



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, 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

Read together. Every single day!

Playtime. What is their favorite game? Share laughs while playing Hide and Seek or coloring.

Praise them. Even on the little things! Tell them positive phrases such as you are great at coloring or thank you for cleaning up your toys.

Acknowledge and label feelings. For example, I know you are sad you have to go to bed, but you are tired and ready for sleep.

Practice slow breathing with the child with bubbles or pinwheels. This can also be a great strategy to use if they are feeling upset.

Create a safe and calm place to regulate. Provide them with a safe and calm place for your child to use when they are upset or sad. Encourage them to use this space to clam down any time. This can be in their bedroom, on the couch, etc.

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Learn

Get Moving. Use music, singing, or rhythms to encourage them to move their bodies to learn.

Have Conversations. Talk to each other as you play, do errands, or visit friends and family.

Give Tasks. Allow your toddler to help with simple chores and tasks at home such as putting toys away or cleaning up a small spill. It may not be done perfectly and take patience, but they are learning!

Play

Body: Build a fort, running games such as tag, go for walks, do art projects such as coloring or painting, explore the world through talk and touch.

Watching: Describe the movement of themselves, others, objects and scenes

Interactive: Back and Forth games such as catch and face-to-face interactions with others.

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. This can also be a good time to teach and encourage boundaries.

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