

WISCONSIN COUNCIL ON CHILDREN & FAMILIES  
*Raising Voices to Make Every Kid Count*  
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**NETWORKING NEURONS E-Newsletter**  
**Spring 2008**

It is with excitement that I send a new issue of Networking Neurons. Over the years this e-newsletter has been a valuable resource from WCCF. It is designed for those of us that know the importance of staying current on brain development research and resources.

If you have any questions, comments or suggestions feel free to e-mail me, Deborah McNelis at [dmcnelis@wccf.org](mailto:dmcnelis@wccf.org). (Formerly: Deborah Schmid)

This issue's topic: Relationships Matter in Brain Development

Research indicates there is a correlation between healthy social/emotional development and cognitive development. Nurturing relationships with caring adults promotes the optimal functioning in the emotional and thinking areas of the brain. This knowledge needs to lead to ensuring that all children's early environments provide not only physical safety but attention is paid to fostering emotional safety as well.

Items this issue:

1. The Importance of Social/Emotional Development and Early Education
2. What Early Education Programs Can Do
3. Activities for Parents to Encourage Emotional Development
- 4 Resources on Social/Emotional Development and the Brain
5. WCCF Adolescent Brain Training Available

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**1. The Importance of Social/Emotional Development and Early Education**

*The kids in our classroom are infinitely more significant than the subject matter we teach.*

*- Meladee McCarty*

Following is a excerpt from;

Preschool Matters

A Publication of the National Institute for Early Education Research  
November/December 2007 Volume 5, No.5

The social and emotional development of children are inextricably intertwined with their

cognitive development, says pediatrician and director of the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University Jack Shonkoff. "Emotional well-being and social competence provide a strong foundation for emerging cognitive abilities. Together they are the 'bricks and mortar' of the foundation of human development. So concerns about behavior should be viewed as one part in the larger story of how children develop. The brain is a highly integrated organ. Social development and regulation of behavior are as much a part of development as cognitive learning," he says. (See article on page 3.) "Let's face it," Shonkoff says, "Little kids aren't famous for being able to stand still, share with others or pay attention. Challenging behaviors occur in normal children with good parents just as they do in children from disadvantaged backgrounds." He thinks those who take care of young children need to have a better knowledge base for managing behavior. "Preschool teachers should know as much about social and emotional development as teaching literacy.

For the full article entitled; Rx for Behavior Problems in Pre-K, go to <http://nieer.org/psm/?article=233>

For more information on the science of early childhood development or the Center on the Developing Child, go to [www.developingchild.harvard.edu](http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu)

## **2. What Early Education Programs Can Do**

*A sense of worthiness is a child's most important need.*  
- Polly Berrien Berends

An article from the Washington State Child Care Resource and Referral Network emphasizes the impact relationships have on children and offers suggestions for child care centers to implement.

### **Early Brain Development and Child Care**

Because the quality of a child's earliest experiences has a critical impact on brain development, the quality of infant and toddler child care has a critical impact as well. In light of what has been learned about early brain development, what must child care providers and child care advocates know? What can they do, and how can they improve their practices to help children and protect them from harm?

The new information about brain development reaffirms the traditional wisdom of maintaining small child to caregiver ratios and of providing children with consistent and loving relationships with caregivers in child care settings. Children need individualized responses. If the caregivers are watching too many children, the child is not getting enough attention; if the child has too many different caregivers, he or she is not getting enough consistency. Consistency and individual attention are important because early learning takes place within the context of relationships. The primary relationship is most often the parent, but many children spend most of their waking hours in the care of someone other than a parent. That relationship has to be a good one too.

**What Child Care Providers and Administrators of Early Childhood Education and Child Care Programs Can Do**

Ensure that each child in the child care program has a principal caregiver assignment whereby each child is paired with one adult who has primary responsibility for the child's care. This person should not only ensure that the child's needs are met but should also serve as this child's advocate in communications with parents, other staff, and the pediatrician or other primary health care professional.

Develop a substitute caregiver plan so that when the principal caregiver is unavailable, the alternate caregiver is known to the child.

Institute policies and procedures that facilitate keeping children in the same grouping from infancy until they are 3 years of age.

Provide ongoing training, support, and technical assistance for child care providers in the areas of child development, responsive caregiving, and enhancing learning opportunities for young children.

