



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

Practice sorting. This can be done with blocks, markers, etc. Group items by color, size, shape!

Empathetic communication. Truly listen to what the child tells you. Repeat what they told you to show you heard them and their voice matters.

Assist them in self-care. Be patient with your child and let them try to do simple tasks with your help. This can be during bath time, while getting dressed, putting shoes on etc.

Let them choose. Give them multiple choices to pick from, such as a movie choice, snack or toy.

Helper. Allow children to help whenever possible. They may not do a perfect job, but it boosts their confidence and self-esteem.

Spirituality

Do calming strategies. This can include simple stretches and deep breathing exercises.

Color. Let them use their imagination to create a picture on blank paper or use a coloring page.

Sensory interventions. Give hugs, roll them up in a blanket, use a fidget toy, swing, etc.

One on one time. Quality time together can be limited. Truly enjoy the moment with little electronic distraction.

Play

Body: Expand gross and fine motor skills learned in infancy and toddler age ranges, practice pedaling bikes, balancing.

Watching: Encourage child to describe their visual environment.

Interactive: Play games such as Hide-and-seek, put together Legos or engage in imagination play.

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Learn

Playtime. Make or use an obstacle course, play a board game, use their imagination!

Ask Why? Ask preschoolers questions that get them thinking. For example, when reading a book together, ask Why do you think the girl is laughing? or How would that make you feel?

Help your child be a good problem-solver. Give them the support they needs to be successful without completely solving the problem for them.

Read and Sing. Also, encourage storytelling or have them create their own songs. Try to help them create stories with a beginning, middle, and end.

Socialize

Assist them in conflict resolution. Toddlers learn through experiences. Provide young children with opportunities to work on their problem solving skills and offer gentle guidance and encouragement when they are struggling.

Encourage free play. Let them use their imagination and explore together!
Encourage play with other children. Use turn taking activities such as rolling a ball between children.

This is also a great time to model positive interactions, such as sharing, trading and taking turns.

Teach children how to be in relationships. Acknowledge cues, talk about empathy, discuss needs and perspectives of others. This can also be a good time to teach and encourage boundaries. Additionally, you can identify feelings of the other children during interactions (such as she is sad because you took her ball without asking).

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