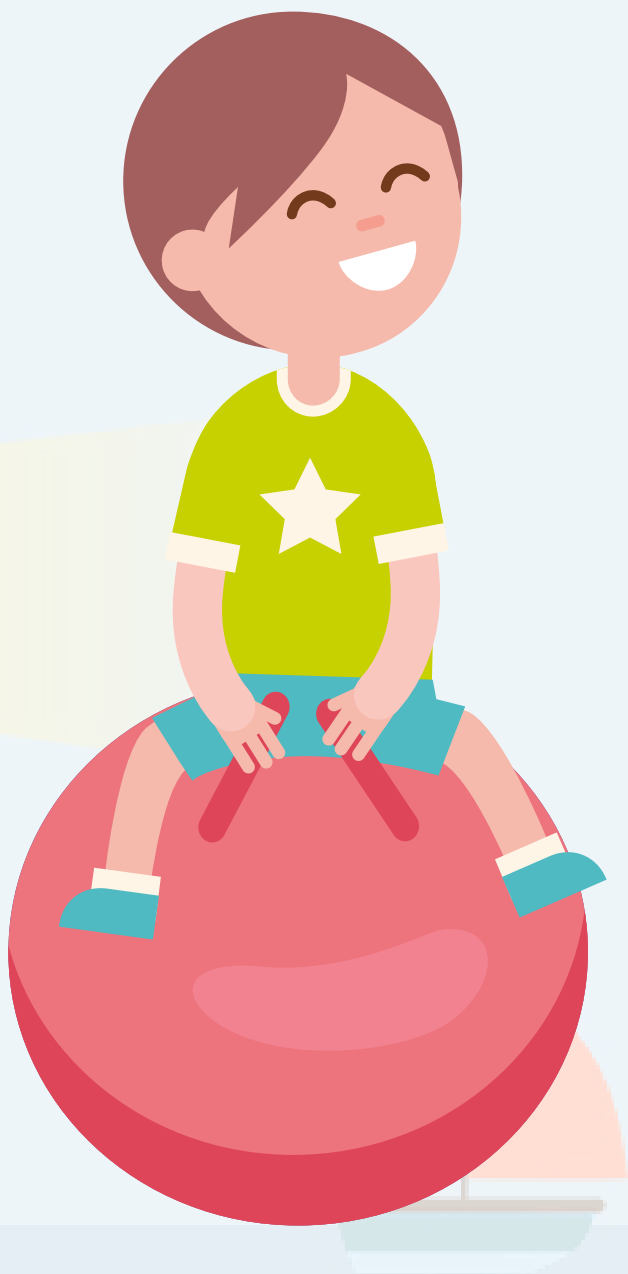




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# Parents guide to Five to Thrive



# Introduction

A baby is born with very few brain connections in place. By the end of the first year of life, a baby's brain has doubled in size with billions of brain cells connected. The most powerful experiences for brain building are relationships, a baby needs to be connected to an adult so that the brain, body and feelings and thoughts of your child have tuned in with you. Your baby can't manage or make sense of their own feelings and thoughts, they need an adult to do it for them.

In the first 3 years of life, the brain is growing and changing faster than it ever will again. So what happens to your baby shapes their brain and the most important thing that happens to your baby is you! Everything you do when you are with your baby sparks connections to their brain.

'Five to thrive' are the 5 building blocks for a healthy brain. Respond, Cuddle, Relax, Play and Talk.



-  Baby brains are getting built
-  Toddler brains are getting organised



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# The Brain

## Flip the Lid (Hand Model of the Brain)



Figure 1. A model of the brain.

Make a **Fist** with your thumb tucked inside your fingers. This is a model of your brain.

**Thumb** = Midbrain (Stem & Limbic) = Emotional Brain. This is where emotions and memories are processed. This is where the fight, flight & freeze is triggered.

**Fingers** = Cerebral Cortex = Rational Brain. Houses the ability to think and reason.

**Fingernails** = Prefrontal Cortex = Problem Solving.



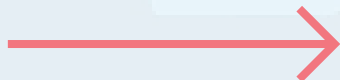
Figure 2. Flipping your lid.

When something triggers us, we are prone to Flip Our Lid which means the Prefrontal Cortex (Fingernails) have a very poor connection with the Midbrain (Thumb), and we're not able to access the logical, problem-solving part of our brain. Our emotions are overriding our ability to think clearly.

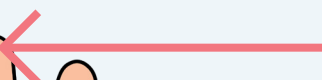
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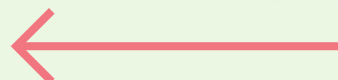
Mid Brain



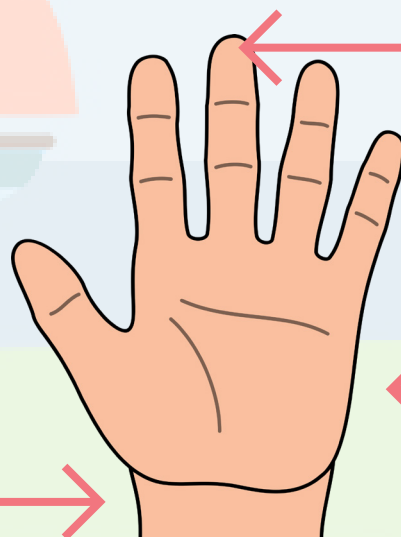
Higher Brain



Basic Life Support



Spinal Cord



Am I safe? Do I matter? This is what can determine how a child flips their lid. If the brain thinks 'no' to these questions, the brain is unable to learn/develop as it goes into survival mode. If the brain thinks 'yes' the child will thrive being able to learn, explore and develop.