For the full article go to [www.childcarenet.org/families/family-resources/brain-development/early-brain-development](http://www.childcarenet.org/families/family-resources/brain-development/early-brain-development)

### **3. Activities to Encourage Emotional Development**

#### Tips on Nurturing Your Child's Social-Emotional Development

Relationships are the way babies come to know the world and their place in it. They provide the loving context necessary to comfort, protect, encourage, and offer a buffer against stressful times. It is through relationships that young children develop social emotional wellness, which includes the ability to form satisfying relationships with others, play, communicate, learn, face challenges, and experience emotions. In addition, nurturing relationships are crucial for the development of trust, empathy, compassion, generosity, and conscience.

Social-emotional wellness is often known as infant mental health by early childhood professionals. In a nutshell, it is the developing capacity to experience and regulate emotions, form secure relationships, and explore and learn-all in the context of the child's family, community and cultural background.

To learn more, browse our tips on promoting children's healthy social-emotional development from birth to three.

#### 4. Resources on Social/Emotional Development and the Brain

*"We worry about what a child will become tomorrow, yet we forget that he is someone today."*

- Stacia Tauscher

The Wisconsin Alliance for Infant Mental Health (WI-AIMH) promotes the healthy social and emotional development of Wisconsin children from birth through age five. Our goal is to weave infant mental health practices and principles into the everyday activities of individuals who touch the lives of infants, young children and their families.

The alliance is also holding the following:

First Annual Wisconsin  
Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Conference  
Early Relationships Matter:  
Building Networks  
June 18-20, 2008  
Concourse Hotel, Madison

For further information go to [www.wiimh.org](http://www.wiimh.org)

Books:

*The Science of Parenting: How today's brain research can help you raise happy, emotionally balanced children.* By Margot Sunderland

From the introduction:

*"For centuries we have been using child-rearing techniques without awareness of the possible long-term effects, because until now we simply could not see the effects of our actions on a child's developing brain. But with the advances of neuroscience, brain scans, and years of research on the brains of primates and other mammals, we no longer have the innocence of ignorance. For several years, science has been revealing to us that key emotional systems in the human brain are powerfully molded for better or worse by parenting experiences. So while we can't protect our children from future unhappiness, we now have scientific information about the impact of different ways of parenting on a child's brain. We now know that millions of parent-child sculpting moments in childhood can set up systems and chemistries that will enable children to have a deeply enriching life..."*

*The Boy Who Was Raised As a Dog.* By Bruce Perry M.D., Ph.D

A review of the book:

*"In beautifully written, fascinating accounts of experiences working with emotionally stunted and traumatized children, child psychiatrist Perry educates readers about how early-life stress and violence affects the developing brain. He offers simple yet vivid illustrations of the stress response and the brain's mechanisms with facts and images that crystallize in the mind without being too detailed or confusing. The stories exhibit compassion, understanding and hope as Perry paints detailed, humane pictures of patients who have experienced violence, sexual abuse or neglect, and Perry invites the reader on his own journey to understanding how the developing child's brain works." -- Publishers Weekly*

Websites:

Attachment Parenting International

The essence of Attachment Parenting is about forming and nurturing strong connections between parents and their children. Attachment Parenting challenges us as parents to treat our children with kindness, respect and dignity, and to model in our interactions with them the way we'd like them to interact with others.

[www.attachmentparenting.org](http://www.attachmentparenting.org)

The mission of the Academy is to help improve the lives of traumatized and maltreated children. We endeavor to improve the systems that educate, nurture, protect and enrich these children - through education, service delivery and program consultation. We work to improve individual lives through clinical assessment and treatment.

[www.childtrauma.org](http://www.childtrauma.org)

Resource from WCCF to promote brain development through positive interaction

Available at [www.wccf.org](http://www.wccf.org)

Help Me Learn More While I'm Four

A packet of 40 activity ideas has been created for you and the child you care about.

The activities are built around every day tasks, so you can easily create learning opportunities with a child during your daily routines.

Children learn through everything they do. . .

- This compact pack of cards makes it easy for you to provide activities that are based on

how a child learns..... through play and having fun with you.

- Included is an explanation of how a child's brain benefits from each activity.

The cards can also be used by early childhood educators and home visitors wanting to share ideas with parents. The suggestions can be:

- added to parent newsletters
- posted on parent information boards
- demonstrated at parent night workshops or discussion groups
- used for interactive activities at family nights

Your child will think they are playing .... You will KNOW they are learning!

## **5. WCCF Adolescent Brain Training!**

Unlocking the Mysteries: Adolescent Brain Development. These two-day trainings, summarizing the latest research on adolescent brain development and popular trends affecting adolescent programming and treatment, are scheduled for four dates/locations so far - May 29-30 in Pewaukee/Waukesha, June 24-25 in Richland Center, and August 21-22 in Eau Claire.

See details or register for the training now under the events tab at [www.wccf.org](http://www.wccf.org)