job sharing, professional part-time employment, alternative work schedules and flexible leave policies which accommodate school visits and volunteer activities).

- Advocate to improve personnel policies such as supporting child care, maternity and paternity leave, and extended leave policies.

- Offer incentives to businesses for operating early childhood programs for working families.

Adapted from: Education Commission of the States. (1998, March). Policy brief: Why policymakers should be concerned about brain research. Denver: Author

Building on Success

Every sector of our society must be involved in the lives of children to continue improving the quality of early childhood. Here are some suggestions for each sector of society:

Parents and Families

Show you love your children by:
- Spending time with them
- Chatting with them
- Protecting their health and safety
- Creating predictable routines and consistent time limits
- Stimulate intellectual growth by:
  1. Reading to them
  2. Engaging them in age-appropriate activities to tap curiosity and spark creativity

Become better informed about:

- · Parenthood, beginning even before children are conceived
- · Family support organizations, childcare centers, libraries, hospital and health clinics, human service agencies, and schools and universities

Learn about your child by:

- · Observing him closely to notice rhythms and preferences
- · Respond to signals she sends through body language such as crying, facial expressions and responses to stimuli
- · Think about and talk about your own past experiences to gain insight about such things as temper management and responses to crying

Local Communities

Be involved by:

- · Promoting efficient, frequent communication among a wide range of service providers
- · Sharing information with other professionals in ways that benefit children and families without violating their rights to privacy
- · Monitoring and documenting children's safety, health and progress toward developmental milestones
- · Analyzing factors that promote or hinder healthy development and learning, making changes as needed
- · Envisioning a future where children and families will thrive and take steps to move the entire community toward that future
- · Helping shape broad-based action strategies aimed at improving life for young children and their families. Some of the universal goals of these strategies are:
  1. Ensure that every expectant mother receives timely care.
  2. Give every child access to the health care and support needed to get a good start in life, physically and emotionally.
  3. Help children build stable, trusting relationships with the adults who care for them.
  4. Support the adults who influence development and learning, and include both mothers and fathers in all parent involvement efforts.
  5. Focus on prevention, and respond quickly when problems arise.
  6. Set high expectations for every child.
  7. Offer varied, engaging, appropriate activities that foster development, including opportunities for conversation and turn taking beginning in the early weeks of life.
  8. Make efficient, equitable use of resources, expanding successful efforts and eliminating those that are not effective.
  9. Collaborate with other institutions .
  10. Take responsibility for results.

Educational Leaders

Rethink "Kindergarten Readiness" by:
· Shifting focus from "ready children" to "ready schools"
· Working more closely with the preschools and childcare programs whose children will soon be moving into kindergarten classrooms
· Sharing curricula and professional development opportunities with preschool and childcare staff
· Communicating with and providing support to parents from the time a future student is born

Business Leaders

Promote family-friendly employee practices by:
· Supporting innovation and research
· Creating or subsidizing childcare programs for employees' children
· Forming coalitions within the business community to address these issues
· Using products to promote best practices

The Media

Use the powerful impact of the broadcast media in our society to:
· Give parents control over what their children watch with devices such as the "V-Chip" (The V-Chip reads information encoded in a rated television program and blocks programs from the television set, based upon the rating selected by the parent, in new televisions with 13'" or larger screens.)
· Support more programming aimed at parents with small children
· Increase educational fare on TV and the radio
· Disseminate new research findings
· Promote more space to children's issues and communicate the importance of healthy development in the early years of life in print media
· Place appropriate technology in libraries, workplaces, schools, community organizations, museums, housing projects and other places where parents can access the wide array of knowledge available on the internet
· Help families evaluate the knowledge they find on the internet

Government

Make sure parents have a range of choices about how to raise and care for their young children by:
· Providing the tools and information that can help them make sound decisions
· Supporting legislation that promotes health, well-being, and learning of young children and their families
· Supporting research
· Disseminating research findings

- Providing technical support to states and communities as they plan, implement, and evaluate new initiatives
- Creating and supporting programs that meet a clear national interest, such as Head Start and Early Head Start
- Keeping children at the top of the agenda

Researchers

Continue to strive to reach a deeper understanding of how children grow as well as how families, communities and the nation as a whole can contribute to the next generation's healthy development by:
- Continuing to value the experiences of families and others who spend days working with families
- Taking into account at every stage of the work the implications of their findings for policy and practice
- Building bridges between research and practice

Adapted from U.S. Department of Education. (1999, September). <u>How are the children? Report on early childhood development and learning</u>. Retrieved March 21, 2000, from the World Wide Web: http://www.ed.gov/pubs/How_Children/IVbuilding.html