

BRAIN-BASED PARENTING QUICK GUIDE

Executive Function Skills — Basic thinking, feeling, and doing skills that grow based on the Brain's Rule: Use It or Lose It — the more we practice them, the stronger they get.

Basic Skills

(Birth to Puberty)

Task Initiation
Flexible Thinking
Planning and Prioritizing
Organization
Working Memory
Self-Monitoring
Selective Attention
Coordination

Advanced Skills

(Puberty to Age 24-26)

Abstract; conceptual understanding
Impulse Control
Problem-Solving
Decision-Making
Judgment
Emotion Regulation
Frustration Tolerance
Ability to Feel Empathy

Brain-based Parenting

Using brain science to meet children where they are developmentally and build executive function skills through everyday interactions. Examples of brain-based praise:

Task Initiation — 'Thanks for taking out the trash without being reminded!'

Flexible Thinking — 'Good job switching from one task to another so quickly!'

Organization — 'Wow! Show me how you organized all those toys.'

Self-monitoring — 'Tell me how you kept track of how you were doing?'

Selective Attention — 'Great work! How did you figure out what to pay attention to?'

Abstract Reasoning — 'You really thought about the bigger picture!'

Impulse Control — 'Good job controlling yourself and waiting your turn!'

Problem-solving — 'Great solution! How did you figure that out?'

Emotion Regulation — 'The technique you choose really helped you calm down.'

Empathy — 'I really appreciate the way you considered how I feel.'



KnowYourNeuro.org

Provides free, ready-to-use, age-appropriate brain-based resources that make prevention science simple, engaging, and effective.



Best Practice Guidelines by Age

Under 18 Months

- No screen time except video chatting with loved ones; offer physical objects or toys for distraction, not screens; minimal to no background TV; play music
- Develop attachment to people, not attachment to screens; provide ample face-to-face, skin-to-skin time, eye contact and warm, responsive care
- Offer touch, toys or soft objects to calm and soothe; always help calm distress
- Consistently return sounds, gestures, facial expressions; narrate routines

18-24 Months

- Little to no screen time except video chatting with loved ones; play music and narrate daily routines out loud to build language and connection; label feelings
- Provide ample physical interaction, creative play, praise effort and independence
- Offer touch and physical objects for soothing and distraction; set limits calmly
- Read books and offer toys to develop social and creative skills; play pretend
- Focus on developing learning skills NOT watching screen skills; practice walking, talking, climbing, pointing, balancing and following simple directions

3-5 Years

- Up to 1 hr/day of co-watched high-quality educational content; converse often
- Read books aloud together daily to develop reading and social skills; discuss characters from the books and educational shows; use play-based teaching
- Provide toys from books and shows to grow creative skills; practice turn-taking
- Praise when children use play to self-soothe and distract; set clear but encouraging limits that allow initiative; teach cooperative play and praise

6-10 Years

- Up to 1-1.5 hrs/day *earned* recreational screen time; basic phone only
- Assign chores as soon as they can complete the task; rec tech earned with completed homework and chores, and respectful, responsible behavior
- None or minimal rec tech on school nights; screens off at bedtime
- Prioritize sleep, structured routines with visual schedules; praise persistence
- Provide 5-7 family media-free meals/week, family activities and screen time
- Use Brain Balance Rule: Every hour rec tech = hour of other activity



11 - 16 Years

- Up to 2 hrs/day earned recreational screen time; basic phone until HS; social media earned at 16; none or minimal rec tech on school nights;
- Reinforce media-free time, sleep hygiene, no tech in bedroom; screens off at bedtime; rec tech earned with completed homework, chores, respectful, responsible behavior; encourage hobbies that require practice; Brain Balance
- Discuss & teach social skills, emotion regulation, values and consequences
- Praise independence and empathy; monitor peers and digital life; collaborate



As recommended by the The American Academy of Pediatrics Center of Excellence on Social Media and Youth Mental Health and The NeuroWhereAbouts Guide at www.neurowhereaboutsguide.com

Six 10-Minute Conversations. A Lifetime of Impact. A child's brain changes rapidly, so prevention works best when conversations happen consistently. Sign up for six or more Know Your Neuro conversation starters delivered by text each year—helping you stay connected, strengthen healthy decision-making, and maximize prevention when it matters most.



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