

# five to thrive

The things you do every day that help your child's growing brain



parenting journal

# The brain is amazing...

Our bodies work better when we eat good food. Our brains work better when we have access to other people who do five simple things that feed the brain and help it to function:

**Respond** • **Engage** • **Relax** • **Play** • **Talk**

These are our daily building blocks for a healthy brain. A healthy brain helps people to be happy in themselves, to make friends, to enjoy family life, to learn, and to support the brain function of other people so that they can also enjoy all these benefits. Every day brings many opportunities to give and receive this healthy nourishment.

Adults are able to connect with other people without touching them – if they **respond** to us we can **engage** with them, and then **relax** so that our brains can work. A successful connection like this switches on the right-hand-side of our brain through non-verbal communication – **play** – and the left-hand-side of our brain through verbal communication – **talk**. And this whole sequence happens at the speed that brains work – which is very fast indeed! Although it happens so quickly, noticing this sequence helps us to improve in connecting to other people.

Babies are not able to connect to other people across a distance. They need to be close to an adult to feel safe, and all humans need to feel safe for our brains to work well. So when we think about what babies need to build healthy brains, our five building blocks become Five to Thrive:

**Respond** • **Cuddle** • **Relax** • **Play** • **Talk**

The brain is not like any other part of the body. Nearly all the cells of the brain are in place from about half way through pregnancy – between eighty and a hundred billion of them. But most of them are not yet working. The brain grows when



connections are made between the cells in response to what is happening to us. These connections are forming all the time all through our lives. What happens to us shapes our brains.

The most powerful experiences for brain-building are relationships. For connections to grow in the baby brain, the baby needs to be connected to an adult. Once your baby is born their relationship with you will shape the way their brain develops. During pregnancy babies are physically connected to their mothers. And they are also connected to the rest of the world through the changes that happen in their mothers as they live their daily lives.

During pregnancy, everything the mother experiences, the baby experiences. The food and drink that nourishes you, nourishes your baby, providing the building blocks for every one of those billions of cells. Loving relationships that give you emotional nurture feed the growing brain of your baby, beginning to make the connections that get the brain working, setting the foundations for social relationships for life.

Experiences that challenge you, times when life is difficult, build patterns in the brain for surviving and thriving – for you, and for your baby, and for your child throughout their life. And experiences that bring you pleasure, times when life is wonderful, build patterns in the brain for joy in living – for you, and for your baby, and for your child throughout their life.

So what happens to your baby shapes their brain. And the most important thing that happens to your baby is you! Everything you do, and everything you experience, will spark connections in your baby's brain, turning connections into pathways that the child will be able to use again.

You can use this journal to keep a record of times when you notice the Five to Thrive sequence happening – times when you **Respond** – **Cuddle** – **Relax** – **Play** – **Talk** with your baby.

You can write yourself a note, or draw a picture, or stick in a photograph, or a scan, or anything else that occurs to you that illustrates one (or all) of the Five to Thrive activities. Each page can be printed or photocopied to add to a loose-leaf folder that can grow as your child grows. And your journal may one day be something you can share with your child – an exciting story of the loving relationship between you.



*My brain grows better when you*

**Respond** – **Cuddle** – **Relax** – **Play** – **Talk**  
*with me...*

*You can write yourself a note, or draw a picture, or stick in a photograph, or a scan, or anything else that occurs to you that illustrates the Five to Thrive activities.*



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five to thrive

*My brain grows better  
when you respond to me...*

*You can write yourself a note, or draw a picture, or stick in a photograph, or a scan, or anything else that occurs to you that illustrates this Five to Thrive activity.*



respond

*My brain grows better  
when you cuddle me...*

*You can write yourself a note, or draw a picture, or stick in a  
photograph, or a scan, or anything else that occurs to you that  
illustrates this Five to Thrive activity.*



cuddle

*My brain grows better  
when you relax with me...*

*You can write yourself a note, or draw a picture, or stick in a  
photograph, or a scan, or anything else that occurs to you that  
illustrates this Five to Thrive activity.*



relax

*My brain grows better  
when you play with me...*

*You can write yourself a note, or draw a picture, or stick in a photograph, or a scan, or anything else that occurs to you that illustrates this Five to Thrive activity.*



play

*My brain grows better  
when you talk to me...*

*You can write yourself a note, or draw a picture, or stick in a  
photograph, or a scan, or anything else that occurs to you that  
illustrates this Five to Thrive activity.*



talk



knowledge that changes lives