



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 21, 2009

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ATTENTION EDITORS & NEWS DIRECTORS: During National Week of the Young Child (April 19-25, 2009), South Carolina First Steps is highlighting early childhood brain development. Cutting-edge research in this field is empowering parents and policymakers alike in creating the brightest of futures for young children.

Feeding young brains when they need it most

The brain develops from the bottom up and from the back to the front. Different areas of the brain control different brain and body functions; the areas develop simultaneously, but development peaks at different times. The first areas to peak in development are those that govern movement and basic organ functions. The development of movement functions in the brain sets the foundation for the child to explore their world and build new capabilities, therefore opening pathways to subsequent areas of the brain. Later, brain development focuses on areas that make us unique, such as temperament and personality.

Brain functions and peak development periods

Vision and hearing	Peaks at 3 months
Language and speech	Peaks at 8-9 months
Higher cognitive functions (problem-solving, self-control, etc.)	Peaks during ages 1-3 years

TIPS FOR BRANIACS

TIP: When the baby is awake and active, give your baby “tummy time” – lay the baby on the floor on his or her tummy.

WHY IT MATTERS: This strengthens the baby’s motor skills, which are flourishing in the first months of life.

TIP: In the first few months of life, hold the baby about 8 to 10 inches from your face when talking.

WHY IT MATTERS: That is the range of the baby’s vision, so fostering vision development requires staying within the baby’s range of vision

TIP: Bathe the child in language.

WHY IT MATTERS: The brain areas responsible for speech and language are rapidly developing in the first three years of life. Throughout the first three years of a child’s life, the brain acquires language by hearing thousands and thousands of words spoken to them by the important people in the child’s life. (Television doesn’t count!)

TIP: Label the child’s feelings with words by saying aloud, “Oh, you are smiling. You look happy.”

WHY IT MATTERS: The frontal lobe of the brain that controls higher level thinking and functioning is peaking in development during the first three years. Labeling the emotions aloud helps the child connect the meaning between the word and the actual emotion.

Sources: “From Neurons to Neighborhoods,” Jack P. Shonkoff and Deborah A. Phillips; WestEd: The Program for Infant/Toddler Care, Ronald J. Lally; South Carolina First Steps staff.



***About National Week of the Young Child:** The Week of the Young Child is an annual celebration sponsored by the National Association for the Education of Young Children. The purpose of the Week of the Young Child is to focus public attention on the needs of young children and their families and to recognize the early childhood programs and services that meet those needs.*

***Week of the Young Child in South Carolina:** To read Gov. Mark Sanford's South Carolina Week of the Young Child Proclamation – and to learn more about early brain development and the work of First Steps and our partners – go to www.scfirststeps.org.*

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South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness is a comprehensive, results-oriented statewide education initiative to help prepare children to reach school healthy and ready to succeed. Public and private support are combined through county partnerships to enable individual communities to address the unmet needs of young children and their families.