# The Brain

If a child is in danger, becomes stressed, unsettled, etc. then their lid can become flipped. The child's ability to then handle their emotions and behaviour goes – it's about survival. The child could now fight to remove the threat, remove themselves from the trigger or can freeze and smile which comes from fear. Some children can then become disruptive and begin testing boundaries which is not conscious but them becoming vulnerable as they don't feel safe. A child in this situation is surviving not thriving!

## Putting the Lid Back On

Escalation – a child is stressed, can have a lot of adrenaline, rising blood pressure, shallow breathing (downstairs brain is in survival mode)

De-escalation – lowering blood pressure, deeper breather (upstairs brain is back in action)

A child needs to learn how to develop this skill, so if a child is unable to self regulate they will need an adult to co regulate for them. This will need to be a calm adult who can become in tune with the child.

It is not always possible to be calm and loving as times can be stressful. As long as a child has enough positive brain building experience they become more resilient by having to deal with times when life is a bit less easy.

When a child has flipped their lid, the 5 steps to help a child thrive need to be put into place – respond, cuddle, relax, play and talk. This could be as simple as a child falling over and becoming upset 'respond' by attending to the hurt child, 'cuddle' by giving the child a cuddle or picking them up off the floor, 'relax' staying calm and relaxed to help the child become relaxed in the situation, 'play' getting down to their level and showing an interest in what they were doing e.g. let's pick up this block and try and build another tower, 'talk' to them about what they are going to do or how brave they have been.

Focus on building foundation and learning will happen naturally. A child will be unable to learn numbers, colours, words etc if their foundations aren't met. If foundations are met then curiosity to learning will be higher.



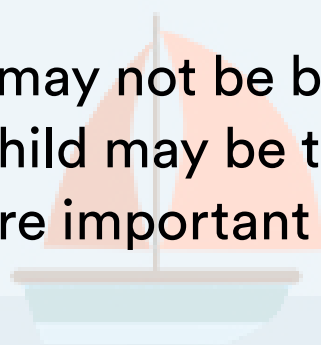
# The Brain

## Behaviour

Behaviour can be a trigger on something that has happened early on in the day and their action could be 'the final straw.' This could be as simple as a child being woken up for nursery and still feeling a little tired and grumpy. The child then wanting more breakfast and there is none left which could add on to the stress of being woken up. The child then may want to play with their favourite toy or watch their favourite programme before nursery but there is no time as you are running late, which has then added onto the stress of the mornings events. This child may now be attending nursery feeling tired, upset, frustrated and their self esteem very low from them having a bad morning. Another child may then accidentally bump into them or take a toy from them and the child may then seem to be over reacting by hitting, pushing biting etc. the other child. This has then not become a behaviour issue as it may appear but a result of them having feelings of tiredness, frustration, and anger and just needing some emotional reassurance from a secure adult rather than being in trouble.

Managing behaviour is a high brain function especially under stress. A child is unable to control their behaviour and understanding when under stress and when their lid has become flipped. There is no deliberate behaviour in this instance just a result of their emotional needs being met.

A child not listening may not be a child deliberately becoming defiant or ignorant but the child may be thinking/processing information or be doing something more important to them.



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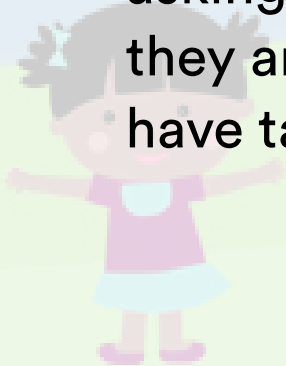
# The Brain

## Time Out

Leaving a child in time out can become very stressful for that child as their lid is flipped so they have no access to their thinking process. This child is now unable to self soothe themselves which is denying them access to comfort which can become a very traumatic experience for the child to go through. This is now not allowing them any time for them to think about their actions and calm down.

A child in this situation will need help with their behaviour through warm interactions and to help them soothe to enable them to have access to their thinking process. A positive way of helping a child in this way is by giving them a calm bear to look after. This helps by 'responding' to the child in a positive way, 'cuddle' giving them contact in some way by holding their hand for example taking them to a calm area, 'relax' and be calm when responding to their behaviour to allow the child to self soothe and become in tune with you, 'play' by giving them a distraction (the bear) and showing that it is interesting and 'talk' to the child by using positive language and you are dealing with the situation. By not rewarding bad behaviour doesn't stop bad behaviour as the child has no understanding what they have done wrong as they haven't had access to their thinking process.







By being positive and then meeting their emotional needs will help prevent that child from repeating the behaviour. A young child is unable to understand the word 'sorry' as their brain hasn't matured enough so asking a child to say 'sorry' after they have hurt someone doesn't mean they are apologising for their actions but are repeating a word that they have taught to say after hurting someone.






# Talk

*“When you talk to me I copy you. At first I can only make a few sounds, but the more you talk to me the more I can make sounds into words... Everything I learn in my life will be built on what you are teaching me now. Involve me in life by telling me about it.”*

## Some suggestions

-  Turn taking in conversation keeps both sides of the brain active.
-  Copy baby sounds when they are young
-  Read to your baby regularly, even when they are very young, and use as many rhymes, poems or songs as you can. Simple rhymes and rhythms will hold their attention
-  Provide running commentary on your own life. Tell your baby about colours, count the steps you climb or the socks and towels as you do the washing
-  As children get older, word play and jokes help develop verbal skills and social awareness
-  Keep your ‘sharp’ voice for danger!

## Remember





-  Any words will help to build your child’s brain. Pop songs, a shopping list or the writing on the cereal packet are more meaningful than Shakespeare to young children
-  Keep eye contact with your child when talking to them  
Switch to start singing or humming when you find yourself becoming stressed
-  Listening with interest can create brain patterns for self-worth and self-esteem.





# Play

*“Toys are great, but the best toy in the world for me is... you! When you pull faces at me I copy you, and connections in my brain make links between the expression on my face and communicating. That will help me to understand feelings. As I get older, playing with me and helping me to play on my own or with other children builds connections in my brain that make it possible for me to think and plan, to make sense of the world around me, and to develop social skills.”*

## Some suggestions

-  Follow your child's lead – if you join in their game, you are telling them that their ideas and decisions are important
-  Try to ensure you spend some time outside everyday as this can help further develop
-  Explore shapes, colours and textures with your child. You could look at picture books together, or make simple toys and pictures with pens, paper, fabric, etc.
-  Encourage pretending and thinking through role play and everyday experiences.

## Remember

-  Play works best when you are on the same level as your child – on the floor together, sitting together at the table etc.
-  Encourage children to have more independent play as well as time with you.







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# Relax

*“When I feel stressed I need you to help me. My body works in tune with yours, so when I am stressed I need you to help me calm down. When you feel calm and comfortable, so do I. That calm relaxed feeling fills my body with chemicals that help my brain to grow.”*

## Some suggestions

-  Try to end exciting play or activity sessions with a wind-down time in which you and your child can enjoy a few moments of calm
-  Try to have some time when you are just focused on the experience of being with your child, not on the things you need to get done, or on people or events that have made you upset or angry
-  Relax into being a parent – the experience can be unfamiliar, scary or leave you feeling guilty or stressed, but all parents have had to learn the hard way
-  Find time for you! Taking time for yourself and doing things you enjoy can help keep you calm and relaxed.

## Remember





-  Older children can revert to baby stress patterns when they are tired, ill, over- excited, frightened, or anxious
-  An over tired, over stimulated baby may need help winding down. Close cuddles, rocking, shhing in a dark environment can help ‘reset’ an over stimulated brain.





# Cuddle

*“Feeling safe with you fills my body with special chemicals that help my brain to grow. The patterns that grow in my brain when you cuddle me will mean that all my life I will be able to feel safe with safe people. When I am close to you my body begins to work in tune with yours. When you feel excited or stressed your heart beats faster and so does mine. When you feel calm or happy your heart beats slower, and so does mine.”*

## Some suggestions

-  Cuddle your baby as often as you like – babies can’t have too much contact
-  The term ‘cuddle’ doesn’t mean just a cuddle this could be other form of physical contact such as touching, stroking, tickling, holding hands etc.
-  Respect the space of infants as they grow older. There may be times when they don’t want a cuddle but you should find other ways to provide reassuring contact
-  Toddlers love giving as well as receiving all these different types of physical contact

## Remember





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# Respond

*“I feel very scared if I get no response from you. When you look at me with love in your eyes I feel safe. Your voice helps me to feel safe. Being close to you helps me to feel safe.”*

## Some suggestions

-  Try to guess what your baby's crying means and meet their basic needs – warmth and comfort, food, a clean nappy and sleep
-  Pass your baby objects they are interested in (if they are safe)
-  Older children need to practice sorting things out for themselves, so wait-and-see can be a good first response
-  Copy sounds and expressions that your baby makes so they can begin to make connections about how they are feeling.

## Remember

-  You need to be emotionally available to your child. When your child has your full attention, their whole brain is working. When you are watching TV, texting or talking on the phone, they don't get this benefit
-  Children will know how you are responding to them by watching the expression, the way you use your hands and your body, and listening to the tone of your voice.
-  It takes time to learn how your child communicates, so learning what each cry means will take time
-  All needs are same to your baby, if they need something such as food, sleep, clean nappy, attention etc. it will all trigger stress which results in your child beginning to cry, not necessarily meaning your child is upset.

